

**SUCCESS FACTORS IN THE TRANSITION TOWARDS
DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP IN LARGE ORGANISATIONS**

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Abstract

The thesis reviews recent and current literature on leadership, and in particular on distributed leadership and complexity leadership theories. It describes my research into the factors affecting the success of transition towards a more distributed approach to leadership in two cases: one is a large UK private company and the other is a large UK university. The longitudinal research was conducted over the period from 2011 to 2013, using repeated interviews at senior and middle management levels, document analysis and observation to collect a rich set of data about both cases.

I used a template to help analyse the data from each case. Through subsequent cross-case analysis the thesis identifies certain factors that influence the degree of success in making the transition to a distributed form of leadership, which involves not only devolved decision making but also increased levels of collaboration and organisational agility, which are key concerns of leaders of large organisations according to recent research across top 250 companies in the UK (Ipsos MORI, 2015: 5). The conclusion from my research is a framework called connected leadership, which describes the critical success factors and how they inter-relate.

The first factor is having senior leadership committed to being role models, which is a prerequisite for successful transition. There are then two factors that lay a strong foundation for the transition, namely having a shared organisational purpose and vision and values-based approach to leadership behaviour. Finally there are factors that then make distributed leadership work in practice: consistently devolved decision making, an emphasis on collaborative achievement, and agility and learning.

The thesis provides practitioners with insight at both the organisational and leadership role levels, based on the connected leadership model. At the organisational level, I have derived from the research certain indicators for each factor that help diagnose and plan for the introduction of a distributed leadership approach. At the leadership role level the framework provides a helpful guide to developing leadership capability and role definition. The connected leadership model represents a coherent guide for leaders to use as a template for successful transition to a more distributed, collaborative and agile organisation, which is able to compete effectively in the 21st century networked society.

Academically, this thesis provides a synthesis of distributed and complexity leadership theories, as well as drawing on authentic leadership theory, in order to understand the organisational and human dynamics that influence the transition to a more distributed leadership approach. Both cases are large organisations, which means that the factor framework provides relevant insight into how distributed leadership can be effective in large and relatively complex organisations.

Declaration

This thesis has been submitted to the University of Manchester by Simon Hayward for the Doctor of Business Administration degree. The title of the thesis is ‘Success factors in the transition towards distributed leadership in large organisations’, dated December 2014.

I confirm that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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Dedication

I would like to thank my family and colleagues for their patience and support during the research for and writing of this thesis.

I would like to acknowledge my supervisors for their great support. I appreciate their wise counsel which has been very helpful in developing my research strategy and in refining my analysis. I would also like to thank them for their support during the writing of this thesis and their feedback to ensure the quality of the end result.

I would also like to thank the two organisations which kindly provided access for case study data collection throughout the preparation of this thesis. They have both maintained open access for me to a wide variety of interviewees and sensitive documents, as well as to meetings and in-depth reviews of my research data and findings. I hope that they have derived practical value from the experience.

About the author

The author has a first degree in English Language and Literature from the University of Oxford and an MBA from Manchester Business School. He has been a business consultant for 24 years working with large UK and international organisations in the fields of leadership development and strategic engagement. He has no previous academic research experience.

Chapter 1: Summary

1.1 Introduction

In this thesis I describe my research into what success factors help or hinder the transition towards a more distributed form of leadership in large complex organisations. The main reason I am interested in better understanding these factors is that many organisations are operating in a complex and volatile environment where new forms of leadership are required to create more responsive and agile ways of working (Leithwood et al., 2006: 55; Thorpe, 2011: 239-240). Individual leaders taking the role of hero in a centralised and autocratic model of organisational leadership is becoming obsolete. In order to succeed in the rapidly changing, sometimes chaotic, world in which large organisations today operate, they need a more nimble, responsive, intelligent way of working that can respond to rapid changes in market demands from globally networked consumers.

Research into leadership has moved over the last fifteen years increasingly to recognise the rise of the 'post-heroic leader' (Badaracco, 2001: 120) who operates in a more distributed and inclusive way. The 'post heroic leader' is in tune with the increasingly transparent, connected world of work and seeks to create an approach to leadership in their organisation where decisions are made by those best equipped to make them, fully empowered to do so through the deliberate delegation of authority and supported with information, tools and training to ensure they can make effective decisions in the best interests of the organisation and its customers.

In my own work with tens of large organisations in the last few years, I see many struggling to adapt to changing markets, changing industry dynamics, changing

technologies and cost models. They are seeking a more agile way of working. Research my firm conducted in late 2014 and early 2015 with Ipsos MORI (Ipsos MORI, 2015) into what CEOs need most from leadership showed that their most important need was organisational agility.

Distributed leadership (Bolden, 2011, Gronn, 2002, Harris et al, 2007, Spillane, 2005a, Thorpe et al, 2011), is a significant area of emerging theoretical research in line with this trend, and one that embodies many of the qualities of leadership that modern organisations are seeking to embed across their operations. Distributed leadership means spreading out the leadership process of influence and decision making widely across human agents in the organisation, such as in schools giving teachers high levels of discretion to teach as they see fit in order to increase student performance.

I use the 'intelligent hierarchy' model of distributed leadership (Leithwood and Mascall 2008a: 553) which describes a balance between the distribution of the leadership process while retaining a strong core structure. This relates well to the large organisational context on which I am focused, as I will show through my analysis, because there are typically more agents and sub-structures in a larger organisation than in a smaller one, creating more scope for variation and a loss of cohesion. DL, however, has its limitations, so I also draw on complexity leadership theory (CLT) (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2001: 389) and authentic leadership theory (ALT) (Avolio et al, 2004, Walumbwa et al, 2008) to make sense of the transition towards a more distributed and agile way of working.

Through my research and drawing widely on academic literature I have identified six factors that are most helpful in the transition to a more distributed approach to leadership. These factors, which are an outcome of my research, I have called connected leadership,

and it is a significant contribution to knowledge for practitioners because it gives them a guide to the journey, an internally consistent approach to developing a more agile, distributed approach to leadership and through this to creating more agile, customer-responsive organisations.

The six factors of connected leadership are:

Senior leadership role models – senior leaders embracing the need to lead the transition, to embody the changes in behaviour, decision making and policy, if they are to succeed

Shared vision and purpose – all people in the organisation having a clear and consistently held understanding of where the organisation is seeking to get to, and why this is of wider human significance, so that everyone is able to make the same sense of what is happening around them

Values-based leadership – having a clear code of conduct to which everyone is committed, so that behaviour throughout the organisation is consistent and in line with the espoused values

Consistently devolved decision making – decision rights are devolved to the lowest sensible level, with only strategic decisions being taken at the more senior levels

Collaborative achievement – team working and inter-team collaboration are seen throughout the organisation as the default way of working, so that the end to end processes operate effectively, quickly and in a responsive way

Agility and learning – sharing insight, experimenting and innovation are prevalent across the organisation, especially at the periphery near the customer, so that the organisation is able to respond to the sometimes chaotic environment intelligently.

These factors draw on DL and other key leadership theories, which I will discuss later, and the synthesis of these theories to provide a route forward for organisations seeking a coherent way to manage the unpredictability of modern market conditions is a contribution to academic theory as well. In figure 1 the factors are arranged in a hierarchy, as the lower ones are needed as foundations for the higher ones to function effectively.

Figure 1.1 – The connected leadership factors



As the layered nature of the figure suggests, the first factor is foundational to the transition to DL as senior leadership commitment to being role models is a necessary pre-requisite to the sharing of power. The next two factors create the framework within which people in the organisation can act with greater freedom. The last three factors then create the cohesive agility across the organisation.

Connected Leadership provides a clear and coherent leadership framework for organisations to use in order to become more distributed, more agile, and more in tune with the ever changing needs and wants of consumers around the world.

Chapter 2: Thesis overview

2.1 The argument

This thesis describes my research into the success factors in the transition towards a more distributed form of leadership in large complex organisations. The need for agility, increased collaboration and shared ways of working are confirmed in recent research (Ipsos MORI, 2015). DL provides a partial answer to this need, but in my research I found that it was not sufficient in its own right to provide large organisations with a satisfactory framework for action.

As well as drawing on DL theory and research, as mentioned above, I also therefore draw on two other areas of leadership research which have been attracting considerable academic interest in recent years. Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2001: 389), which has developed from research into complex adaptive systems (CAS) which are able to survive and flourish in fast-changing environments; and authentic leadership theory (Avolio et al, 2004, Walumbwa et al, 2008), which focuses on the moral and social responsibilities of leaders in modern organisations. I draw on CLT research for two main reasons: one, it is, like DL, set in the context of an increasing complex world requiring more agile organisational leadership and culture; and two, it uses similar constructs as the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ (Leithwood and Mascall 2008a: 553) in terms of a balance between the strong core with distributed leadership processes. I also draw on ALT research because of the significant importance of a shared code of conduct in achieving coherent distributed leadership processes.

There is, in my view, a large array of leadership theories available to practitioners from academics, many of which are variations on particular themes, and I believe that by creating a coherent theoretical framework in Connected Leadership I have moved to a more intelligible position for practitioners in large organisations. I have drawn on relevant theories (DL, CLT and ALT in particular) in a way that helps to make sense of the transition towards a more distributed and agile organisational mode.

So my theoretical focus is, in my view, very much in line with the main challenges facing leaders in many organisations seeking to succeed in a complex world where leaders are subject to increasing levels of scrutiny and asked to deal with accelerating levels of complexity in their market environments.

Also, in my experience as a practitioner in the area of leadership development, I note the move in many organisations towards increased devolution, collaborative ways of working and a reduced emphasis on the individual leader to drive performance across large groups of people.

I conclude this thesis by describing the connected leadership factors that my research suggests contribute to the success or otherwise of the transition to distributed leadership (DL) in my case organisations, drawing on the theories described above to help explain the findings from my analysis. My focus on transition is partly because it is where many of those interested in more distributed leadership processes are likely to be currently, including my two cases, so it is going to be of relevance to practitioners; and partly because I believe the move towards DL is a journey away from a more traditional 'command and control' approach to leadership where authority is vested in hierarchy, with

many leaders I come across in my work finding it challenging to ‘let go’ of the authority for which they have striven throughout their careers.

The factors provide a helpful point of reference for practitioners as well as academics in helping us to understand how to increase the likelihood of a successful transition to more distributed ways of working in the context of large organisations. I also refer to and compare where appropriate my findings with other leadership theories, as well as theories of engagement, which are seen as a driver of performance (Lockwood N., 2007: 2), several of which are also helpful in explaining the data. The connected leadership model has helpful implications for practitioners in terms of their approach to recruitment and reward criteria, the focus for performance management and capability development, as well as governance in practice. I explore all of these implications in chapter 9.

Much of the research into distributed leadership to date has focused on smaller and simpler organisations such as hospitals and schools (Harris, A. et al, 2007, Spillane, J. 2005). These have their own complications, but they are typically single site and focused on one service area. My cases are multi-site, larger organisations with multiple operating units. Currie and Lockett (2011: 297) suggest that DL ‘should be subject to rigorous empirical examination’ outside the health sector, in other forms of public sector or private sector: ‘the appeal of DL is equally strong in the private sector’. Although all organisations have challenges from the environment in which they operate, I would argue that larger organisations often operate across more varied contexts, requiring more flexible responsiveness in each context (such as serving local markets) coupled with maintaining coherent activity across the organisation in order to achieve efficient operational performance.

My research question therefore is ‘what are the critical factors in the successful transition towards Distributed Leadership implementation in large complex organisations?’

In this research I will consider what the organisational indicators for DL transition are, in order to assist practitioners in understanding where their own organisation is on the transition journey. I will also consider what other leadership theories are relevant in this transition. My data is drawn from two longitudinal case studies. One is a large UK-based fashion and sports business which operates around the world (case P); the other is a large university based in the UK (case M).

I have approached the research endeavour from a point of view based on contextualism as a way to develop and articulate knowledge in the field of human organisations, the field on which I am focused (Dancy, 2010: 12). Contextualism provides a pragmatic view of knowledge, with justification dependent on the standards relevant in each context, which in the social research world is multi-faceted and based in part on the interaction, dialogue and perceptions of the people in the organisation.

I use a longitudinal case study research strategy which is consistent with my contextualist perspective, and which allowed me to reference relevant case history as well as dig deep into the data over an extended period of time in order to understand the nuances of the evidence relating to the transition towards DL.

My case-based approach allows in-depth research of various factors in DL which affect employee engagement. The case approach also allows a deep appreciation of the context and how this influences engagement outcomes. I use semi-structured interviews, focus groups, document analysis and leader observation to collect data which can be cross-

referenced within and between cases to establish plausible results. I am using two large organisations to which I have the privilege of long-term access to ensure continuity in my research activities.

I used template analysis in NVivo 9.0 (in appendix 2) to provide a relevant structure for the data analysis activity, which helped with coding and comparison of data both within and between cases. Then, through cross-case analysis, I was able to identify several factors which had a significant impact on the transition towards DL in each case, which formed the basis of my research conclusions.

These conclusions will, I believe, have benefit for practitioners in the fields of human resource management, leadership and organisational development, as well as for leaders in large organisations seeking to develop more responsive and collaborative working practices across the organisation as a whole.

I also draw on over 20 years' experience working in these areas of consultancy. In 1990, after several years in general management roles in high tech companies, I started a career in consultancy focused on developing leaders in large organisations. My consulting assignments over the years have included working with many senior leadership teams, advising large organisations on leadership and organisational strategy, and developing thousands of leaders to be more effective enablers of others to succeed. I have worked in North America, across Europe, Asia and Australia/New Zealand, with large companies intent on developing more collaborative ways of working through developing leaders at all levels to create the climate for this to flourish.

My work in this area has fuelled my desire to research new models of leadership in more detail, to develop deeper insight into how leaders can accelerate movement in their organisations towards what I believe is a style and approach to leadership which is suitable for the challenges of leading in the twenty-first century. Moving towards a more distributed approach pushes decision making towards the experts in the customer experience, enabling those who know most to operate with freedom within an organisational framework that should empower and lead to more effective outcomes for customers, employees and for the whole organisation.

2.2 Thesis structure

In chapter 2 of this thesis I provide an overview of the main literature in the areas of leadership and engagement, providing a historical context which suggests a gradual evolution in leadership research from a focus on the heroic individual to an appreciation of the role of leadership as a shared act of influence to achieve collective objectives. I also describe authentic leadership theory (ALT) which I use in understanding the cases later in this thesis.

In chapter 3 I describe the two theories on which I draw most heavily in my research: distributed leadership and complexity leadership theory (CLT) and I explore them in some depth so that I can then draw on this in making sense of the case analysis. The version of DL that fits particularly well with CLT is called ‘intelligent hierarchy’ (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553) which I explain. This and the ‘leadership functions’ of CLT (Uhl-Bien et al, 2007: 300) are particularly helpful in explaining the data in both cases, and in formulating a framework in the cross-case analysis. I conclude by explaining how I landed on the research question used in my subsequent research.

I describe the methodology I have used for my research in Chapter 4. Here I explain my epistemological position, my research strategy and the methods I used to collect and analyse the data.

In chapters 5 and 6 I describe the analysis I conducted for each of my two case studies. I have anonymised both cases to protect confidentiality. I used my research question as a basis for analysing the data from each case, referring frequently to representative quotations to help bring each case to life, and comparing the data with theories from the literature chapters.

In chapter 7 I describe the cross-case analysis I conducted to draw out the insights from both cases into the factors that are either helping or hindering the transition to a more distributed approach to leadership, and to understand the patterns of behaviour and response in each case. Through this comparative process I was able to draw out certain themes that formed the basis of the framework with which I complete this chapter.

I conclude in chapter 8 with a summary of my research findings, some limitations of the research and an indication of my academic and practical contribution to knowledge.

2.3 Contribution to knowledge and practice

In terms of theoretical contribution, my research findings bring together aspects of the three main theories and relate them to particular distributed leadership outcomes in large organisations. This synthesis takes the form of a coherent framework, which is informed by the empirical research, and is a contribution to current theory about distributed leadership in that it identifies factors that influence the success of the transition towards DL, drawing on recent research into complexity leadership theory and authentic leadership theory as well as the existing DL research.

Both DL and CLT are particularly relevant in a society where the Internet and social media are increasing the transparency of organisations to internal and external audiences, and where democratic politics are seen as a right in more and more countries. ALT is also increasingly relevant in a society where the behaviour of individuals and of organisations is being held to account through media and legislative scrutiny. I believe these theories are in tune with the 'post-heroic' world. My research has added some insight into how they can be introduced to large complex organisations in practice, which will help practitioners (both senior executives and senior Human Resource professionals) as they pursue more accountable and ethical ways of working.

Through my analysis I also provide insight into how the exercise of leadership power affects the transition towards DL in terms of how followers respond. The links my research suggests between distributed leadership and employee engagement are also helpful in advancing our understanding of this phenomenon and provide practitioners with a clear business rationale (employee engagement) for starting the journey towards DL.

In looking at the exercise of power I have also developed the way we understand how individual senior leaders and senior teams can accelerate or decelerate the transition towards a more distributed approach through their style and what decisions they choose to share with their wider teams.

My research outcomes also show how the factors fit together, with some enabling others to work in practice, which can be of value to practitioners who are either on or contemplating the journey to a more distributed leadership approach. The factors help practitioners to understand their current position and to track progress on the DL journey. The framework may also be of value in the field of leadership development, as it provides a coherent structure for developing leaders across the organisation in a range of skills that will help to make DL work well in practice.

In these ways my research provides practical as well as theoretical contributions to knowledge in a way that is relevant to some of the issues facing organisations in the connected world in which they now operate. I focus on transition because I see many organisations in my work working hard to adapt to changing consumer and employee expectations driven by increased transparency and many ethical issues facing organisations in sectors as diverse as banking, services, pharmaceuticals, engineering and mining. Their challenge is to be more accountable, more flexible, and more responsive, whilst achieving a concerted shift in approach across boundaries. DL provides one route to this end.

We now turn to the literature review which is divided into two chapters: a general review of relevant literature and a more in-depth review of DL and CLT.

Chapter 3: General Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

I will start my review of literature with a wider analysis of leadership theories that relate to my research, including authentic leadership theory (ALT), which is one of the theoretical sources for the framework I use in my research. I will then explore distributed leadership (DL) and complexity leadership theory (CLT), as in my view it is closely related to DL, in the next chapter, as these are the other primary sources for the theoretical framework I use. My research suggests certain factors that influence successful transition towards DL which are consistent with these theories, and also draw on aspects of the other theories described below. I believe it is helpful to see DL in the wider context of how leadership theory has evolved in recent decades, to understand how it is both a different perspective on leadership whilst also reflecting much of the insight from earlier theories. DL and CLT place considerable emphasis on leadership as a shared process, rather than focusing on individual leaders and their attributes, which is in line with the increasingly shared perspective one can trace in other leadership theories such as servant leadership and authentic leadership theories, both of which are discussed below.

I will also describe theories of engagement, community, social networks and sense making as they relate to the follower experience in the transition towards a more distributed and shared approach to leadership. They are also theories that in my research have influenced the intent and experience of organisations to distribute leadership as a way to respond to complexity and ambiguous operating conditions.

3.2 General theories of leadership

In this section I will review a range of leadership theories that I believe are relevant to the emergence of DL and CLT. I will discuss each theory based on some of the key contributors to their development and comment on how they relate to DL research.

In my research I look at the way the prevalent leadership styles of both individuals and leaders across each case influences the transition towards DL, and how both are important factors in achieving a more distributed approach to leadership. I also explore how apparently competing leadership theories provide helpful insights into the exercise of leadership at an organisational level, and how we can draw on these insights in understanding the factors that influence the transition towards great distribution.

The main general theories of leadership I cover are Leader Member Exchange (LMX), transaction leadership theory, transformational (or charismatic) leadership theory, authentic leadership theory (ALT), ethical leadership and servant leadership.

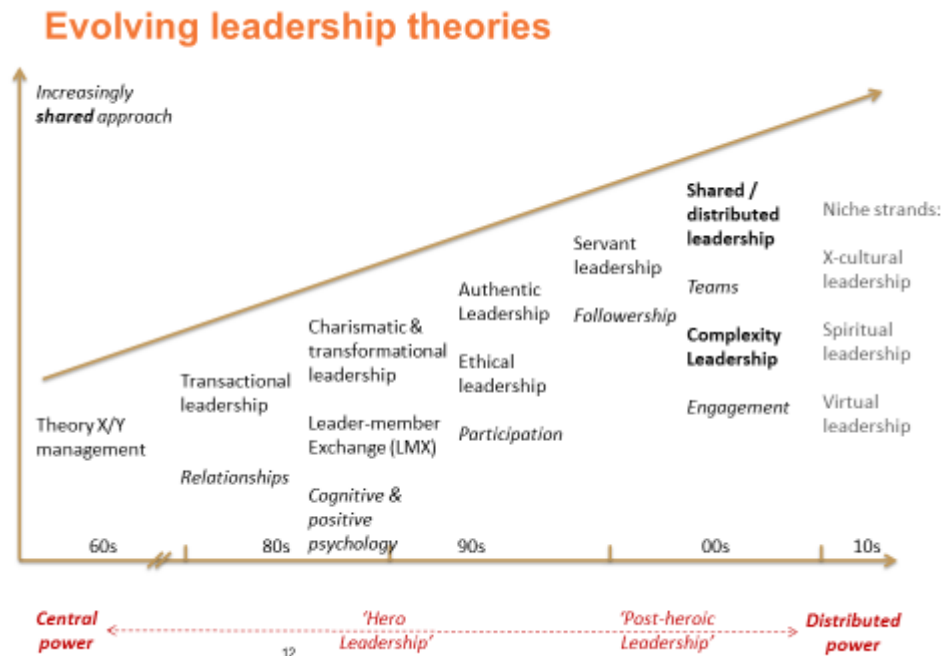
There are earlier leadership theories that have also been influential, such as theory X and theory Y by Douglas McGregor (1957: 41), based on two assumptions managers make about employees. Theory X suggests managers assume employees are inherently lazy and need close supervision, while with theory Y managers are open to seeing employees as inherently self-motivating and seeking responsibility, so requiring involvement and trust to perform at their best.

Eric Berne (1964) was one of the first to analyse the relationships between the leader and groups in transactional analysis through the book *Games People Play*, developing a theoretical framework of ego-states based on parent, adult and child styles and responses to describe the nature of transactions in a way that practitioners can understand and use. The emphasis in Berne's adult state on balanced processing of information and open, transparent transactions between leaders and followers is reflected in later work on authentic leadership (Avolio et al, 2004, Walumbwa et al, 2008). This becomes an important aspect of the theoretical framework I use in my research.

I also refer below to environmental dynamism (the level of change – or relative stability - going on in the organisation) and how it affects the follower's responsiveness to each leadership approach. I refer to this because in my research question is an explicit reference to organisations going through significant change, and I believe there is a relationship between the rate of change outside and inside an organisation. In my cases I explain the way each organisation's environment is changing and relate this to the extent of change occurring within the organisation.

In Figure 2.1 we see my interpretation of the evolution of main leadership theories, from Theory X/Y management to distributed leadership and complexity leadership theories. There is a general progression through these theories to an increasingly shared approach and a decentralisation of power, starting with McGregor's Theory Y (1957: 41), which broadly describes a shift from the 'heroic' leader to the 'post-heroic' (Badaracco, 2001: 120) leader. Senge (1990: 340) criticised the myth of individual leaders as 'charismatic heroes' with a focus on short term events, 'rather than on systemic forces and collective learning', which is in line with later research into 'post-heroic' leadership theories such as DL and CLT.

Figure 3.1: Evolution of leadership theory



In the sections below I will outline the key contributors in each of the main areas and compare and contrast them to help set DL and CLT in a wider theoretical context.

3.2.1 Transactional leadership

Transactional leadership focuses on process and reward influencing what followers actually do at work. Burns (1978) described how the leader has the power to reward or punish the team's performance and to train and manage when under-performing (alongside defining transformational leadership). The focus on leadership as a process is helpful in understanding the DL transition, and we can see similarities between transactional leadership theory and DL from this perspective in particular.

Jansen et al. (2009: 8) describes, based on his empirical research using exploratory factor analysis, how transactional leaders focus on the status quo, potentially limiting exploration; followers 'are explicitly rewarded and recognized for accomplishing agreed-upon objectives.' Transactional leaders monitor to anticipate mistakes and take corrective action, whereas transformational leaders encourage exploitative innovation.

He concludes with the importance of having both transactional and transformational (see below) leadership behaviours in a leader's repertoire to respond to different levels of environmental dynamism (see below) and needs for different types of innovation.

Jansen et al. are arguing for a more hybrid model of leadership effectiveness, balancing the transactional emphasis on current behaviour and results with the longer term transformational focus on vision and motivation to create the future (see transformational leadership section 2.2.3). I would link this hybrid mix of theories to the balancing of 'functions' we find in CLT later on, whereby there is a need for a strong 'administrative' core to the organisation as well as a strong 'adaptive function' across the organisation to help it respond to rapid changes in environment (Uhl-Bien, 2007: 300).

3.2.2 LMX theory

A prominent approach to defining and analysing leadership has been LMX theory which proposes that effective leadership involves high quality relationships between leaders and followers. LMX evolved originally from the vertical-dyad linkage model (Dansereau et al., 1975: 48), which states that leaders treat each team member differently, and that by doing this their leadership becomes a 'role' as opposed to merely a position. LMX evolved

following empirical work by Graen & Uhl-Bien (1995) focused on ‘role-making and role-taking processes’ (cited in Avolio et al, 2009: 433). In Chang’s positivist research paper (based on data from two independent samples) she describes how in LMX theory ‘leaders and followers develop successful relationships, and how these relationships lead to favourable individual and organizational outcomes’ (Chang & Johnson, 2010: 797). Avolio et al. (2009: 433), in their academic review, describe LMX as based on ‘mutual obligations and a psychological contract’ creating ‘relationship strength’ between the individual leader and individual followers.

This is helpful in understanding the way the quality of relationships between leader and followers influences the effectiveness of the leader in engendering commitment and discretionary effort among followers leading to improved performance. Chang & Johnson (2010: 797) cite how ‘a meta-analysis by Gerstner & Day (2007) concluded that subordinate-rated LMX was positively related to both subjective and objective measures of job performance’. The more the subordinate feels a strong relationship with his/her manager the more motivated they are to perform their role well.

Markham et al. (2010: 470) suggest through their quantitative research that LMX relationships are most effective when collaborative: e.g. when there is a shared setting of performance expectations. He states that LMX relationships are sometimes seen as ‘dyads-within-groups’ and sometimes as purely independent dyadic relationships. This is a helpful link to the importance of collaboration and shared influence in DL.

Markham et al. argue that the level of agreement is also a contributing factor, so where both parties agree on the quality of relationship it leads to more productive outputs. This goes further into shared agreement of deeper beliefs and work values (Markham et al,

2010: 471). This values-congruence is more important between the individual and their manager than between the individual and the organisation, although I would argue from engagement research (see MacLeod, 2009, below) that the manager-subordinate relationship is also a conduit for the organisation-individual relationship. The importance of values-congruence and the resulting strength of relationships between managers and subordinates is a helpful link to the importance of authentic relationships described later in ALT, which emerges as an important factor in successful transition towards DL when replicated across the organisation.

In summary, the LMX literature, which is predominantly from North America, is persuasive in demonstrating how the individual leader: subordinate relationship influences performance. Its emphasis on this dyadic relationship, however, is not consistent with further research into the increasing importance of teams to drive organisational performance, and in my view is a partial insight into the dynamic between leaders, followers and teams. It is broadly consistent with the relational emphasis in transactional leadership but it lacks the wider emphasis on organisational leadership which DL exemplifies. Other criticisms include that it creates in/out groups within organisations that can then erode trust in a leader's ability to deal effectively with all team members. There is also the idea that team members and leaders may view the relationship differently, creating the risk of imbalance and disengagement (Gerstner & Day, 1997: 828).

Graen (2006: 95) has extended LMX theory through empirical analysis to include a social networking view of organisations as 'systems of interdependent dyadic relationships, or dyadic subassemblies', which is helpful in linking to the emerging importance of social networks and complex adaptive systems, both of which are discussed in more detail below. Going beyond the emphasis on the one-to-one relationship is helpful to

accommodate the wider set of influence and control relationships that operate through and across the organisational structure and beyond into the socially connected world in which organisations now operate.

The importance of LMX in my research is its emphasis on the quality of the manager: subordinate relationship and how at the organisational level the process of leadership is still rooted in a multitude of such dyadic relationships. The effect of the manager on the motivation and engagement of their team members is typically significant, and is the conduit through which a wider organisational shift in leadership style is enacted in practice. Where it breaks down, and power is centralised, for example, at a particular node on the organisational structure, the knock-on effect for the part of the organisation 'below' this node is going to be a break down in distribution. Where senior leaders, by contrast, succeed in orchestrating a coordinated shift in style and practice across their manager population, they open up the possibility of distributed power and increased organisational agility.

3.2.3 Transformational leadership

Burns (1978) and Bass (1985) argued that there was a need to shift the research focus from the transactional to a more transformational view of leadership in order to explain the effect of charismatic leaders on follower behaviour. Avolio et al. (2009: 428) describe how 'the new [transformational] leadership models emphasized symbolic leadership behaviour': visionary, inspirational, and motivational. 'Charismatic and transformational leadership theories have turned out to be the most frequently researched theories over the past 20 years'. Interestingly, Bass draws on sensemaking (Weick et al, 1979b: 409) in defining inspirational motivation (Densten, 2005: 106). There is strong research evidence

described below to show that charismatic individuals can have a material impact on the way their followers make sense of what is going on, and how they then choose to dedicate their energy and commitment to particular ends. At first sight this might be seen as antithetical to DL, in which leadership is a shared social process (Bolden, 2011: 252), as described in the following chapter. In my research, however, I draw on both the impact of key figures in each case as well as the wider impact of the leadership process across each case and how it can affect the way people across the organisation choose to prioritise their efforts. So I draw on transformational leadership theory as well as DL, and other theories, in a theoretical synthesis that helps us understand the data in each case.

Wu et al. (2010: 90) describe transformational leadership thus: ‘inspire followers to pursue higher order goals and to exert extraordinary effort’. Transformational leadership behaviours (drawing from Bass, 1985; Arthur et al, 1993: 578) include:

- **‘Idealised influence’** (or charisma) – followers aspire to the vision and values - followers identify with the leader, the degree to which leaders are admired, respected and trusted (Jansen et al., 2009: 6) - Wu et al. see this as primarily group-oriented
- **‘Inspirational motivation’** – followers are motivated to achieve stretching goals – the degree to which leaders articulate an appealing vision and motivates others by providing meaning and challenge in their work (Jansen et al., 2009: 6) - Wu et al. see this as primarily group-oriented
- **‘Individualised consideration’** – leader tailors attention and support to each individual’s needs, focusing on the distinctiveness of each follower – attention to follower’s needs for achievement and growth by acting as coach/mentor (Jansen et al., 2009: 6) - Wu et al. see this as primarily individual-oriented

- **‘Intellectual stimulation’** – behaviours that appeal to each follower’s intellect – degree to which leaders stimulate followers efforts to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways (Jansen et al., 2009: 6) - Wu et al. see this as primarily individual-oriented.

The model also directly contrasts these behaviours with two extra transactional components – these are ‘contingent reward’ and ‘management by exception (active) and management by exception (passive).’ Jansen et al. (2009: 8) link transformational style with follower identification as the moderator to different types of innovation. He describes ‘transformational leadership that challenges assumptions, takes risks, and inspires others, is ideally suited to exploratory innovations.’

Transformational leaders inspire, mobilise commitment, and communicate well. ‘Through idealized influence and inspirational motivation, transformational leadership provides ideological explanations that link individuals’ identities to the collective identity (Jansen et al., 2009: 8). Transformational behaviours ‘serve to engage individuals’ self-concepts in the interests of the firm’s mission and increase followers’ intrinsic motivation to engage in exploratory innovation’. Interestingly, Strang & Kuhnert (2009: 422) use constructive-development theory in their empirical study to explain higher order development and its links to performance, which is closer to authentic leadership’s emphasis on developing ‘openness’ and comfort with ‘paradox’ through positive reinforcement of the individual’s identity. Transformational theorists often cite the use of the MLQ (Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire) developed by Bass and Avolio to test where leaders are on the scale.

The criticism of the transformational school of thought (Badaracco, 2001: 120; Senge, 1990: 340) is that it focuses too much on the individual heroic leader, inspiring others to ‘save the day’, based on charisma and personally appealing influence more than ethical or distributed approaches to influence. There is, however, a clear role for the inspiring individual to create fresh energy and forward momentum, to develop a new sense of purpose in an organisation. In the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ (Leithwood, 2008a: 553) these characteristics are also present, albeit in a more collective and less ego-based manifestation.

Transformational leadership has been criticised by some for assuming a basic level of ‘generalizability’ (Buchanan, 2012: 365) to all levels and sectors, i.e. one cannot conduct research into senior managers and then use their style of leadership for ‘nearby’ leaders, as the situation and context is entirely different (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005: 55).

There are also elements of the transformational leader theory that have similarities with authentic leadership below, with a continued emphasis on the individual’s character and a recognition of their role in initiating activity and goal achievement.

3.2.4 Authentic leadership

Authentic leadership represents a more inclusive and less individualistic style of leadership than transformational leadership, more in keeping, I would argue, with the shared process of DL. Luthans & Avolio (2003) and George (2003) published seminal texts on authentic leadership, bringing it to a wider research audience, and Avolio et al. later redefined it as ‘a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behaviour that encourages

openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers' inputs' (2009: 423). This multi-level definition accommodates the relationship between leaders and followers within an organisation's hierarchy, and as such is helpful in linking authenticity to DL. Without authenticity of motive and practice, DL is less likely to work in practice. The benefits of authenticity in the workplace are backed up by important studies that focus on employee wellbeing and its link to authenticity (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Ryan & Deci showed that feeling competent and being able to be authentic are linked to increased employee wellbeing, which is largely determined by the climate created by leaders.

Walumbwa et al. define authentic leadership as having four dimensions: 'a pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information and relational transparency ... on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development' (Walumbwa et al, 2008: 94). Avolio et al (2009: 424) affirm that these four factors are generally accepted as the components of authentic leadership. Avolio et al. created the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire (Avolio et al, 2007: 424) as a contrast to the pre-existing MLQ and ELS (Ethical Leadership Scale), the latter developed by Brown et al in 2005. Walumbwa et al (2008: 105), identified that the questionnaire found and allowed new and unique examples of variance with respect to three dependent variables: Organizational Citizenship Behaviour, Organizational Commitment, and Satisfaction with One's Supervisor.

There are significant links between authentic and transformational leadership: authentic leadership has a stronger moral element, linking it also to ethical and spiritual leadership styles. However, authentic leadership has roots in the work on positive psychology and

leadership by Fredrickson (2001: 3), less about the leader him/herself and, using his ‘broaden and build’ theory, more about building on the positive resources within each individual. The authentic leader empowers others and develops their capability to achieve, based on a belief in the efficacy of others (Walumbwa, 2008: 112).

Gardner et al. appear sceptical of authentic leadership, purely because it is so difficult to ascertain and document displays of real emotion. They ask: ‘is it possible for leaders to exhibit flexible emotional reactions across a wide variety of contexts without violating their sense of self?’ They state that there is a need to ‘reconcile the purported benefits of leader authenticity with available evidence that leaders who are not necessarily fully authentic (e.g., leaders high in emotional intelligence, self-monitoring ability, and political skill) tend to be perceived as highly effective’ (2005:479). I would argue that the high levels of self-awareness and self-management in open and trusting relationships suggested by Gardner are in fact consistent with the definition of authentic leadership by Walumbwa et al. above. The key distinction is that the latter is based on genuine motives whereas Gardner is attributing disingenuous motives to the leaders who actively manage their behaviour, which is not consistent with the ALT definition above. For the purposes of my research I have focused on observable leader actions where possible, as well as seeking various data sources to provide some validation of whether these actions are perceived to be genuine by other members of the leadership community in each case.

3.2.5 Ethical Leadership

Ethical leadership (at least the modern DL-influenced version) was initially written about as a named theory in 2001: Kanungo (2001) sees ethical leadership ‘as a tension between altruistic and egoistic motives’ (quoted from Kalshoven et al., 2011: 52). This tension

captures neatly the evolution of leadership theory from individual act to shared process discussed above.

The constructs in ethical leadership are linked to authentic leadership. There are two major measures of ethical leadership. Firstly there is Brown et al.'s (2005) 10-point leadership questionnaire named the Ethical Leadership Scale, and secondly there is Kalshoven et al.'s (2011) Ethical Leadership at Work (ELW) questionnaire. Kalshoven built upon Brown's foundation and it is considered a refinement of Brown's work. Brown was the first to see Ethical Leadership as a completely separate leadership style. Kalshoven (2010: 25) states: 'Based on theory, interviews and a student sample, we developed seven ethical leader behaviors (fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, and concern for sustainability).' Kalshoven (2010: 25) also states that 'ethical leadership was also related to OCB [organisational citizenship behaviour] (supervisor-rated). Employees who rate their leader higher on power sharing and fairness show more OCB.' Kalshoven identified seven leader behaviours associated with ethical leadership, as described in Table 2.1.

Table 3.1: Ethical Leadership Behaviours

ELW dimensions	Descriptions
Fairness	Do not practice favouritism, treat others in a way that is right and equal, make principled and fair choices
Power sharing	Allow followers a say in decision making and listen to their ideas and concerns
Role clarification	Clarify responsibilities, expectations and performance goals
People orientation	Care about, respect and support followers
Integrity	Consistence of words and acts, keep promises
Ethical guidance	Communicate about ethics, explain ethical rules, promote and reward ethical conduct
Concern for sustainability	Care about the environment and stimulate recycling

Kalshoven et al. (2011: 52) say that ‘authentic leadership is described as behaving in line with the true self and to know oneself’ (e.g., Gardner et al., 2005, May et al., 2003 and Sparrowe, 2005). Walumbwa et al. (2008: 103) empirically showed that Brown et al.'s measure of ethical leadership is related, but well distinguishable from authentic leadership. One distinction is that ethical leaders also use transactional forms of leadership whilst authentic leaders don't. In other words, ‘ethical leaders discipline and reward (un)ethical behaviors, which is less in line with authentic leadership (Brown et al., 2005 and Walumbwa et al., 2008).’

Kalshoven says: ‘in line with previous research (e.g., Brown et al., 2005 and De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008) we found that perceived ethical leadership is positively related to team and organizational commitment, trust, leader effectiveness and job satisfaction. Also, both studies clearly show that ethical leadership is associated with trust’ (2010: 65).

3.2.6 *Servant leadership*

The concept of servant leadership was developed initially by Robert Greenleaf (1991) and later developed into a ten-point list of attributes by Larry Spears (2004: 3-4) as follows:

1. **Listening:** keen to listen, supporting others in decision analysis
2. **Empathy:** seeking to understand and empathize with others as human beings
3. **Healing:** able to heal one's self and others, helping others solve their own problems without fear of failure
4. **Awareness:** especially self-awareness, able to view situations from a more integrated, ethical position
5. **Persuasion:** seeks to persuade rather than using power to convince others, open rather than controlling
6. **Conceptualization:** thinks beyond day-to-day realities, and also focuses on long term operating goals based on a personal vision
7. **Foresight:** able to foresee the likely outcome & consequences of a situation
8. **Stewardship:** holding their institution in trust for the greater good of society
9. **Commitment:** to the growth of people & belief in their value
10. **Building community:** within and beyond one's organisation.

There are similarities between servant leadership theory and authentic leadership theory, with the emphasis on self-awareness, an ethical frame of reference and empathetic relationships. Servant leadership is not extensively used in the research literature, with a noticeable lack of empirical work that focuses upon its efficacy. This may be influenced by the religious connotations this theory has collected through the explicitly religious

position adopted by both Greenleaf and Spears (Greenleaf et al, 1996). Servant leadership is helpful, however, as it demonstrates the gradual shift towards a more shared approach to leadership, which is central to the emerging DL research base.

3.3 Related theories

I have reviewed in the sections above several important leadership theories from the last fifty years, and sought to demonstrate how some indicate a move towards a more shared approach to leadership, as opposed to the emphasis being primarily on individual leaders. I have also indicated where elements of each theory are consistent with the theoretical constructs we find in DL. I now move on to outline certain literature that describes theories that are relevant to leadership research (and DL in particular), and therefore helpful in giving us a wider frame of reference in understanding DL (and CLT) in context.

I am particularly interested in certain niche subjects that represent the changing nature of the organisation in a wider socio-political context where cultural exchange, increased remote working and an increasing desire for meaning are causing people in organisations to seek more subtle forms of leadership practice. That is the main reason for considering these subjects alongside leadership theory.

An area of research related to the increasingly global working population, linked together in real time by telecommunications and global marketing activity and remote working practices, is that of virtual leadership. This is a response to the increasing levels of remote team location, outsourcing, and internationally coordinated project teams, see Zigurs (2003: 339). Of significance to this thesis is how research shows that leading people virtually requires more active leader communication, and building more trust, as the

option for local and tight control of work is removed, at least partially, by the increased geographical separation between workers and their leaders. Virtual leadership research also demonstrate the increasing need to accommodate distributed leadership into the way large organisations conduct leadership if they operate internationally and with distributed project teams.

3.3.1 Environmental dynamism

Environmental dynamism is an interesting moderator of follower response. Waldman et al, (2001: 136) suggests that a more dynamic environment ‘is stressful to followers, makes organizations more receptive to charismatic effects, and allows leaders more latitude for discretion.’ His research suggests that it fits well with transformational leadership whereas this style can be ‘distracting and superfluous’ in stable environments (Jansen et al., 2009: 10). So environmental dynamism amplifies the positive relationship between transformational leadership and exploratory innovation: transformational leadership is more effective in dynamic environments. Conversely, transactional leadership will be well suited to more stable conditions (Waldman et al, 2001: 134), encouraging incremental improvement, leverage of existing knowledge, and clarifying expectations clearly.

Jansen et al highlight ‘the importance of internal triggers to facilitating incremental innovation in stable environments’ (Jansen et al., 2009: 15). ‘Organizational members, including middle and lower level managers, will continue “business as usual” without considering improvements or refinements to existing products and services unless their leader exhibits transformational behaviours and triggers them to do so.’ (2009: 15-16).

Both cases I study are operating in dynamic environments, so this literature is helpful in informing the context within which both are operating. I will explore whether the leadership style that works well in the transition towards DL in this environment is in fact transformational or in fact a more subtle mix of transformational and other approaches.

3.3.2 Teams and collective leadership

A relevant area of research to both cases is that of teams and team leadership. Van Dierendonck & Dijkstra (2012) note that the ‘trend... toward decentralized, organization forms (Houghton & Yoho, 2005) asks for a different kind of working from both leaders and employees. Leaders are expected to be more adaptive and flexible (Basset al., 2003), and often are asked to lead and motivate not only individuals, but also teams as a whole (Chen et al., 2007)’ (2012: E1).

The increasing emphasis on teams is an important aspect of DL. Wendt (2009: 1) states: ‘The rise of team-based work structures is perhaps one of the most salient characteristics of contemporary work places and the shift from individualized work structures to teamwork has spread throughout the organisation (NRC, 1999; West, 2004)’. Wendt goes on to say in the article describing his empirical research, that ‘modern management is primarily about managing groups, and leadership behaviour should thus be evaluated in relation to team effectiveness’ (Wendt, 2009: 1).

This is backed up by Hiller et al. (2006: 388) who state that ‘The epicenter of collective leadership is not the role of a formal leader, but the interaction of team members to lead the team by sharing in leadership responsibilities.’ Here we begin to see the ‘team as leader’ approach. Mehra et al. (2006: 233) also supports this ‘team as leader’ idea, when

they state that ‘in this paper, we join a small but growing number of researchers who take seriously the possibility of leadership in teams as a shared, distributed phenomenon in which there can be several (formally appointed and/or emergent) leaders within a group. In re-conceptualizing leadership as a team-level construct, our focus is on the emergent network of leadership perceptions within work teams.’ The difference between Hiller and Mehra is that Hiller sees teams as distributed in their relations (i.e. follower-leader relationships occur between multiple parties) whilst Mehra sees the leader-follower relation as still principally dyadic.

There has recently been an increase in research into ‘distributed teams’, which are defined as teams that are ‘distributed’ over a large geographic area, not necessarily teams that are designed around a DL framework. They collaborate in a ‘virtual’ setting, often online, and I discuss the role of social media and increased widespread communication later.

These new ‘virtual teams’ are on a continuum, according to Al-Ani (2011: 225): ‘On one side of this continuum is the traditional concept of a team – highly synchronous, meeting face-to-face, with minimal use of any type of technology or virtual tools. At the other end of the continuum is the purely distributed team: high in virtual tools, low in media richness, and completely asynchronous across one or more dimensions (Bell & Kozlowski, 2002; Kirkman & Mathieu, 2005; Zigurs, 2003).’

Zigurs (2003: 343) describes how technology is increasingly being used to structure group processes, illustrating how team working is a social process, enabled by ‘groupware’ to increase effectiveness in shared decision-making. Leadership is also a social process. When Spillane said that ‘aspects of the situation define and are defined by leadership practice in interaction with leaders and followers’ (Spillane, 2005b: 147), his comment

now has implications for DL being instituted in ‘distributed teams’.’ I will draw on this later when I analyse the way in each case leaders sought to increase team and inter-team collaboration in order to achieve concerted action across diverse structures.

Millikin et al. (2010: 287) suggest that self-managed work teams ‘mark a radical departure in how work is organized and done by assuming responsibility for doing tasks and decision-making authority traditionally reserved for management’. This is based on their study of 97 self-managed teams in a single semiconductor plant. Millikin et al. (2010: 687) also describe how some research indicates widespread adoption (75% of the top 1000 US firms) and successful improvement in ‘work-life quality, customer service and productivity’, but others say it is over-hyped. Certain conditions such as ‘groupthink or directive leadership can threaten team productivity or viability’. They conclude that ‘this study sustained growing reservations about excessively high individual self-management on collective effectiveness’ (2010: 697). This correlates with Wu et al. (2010: 101) who describes the over emphasis on individually differentiated relationships in teams having a detrimental impact on performance in the article above ... when group-focused leadership was more effective. Fitzsimons et al. (2011: 317) states ‘there is sufficient evidence in these and similar studies to argue that teams in which leadership is shared are considered effective.’

This supports my proposition that distributing leadership power and influence will increase organisational engagement and effectiveness if it is supported by strong team regulation and shared identity with the organisation’s goals. Too much individuality in terms of autonomous action can lead to chaos and ineffective organisations. This is supported by Hargreaves and Harris (2011) in their report *Performance beyond expectations*. They note 15 features of successful organisations. Many of the features are

related to team support or team activity in increasing productivity and success. 'Feature 12 is: Flair, flow and flexibility – these organisations engage a talented team in which risk and creativity are valued and members participate and play in interchangeable roles and positions' (2011: 61). They remark that 'Performing beyond expectations involves everyone in the organisation. It depends on engaging a talented team in which risk and creativity are valued, honest mistakes are acknowledged and tolerated, and members participate and play in interchangeable roles and positions' (2011: 58). In their discussion of feature 11, Fraternity, they say: 'Leaders who perform beyond expectations build powerful teams that connect vertical and lateral leadership to produce much better results. The team knows exactly what it has to accomplish and is motivated by high degrees of internal collaboration' (2011: 61). This links the intelligent hierarchy concept (Leithwood, 2008a: 553) to teams.

In this context there are two ways a leader can focus their attention on followers: individually or collectively. Wu et al. describe 2 forms of leadership focus (2010: 92-93). 'Differentiated individual-focused leadership', i.e. a different approach to each individual in the group (relates to LMX theory). This relies on close working relationships with followers and tends therefore to 'leader identification' which leads to increased self-efficacy (self-enhancement, from social identity theory) and higher individual performance. Individuals who identify with charismatic leaders tend to have a positive self-concept as a result. LMX suggests leaders tend to treat different members differently, leading to an 'in' and an 'out' group, causing differences in self-efficacy among members which in turn causes lower overall group expectations about the group's performance.

Wu et al's second style is 'group-focused leadership', i.e. a consistent approach to the group. The leader shapes the group identity - a shared cognitive process whereby the

members define themselves in terms of group membership. This relates to self-concept leadership theory (Lord & Brown, 2004). Through having shared values and goals the group builds a collective identity which increases group efficacy, the followers' shared belief in their collective capability to perform. This emphasis on collective achievement will be important as I analyse the dynamics in both cases and the consequent extent of transition towards increased levels of DL.

Friedrich et al. (2009: 933) effectively introduce the idea of the intelligent hierarchy (though not calling it that in their paper). They state that 'collective leadership' is 'a dynamic leadership process in which a defined leader, or set of leaders, selectively utilize skills and expertise within a network, effectively distributing elements of the leadership role as the situation or problem at hand requires.' This is also context-dependent, and is linked to the adaptability required in complex adaptive systems (CAS). Friedrich et al help to define the link between DL and CLT. They also state that 'collective leadership is not static. As different problems emerge, different skills and expertise will be more appropriate' (2011: 935) (quoted in Contractor et al., 2012: 998).

The role of the follower, both individually and as a team or group member, is an important contributor to effective leadership working in each specific context. Interestingly, the group-focused leadership approach leads to strong shared performance within the context of organisational alignment of identity, which creates helpful conditions for effective DL.

Thus the team is an important point of analysis when looking at DL, as DL is a social process manifest at least in part through shared action and mutual influence. The level of inter-team collaboration will also be an important aspect of my research analysis, as it affects the organisation's ability to operate efficiently and effectively.

3.3.3 Empowerment

An underlying implication of DL research is the need for leaders to empower followers, which is also consistent with authentic leadership theory. ‘Empowerment is conceptualized as a psychological state that encompasses four cognitions: competence, an individual’s belief in his or her capability that he or she can be effective; impact, the degree to which an individual can influence strategic, administrative, or operating outcomes at work; meaningfulness, the value of a work goal or purpose, judged in relation to an individual’s ideals or standards and self-determination, an individual’s sense of having choice in initiating and regulating actions’ (Van Dierendonck & Dijkstra, 2012: E3). Leaders create the climate where this can happen, and I would argue that authentic leaders operating on a distributed basis do this especially well. Their key point, however, is that empowerment is more than the delegation of power, it is more to do with the creation of an environment where this sharing of authority is more likely to lead to more effective decisions and operations.

There are also more general definitions of empowerment, one of which is from Conger and Kanungo (1988: 474), who said it was a ‘process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy among organizational members through the identification [and removal] of conditions that foster powerlessness.’

Spreitzer gives a helpful overview of the impact empowerment in teams has on performance. ‘Research on empowered teams also indicates positive outcomes. More empowered teams have better work-unit performance (Seibert et al, 2004), productivity (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999), team process improvement (Spreitzer et al., 1999b), customer

satisfaction (Mathieu et al., 2006) and team effectiveness (Chen et al., 2007; Kirkman et al., 2001). Empowered team members are also more proactive, satisfied with their jobs, and committed to the team and the organization (Kirkman and Rosen, 1999)' (Spreitzer, 2008: 62).

Kirkman et al. (2004a: 336) suggests that teams experience empowerment in a similar way to individuals. This has particular relevance to the DL literature on empowerment as it gets away from a more dyadic relationship. They state: 'teams experience empowerment on four dimensions: potency, the collective belief of a team that it can be effective; meaningfulness, the extent to which team members feel an intrinsic caring for their tasks; autonomy, the degree to which team members believe that they have freedom to make decisions; and impact, the extent to which team members feel that their tasks make significant organizational contributions (Kirkman & Rosen, 1997). The four dimensions combine additively to create an overall construct of team empowerment.' We can link them to Spreitzer's features of individual empowerment (cited in Van Dierendonck & Dijkstra, 2012: E3): potency links to competence, meaningfulness to meaning, autonomy to self-determination, and impact to impact.

The main difference, according to Kirkman and Rosen (1997), between this form of empowerment and individual empowerment is that team empowerment is socially constructed amongst a collection of individuals. They say: 'unlike empowerment at the individual level, which consists of a set of individual cognitions (Spreitzer, 1995), team empowerment emerges from collective cognition – that is, it is socially constructed (Gibson, 2001) – and represents members' assessments of their tasks and the conditions under which their team works. Thus, the referent is the team rather than the individual.'

I would argue that both individual and team empowerment is socially constructed amongst a collection of individuals, whether they are operating individually or with a shared team purpose. The action of the leader is key to initiating this construction. Both at an individual and at a team level the way leaders collectively create a climate of empowerment is likely to have a significant impact on the extent to which the transition towards a more distributed leadership approach is successful. Ironically, it is the action of an individual, the CEO or senior figure, in the first instance that sets in motion the ripple effect of changes in the way leaders interact with their teams that creates the climate for success. I will explore this interaction between leaders, follower responses and how empowered people feel in the case analysis.

3.4 Employee engagement

One of the benefits of DL is increased levels of employee engagement through increased involvement (MacLeod, 2009: 105). I therefore provide a summary of the engagement literature as it pertains to leadership behaviour and its consequences for other agents in the organisation.

Avolio (2004) cites the Gallup Organisation's three levels of engagement: 1. engaged – passion, profound connection to the organisation, with innovation and forward drive; 2. not engaged – 'checked out', sleepwalking, present but giving average effort; and 3. actively disengaged – unhappy, acting it out, undermining others' efforts.

Employee engagement is typically defined by academics as either a psychological state or a behavioural outcome (Macey & Schneider, 2008a: 5). This balance of cause and effect reflects two sides of the engagement coin. It is a state affected by the interaction of

employer and employee as well as a resulting devotion of discretionary effort by the employee to the benefit of the organisation.

The importance of engagement in the workplace has long been known about, with studies stretching back to the Hawthorne Studies in the 1920s (Jeffrey et al., 1985) and include studies such as the one by Judge et al. (2001: 389) which found a relationship between individual employee attitude in the workplace and individual employee levels of performance. Consultancies and research institute definitions tend to focus on the positive outcomes of employee engagement. Towers Watson (2008: 3) suggests three aspects of engagement: rational, emotional and motivational in terms of the employee's level of engagement. These broad categories are also reflected in definitions from other consultancies.

The Institute for Employment Studies (IES) provides a broad and effective definition of employee engagement in their qualitative report, which unifies these different sources (2004: ix): 'a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. An engaged employee is aware of business context and works with colleagues to improve performance within the job for the benefit of the organisation. The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee'.

In both cases I will analyse the leadership approach over time and relate it to the changing levels of engagement among employees.

Research into the effect of leadership on levels of engagement is primarily focused on leadership styles and in particular transformational, charismatic or authentic leadership.

This is partly because the transformational and charismatic school started over 30 years ago and has therefore been subject to research for more time. The authentic school (Luthans and Avolio, 2003) developed from this previous focus on the individual leader attributes. DL is more concerned with the collective working of leadership across the organisation, which has potentially more impact on the widespread engagement of employees. There is therefore a viable and interesting gap for my research to introduce the linkage between DL and engagement.

3.4.1 The drivers of and barriers to engagement

According to the IES ‘the strongest driver of engagement is a sense of feeling valued and involved’ (2004: 21). The authors point out that this is a perception of the employee which can be influenced by their development, their relationship with their manager, the communications they receive, how fairly they feel treated and their involvement in decision making.

The MacLeod report (2009: 33) draws on a wide range of sources and concludes that the main drivers of employee engagement that emerge are:

- ‘Leadership which ensures a strong, transparent and explicit organisational culture which gives employees a line of sight between their job and the vision and aims of the organisation.
- Engaging managers who offer clarity, appreciation of employees’ effort and contribution, who treat their people as individuals and who ensure that work is organised efficiently and effectively so that employees feel they are valued, and equipped and supported to do their job.

- Employees feeling they are able to voice their ideas and be listened to, both about how they do their job and in decision-making in their own department, with joint sharing of problems and challenges and a commitment to arrive at joint solutions.
- A belief among employees that the organisation lives its values, and that espoused behavioural norms are adhered to, resulting in trust and a sense of integrity.’

This summary includes reference to the organisation (culture and values), the manager, the work itself and the ability of the employee to influence the organisation. This is the two-way relationship in the IES definition above. It is also consistent with the Towers Watson research (2009) suggesting that recognition is a key driver of engagement, through inclusion, communication and trust. The leader and how they create the organisational construct around the employee is, I argue, central to all of these factors.

The barriers to engagement also cluster around leadership, management and communications, the work itself and a lack of trust. Qualitative research by Roffey Park Institute (cited in Robinson’s IES, 2004) found in their survey of UK managers that workload pressure along with poor management and poor communication were key barriers to engagement. Lockwood (2008: 8) also argues in her qualitative report that bureaucracy and heavy workloads inhibit engagement. I would suggest that these are symptoms of the organisational construct, the system that is ultimately the leaders’ responsibility. My unit of analysis is the organisation, but I recognise that managers at all levels influence the overall level of engagement within the organisation as a whole.

Other research, such as the survey work done by BlessingWhite (2008: 19), found that a lack of trust can lead to disengagement in organisations, particularly a lack of trust in senior leadership. In the authoritative and widely researched MacLeod Report (2009: 32)

for the UK government, the authors state ‘In our view this joint and consequential failure of leadership and management is the main cause of poor employee engagement.’ Many of the drivers and barriers of engagement appear to be related to the critical link between leadership and engagement.

3.4.2 The beneficial effects of engagement

The benefits of high levels of employee engagement to the organisation include improvements to financial performance, customer loyalty and employee productivity. In one study of financial performance, Towers Watson (2008: 3) looked at 50 global companies over a one-year period, correlating their employee engagement levels with financial results. The companies with high employee engagement had a 19% increase in operating income and almost a 28% growth in earnings per share. These results are replicated by many others, cited liberally throughout the MacLeod report (2009).

Some of the research relates to identification as a mediator for the leadership effect on levels of follower engagement, which is discussed in the next section. Another effect of leadership on employee engagement is discussed by Davies et al. (2010: 536) in their empirical work on the influence employee experience on customer experience: ‘it is managing employee perceptions of the firm, and not necessarily those of customers, which ultimately controls whether sales will increase into the future’. This research reveals an interesting commercial relationship between sales and employee engagement with a positive perception of the organisation. This has interesting implications for my cases which I will explore in the case analysis later.

The service profit chain research for Sears in the USA (HBR, 1998), IES research in the UK retail sector (2003) and quantitative research by Harter et al. (2006) all describe the statistical link between employee engagement, customer loyalty and consequent sales revenues.

Employee productivity also increases with rising engagement. Wellins and Concelman (2005, cited in Macey & Schneider, 2008: 5) suggest that engagement is an ‘illusive force’ that motivates an individual to achieve higher levels of performance. A study of 50,000 employees found that ‘highly engaged organisations have the potential to reduce staff turnover by 87 per cent and improve performance by 20 per cent’ (Corporate Leadership Council, 2008, cited in the MacLeod report, 2009: 37).

3.4.3 Follower identification

Identity represents a major area of research in social sciences. For the purposes of this research I am considering follower identification in relation to how it links leadership and engagement. In his review of leadership theories, Avolio (2009: 427) draws on cognitive psychology and the importance of self-construct theory in understanding the area of leadership and follower interaction. He suggests there are two ways a leader influences followers: through emphasising values which motivates the follower to act in a certain way or through appealing to their self-concept, ‘activat[ing] a specific identity to which the follower can relate’. I will explore through the case analysis whether leaders can increase follower identification with the organisation through increasing the perceived value of the organisation’s purpose (such as making a constructive difference in the world), vision (such as having goals to which people can aspire) and its values (such as people feeling aligned to principles of behaviour that prevail).

Weick explores follower identification in terms of sensemaking. He suggests that individuals make sense of their immediate environments and form their identity ‘out of the process of interaction’. He goes on, ‘whenever I define self, I define “it”, but to define it is also to define self’. (Weick, 1995: 20).

This research has been added to by Sluss & Ashforth (2007: 11) with reference to ‘interpersonal relationships and their influence of identity and identification in the workplace. Specifically, the interpersonal level of identification focuses on one’s role-relationship such as between supervisors and their direct reports.’ They define relational identity as ‘the nature of one’s role-relationships, such as manager-subordinate’ and relational identification as the ‘extent to which one defines oneself in terms of a given role-relationship’.

Lührmann & Eberl (2007: 122) suggest that ‘identity proposals need to be believable to all participants involved in the identity trade. Such proposals are more believable if they are interpreted as authentic ones’. In the cross case analysis in chapter 7 I will explore whether the credibility of the ‘identity proposals’ influenced the extent to which leaders achieved increased engagement.

Howell & Shamir cite ‘self-concept clarity and collective identity’ as key factors in how followers relate to leaders (Howell & Shamir, 2005: 101). This is an interesting area of research to understand how this moderates the leaders’ influence on key outcomes such as engagement and adoption of strategic change. In both cases there is a significant strategic change agenda, with which senior leaders are seeking to engage their wider colleagues.

Their attempts to create a stronger sense of ‘collective identity’ is explored in the case analysis chapters.

Chang & Johnson (2010: 796) explore ‘how follower self-identity functions as a mediator and moderator of leader influences’ and how it is a ‘crucial mechanism in leadership-related processes’ (citing Lord and Brown, 2004). They describe how actors can ‘define themselves as independent entities with unique attributes and goals (*individual* identity), as partners fulfilling the role expectations communicated by another person (*relational* identity), or as group members confirming to social norms (*collective* identity), (Brewer et al, 1996)’ (2010: 796). Chang & Johnson place particular importance on the relational identity, as ‘leadership is an inherently social process’ (2010: 798). I will explore the relationship between these types of identity and the level of coherent distribution of leadership in my case analysis.

Davies’ (2010: 541) research into how employee perceptions influence customer experience of service could be described as representing collective identity. He describes three ways to influence this identity from his research: ‘training was mentioned frequently as a way to instil and develop a positive internal reputation.’ Quality of management and how much autonomy workers have drive the positive identification with the firm. ‘In our data, year on year sales growth among businesses with a clear positive reputation gap averaged over 16 percentage points higher than those with a clear negative gap’ (2010: 542). All of these ways are relevant to the case analysis later.

Much of the work on identity is also similar to theories of trust and identification with an authority figure (in order to trust them). De Cremer & van Knippenberg (2005: 363) discovered that ‘follower trust in the leader and identification with the collective both play

an important role in translating a leader's self-sacrifice into follower's cooperation.' If the follower feels a part of the community (collective) then they're more likely to feel engaged. This relates to the importance of collective activity described in the case analysis chapters.

In my research analysis I am focused on the way followers respond to leaders' attempts to share the leadership process, with its associated levels of influence and responsibility, and in particular how their sense of identity with the organisation influences their response (and in turn how this affects their level of organisational engagement).

3.4.4 Communities at work

It is important to define what 'community' (or 'sense of community') means with respect to workplace engagement. A thorough definition is given by McMillan & Chavis (1986: 9) and contains four elements: 'The first element is membership. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. The second element is influence, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. The third element is reinforcement: integration and fulfilment of needs. This is the feeling that members' needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. The last element is shared emotional connection, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences.' It is interesting to note how similar the above factors are to the workplace empowerment factors (both individual and team empowerment).

Uhl-Bien & Marion state that ‘complexity science has identified a number of dynamics that characterize the formation and behaviors of CAS. For example, complexity science has found that interactive, adaptive agents tend to bond in that they adapt to one another's preferences and worldviews (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2001: 392). From this, they form aggregates (i.e., clusters of interacting agents engaged in some measure of cooperative behavior). Mature social systems are comprised of a complex of hierarchically embedded, overlapping and interdependent aggregates, or CAS (Kauffman, 1993)’ (2007: 303). This links CLT to communities and teams in increasingly complex situations, although it is helpful to make a distinction between aggregates (teams) that form by adapting to ‘one another’s preferences and world views’ and aggregates that form due to a shared acknowledgement of the process (and the structure) in which they interact (i.e. through social media or technology in the workplace) (Uhl-Bien et al, 2007: 303).

Edwards (2011: 308) provides a clear description of how theories of DL and community at work are inter-related in his qualitative research, citing shared aspects such as:

- The importance of symbols for community and leadership identity
- The sense of belonging that underpins both communities and distributed leadership
- The sense of a shared community, with emphasis on participation, collective action around a shared narrative
- Embracing the individual as a legitimate part of the collective, self-fulfilment as well as group-fulfilment
- Shared ethics being a basis for shared action in both communities and DL
- Liminality – the ‘between’ moments such as rituals in which ‘normality is suspended which symbolize the renewal of the group and its collective identity.

By understanding the nature of the community and its shared identity in each case we can better understand the basis on which DL will work effectively as an expression of a natural social process. Through community-based dialogue people make sense of their work, the organisation for which they work and the relationships at work, as suggested by Weick (1995: 79-80).

There is an increasing emphasis away from geographic communities to networks.

Wellman (2001: 227) writes: ‘We find community in networks not groups... In networked societies: boundaries are permeable, interactions are with diverse others, connections switch between multiple networks, and hierarchies can be flatter and recursive...

Communities are far-flung, loosely bounded, sparsely-knit, and fragmentary.’ This relates to the conclusions in the section above on social networks and emerging leadership.

3.4.5 Sensemaking in engagement

Weick (1995) is a seminal writer on sensemaking in organisations, and describes the link between sensemaking, leadership and engagement. This helps identify sensemaking as a route into engagement for leaders, and we can draw from Weick’s work (1995: 17-61) the way sensemaking encourages employees to engage with their organisations and the implications for how leaders can behave to reinforce that process. This is described in table 2.2.

Table 3.2: Sensemaking, engagement and leadership

Sensemaking aspect	Engagement	Implications for leadership
Grounded in identity construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each person makes sense for themselves of themselves • How do I/we align with this organisation, how does it give me meaning and build self-worth? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to personal and collective identity • Help people to see their organisation's worth as their own ... our value to society, our role, our compelling identity
Retrospective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensemaking needs attention to things in the past • We want to look back and make sense, possibly over-simplifying to help the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the importance of feeling that the past is important and understood • Make links to 'plausible history' helps people feel comfortable with the present
Enactment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We partly create the environment we face • Action is crucial for sensemaking, testing our assumptions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalise social constructs so they become part of 'reality' – e.g. rituals, routines, procedures • Get people to <i>do</i> things to create a new 'reality'
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human thinking and social functioning are intertwined • We make sense through action, interaction, reflection and 'fit' • Dialogue is key; labels are symbolic shared meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay attention to what you say • Help to cause an 'architecture of simplicity' as an organising mechanism

Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are always in the middle of things, in flow • Interruptions cause an emotional response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use events to punctuate the flow to focus and crystallise meaning • Take care of ongoing routines and ensure they are aligned to shared purpose
Focused on and by extracting cues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People tend to extract specific details to help make sense of things, • Context influences what is extracted and how it is interpreted – what we notice • Cues lead to action - can be a self-fulfilling prophecy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders can direct focus to particular cues to influence how people interpret and act • Have a strategy map even if it isn't entirely accurate to give a sense of confidence and steer action
Plausibility rather than accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People need to filter noise to see clear signals – simplification enables action • Sensemaking needs coherence, embodies experience, resonates with a good story – energises action. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plausible reasoning to fit the facts is more important often than logical certainty • Create a story to explain and energise.

I draw on these themes to help interpret the way followers respond to the changing cues provided by leaders in both cases. Through data collection I explore how followers make sense and how this influences their willingness and desire to participate in the process of distributing leadership in practice.

3.4.6 Summary

In summary, recent literature on leadership and related topics such as engagement and teams provides both a rich source of insight and a series of questions about the transition

towards DL. I am exploring the extent to which leaders' actions in introducing more distributed approaches to leadership precipitate changes in followers' reactions and how contextual conditions moderate this effect.

The literature described here suggests that the transition is likely to involve changes in several inter-related areas, if the type of organisational culture in which DL can flourish is to be created by senior leaders. For example, I need to explore in my research how the leader: follower relationship (described primarily in LMX theory) evolves, both locally and at the organisational level, as well as how leaders influence and inspire others (drawing on transformational leadership) to embrace the collective approach to leadership suggested by DL.

I need to examine how authentic followers perceive leaders' attempts to change the organisational leadership style to be, and how this influences how they respond (referring to authentic leadership theory). The role of personal and organisational values is likely to play a part here, which I will explore through the case and cross-case analysis.

Also, I need to explore the way leaders engage followers, and how they achieve increased levels of motivation to adopt new ways of working which is a characteristic of transition.

I need to assess the extent to which leaders in each case create a sense of shared destiny, of community and shared identity as collaborators in the process of distributed leadership, and to what extent this influences how people respond to the leaders' desire to introduce new behaviours and ways of working as the shared norm.

I will now explore the literature on DL and CLT in more depth in the following chapter.

These two theories form the majority of the framework I use in exploring my thesis, with

additional theoretical input from ALT in particular. During my research I have drawn on each of these and created a new theoretical synthesis that I believe is a unique contribution to theory.

Chapter 4: Distributed Leadership and Complexity Leadership Theory Review

4.1 Introduction

My thesis is about the factors affecting the transition towards distributed leadership in large organisations undergoing significant change. The DL literature is still emerging and most research has been in schools and small public health centres. There is a limited amount of research into DL and the efficacy of the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ concept in large complex organisations.

The more recent literature about complexity leadership theory is also relevant to the interpretation of the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ concept in large organisations and helps to explain what it means in practice. In this chapter I will explore both theories and how they can shed light on my research question. I will draw on each and create with ALT a new synthesis which I then explore in my case analysis stage.

4.2 Distributed leadership (DL)

If ethical and servant leadership theories indicate a more involving and less egotistical style of leadership, the emergence of DL was part of an increasing movement towards a de-emphasis on the individual leader at all. If leadership is a process of influence, it can exist between agents at any time and at any level, depending on the context. Alimo-Metcalf (2013: 58) states that ‘in parallel with the ethical and authentic “post-heroic” models of leadership, which have focused on the values base of leadership, there has been

a fundamental paradigm shift in thinking about the nature of what leadership is in knowledge-based economies’.

Thorpe et al. (2011: 241) reinforce this by discussing the movement away from the focus on individual leaders rooted in the individualistic culture of Western economies. They doubt the impact that individual leaders have on organisational performance, citing Senge (1990: 340) who criticises the myth of the individual leader as a ‘charismatic hero’ with a focus on short term events, ‘rather than on systemic forces and collective learning’.

Contractor et al. (2012: 994) note that recently there has been ‘a shift in the focus of leadership research; from understanding the actions and interactions of “leaders” to understanding the emergent, informal, and dynamic “leadership” brought about by the members of the collective itself.’

Thorpe et al. relate the emergence of DL to the evolution of the organisational form to be more agile, ‘flatter structures, matrix structures and ever more widely linked network structures, all of which reflect the limitations of top-down models and the limitations of leadership when the unit of analysis is a single individual’ (2011: 239-240) This idea was developed through the research by Leithwood et al. (2006: 55) into the limitations of ‘top-down models’ which suggested that the nature of DL that works best in practice is in fact a hybrid of pure distributed leadership and a more traditional hierarchy. This is encapsulated in Leithwood’s ‘intelligent hierarchy’ theory (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553), which is described in a subsequent section.

Spillane et al. (2001a: 25), a leading researcher in the field of DL, describes leadership ‘stretched over people and situations’. His empirical research into school performance has

been seminal in developing a coherent approach to DL, based on empirical studies of schools in the Chicago area. He suggests that DL is best understood as ‘practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates activities of multiple groups of individuals’ (2008b: 32). He also emphasised the importance of context, describing DL as ‘a product of the interactions among school leaders and followers as mediated by aspects of their situation’ (Spillane et al., 2011: 161).

A fundamental aspect of DL research is that it ‘is considered as a social phenomenon with a context integral to its understanding and, indeed, constitutive of the practice of leadership, concerned with thinking and action *in situ*’ (Thorpe et al., 2011: 241). Thorpe et al. define DL as ‘a variety of configurations which emerge from the exercise of influence that produces interdependent and conjoint action’ (2011: 241). (There is a convenient congruence between the contextual emphasis in DL theory and my own epistemological position regarding contextualism).

Another key contributor to DL theory is Gronn (2002: 423) who described the ‘aggregation of individuals towards concertive action’ and that DL was ‘an idea whose time has come’. Thorpe et al. suggest that the first writer to use the term ‘distributed leadership’ was Cecil Gibb in the 1940s, saying that ‘leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group’ (Gibb, 1954, cited in Thorpe et al., 2011: 242).

Another key DL theorist is Fletcher (2004: 648-650), who calls distributed leadership ‘post-heroic’ leadership. Fletcher finds three characteristics of post-heroic leadership: 1) leadership as practice, 2) leadership as social process, and 3) leadership as learning. The first point implies that leadership can be enacted at all levels of an organisation (i.e. it is

not a set of personality characteristics that are innate or bestowed), the second implies that leadership is different from role or position. Fletcher says post-heroic leadership is ‘an emergent process more than an achieved state’ (2004: 649), which has repercussions for the intelligent hierarchy idea in that it is not a destination, more of a journey. There is an emphasis on changing views of the individual from focusing on the individual’s importance in and of itself to ‘a more relational concept of self as an interdependent entity’ (2004: 649). The third point implies that post-heroic leadership will, by virtue of the democratic decision making process, allow for more positive interactions between team members (member to member, member to leader, leader to leader). This changes the idea from power-over to power-with (see Debebe, 2002, referenced in Fletcher, 2004: 650). This position is an extension of LMX theory (blurring who holds the leader: member roles at any one time) and a departure from transformational leadership theory (with its emphasis on the leader as individual).

Distributed leadership incorporates a range of styles, including collective, shared, collaborative, emergent and co- leadership, according to Bolden (2011: 251) in his review of DL theory. In my research I have also combined them into the DL school based on the fundamentally similar approach they represent to an organisational model of leadership based on collective influence and shared control. As Bolden states: ‘common across all these accounts is the idea that leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person, with each suggesting a similar need for a collective and systemic understanding of leadership as a social process’ (2011: 252).

Spillane (2005b: 145) backs this up by suggesting that ‘situation’ is not just an important part of understanding DL but that it actually constitutes DL: ‘my argument is not simply that situation is important to leadership practice, but that it actually constitutes leadership

practice – situation defines leadership practice in interaction with leaders and followers. This way of thinking about situation differs substantially from prior work.’ This is very important in our understanding of how DL works – there needs to be much more emphasis on organizational structures and human resource processes, because leadership is no longer just a role that can be taught, it is part of an operating structure that is either planned (as in the ‘intelligent hierarchy’) or emergent.

Shared leadership is ‘a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of the group or organizational goals, or both. This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence’ (Pearce & Conger (2003), cited in Avolio et al., 2009: 431).

Heck & Hallinger (2010: 871) describes in his longitudinal study the characteristics of distributed leadership in schools as ‘loosely-coupled’ organisations. DL has a positive impact on performance (in this case student outcomes) through ‘improved communication of mission and goals, better alignment of resources and structures to support people, more active engaged learning among employees, shared governance & participation on governing bodies, involvement in resource allocation, and maintaining a focus on innovations by those responsible for implementation’ (Heck & Hallinger, 2010: 871).

4.2.1 Intelligent hierarchy

My research question is focused on the transition towards distributed leadership in large organisations, where the increasing levels of diversity of activity, external regulation, global working and organisational complexity mitigate against the introduction of DL in

its simplest form. There is a need for greater levels of coordination, governance and external accountability for policy and action, which suggest that some form of centralised structure is essential for effective operational performance. The ‘intelligent hierarchy’ model of DL (Leithwood and Mascall 2008a: 553) is a helpful interpretation of DL in that it recognises this conundrum and accommodates a mix of distributed and centralised leadership.

Harris’ report from 2011 is called *Performance beyond expectations*, with the principal investigators being Hargreaves and Harris (also referred to in the previous chapter). In their discussion of what they call ‘Fusion Leadership’ they state: ‘Leadership beyond expectations is a combination of leadership that is charismatic and ordinary, autocratic and shared, top down and distributed – defying the opposites and extremes that often define the field’ (2011: 43). They argue that leadership requires the ‘fusion’ (2011: 69) of different styles, which supports a key insight by Leithwood and Mascall who wrote in 2008 that the most effective implementation of DL ‘is rather a hybrid composed of the autocratic prototype (influence rises with hierarchical level) and polyarchic prototype (high levels of influence for all). If one were to accept the inevitability and value of hierarchy in organizing, this hybrid would be considered a best-case scenario. Let’s call it *intelligent hierarchy* to reflect the opportunities that this approach affords to ensure that such organizations take advantage of the capabilities and strengths of most of their members while ensuring careful coordination of effort in a common cause’ (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553).

Harris et al (2007) discuss the approach of Locke (2002), whose ‘integrated model of leadership’ suggests that different leadership functions require different roles to practice them effectively. Developing, for example, a widely shared vision is normally best done

at senior levels where the optics allow for the longer term perspective (Harris et al., 2007: 343).

The work of Locke, Leithwood & Mascall, and Friedrich et al. draw on evidence, as well as coherent theory, to suggest a pragmatic, workable way to achieve the intended benefits of DL within complex organisations with multiple stakeholders. The development of the Intelligent Hierarchy view of DL could be seen as a precursor to the development of CLT, which is described later. CLT described the tension between the need for devolved power and the need for centralised coordination more elegantly, in my view, but there are similarities in the two theories. My empirical research analysis therefore refers to both as they help to explain the data and progress our understanding of what makes the transition towards more distributed leadership work in practice.

4.2.2 Evidence of DL benefits

Much of the literature on DL is descriptive rather than focusing on the empirical evidence for the claims made. The evidence, however, suggests significant benefit in terms of, for example, improvement in student experience in schools. Harris (2012: 13), for example, writes: ‘the first study by Leithwood & Jantzi (2000) suggest that distributing a larger proportion of leadership activity to teachers has a positive influence on teacher effectiveness and student engagement. They also note that teacher leadership has a significant effect on student engagement that far outweighs principal leadership effects after taking into account home family background’.

It seems that a lot depends on how DL is introduced. Harris et al. (2008: 343) cite a major study by Leithwood et al. (2007) which ‘shows that the patterns of leadership practice in a

school affect organizational performance. This work highlights two key conditions necessary for successful leadership distribution. First, leadership needs to be distributed to those who have, or can develop, the knowledge or expertise required to carry out the leadership tasks expected of them. Second, effective distributed leadership needs to be coordinated, preferably in some planned way.’ So there are two clear criteria for successful implementation of DL: management capability and a coordinated approach.

Leithwood et al. (2008b: 227), in their review of the evidence, confirm that ‘planful alignment [of DL] seems more likely to contribute significantly than other patterns of alignment to long-term organizational productivity.’ They place particular emphasis in ‘perceived concordance’ or ‘the importance of agreement on the perceptions of the control structure’ (cited from McMahon & Perritt, 1971). It is interesting to note how the need for this agreement on perceptions may also link to the conditions for creating a climate conducive to empowerment discussed in the previous chapter. Perceptions can affect the degree to which followers feel confident to share power and leadership responsibility.

When Harris (2013: 549) discusses Day et al (2009) she states that ‘this research study found that the most effective heads actively and continually restructure, re-formulate and re-designed their organisation and widely distribute leadership. The study also highlighted that distributed leadership was associated with greater involvement in leadership practice which in turn was associated with better organisational performance and outcomes.’

4.2.3 Gaps in DL theory

There are several gaps in published DL theory currently, according to Bolden (2011). Firstly, in the area of ‘power and influence’ (2011: 260) – much of the research to date has

excluded the notion of power, and there is a need to investigate the exercise of power through strategic planning, decision-making, and performance review, to understand how power and influence can be distributed effectively. DL is intrinsically about the sharing and exercise of power and influence, and I will explore this in my case analysis.

Secondly, in relation to ‘organizational boundaries and context’ (2011: 261), Bolden states that most research has looked at individual schools and health provider centres, i.e. small discrete public sector organisations, a gap echoed by Edwards (2011: 302), and there is a need to focus on large organisations and on cross-case comparisons to draw out more insight into how DL can be effective in large organisations. Large organisations are more likely to be complex and to operate in more varied environments than smaller counterparts, which is likely to increase the need for coherent responses to changing circumstances, and the difficulty of making this happen in practice. In my work as a leadership consultant, I see practitioners often responding to this challenge by seeking to centralise power and decision making in order to exercise more direct control over the operations of the organisation. This would suggest that the transition towards DL might seem counter-intuitive to many practitioners, which I will explore in my research.

Bolden’s third area is ‘ethics and diversity’ (2011: 261), in that DL ‘offers the promise of a more inclusive perspective on leadership’ (2011: 262), but this has not yet been a focus for extensive research; this gap offers interesting opportunities to explore the link between DL and other leadership theories such as CLT and authentic leadership theory. I take that opportunity through this research and by relating my research findings back to the values dimension of ethics.

Finally, Bolden's fourth gap relates to specific roles and contributions (2011: 263). Gronn (2009) calls for greater clarity from research especially for those in traditional roles of leadership, both at senior levels and more widely across the organisation. I explore the role of the senior leader in particular in orchestrating a shift towards DL in my case analysis.

Bolden's 2011 review states that there was 'somewhat inconsistent evidence on the impact of DL on organizational performance' (2011: 259). Furthermore, there were found to be 'boundary management issues' surrounding the delegation of and acceptance of responsibility (Storey 2004; Timperley 2005 referenced in Bolden 2011: 259). I link the level of DL with organisational performance in both cases.

Others have suggested that a more distributed and lateral-type influence can cause leaders to work against each other. Spillane (2005) says 'leaders can strive for different or even conflicting ends while working in parallel or even while co-performing leadership routines.' Wright (2008: 19), in her study of a school's organisational structure, goes so far as to say that 'Despite the principal's leadership, these "teachers on the periphery" [rebels against the central leadership team] had considerable influence over other teachers and school members despite the fact that they were promoting a vision that was different from or in direct opposition with the administration's plans.' This suggests that DL allows for *negatively emergent leaders* due to the freedom it offers those lower down the leadership hierarchy. Thus there is scope to research how distributed can also mean coherent rather than divided leadership. The 'planful' approach to introducing DL advocated by Leithwood above is key to avoiding this potential divisive aspect of DL.

Timperley et al. (2005: 18) expresses caution that 'nomination of teacher leaders by colleagues may not realize potential expertise within the group because colleagues may

select their leaders using other criteria'. Leithwood et al. (2006: 55) references Harris & Muijs (2004), who have some pertinent things to say about the dangers of implementing DL. There are three main objections from Harris & Muijs: 1) DL threatens those in formal power positions by relinquishing power to others, 2) current 'school' (but by extension organisational) hierarchies as they exist (i.e. in hierarchical structures) are naturally preventative of members lower down the hierarchy gaining access to positions of power, and 3) DL implemented from the top down can create mis-delegation of responsibility.

Leithwood's concerns are echoed in part by Fitzsimons et al. (2011: 324), who suggests in his qualitative review, that 'because of the potential of transitions to shared and distributed leadership to unsettle existing roles and authority relationships, such transitions may prove more challenging than first thought.' There is a need for real pragmatism in looking into how DL can work within large organisations, and the notion of the 'intelligent hierarchy' as a suitable hybrid solution is potentially attractive.

4.3 Complexity leadership theory

In recent years the development of complexity leadership theory (CLT) has run to some extent in parallel with the development of DL. I would like to propose that it is helpful to use CLT in association with DL in that CLT helps to clarify some of the challenges described in the previous section regarding how DL works in practice, especially in larger organisations. I will describe below how CLT builds a more rounded view of the intelligent hierarchy concept of DL from Leithwood and how it offers a more practical route to implementation. I then relate the case and cross case analysis to both theories later in this thesis, drawing extensively on both DL and CLT in the framework I use for data collection and analysis.

Uhl-Bien & Marion (2011: 468) state that ‘the field of leadership is in the midst of a paradigm shift, in which traditional models are giving way to new conceptualizations of leadership and organizing.’ They go on to write that ‘complexity is providing a new lexicon for leadership research and practice – one that considers leadership as occurring in both formal and informal processes, and as emerging in and interacting with complex interactive dynamics.’ There are similarities here with the emphasis in DL on leadership as an emerging process (Thorpe et al., 2011: 241), with different agents playing the leadership role at varying times according to the context. Interestingly Uhl-Bien & Marion refer to both ‘formal and informal’ processes, suggesting a similar balance between coordinated hierarchy and decentralised decisions making it akin to the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ concept (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553). I will discuss this again later in this chapter.

In Wheatley’s ‘Leadership and the New Science’ (Wheatley, 1999: xiii) she describes a shift from management control to emergent order, using a ‘living systems’ metaphor. She places emphasis on local connections sharing information to develop responses to emerging situations in an intelligent and uncontrolled manner.

Uhl-Bien & Marion (2011) propose certain distinctions between traditional leadership and complexity leadership, as displayed in Table 3.1.

Table 4.1: Traditional and complexity leadership

Traditional leadership	Complexity leadership
Alignment and control	Interaction and adaptability
Change efforts driven top-down	Change is emergent (in context)
Relies on leader vision inspiration and execution	Seeds organization with generative (i.e. adaptive) properties and uses for day-to-day performance
Ordered response to challenges – ‘focuses on top-down influence processes to motivate and align organizational members around the strategic vision’	Adaptive response – ‘individuals engaged in networked interactions generate innovative solutions’

Complex leadership theory has evolved from complex systems theory, which has itself developed from theories of complexity. CLT sees companies and organisations as large, complex systems that need to adapt in order to survive. Complex Systems Theory (CST) states that adaptive systems perform better than static ones in fluid situations. Coveney defines complexity theory as the ‘study of the behaviour of large collections of ... simple, interacting units, endowed with the potential to evolve with time’ (Coveney, 2003: 1058). Ralph Stacey (1995) describes complex adaptive systems using concepts such as ‘far from equilibrium’ states in which negative and positive feedback drives changes in behaviour and increased innovation and creativity. Rather than seeking to minimise uncertainty, Stacey saw the benefit of uncertainty in causing constant change and adaptive behaviour in organisations.

A Complex Adaptive System (CAS) is able to deal with changes *in situ*, as it were, coordinated but not controlled through a hierarchy. Cantore & Cooperrider (2013: 269) are interested in the intersection between CAS and organizational change theory. They sum up this intersection as describing ‘what emerges from the relationships of its members rather than being determined by the choices of individuals (Stacey et al., 2000: 123). This leads

to: (1) a set of beliefs about how change happens in organizations, with a focus on changing patterns of human relationships; (2) the expectation of both stability and instability at different points in the process; and (3) the recognition of the importance of continuous learning and the need for a willingness to change ways of thinking about how organizations work and develop.’ The emphasis on relationships and learning in the quotation above are relevant to the framework for analysis that I use in my research as they relate to the importance of evolving human interactions in the transition of leadership processes.

In CLT we are looking at leadership within an organisational context, and there are considerable overlaps with organisation development (OD) and organizational change theories, as suggested in Table 3.2 below from Olson & Eoyang (2001):

Table 4.2: Complex and traditional models of organisational change

Complex Adaptive Model Of Organization Change	Traditional Model of Organization Change
Innumerable variables determine outcomes	Few variables determine outcomes
The whole is different from the sum of the parts (holistic)	The whole is equal to the sum of the parts (reductionist)
Direction is determined by emergence and the participation of many people	Direction is determined by design and the power of a few leaders
Individual or system behaviour is unknowable, unpredictable and uncontrollable	Causality is linear: every effect can be traced to a specific cause
Relationships are empowering	Relationships are directive
Each system is unique	All systems are essentially the same
Responsiveness to the environment is the measure of value	Efficiency and reliability are measures of value
Decisions are based on tensions and patterns	Decisions are based on facts and data
Leaders are facilitators and supporters	Leaders are experts and authorities

A good example of how people work in a CAS can be found in the work of Argyris & Schön (1974). They make a distinction between single-loop learning and double-loop

learning. When an organisation experiences a problem and they solve the problem in a way that allows them to continue as normal then this is single-loop learning. If an organisation experiences a problem that they have to deal with not only by looking at the problem but also by looking at the *underlying* structure of the company that may have led to it, that is double-loop learning. I refer to this approach in the case analysis chapters.

In 2007 Uhl-Bien et al identified in their influential work ‘Complexity Leadership Theory’ three functions of leadership: the administrative, the adaptive and the enabling. In combination these create balance in the organisation so that it can succeed in unpredictable and constantly changing environments (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 314). The administrative function is ‘associated with the bureaucratic elements of organizations.’ ‘It occurs in formal, managerial roles and reflects traditional management processes and functions aimed at driving business results’ (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011: 474). According to Uhl-Bien, this function ‘recognizes that although organizations are bureaucracies, they do not have to be bureaucratic.’

The adaptive function ‘reflects the complexity view of leadership ... with leadership emerging in and from the dynamic interaction of heterogeneous agents as they work independently in organizations.’ ‘It is an informal leadership process that occurs in intentional interactions of interdependent human agents (individuals and collectives) as they work to generate and advance novel solutions in the face of the adaptive needs of the organization’ (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 314). Uhl-Bien et al wrote in 2007 that ‘using the concept of Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS), we propose that leadership should be seen not only as position and authority but also as an *emergent, interactive dynamic*—a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when

heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating (cf. Heifetz, 1994).’ (2007: 299).

The administrative and adaptive leadership functions work in dynamic tension with one another. To address this, the third function is needed: the enabling function ‘operates in the interface, the dynamic tension, between the administrative and adaptive functions. This links CLT with the intelligent hierarchy theory. It recognizes both needs of the organization as legitimate, so it works to ‘loosen up the organization – stimulating innovation, creativity and responsiveness and learning to manage continuous adaptation to change – without losing strategic focus or spinning out of control (Dess & Picken, 2000)’ (from Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011: 475). Uhl-Bien et al. also link enabling leadership to emergent leadership: ‘enabling leadership occurs at all levels of the organization (as well as within the adaptive dynamic), but the nature of this role will vary by hierarchical level and position’ (2007: 305).

Uhl-Bien et al. acknowledge that enabling leadership is intimately linked with structures of DL and intelligent hierarchy: ‘A role of enabling leadership at the strategic level (Jaques, 1989), then, is to manage the coordination rhythms, or oscillations, between relative importance of top-down, hierarchical dynamics and emergent complex adaptive systems (Thomas et al., 2005)’ (2007: 306). This is essentially the outcome of the managed distributed approach. As those agents at the bottom of the structure gain more implicit power it is up to the leaders in the structure to ‘enable’ that power and coordinate the lower agents into constructive aggregates and constructive roles.

4.3.1 Social Networks and CLT

The global context within which the DL and CLT theories are being discussed is becoming increasingly complex and connected. The rapid rise in the popularity of social networks in recent years has precipitated a corresponding increase in open transfer of information between agents within and outside organisations, creating new levels of transparency into organisations. This in turn has reduced the time organisations have to respond to colleague, customer or competitor communications, which in turn has increased the levels of complexity with which leaders are working.

Korzynski (2013: 989) conducted his study by investigating the link between authentic leadership and social networking, but this still has consequences for DL. Interestingly he writes, 'It is believed that, due to the technological change, all managers will work in an online working environment within a few years and the role of manager will evolve from the traditional leader to a leading interweaver who coordinates and facilitates the collaboration in a variety of networks' (Miller, 2005: 989). This relates to the process of leadership as influence in the network, which is also akin to the enabling function from CLT. I would suggest this is a more sophisticated version of DL, relevant in the networked society in which we live, and building on the concept of distribution by adding nuances of the type of influence the leader needs to exercise to enable the organisation to learn and operate effectively.

The increase in networking is also linked to the increased emphasis on teams in modern organisations. Uhl-Bien et al. suggest that the simplest reason that aggregates form is purely because their agents are all interacting within the same environment in the first place (i.e. an office, a company, or a social network). This is key to why it is often easier

to form larger and more emergent aggregates on social networks, primarily because they are working in much the same way that an office environment works. The horizontal connection is extended way beyond the acknowledged social limit of any single agent in the structure. Hence the challenge that social networks pose for traditional organisations intent on maintaining their boundaries and keeping secret their information.

Korzynski (2013: 975) describes how his study found that ‘online social networks are more useful for participative and consultative leadership styles on social networking platforms than for a directive leadership style.’ This already links social networks with ideas of post-heroic leadership. Importantly, he goes on to say that ‘prescriptively, the view of networks as pipes suggests that actors (companies or individuals), occupy structural holes or put themselves in positions of power (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005). The second view, often called the ‘prisms view’, states that a network tie between two actors has implications not only for the two actors involved, but also for the third parties not involved in the exchange (Podolny, 1993)’ (2013: 976). By bringing in third parties he suggests that social networks can be the beginning of some form of CAS (and the aggregates that form those systems). As social networks now cut through traditional organisational boundaries, this research suggests that leaders in organisations need to be adapting to this lateral influence and demonstrating a less ‘directive leadership style’.

One study by Sutanto et al (2011: 421) called *Emergent Leadership in Virtual Collaboration Settings: A Social Network Analysis Approach* states that ‘In recent years, there has been a great enthusiasm among organizations, especially multinational companies, for exploiting social software systems to engage physically dispersed employees in collective problem solving and planning over extended time periods.’

Korzynski’s research would suggest that this needs a new form of post-heroic leadership.

One of their central points is important for the idea of 'leader as process', as they state that 'notably, research on the role of informal structures on organizational processes (e.g. Shaw, 1964) has consistently equated informal leadership, which Bono & Anderson (2005) note 'has been defined and operationalized as the number of individuals in a group who nominate an individual', with centrality, since it arises from the position in the actual patterns of interactions, rather than from any formally designed location' (2011: 424). Leadership, according to this thinking, is defined through interaction, even in traditional single-location office environments. This means, though, that the systems through which we interact (in virtual teams this is through social networks) are themselves the sites of emergent leader creation. The context creates the leader and the type of leader depends on the context, which is increasingly relevant for DL in large organisations as the context of the workplace is changing increasingly rapidly.

The social network is a fertile environment for the development of emergent or complex leadership practice. Indeed, Uhl-Bien et al (2007: 299) wrote that 'we propose that leadership should be seen not only as position and authority but also as an *emergent, interactive dynamic* - a complex interplay from which a collective impetus for action and change emerges when heterogeneous agents interact in networks in ways that produce new patterns of behavior or new modes of operating (cf. Heifetz, 1994).' This final clause describes what a social network is and how it can affect an organisation. Online social networks can be seen as pure forms of the Complex Adaptive System. Unlike companies and organisations many are not managed in any typical and traditional sense. The pervasion of social media is therefore accelerating the opportunity for more distributed and complex forms of leadership to emerge both outside and within the form of the

organisation (Korzynski, 2013). We could therefore suggest that the transition to DL is going to become more rapid and unavoidable for organisations in coming years.

4.3.2 CLT as an organising framework

So, if we see CLT as a helpful addition to the literature that relates to DL, we can combine them to create an analytical framework suitable for analysing the transition to DL in the complex networked society in which the organisations on which my research is focused operate. Given also the importance of transparent relationships and building trust in order to create a climate in which DL can flourish, I would suggest adding to this mix ALT.

In order to understand how these three theories of DL, CLT and ALT are compatible, we can use the three functions of CLT as an organising framework. In table 3.3 I show how the three theories correspond to the three CLT functions of administrative, adaptive and enabling.

Table 4.3: Using CLT as an organising framework

Themes	1 – Administrative	2 – Adaptive	3 – Enabling
CLT function	Administrative: alignment, bureaucracy, achievement of goals	Adaptive: informal emerging leadership, adapting to change, innovating, reacting to the context, ‘networked interactions’	Enabling: balancing the other two factors, maintaining harmony, empowering, ‘loosening’ to create flexibility
ALT attribute		Balanced processing of information	Self-awareness, strong moral compass, balanced processing of information, open relationships
DL function	Hierarchy: influence rises with seniority, organisation of effort	Intelligent: influence is shared throughout via a connected process	Community and shared leadership

Firstly, the administrative function in CLT fits with the need in the intelligent hierarchy for clarity of direction and purpose, as well as alignment of intent, if an organisation is to be able to operate coherently, with consistent ways of working and communications (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553).

Harris (2013: 546) also says that Robinson (IES, 2008) ‘has suggested that the nature of distributed leadership encompasses two main concepts: distributed leadership as task distribution and distributed leadership as distributed influence processes’. This distinction is similar to the distinction between the administrative and adaptive functions. Robinson

(IES, 2004) herself says that she does ‘not intend to set up an opposition between the two’. Interestingly though, Uhl-Bien et al. find that it is precisely the ‘entanglement’ of the adaptive and the administrative function that creates the need for the enabling function (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 305).

In DL this is similar to the recognition by Leithwood and Mascall (2008a) of the need for hierarchy even in a distributed leadership format: influence may be a shared process in DL but Leithwood recognised that influence also increases with seniority to reflect the need for coherent decision making to coordinate collective effort.

Secondly, in terms of the adaptive function, on the one hand we have the recognition in both CLT and DL of the need for some form of centralised influence and coordinated effort, in order to achieve organisational goals. On the other hand, in the same theories we have a conflicting need for adaptive behaviour in order to achieve responsiveness to the context and innovative ways of sustaining organisational performance. The adaptive function is a more contingent leadership function, based on initiative and the need for change. In the military context, this is a result of what von Clausewitz called ‘frikition’ (Bungay, 2011: 26), in which human interaction in war is messy, unpredictable and specific to the context. Officers in the field need the freedom to act within a framework set by the generals in advance, based on clarity of mission and the acceptable parameters of flexibility.

In DL this is about influence being exerted by those closest to the customer, those most able to decide what to do to optimise the outcomes in each given situation. In some interpretations of DL (see Thorpe et al, 2011), the focus is on this completely shared influence in a self-organising non-hierarchical process. There would only be the adaptive

function, in other words. Research into the efficacy of DL by Leithwood and others suggests that the development of the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ interpretation of DL is more likely to be successful in achieving organisational goals. This suggests a combination of administrative and adaptive functions to achieve coordinated outcomes: the ‘careful coordination of effort in a common direction’ (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553).

Thirdly, Uhl-Bien et al describe CLT as ‘shifting leadership from the industrial age to the knowledge era’ (Uhl-Bien, et al, 2007: 298) and the enabling function echoes the emphasis in ALT on the leader’s ability to process information in a balanced way, in line with the values of the organisation, which underpins their ability to respond intelligently, adapting to local conditions, and able to make effective yet contingent decisions as a result. The enabling function in CLT is closely aligned, I would argue, with authentic leadership, in which the leader role is one of creating a coherent culture in which values and a shared code of behaviour are expected and in which leaders have certain attributes in common: self-awareness, a strong moral compass, balanced processing of information and open relationships. These four attributes help leaders to develop increased levels of trust, which in turn supports harmony between the administrative and adaptive functions.

There is a tension between administration and adaptation, between alignment and freedom, which the third CLT function, enabling, is intended to balance. In CLT this means creating a culture in which the tension works effectively. In mission command this is based on a combination of honour and discipline. The code of honour defines what behaviour is valued, and what is not tolerated. The discipline unites everyone in pursuit of a shared purpose. In DL terms, the ‘careful coordination of effort’ (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553) is supported by the sense of community among the leadership population of

an organisation (Edwards, 2011: 305). This is also reflected in the ten principles of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1991).

4.4 Conclusion

I would argue that a helpful post-heroic integration of leadership theory can be based on a synthesis of CLT, DL, and ALT. It shows complimentary functions of leadership, drawing on CLT, which expands our understanding of how distributed leadership can operate in a large organisation and provides a more comprehensive description of the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ form of DL in line with a wider base of academic leadership research.

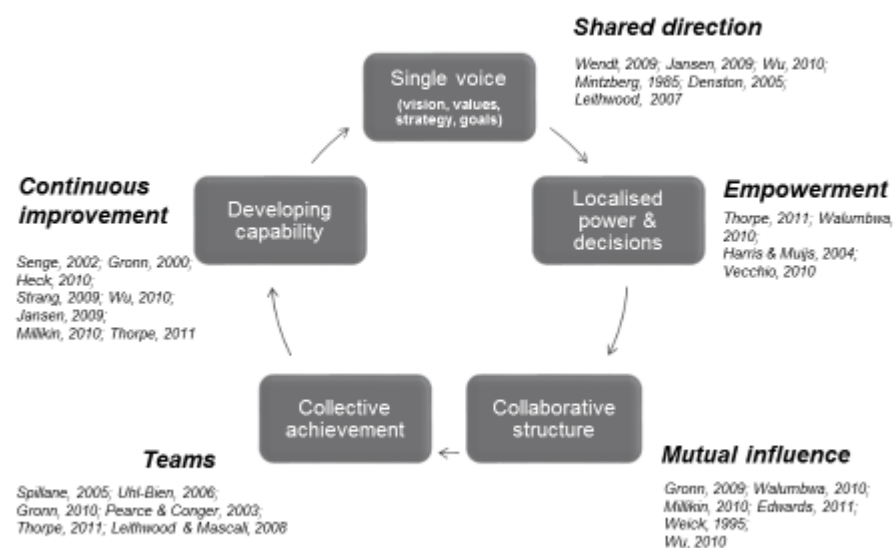
I will discuss how this synthesis helps to provide me with an initial framework for analysing my cases in the next section, in line with my research focus on the factors that influence the success of transition towards a more distributed leadership approach in large organisations.

4.4.1 Initial theoretical model

From the review of leadership literature above and in particular the synthesis of DL, CLT and ALT, there are several themes that we can extract as being likely to influence the success of transition to a more distributed form of leadership. These include having a clear and shared strategic direction based on well-defined vision, strategy and goals, which we can draw from the administrative function in CLT as well as the importance of vision in transformational leadership theory. From DL we can identify the importance of leaders having explicit accountability for coherent implementation of strategic decisions based on localised discretion and decision-making. From the adaptive function of CLT we see the

significance of adapting the organisational structure to create coherent and cooperative groupings with effective cross-functional collaboration based on mutual influence. From shared leadership theory (and DL) there is the emphasis on collective achievement and team working. And from the enabling function of CLT we see the importance of having competent managers and leaders acting in concert across the organisation to drive continuous improvement in line with the shared vision. This is summarised with references in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 4.1: My initial theoretical framework



The benefits of these themes for practitioners include increased agility in uncertain times (Pearce & Conger, 2003), more nimble customer responsiveness (Leithwood, 2008), productivity improvement in teams (Wu et al., 2010), increased learning and adaptation to changing contextual challenges, improving performance (Heck & Hallinger, 2010) and increased levels of engagement, trust & shared accountability (Weick, 1985).

By bringing these theories together we are able to start to articulate a post-heroic theory of leadership relevant to the large organisation in an increasingly complex context that draws on the main themes of leadership research. An important underlying theme I believe is balance: balance of central and decentralised organisational leadership, and balance at a personal level between structure, emotional intelligence and morality.

Through this analysis of the literature I was able to identify some questions which were helpful in developing my research strategy, as described in chapter 4. I will use these questions to inform my analysis of the cases:

- How important is the senior leader in the journey towards DL? Is their function primarily in an enabling role (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 305)?
- What is the central focus which maintains coordinate activity when leadership is distributed and the administrative function therefore diminished (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a:553)?
- To what extent are the values of the organisation and authenticity of its senior leaders influential in engaging followers and guiding their behaviour in a distributed format (Avolio et al, 2004, Walumbwa et al, 2008)?
- How are decisions and the power to make them devolved in practice in a large organisation where the process of personal influence between leaders is diluted (Spillane, 2005b: 147)?
- How do large organisations achieve concerted action across distributed organisation structures (Hargreaves & Harris, 2011: 61)?
- How do large organisations achieve significant local adaptive behaviour that drives learning across the whole organisation (Senge, 1990: 340)?

This analysis leads me to my key research question, which is ‘what are the critical factors in the successful transition towards Distributed Leadership implementation in large complex organisations?’

The productivity and agility benefits for large organisations of a coordinated implementation of DL are I believe significant, based on evidence of impact in current research in other environments. In bringing together insights from key leadership theories (especially DL, CLT and ALT), I have created a frame of reference which will help me investigate my research question through in-depth case analysis in suitable organisations, so that I can provide helpful insights to practitioners and academics alike.

Chapter 5: Methodology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology I have used in my research. I start by describing my philosophical perspective and how it has influenced the design and execution of my research. I define the overall case study methodology I used, and the research methods I deployed to investigate my research question including the use of a longitudinal study method. I describe the initial research I undertook and what I learned, and how I introduced this to the subsequent interview process. I relate details of the approach I took to data collection, including reference to my sample strategy. I describe how I set up and completed the data analysis for each case and then on a cross-case basis, including the use of a template for initial data coding using NVivo software. I conclude with a reflective account of some of the points of interest along the way.

Through this description of method I intend to demonstrate how I have maintained high standards of academic rigour whilst interrogating the actual data to understand the nuances of what each of the cases can tell us about the success factors relating to the transition to a more distributed form of leadership. In this way I intend to provide credible insights for practitioners and academics about the challenges in such a transition and what we can learn from how senior agents in each case tackled these challenges, and the resulting outcomes.

5.2 Philosophical perspective

I argue primarily for the validity of contextualism as a way to develop and articulate knowledge in the field of human organisations, the field on which I am focused.

Contextualism reflects my belief that ‘the truth conditions ... vary from one context to another’ (Dancy, 2010: 12). The context in my research is an important consideration in several ways. The organisation’s context influences what people in the organisation say they know. The context of agents within the organisation influences what they perceive to be true, and how they report it. For some the issues of leadership and culture are of greater significance than for others, which may affect their interpretation of action and reaction in the transition of leadership approach and the resulting culture.

My underlying argument is therefore that understanding human systems is aided by understanding the nature of dialogue and influence between agents if we are to achieve meaningful additions to our knowledge base. The varied factors at play in organisations include relational, technological, structural, political and economic forces that influence individual and collective behaviour and outcomes. To understand effectively this complex mix we need to understand and use the same sensemaking processes that are going on for each individual within the system at any one time.

Contextualism is a satisfying perspective for my research because it recognises that we are on a journey, with the standards of knowledge depending on the ‘spectrum’ of contextual conditions in each case (Dancy, 2010: 13). Each argument we seek to justify can be supported in some way by the context of the discussion, so we need to focus on the context to understand the relevant standards for justification. Heidegger (1927, cited in Dancy et al., 2010: 408) demonstrates the interrelationship between identity and context

with the image of Dasein hammering in a workshop: we are explained by reference to our context, “being in the world” rather than through some externalised epistemological significance. Context gives meaning to the identity and the act (described in Dancy et al., 2010: 408). In my research I explore the interplay in each case between the leadership agents, the organisational context and the changes in the leadership process, so taking a contextual perspective is helpful in that it supports a degree of interpretation to achieve deeper insight into what factors are influencing increased distribution of leadership authority.

The significance of inquiry in contextualism is important to me: through inquiry and dialogue human knowledge can be extended. As human knowledge develops through logical and empirical exploration we are making increasing sense of the world around us. Beliefs are typically best justified relative to the context of discussion, from which clear standards of justification can be derived. In the world of organisational research our context is primarily human interaction, in which the desires and beliefs of individuals and communities create a complex web of evolving interactions. Our research therefore needs to be cognisant of this and suitably cautious in declaring generalizable truths. In both cases I describe how inquiry and dialogue help interviewees to shape meaning in their particular context, using interviews as the primary method of data collection.

Part of Hegel’s impact on epistemology was by introducing history: ‘Hegel’s perception of the historical dimension of knowledge’ (Dancy et al., 2010: 287). Hegel proposed the idea that internal contradictions in history cause significant changes (such as the French Revolution) as forms of correction or reaction to what has gone before - signs of what Hegel called the working of ‘spirit’ (Dancy et al., 2010: 417). This can be related to our collective human memory, which is an important part of the narrative for both cases I

studied. History has a significant influence on how we interpret events and perceptions today. Our personal and collective histories create a lens through which we perceive the world around us, which in turn affects what we value, what we notice, what we give priority to in our lives and in our research. In my research I use a longitudinal case study methodology in order to understand the changes in each case over time, so that we can understand how the actions at one time influence agents and events in subsequent times.

It is important, I believe, in studying DL transition to trace changes in the leadership process and the dynamics between key agents over time. The history of each case, and how the leadership dynamic in each is evolving, are important influences on the transition towards more distributed leadership. I have used a research strategy that is sensitive to these dynamics and allowed two separate points of input from interviewees in order to trace their evolving interpretation of what was going on in each case.

Weick describes sensemaking as how people make sense about the organisation in which they work as a social process of storytelling, discussion and making sense of complexity together (Weick, 1979b:410), which is a helpful way to view the social processes involved in the transition to more distributed leadership. Because it requires agents at multiple levels of the organisation to adapt their role, to change their mind-set and behaviour, it requires many coordinated responses to occur in some degree of unison to succeed. DL is not a singular leadership approach, it is by its very nature pluralistic. How these agents therefore make sense and respond to the actions of others is something I will explore throughout my case analysis.

Contextualism provides a pragmatic view of knowledge, with justification dependent on the standards relevant in each context, which in the social research world is multi-faceted

and based in part on the interaction, dialogue and perceptions of the people in the organisation. It provides me with, therefore, a helpful epistemological perspective for my research, accommodating as it does the emerging nature of the transitions on which I am focused.

5.3 Research strategy

I have used a case based strategy in my research. My underlying objective is to provide fresh insight into the emerging area of DL, especially in large complex organisations when much of the research to date has focused on schools and primary health institutions. My unit of analysis is the organisation. As Buchanan states, the organisation is a legitimate unit for case study research: ‘the longitudinal study of [...] ICI by Andrew Pettigrew (1985) is a benchmark in both methodology and the study of organisational change’ (Buchanan, 2012: 354).

Case studies provide the framework to develop high quality depth of insight and meaning that can help ‘bridge the relevance gap’ described by Starkey & Madan (2001: S6) between management research and business utility: ‘What makes knowledge valuable to organizations is ultimately to make better decisions and action taken on the basis of knowledge’ (Davenport & Prusak, 1998, cited in Starkey & Madan, 2001: S6). Case research is essentially practical, context-sensitive and relevant to the issues and decisions being made in similar organisations. As I conclude my cross-case analysis I provide practical insights which will enable improved decision making by practitioners on similar transitions.

According to Scapens (2011), a good case study ‘weaves together all sorts of input and evidence to tell a story’. I have sought to work within a consistent epistemological paradigm to bring a consistent approach to my research and to tell the story of each case from a consistent contextual perspective.

I have approached the case analysis in the interpretive tradition, to be explanatory, contextual and typically holistic as compared with a more positivist approach which would tend to be exploratory and often a precursor to more quantitative research (Scapens, 2011).

I decided to use a longitudinal case-based research strategy to allow in-depth research of various factors in the transition towards a more distributed leadership model, tracking the behaviour of senior agents and their intended impact in comparison with the actual experiences of middle managers on the receiving end of those senior behaviours. By investigating the intended and actual effects of senior leadership in both cases twice I was able to trace the transition in leadership approach in both cases. Learning is at the heart of my purpose in using a case study approach. As Hans Eysenck (originally a sceptic about case studies) said: ‘sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something’ (1976: 9).

The case study has become recognised as a mainstream research strategy. Hartley (2004: 323) states that ‘there is growing confidence in the case study as a rigorous research strategy’. My epistemological position is contextual rather than positivist, from which perspective the case is a key means to understand in depth the subtle changes in leadership approach and resulting engagement and concerted action across an organisation.

Using case analysis, is, therefore, a helpful basis for my research, and there are three main benefits the case-based strategy brings. Firstly, it provides a flexible architecture to accommodate the research methods most useful in each research situation: they ‘draw from different data sources ... and allow several levels of simultaneous analysis of the dynamic in a single setting’ (Eisenhardt, 1989: 534). Secondly, the case-based strategy provides a depth of insight, what Lee calls the ‘benefits of the particular’ (Lee et al, 2007: 172), in relation to the specific context of each case. Finally, it allows us to focus on meaning, on developing understanding in the way human systems tend to operate – it is a ‘virtual reality’ (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 219). In my own research these benefits are helpful in that I use several data sources over the course of the collection process, I delve into nuances of changes in leadership behaviour and their corresponding impact further into the organisation, and I draw from this analysis meaning that can assist practitioners who are also working with the transition towards a more devolved and collaborative approach to organisational leadership.

Leadership occurs within a context, as I have described in the literature chapter. A fundamental aspect of DL research is that it ‘is considered as a social phenomenon with a context integral to its understanding and, indeed, constitutive of the practice of leadership, concerned with thinking and action in situ’ (Thorpe et al., 2011: 241). I track over time the evolution of distributed leadership in different cases very much recognising the importance of the context within which each case is operating.

A robust approach to using the case study as a flexible architecture is outlined by Miles & Huberman (1994). During the early stages of my doctoral studies through research into the wider leadership literature, I developed an initial conceptual framework relating to

leadership and engagement from which my research question initially emerged. This then led me to decide on the cases to research, which then required a sampling strategy to be agreed. My research population is drawn from large UK organisations (including senior and local leaders) undertaking major strategic change, focused on two case study organisations. Two cases allowed me to combine a high degree of detailed data collection in each case over time with the ability to conduct cross-case analysis.

My unit of analysis is the organisation, which is supported by Spillane, writing on DL, where he suggests that the 'school rather than the individual is the most appropriate unit for thinking about the development of leadership expertise' (quote from Harris et al., 2007: 343).

In my research the focus has evolved over the course of my initial studies and data collection, from a more general review of leadership styles and resulting levels of employee engagement to a more focused approach exploring the transition towards more distributed leadership and the factors that influence its rate and levels of impact. By the end of the initial stage 1a interviews at case M my research question was clear and defined. Later in the research process I recognised the importance of complexity leadership theory (CLT) as a compliment to DL and this influenced the overall research outcomes by adding more texture to the interpretation of the cases, drawing on both DL and CLT insights into the interaction between hierarchy and adaptation in the large organisational context.

The benefits to my research of the case-based approach include its consistency with my epistemological point of view in that it emphasises the importance of understanding the complexity of each situation if we are to derive insight into how human organisations

work. I believe that leadership is a process involving agents within a context, and therefore it is important that I studied this in depth and over a period of time.

The case also enables us to develop ‘concrete context-dependent experience’, (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 223), which is significant for my research in enabling us to observe how the different contexts of each case influence the DL outcomes. This is discussed in the cross-case analysis chapter. Each case provides specific depth of insight so that we can identify more detailed aspects of the success factors in question. In the case analysis chapters I identify the combination of factors that influence the outcomes in each case.

Cases provide a flexible architecture ‘to allow several levels of simultaneous analysis of the dynamics in a single setting’, (Lee et al, 2007: 169). This has allowed me to work with a wide-ranging and multi-faceted template, covering topics as diverse as senior leadership capability and strategic clarity. In this way the case allows us to focus on meaning ... Flyvbjerg’s ‘virtual reality’ again (2006: 219), providing high quality insight into what is happening and why.

Cases help us to tell the story of how followers make sense and engage, (Weick, 1979) in a way that can help practitioners to understand the way senior level actions lead to consequences deeper into the organisation that may or may not fit with their intentions. Cases demonstrate how theory plays out in practice so that practitioners can use the insight in an intelligent way in their own contexts.

5.3.1 Selected cases

My case selection criteria were that they needed to be large organisations, with long histories, from different sectors, going through major change and with an expressed commitment to shifting their style of leadership towards being more engaging and in line with being more distributed. This enabled me to make cross-case and cross-sector comparisons. They were both also available to me, for different reasons, and with security of access for the duration of data collection. In this way they were what Buchanan would call ‘self-selecting, emerging from opportunities and evidence’ (Buchanan, 2012: 361). I selected the two specific cases for the reasons described in Table 4.1.

Table 5.1: Case selection reasons

Case	Reason for selection
Case M	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term access guaranteed by the Vice Chancellor (VC) • Access to the VC, senior decision making forums, and to the faculties and schools • A large organisation going through significant change in a post-merger context • A VC with a desire to move towards a more inclusive and collaborative style of leadership focused on research and student outcomes.
A UK university	
Case P	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long term access guaranteed by the CEO who is also the owning family’s representative • Access to the CEO and senior leadership team, senior decision making forums, and across the various business units • An organisation going through significant growth internationally • A CEO with a desire to move towards a distributed model of leadership.
A UK-based £1.5bn brand management company with global operations employing over 2,000 people.	

I was able to secure a commitment to access to each case during the early stages of my doctoral studies because both the CEO and the VC agreed with my research question and

that they would see benefit from the research outcomes. Case P was a consulting client and I had met the CEO through that connection. He had expressed an interest in my research question and invited me to study the transition over the period of my research. I met the VC of the University through a function and she also expressed specific interest in my research question and committed to allowing me access throughout my research period. Both leaders have maintained access for me as promised and have been supportive of the data collection and analysis stages of the research.

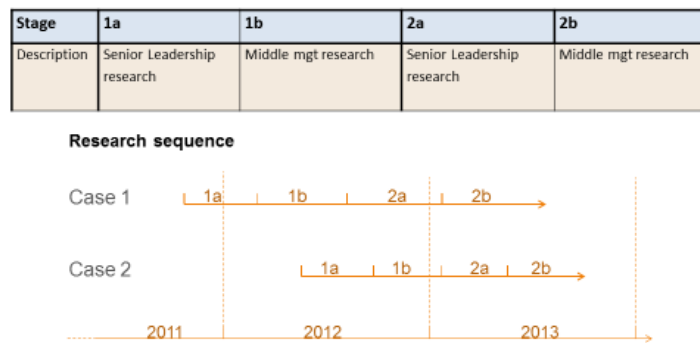
5.3.2 Longitudinal approach

I was therefore fortunate to have two suitable cases with reasonable levels of security that access would be in place to allow the longitudinal nature of my research to work in practice. I had access to other organisations, particularly through my consulting work, but not with such longevity of access guaranteed (barring a change in CEO/VC).

The longitudinal approach provides two opportunities to understand the intentions of senior leaders and two opportunities to check the extent to which the transition towards DL is being realised in practice further into the organisation. The longitudinal approach I used is spread over a two year period. In each year I collected data at two levels, one after the other, with senior leadership interviews being followed by middle manager interviews. In this way I was able to test twice the cycle of intention and effect between the senior and middle levels, and also to build in a feedback loop back to the senior levels between the 2 years, which helped with validation. There were in effect four stages of case involvement, as summarised in Figure 4.1.

Figure 5.1: Longitudinal approach

Longitudinal study plan



In summary, therefore, I have used a longitudinal case study research strategy, focused on two major cases, both of which were large, complex and on a journey to change their style of leadership to be more distributed, inclusive and less command and control.

5.4 Data Collection Approach

Within the case study framework I was able to use a variety of data collection methods relevant to my research question. Buchanan writes ‘case studies are more often a multi-methods design’ (2012: 364). I used a mixture of relevant qualitative methods (interviews, document review, observation and a diary) rather than quantitative methods (e.g. surveys, counting, statistics) to collect data in a coherent research design suited to my research question and epistemological perspective. This is summarised in Figure 4.2.

Figure 5.2: Case based research strategy



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In Table 4.2 is a list of the various sources of data I have for each case. In my analysis I compare and contrast the data and explore how it all fits together.

Table 5.2: Data sources by case

Case P	Case M
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews as per the plan • Strategy documents (e.g. annual strategic plans) • Employee survey data (Great Place To Work survey results) • Global leadership forum (the wider senior leadership group) formation process write-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews as per the plan • Strategy documents (2015 and 2020) • Employee survey data (over 3 years) • Stakeholder research documents • Documents relating to the merger

5.4.1 Initial data collection

I piloted my interview guide in 2011 with colleagues at work and also through discussion with my supervisor, in order to ensure that each question was helpful, effective at asking the intended question, and user friendly. I also tested through a simulated interview with a

colleague that the number and scope of the questions was manageable in the one hour time slots allocated. As a result I reduced the number of items and collected them into sections so that there was a series of questions on a common theme such as leadership style or engagement. I found that this made it easier for the interviewee to develop a train of thought and therefore to be more detailed in their responses, giving better quality data with which to work.

I started my data collection with the senior leader population in case M. I conducted 18 interviews in case M and analysed the data using an initial template which I subsequently refined a little for use in the rest of the data analysis. The number of interviews in this first stage was relatively high but the advantage was that this allowed me to dig deeply into the first case and to test my initial ideas about DL in practice.

As a result of this initial stage I amended my research question from focusing on what made DL effective in large organisations to the success factors in successful transition towards DL in large organisations. This was based on the realisation that the case was in a state of change and that it was the journey the main agents were on that was both interesting and most likely to be useful to other practitioners. It was a significant change in focus, and a very helpful one, giving greater clarity to the rest of my data collection and analysis.

I interviewed a range of people from both cases twice over the course of the research to provide longitudinal data on the activities and effects of leaders as they sought to alter the leadership approach in their organisation.

I used purposive sampling, where ‘members of a sample are chosen with a “purpose” to represent a location or type in relation to a key criterion’ (from Ritchie & Lewis, 2014: 116), to identify my interviewees. I selected interviewees in both cases from two main groups: I interviewed all or most of the senior leadership group and a selection of middle managers.

The reasons for selecting the entire senior leadership team of both cases were to understand the intended changes to leadership behaviour and action, to identify the dynamics among senior leaders during the transition and the effect of these on the transition in practice, and to explore the individual actions and motivations of key individuals such as the CEO/VC and their close executives. In both cases this worked well as it was inclusive and gave each interviewee confidence that all of their peers were going through the same interview process. In the second stage I was unable to interview all of the senior leadership team (SLT) due to diary pressures at the time, but this was not a problem as I had reached saturation with a broad consistency of views being expressed.

With the middle management population my reasons for selecting them were to understand the effect of the intended changes by SLT more widely across the organisation, to compare these effects with the intentions at senior levels and to identify the dynamics up and down the hierarchy during this period of change. In this second population I wanted to gain a cross-section of opinions from across the organisation, with a mixed sample representing the main constituencies such as functions, brands or faculties. I was guided by the HR director in each case to achieve a representative sample from across the organisation. I was satisfied that I was able to interview anyone I sought to, and I encountered no resistance from people in either case to participating in the research. I

stopped interviewing each group when I got to saturation in that the same data was coming out each time from interviewees.

I used semi-structured interviews, strategic document analysis and leader observation to collect data that could be cross-referenced within and between cases to establish plausible results. The two-stage interviews provided a range of interpretations of the changing leadership approach in each case, the document analysis primarily provided information about the context of each case, both strategically and in terms of wider stakeholder views, and the observation helped to validate the data from interviews by seeing the senior leadership team of each case in action. In this way I developed a richer picture of each case and the dynamics of transition which in turn led to a higher quality of analysis and comparison.

5.4.2 Stage 1 interviews

The interview schedule for stage 1 is described in table 4.3 below. This started in 2011 with my initial research and continued in both cases throughout 2012 and into early 2013.

Table 5.3: Interview schedule – stage 1

Stage	Case	Audience	Number	Dates
1a	M	SLT	18	Sept - Nov 2011
1b	M	Middle management	8	Sept – Dec 2012
1a	P	SLT	7	July – Aug 2012
1b	P	Middle management	7	Jan 2013

The first stage interviews provided the baseline position for each case, and gave a rich understanding of the intentions for change in leadership approach in each case. They also provided the core themes that I used to construct my original research template, which I subsequently adapted in light of second stage findings (see appendix 2). This is in line with the flexibility the template analysis affords the researcher, according to King (2011: 2).

Each interview took between 50 and 60 minutes and I recorded them with permission on a data recorder. The recorded contents were then transcribed by a professional audio typist experienced in transcript typing, who was asked to avoid any editing. The recording quality was clear and no significant gaps were found in the transcript. Each voice recording was kept in a separate file for future reference, and backed up for security.

I also kept notes throughout the entire interviewing process about possible themes for use in the coding frame, as well as reflexive notes discussed later. These notes have helped in the pursuit of meaning from the interviews, especially by allowing me to respond immediately after each interview with key insights that could later be included in the analysis.

In my interviews I adopted an ‘organisation by interview’ approach rather than an ‘executives by interview’ approach, in that I am focused on the organisation as the level of analysis. I sought to focus the interviews on information not available through secondary sources such as public domain documents, engagement survey data, and so on.

I conducted most stage 1 interviews in person, in people’s offices or in a designated meeting room at each of the case main office buildings. This allowed me to develop high

quality rapport with each interviewee, which I believe helped me to draw out more specific and in-depth responses from participants. Anecdotally, one senior leader at case M commented to the VC after his interview with me that he had probably said more than he had intended because I had drawn more from him than he had initially wanted to say. I took this as positive evidence of the efficacy of my interview questions and technique, whilst acknowledging that the process of interviewing agents in each case was in itself an intervention which may have affected the outcomes. There was no further evidence, however, that this was the case in practice.

Other comments from interviewees in both cases included appreciation of the opportunity to step back and look at the organisation as a whole, a desire to be included in the second stage of data collection and that talking through the leadership dynamics had in itself been a helpful exercise in taking stock and raising awareness of what was going on. I conducted the majority of stage 2 interviews by telephone because I had already established rapport and also to increase efficiency. I did not experience any difference between face to face and telephones based interviews in the first and second stages, with both sets taking the same time on average and the quality of disclosure by interviewees was similar. I believe this was because I had already met them in the first stage, so there was a helpful level of rapport and trust carried forward into the second stage.

Interviews were an important method for me because I needed to enter the private world of the organisations so secondary sources were not adequate, I needed to generate data on the attitudes, interactions and intentions of leaders and understand how they operated, made decisions as an exercise of power, and created alignment with their strategic direction among the wider population. Interviews have also given me flexibility to explore areas of content where there is potentially greater richness and meaning, such as

the legacy of previous senior leaders. I worked hard to frame my interview questions in a way that resonated with executives, building rapport and managing the interview effectively, and providing value to them in the process by helping them to reflect on what was happening among the leadership of the organisation.

I invested time in effective preparation to be credible, enabling me to frame questions to indicate understanding of what was going on as well as published strategy and to link questions to the organisation's agenda.

I used a semi-structured interview approach, with a limited number of key questions giving respondents the freedom to articulate their own responses & the researcher the freedom to explore unanticipated themes. I had a series of prompt questions under each key question which I could use flexibly to cover the main areas but in a sympathetic way to the interviewee. I avoided using theoretical language which would not be relevant to the interviewee.

The question set used for the stage 1 interviews is provided in the appendix 1. Here, I provide an overview with an explanation of the objectives for the questions. Following introductions and an assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, I asked how the person described their role to people in a non-work setting, in order to explore how they summarised their work identity in layman's terms. This helped me to understand how the person defined their work identity, and whether it was, for example, as a leader of an organisation, or a function, or as an individual contributor. I then explored the wider context of the organisation and the implications for an appropriate model of leadership. The resulting commentary on the leadership issues facing the senior leaders in particular

was helpful in itself as well as positioning the rest of the interview in this context for each interviewee.

I then asked a series of questions to explore leadership behaviour in different acts of leadership, to draw out the predominant styles of leadership currently and I found people were very forthcoming with descriptions of the prevailing leadership behaviour in their immediate teams and how it made them respond.

I explored the trends over the last few years and how people have responded in order to explore how these leadership behaviours had changed in the recent past. In the university context this tended to focus on the differences between the current VC and their immediate predecessor. I also asked about the decision making processes now and their impact on people's commitment to the decisions, in order to explore the exercise of power and empowerment.

I explored how communications worked currently and how people received and fed back information, so as to understand communications and the exercise of influence among the leadership actors in each case. I also explored the strategic planning approach in use in each case and its influence on people's sense of purpose and identification with the organisation. This was to draw out the interviewee's views on the planning process as an exercise of central decision making and to what extent it was evolving to be more inclusive and shared amongst leaders at different organisational levels.

Turning to the impact of leadership behaviour on the engagement of people (defined for this interview as 'a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values'), I asked people to describe current levels of engagement in their own area and

across the organisation, both now and in the recent past. This was to explore the impact on engagement for the interviewee and their colleagues of changes in leadership style. I recognise that the evidence from these interview discussions is to some extent one remove away from the wider population of followers across each case organisation. I was asking middle managers to express an opinion on the levels of engagement they perceived in their areas of responsibility. This is a limitation of my research method. There was however considerable unanimity among interviewees from each case about the levels of engagement and this data was also supported by the evidence from the engagement surveys in both cases.

Finally, I sought suggestions for improvement to drive increased engagement both in their own area and across the organisation, in order to define the gaps and lacking leadership behaviour. I also asked people what would make them more engaged which drew out personal anecdotes about their personal commitment and areas for improvement.

5.4.3 Stage 2 interviews

The interview schedule for stage 2 is described in table 4.4 below.

Table 5.4: Interview schedule – stage 2

Stage	Case	Audience	Number	Dates
2a	Case M	SLT	7	April - June
2b	Case M	Middle management	7	May – July
2a	Case P	SLT	6	April – June
2b	Case P	Middle management	8	July – September

The second stage interviews completed my data collection process and provide the data on the extent of progress towards a more distributed style of leadership in each case.

In the second stage I adopted a three-fold approach to the choice and design of questions.

Firstly I sought to test the key findings from stage 1 and to explore them further.

Secondly, I repeated the key questions from stage 1 to explore what has changed, or not changed, in each case. Finally I raised some specific points of discussion with each individual to explore what has changed in areas they cited as significant in the first interview.

The question set used for stage 2 interviews was the same as in stage 1 except for two amendments: I explored issues that had come up in the stage 1 interviews, such as to what extent the relationship between the organisation and the brands/faculties had changed over the last 18 months in the case of P, and what changes people had seen in engagement levels since stage 1.

I found these semi-structured interview guides helpful because they allowed me to explore issues of interest to the interviewee which in turn provided richer insights into how the leadership relationships work in practice. They also provided confidence in the process for the interviewee without creating a barrier to an intelligent and responsive dialogue through which we built shared understanding.

The stage 2 interview questions have provided a broadly consistent data set between interviews based on the main questions, with rich text in each, enabling the creation of a meaningful template for analysis. In addition I was able to explore how each person

interpreted particular questions (such as how they describe their role outside work) to illuminate personal views (such as their social image and sources of identification).

5.4.4 Documentary data collection

The documentation I analysed included strategic plans for both case as well as documents relating to the strategic planning processes used in each case.

These documents provided a point of reference for validating the interview data and a helpful insight into the intentions behind the various meetings and events that are analysed in the case study chapters below. The strategic documents relating to each case help me to understand the strategic context of each case and the data available around engagement and the consequences of leadership behaviour.

For example, I started my research with desk research relating to the University case, using 13 documents, including published strategy documents such as the 2015 Agenda, the draft 2020 Agenda, the last 3 employee opinion survey reports, the 2010 stakeholder report, a published article about the university's post-merger integration (Georghiou, 2009), and various internal documents such as a report on stakeholder views from 2010 and a record of actions from a recent SLT meeting. Each document has provided insight into areas such as the evolution of the institution since merger, which relates to the context for leadership I relate in my analysis, and the evolving nature of the strategic goals.

For the P case I read leadership meeting notes such as GLF July Agenda, Exec team meeting notes Feb 9th 12, Strategy Meeting-27th April 2012, Notes from MD-HoD Meeting March 12-13th 2012, Exec team meeting notes Feb9th 12; and strategic

documents including Case P Plc Scorecard Report, Strategic Business Plan pack for Group Board Meeting, and the Purpose and Strategy Section of the 2011 Annual Review.

5.5 Data analysis approach

I sought to develop a depth of insight from the case narratives which are a drawing together of the data I collected through the research activity. The insight is ‘locally grounded’, with a ‘richness and holism’ that allows us to move from the micro to the macro and back so that we understand how agents are interacting within the context of the case itself (Miles, 1994: 10).

With each case I provided a briefing to the senior leader after each stage of research which provides value back to the organisation as well as helping to validate my analysis and to check out supplementary questions. I summarised the main themes I was seeing in the data, and checked with them various facts to ensure accuracy. At each review meeting I received strong reinforcement from the leaders of both cases about the relevance of the insights to their progression as leaders on a journey.

Case studies provide local causal data which is helpful in building theory in an inductive way. By adding in cross-case analysis I was able to develop a richer causal model that allowed me to demonstrate greater theoretical rigour and transferability. In line with Miles & Huberman, by noting patterns and contrasting the relationships between variables I was able to develop conceptual coherence that goes beyond the case specifics (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 90). Through my observation and analysis of the cases I generated theory which can be useful to managers in other organisations to make sense of what is

going on and to learn from the experience of others in order to know better what to do next.

5.5.1 Interview analysis

In terms of interview analysis, I used the template analysis (TA) method to order and analyse the wealth of data I collected through the interview process. TA is ‘a style of thematic analysis that balances a relatively high degree of structure in the process of analyzing textual data with the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of a particular study’ (King, 2012: 426). It is consistent with my epistemological position: ‘template analysis can be used within what Madill et al. (2000) call a ‘contextual constructivist’ position [...] the emphasis is on the reflexivity of the researcher [...], the attempt to approach the topic from differing perspectives and the richness of the description produced (Wimalasiri et al., 2008)’ (King, 2012: 427).

TA has allowed me to investigate a range of perceptions and interactions in each case with a flexibility to interpret these in a way that emphasises the meaning of what is going on for each agent, and how these interplay over time.

I have used a research template with a selection of nodes which has evolved over time. The first version was based on my initial review of literature and the interpretation of data coming from my pilot research project. I started with some a priori themes and then refined them as I analysed the data from the first 18 interviews I conducted with case M.

The second version (reproduced in appendix 2) evolved from the first as I continued to read more widely during 2012 and into 2013, especially in the areas of DL and complexity

leadership theory (CLT). The template reflected the increase focus I adopted at this time on the transition towards DL. It also supports the evolving theoretical model that was emerging from my data collection and analysis (see the mid research review section below for a fuller description).

I took extensive notes during the interviews in addition to the recorded content file.

Drawing on the tactics suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994: 246) I used my notes to explore possible themes after each interview (such as bottlenecks in the distribution of leadership power), based on 'plausibility' – i.e. clusters of data which were not always consistent but related to consistent issues in the case. Through repeated reading of the interview and comparison with my research question I have developed an increasingly helpful and reasonable interpretation of the data, described below, contributing to the more representative second template. As King suggests: 'the researcher produces a list of codes (a template) representing themes identified in their textual data' (King, 2004: 118). This iterative process of interpretation leads to a richer understanding of the interview data and how it fits with the wider data set from all of the interviews.

Key considerations I took into account in conducting the data collection and subsequent analysis include balancing the need for structure with the need for an empathetic response to each interviewee's perspective in order to uncover the richness and ambiguity inherent in a case focused on organisational leadership. I was conscious of the need to create a structure which enabled effective interrogation of the data, hence the use of template analysis to make the structure relevant to the case and transparently robust.

It was also important to have a strategy for this interrogation consistent with my epistemological starting point, in my case a contextualist approach which recognises the

contextual nature of leadership and the way it evolves at least in part in response to the specific conditions of the situation.

Template analysis is ‘a particular way of thematically analysing qualitative data ... and serves as the basis for the researcher’s interpretation or illumination of the data set, and the writing up of findings’ (King, 2011: 1). Template analysis is a technique which accommodates flexing of the research structure as the research proceeds, which is consistent with my contextual approach, although template analysis is not used exclusively in this tradition. ‘Template analysis works particularly well when the aim is to compare the perspectives of different groups of staff within a specific context’ (King, 2011: 5), which has been my approach in the later stages of the case research and analysis.

My research template is organised into a series of themes and sub-themes as outlined in Table 4.5. This template structure combines some a priori themes such as ‘leadership styles’ and ‘engagement’ with some that emerged through the data gathering process, such as ‘initiative’ and ‘leadership capability’.

The themes are based on current theory in the following ways:

- The strategic context is important, as Spillane emphasised, describing DL as ‘a product of the interactions of ... leaders, followers, and aspects of their situation’ (Spillane & Diamond, 2007: 161).
- The organisational leader’s style may affect the direction and speed of transition to DL, with an intended shift in both cases from one of centralised control to a more distributed, consensual and trust-based approach.

- Leadership capability may affect the transition, ‘as leadership needs to be distributed to those who have, or can develop, the knowledge or expertise required to carry out the leadership tasks expected’ (Leithwood et al., 2006: 58).
- There is a suggested need for a planful adaptation of the decision-making process to accommodate decentralised power and communications responsibility, as Leithwood and Mascall (2008b: 227) suggest: ‘planful alignment [of DL] seems more likely to contribute significantly’.
- The organisational structure may supports or impede this ‘planful alignment’ by encouraging identification with either the firm or the local discipline. In one of the cases, for example, the concentration of power in the divisional structure has created blockages to the effective distribution of leadership, and encourages localised identification by professionals.

The full template I used in NVivo version 9.0 is shown in appendix 2. In order to produce consistent data analysis I used the following definitions in table 4.5 for the template analysis to categorise content from the interviews and other sources into the revised template. (Bold items are main nodes and other items are secondary nodes.)

Table 5.5: Coding themes in my analysis template

Coding item	Definition
Alignment	The degree to which different people in the organisation share the same sense of direction and purpose in their work.
Collaboration	People working voluntarily in an interdependent way to achieve outcomes together.
Context	The wider situation in which each case is operating, including current factors and those from the past that still influence people’s behaviour today.

History	What has happened in the past and the way it influences what happens in the present.
Strategic challenge externally	Factors that influence the organisation from outside in a way that can affect its achievement of its strategic goals.
Decision making	The exercise of power through making a choice about the course of action in a particular area.
Discretionary power for decision making	The extent to which people at a certain level in the organisation can or cannot make decisions based on their own judgement without undue interference from more senior levels.
SLT decision making process	The way the senior team makes decisions together (or individually).
Strategic planning process	The approach the organisation takes to longer term planning and deciding on the direction and strategy to achieve certain goals for the organisation as a whole.
Effect of transition	The impact the transition towards greater distributed leadership has on the organisation.
Implementation of decisions	The way decisions are put into practice and reviewed by the decision making party.
Innovation	The systematic development of new ideas for generating value for the organisation and turning these into a commercial opportunity.
Engagement	The extent to which people in the organisation are emotionally and cognitively connected to it and willing to invest discretionary effort to help it achieve its goals.
Identification	What people in the organisation relate to in terms of their own identity, and how it affects their commitment to the organisation as a whole.
Individual contributors	People who do work but who do not have people reporting to them in a managerial role.
Initiative	The extent to which people commit unprompted energy into making something happen, typically for the improvement of the organisation.

Leadership style	The approach people managers take in the way they interact with people in their teams and more widely across the organisation.
Authentic leadership	Leaders operate in line with their values and those of the organisation, demonstrating strong relationships based on self-awareness and balanced judgement.
Complexity leadership	Leaders balance the need for high levels of adaptation at the customer interface with a strong sense of where the organisation is going and how to operate within it.
Distributed leadership	Leaders share decision making and communications responsibility, and make decisions based on the overall organisational strategy and values as well as what local conditions dictate.
Middle management (MM)	The managers who are between senior and junior managers, typically leading a part of the organisation (e.g. a function or a particular unit) in line with the wider strategy of the business.
MM Capability	The skills, knowledge and ability of middle managers relevant to their role, e.g. performance management, coaching, planning and feedback.
MM Performance management	The process of regular goal setting and reviews of performance to support individual growth and organisational coherence of activity.
Organisation	The whole case.
Communications	The way information flows around an organisation, and the quality of the interchange between people about that information.
Culture	The way we do things around here. The code of conduct that defines the organisation, including symbols of power and history.
Scale & structure	The size and structure of the organisation.
Strategic clarity	The extent to which the vision, values and strategic goals of the organisation are well understood across the organisation.
Senior leader	People in the senior decision making group at the head of the organisation.

CEO/VC capability	The skills, knowledge and ability of the CEO relevant to their role.
CEO/VC intentions	What the senior leader is seeking to achieve in the transition towards DL.
CEO/VC style	The approach the senior person takes to formal and informal interactions, communications and decisions.
Senior leadership team	The top team in the organisation.
SLT behaviour as a team	How the team members behave with each other.
SLT behaviour as individuals	How individual members of the senior team behave when not physically with the rest of the team.
SLT capability	The skills, knowledge and ability of the senior team relevant to their role.
Theories	Relevant theories.

Part of the issue with template analysis is its flexibility. As King writes (King, 2004: 269): ‘A fundamental tension in template analysis ... is between the need to be open to the data and the need to impose some shape and structure on the analytic process.’ Getting this balance right is challenging, and I found that returning to the research question is a helpful check and balance in maintaining a useful level of structure in line with the underlying research intent.

I used NVivo to assist in the coding of the data, which enabled me to develop a rich understanding of the intentions and effects of leadership behaviour in both cases. I have traced the relationship between the input factors, the actual experience of people within each case, and the corresponding outputs, or effects. This helps to provide a clear picture of the leadership dynamics over time and the changes they create in the experience of leaders and managers at senior and middle levels.

In my data analysis I have sought to identify both what is helpful in answering my research question and also what is more puzzling. I explore both in the case analysis chapters. I have also sought to identify data that does not fit the theory and to explore why, such as asking is it anomalous or does it illustrate an issue?

Following the case analysis I used cross-case analysis in order to develop a richer interdependent picture of what was going on, and why it was happening in this way, as described in chapter 6. I used various techniques such as cross-case displays and general condensation to draw out increasingly consequential insight and explanation into the phenomena concerned, always in the context of the specific cases involved (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 172).

5.6 Quality criteria

I need to be able to demonstrate how I have assessed the case study methodology I adopted. For case study research in particular I believe we need to demonstrate quality for our conclusions to counter the criticism of being non-academic from some positivists. I have drawn on work by Buchanan (2012), Symon & Cassell (2012) and Miles & Huberman (1994) in identifying three particular criteria that I propose are helpful in assessing the quality of my research and its outcomes:

- Generalizability (Buchanan, 2012: 365)
- ‘De-centring the author’ (Symon and Cassell, 2012: 212).
- Avoiding bias (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 263)

I have selected what I judge to be the most relevant criteria based on Symon and Cassell: ‘as qualitative research is so diverse, our overall view is that qualitative researchers should draw on those elements of quality that they think are most relevant to their own research and be careful in their writings to indicate to potential assessors what the aims of the research were and therefore how they should be judged’ (Symon and Cassell, 2012: 221).

5.6.1 Generalizability

Buchanan describes two modes of generalizability. ‘Generalizability, or external validity, concerns the application of findings to settings other than the one studied ... [which] is a matter of judgement’ (Buchanan, 2012: 365). He cites, amongst others, ‘naturalistic generalization’ and ‘analytical refinement’. The first is when ‘we learn from case (and other) accounts and apply them to our own context’. The second is when case research informs theory.

In my research I have demonstrated ‘naturalistic generalizability’ through the use of the research outcomes to inform the understanding of leaders in other organisations.

Throughout the latter part of 2013 and 2014 I have shared my anonymised research findings with executives from, for example, a FTSE 100 retailer, where they have adopted the behaviours and used them to plan their leadership resourcing and development approach.

Another way to assess the use of case based research (which is related to this criteria), is the use of narrative in helping ‘make sense of experience’ (Weick, 1979b). Through telling the story of how people respond to leaders’ behaviour in the context of a changing strategic direction I can enable more leaders to be able to engage their people in the

particular journey on which they are bound, the criterion of naturalistic generalizability will have been achieved. There is a pleasing symmetry in my using case-based narrative as the method of helping leaders to use narrative to engage people in making sense about the organisation and increased sharing of power and influence in which they work together (Weick, 1979b).

The naturalistic generalizability criterion is related to the fourth of five standards from Miles & Huberman (1994: 277): the fourth criterion is external validity or transferability, in that the findings have wider import and relevance to other situations and showing valid links to other studies and cases to support generalizability. The recent increase in published research into DL and CLT demonstrates the wider import of these theories and the need to test them through analysis in the field. In addition, throughout the analysis and reporting process I have related the observable situation in each case to the theories I am using to interpret the data, and more widely to other leadership theories described in the literature chapter.

Miles & Huberman's fifth criteria is 'utilisation, application and action-orientation', i.e. it is useful to the intended audience, 'what the study does for ... its consumers' (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 280). In my situation this is leaders of organisations seeking to change direction and academics interested in this field. As the social pressure and internal demand for more distributed and responsive ways of leading organisations increases the usefulness of this research is both significant and timely.

As well as individual companies, whole industries are undergoing change relating to increased distribution of leadership – for example, in the UK rail industry there is a regulatory requirement for the rail infrastructure provider, Network Rail, to lead a culture

change in the industry to one of partnership and customer-centricity, based on a devolved structure. This is recorded in the CP5 notice of the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR, 2014: 15-16): ‘Network Rail has made important changes in its internal structure, moving more responsibility away from the centre towards its devolved routes, and making changes to how it works with the wider industry in terms of alliances with train operators and more partnership working with suppliers.’ At the time of writing I am in regular dialogue with those at Network Rail who are responsible for leadership development about the content of my research and how they can use it in their work to support the ongoing transition to more distributed leadership.

Regarding Buchanan’s (2012: 365) second aspect of generalizability, ‘analytic refinement’, in the conclusion chapter I describe the way my research outcomes have helped to provide a more holistic definition of the factors affecting increased distribution of leadership. This, I would argue, is informing current theory by demonstrating in the cases I studied that the factors are drawn from different theories, namely authentic leadership theory, distributed leadership theory and complexity leadership theory. I would suggest this is an analytical refinement. In the resulting theoretical model I have used the case study evidence to identify links between different theories and created a coherent synthesis that reflects the realities of the cases in various ways. With case P the model provides a reasonable fit with the reality as reported by agents at different levels of the organisation, and with case M the model explains why progress towards DL has been more limited.

5.6.2 De-centring the author

Moving to the second criterion, Johnson et al describe the following question as indicative of the ‘de-centring the author’ criterion: ‘Has the author reflexively considered their own narrative and elements of its production? (e.g. how does the paper ‘work’ as a convincing narrative?)’ (Johnson et al, 2006, cited in Symon, 2012: 212).

At key points throughout this thesis I have also provided reflexive accounts of the way I have sought to ensure a balanced perspective with both cases.

In order to avoid ‘going native’ (Miles, 1994: 263) I held periodic review meetings with key stakeholders including the senior leadership team of each case to help validate the interim findings throughout the research process. This helped me to maintain a high standard of research quality assurance, as I was testing what was coming out of data analysis with the cases to ensure that I was interpreting the data accurately. I used these review meetings to check for ‘researcher effects’ and going native – both from and to the cases. Both of the CEOs are robust, insightful and direct in their feedback.

5.6.3 Avoiding bias

I was keen to avoid the typical sources of bias that Miles and Huberman (Miles, 1994: 263) see as possible downsides of case studies:

- Holistic fallacy – seeing more congruence than is really there
- Elite bias – over-emphasis on particular individuals (discussed above)
- Going native – losing our research perspective by aligning with the case.

I used several of the ways Miles and Huberman (1994: 277) suggest to avoid bias and to increase quality (credibility and transferability). For example, in order to ensure representativeness and avoid elite bias, I used purposive sampling across the senior and middle management of both cases.

The core design of my research, with two populations interviewed twice, plus observation of key meetings and document analysis, led to a helpful increase in credibility, as I was using different sources of data, method and data type to corroborate or challenge research conclusions, helping also to avoid the holistic fallacy.

Finally, I weighted the evidence (explicitly checking the quality of data sources and methods) by using only direct or published sources and by spreading the interview sampling sufficiently widely across the potential audience in both cases. For each case I used interviews, observation and document analysis to understand what was intended and what was actually happening with respect to the senior leadership behaviour and consequent middle manager experience relating to the increased distribution of leadership.

In addition to these three specific criteria, I would suggest that the underlying rigour of my research strategy, method and analysis provide a level of quality that is in itself sufficient to provide the assessor with confidence in the robustness of the approach and its outputs. I have included 'rich descriptions' of the cases, and 'a variety of theoretical and methodological concepts' in the research project, and have sought throughout to demonstrate intellectual rigour and consistency (Tracy, 2010, cited in Symon, 2012: 211).

The criteria I have selected and discussed above are consistent with the recommendation from Easterby-Smith et al (2008: 59) that ‘the results of constructionist research should be believable, and reached through methods that are transparent’. This is consistent with my philosophical position.

5.7 Reflections

There are several points of interest as I reflect on the research project I have just completed. I discuss them here and elsewhere in the thesis.

I have maintained a research diary throughout my DBA, which has been a helpful source of insight and a reminder of the journey I have undertaken. It is an on-going record of events such as DBA conferences & supervisor meetings, reading and research experiences, insights gained and implications for my research. It contains over 10,000 words. It was useful for developing my conceptual framework in that it helped to tie together the various strands of insight, and to maintain a helpful perspective towards particular aspects of the cases or theories.

I read through the diary entries at different stages of research, and found that it stimulated new thinking each time. For example, in early 2013 it reminded me of the reasons I had selected the two cases I have used as I was working on the data analysis, and the caveats I had about each case. Before selecting case M, I considered several potential problems, as recorded in my research diary on 23rd January 2011, including a possible conflict of interest given my association with the university, potential issues of confidentiality, the fact that it was not a commercial organisation and whether it was too complex.

I discussed the possible conflict of interest with my supervisor and we concluded that this could be managed effectively with proper disclosure to and protection of anonymity for all interviewees. The fact that the university is not a commercial organisation provides certain advantages as well, as it provides a different perspective to my research with the other case, and thus provides a rich and contrasting contribution to the data and subsequent analysis. The complexity of the institution was an issue because of the difficulty of identifying organisational issues rather than faculty or school issues. I felt that this was a challenge that could also provide richer data and that as long as I was clear about the data I needed and remained focused on this I could manage this to the benefit of my research and contribution to knowledge.

With case P I also had a potential conflict in that I was and had been for some time consulting to this organisation on matters relating to leadership and executive team effectiveness. I therefore met with the CEO to discuss this issue and we agreed that we would position with the business all research activity as quite distinct from consulting work I or colleagues were providing. In addition I visited their offices to conduct interviews or observe meetings on separate days to those when I was involved in consulting activities. In retrospect I am confident that this was effective, because the interviews were all conducted with a clear purpose and feedback from the interviewees was that they saw the interviews as part of a research project rather than being linked in any way to the other consulting activities in which I was involved. Conversely, I found that the insight I had already into the nature of the organisation helped me to ask more relevant questions to enable respondents to provide more insightful answers.

I maintained steady progress and regular contact with my cases during the period 2011 to 2013. In fact I found that through regular dialogue with the senior leaders in both cases I

was able to understand better the journeys they were on, the challenges and adjustments they were making, and the personal as well as organisational dimension to the changes involved. These are discussed in the relevant case analysis chapters that follow.

Chapter 6 – Case P

6.1 Introduction

In this case analysis I will describe the narrative of how the business evolved over the period of my longitudinal study, relating it to both the draft theoretical framework and my research question and drawing out insights that help to provide answers to those questions.

I start with an overview of the business, looking at the key agents as they relate to my research, and the impetus for the transition towards DL as a revised approach to leadership. I then relate the findings from my research in a chronological order, tracking the journey the organisation undertook during the period 2011 to 2013. I reflect on the indicators of success that the senior leaders in this case used to assess their journey, and I conclude with a review of the factors that help us make sense of the changes that were reported by interviewees during the research process. Where appropriate I have sought to make the link between the data and the theory, as described in the literature chapters.

I have made all references to people and places anonymous in this chapter and in the cross case analysis chapter, so as to maintain the level of confidentiality I agreed with the organisation's leaders.

6.2 Case overview

Case P is part of a wider family owned group which was originally formed by the family in 1932, and which grew rapidly in the 1980s through acquisitions and disposals as well as organic growth. The current CEO is the third generation of the family to lead the

business. His father is still Chairman and has a more autocratic style, and his presence is still apparent in the background at the company: ‘if the Chairman asks for something then everyone, including the CEO, prioritises making sure he gets what he needs’, said one Exec member.

The CEO has been adapting how the business operates for several years, and his philosophy is broadly aligned to the principles of DL, as we discovered in our initial interview in 2011. He decided to accelerate the transition of the business towards a more distributed form of leadership during 2012 using the strategic planning process as the focus for a shift in style and decision-making. The CEO used DL as a short hand title for the overall shift in the way he wanted the business to operate, including distributed decision-making, increased learning and adaptive practice (in line with to adaptation in CLT (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)), coupled with more collaboration (in line with collaboration in DL (Hargreaves & Harris, 2011)), and coherence across the brands and functions, supported by improved relationships based on the company’s values (in line with values-based relationships in ALT (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2001)).

In this chapter I describe the way case P put this into practice during 2012 (stage 1) and 2013 (stage 2), based on interviews with the CEO and his executive leadership team (Exec), as well as subsequent interviews with middle managers across the business which were used to validate the intended effect in terms of ‘increased involvement in decisions’ and ‘making slightly longer term decisions for the right strategic reasons’.

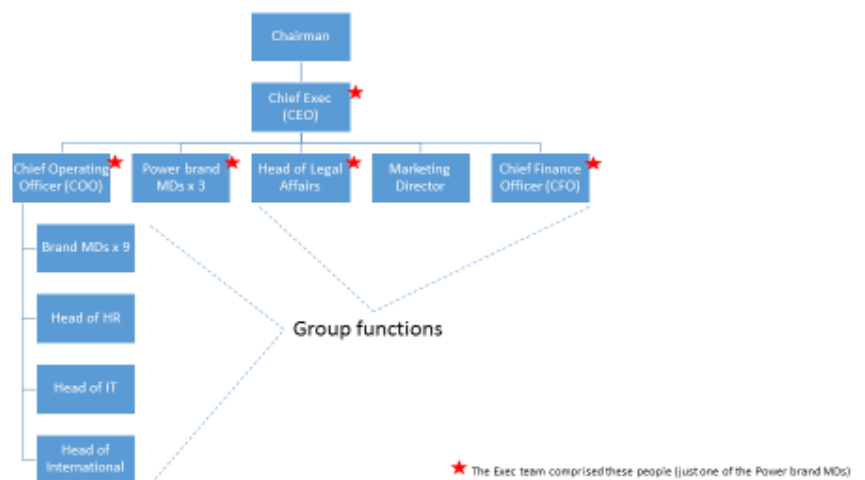
6.2.1 Key agents

The key agents in the activity during 2012 and into 2013 included the CEO, who wanted to introduce changes to governance and ways of working across the business during the research period in order to improve brand and functional collaboration as well as more coherent planning and implementation of company and brand-specific strategy. He discussed the DL approach with me at the beginning of the research period and stated that it described very well the leadership aspects of the changes he was seeking to introduce. He said that DL was consistent with his intentions and with the direction in which he was leading the business to operate anyway.

Figure 5.1 shows the senior organisation structure for case P at the beginning of my data collection, with the group functions reporting to either the CEO or the COO roles.

Figure 6.1: Case P senior structure

Case P senior management structure



Another key player was the Chief Financial Officer (CFO), who had only recently been promoted to this role and to the Exec. She shaped how DL would be embodied in the revised strategic planning process. She had the same changes in mind as the CEO. The Chief Operating Officer (COO) had been a long term supporter of the gradual movement of the business towards what he described as a more ‘professional’ approach to leadership and strategic management. Most of the functions and smaller brands reported to him.

The Exec comprised the CEO, CFO and COO, plus the Head of legal affairs and the most senior Brand President who was responsible for case P’s biggest brand. This group and some of the more senior Brand MDs were the members of the sample I interviewed in stage 1A and 2A. I included the more senior Brand MDs at the suggestion of the CEO who saw them as being among the senior leaders of the business.

The Global Leadership Team (GLT) was brought together for the first time in March 2012, comprising the Exec, the Brand MDs and the Heads of Departments (HoDs). I interviewed managers from this wider group and some of their direct reports as part of stage 1B and 2B in order to get a wider representation from across the business, and to understand how they were reacting to the intended changes in approach emanating from the Exec.

6.2.2 The starting point

Strategic decision-making up to the beginning of 2012 was through the following combination of activities: the CEO and his father, the chairman, held private discussions as well as discussing strategic issues in board meetings, and the CEO would then have corresponding discussions with the Exec.

Case P has a collection of sports and fashion brands, many of which enjoy global success. The Brand MDs were used to working relatively independently, with many years of having had a high degree of autonomy as long as they were producing the expected results. They prepared their annual strategic business plans (SBPs) in isolation from each other and had them reviewed by the Exec at a formal review session each September. The Brand MDs also met together with the Exec twice per annum to discuss major company-wide topics (such as expanding into the Chinese market), the output from which the Exec would then take back to their own forum for review.

In terms of wider communication of the case P strategic plans with the rest of the business, the CEO had previously run an annual road show in December/January in which he presented the company's strategy through a lengthy slide show to all members of the business, including some long term aspirations, frameworks for effective action (such as world class brand building), but with limited specific financial information (due to the tendency towards privacy by the family).

Feedback about this process was that there was too much information to take on board in the road show presentations, although it was seen as very motivational for employees across the business to see and hear from the CEO in person.

6.2.3 The impetus for change in leadership approach

The CEO is well educated, including a first class degree at Cambridge and an MBA from Harvard. He is not an arrogant person, according to his colleagues, and he is respected for his insight and fairness. The movement towards DL could be seen as a natural extension

of his underlying and stated belief in authenticity and shared leadership. As one Exec member put it early on in the process: '[he] has reached the point of understanding within himself about what he believes in and what he thinks is right.'

The momentum for a change in the way leadership operated in the organisation was accelerated by the CFO who at the time of her promotion late in 2011 to the Exec stated that she saw the need for a 'less deferential' and more 'professional' approach to leadership across the organisation.

Another factor influencing the change in leadership approach is the fact that the Chairman will at some time retire and at that time the CEO will step up to chair the Group, of which case P is a part. The CEO therefore wanted to have in place a robust organisation that could effectively lead itself without his (or his father's) persistent or direct day to day involvement. He does not have any offspring who are currently ready (or likely to be ready for some time) to take on the role of CEO. So succession to a non-family CEO is likely and interviewees have stated that the CEO wants to manage this in a way that enables the business to continue to flourish commercially and culturally 'under new management' in line with the values and strategic direction of the group. The values are explicitly defined in case P as 'passion, courage, creativity, and always learning', and have been in place for many years. Several interviewees referred to the values as being an important guide to behaviour, which is in line with ALT's emphasis on a shared moral code and transparent relations (Avolio, 2009: 423).

In addition, the CEO wanted to define a clear purpose and vision to guide distributed decision-making in a coherent long term way, and these were intended to be a product of the new approach to strategic planning in 2012 described below.

A common phrase used by the CEO at this time was ‘we are living in a VUCA world’, which he used to describe the volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous world in which case P is operating. Originally drawn from US military parlance (as described by Stiehm & Townsend, 2002: 6), the phrase VUCA was to be heard frequently around case P as a short hand for the need to think in a more flexible, joined-up and open minded way, not always using the same methods as in the past, and being open to new ways of working. The CEO said he was keen to challenge people across the business to think differently, and to embrace change and new ways of achieving growth as the business became increasingly international and complex in itself. This ties in closely with CLT (Lichtenstein et al, 2006) and I will explore this in more detail later in this chapter.

6.3 The journey

In this section I describe the sequence of activities that, according to the stage 1A interviews, the CEO and Exec wished to use to cause a shift in the way the business operated. Through a series of events they sought to orchestrate a shift away from being a loose federation of brands run relatively independently by each Brand MD supported by a series of central functions with varying degrees of engagement with the brands. They wanted to create a more interdependent group of brands and functions with over-arching strategy and values and a high degree of collaboration both between brands and between brands and functions.

6.3.1 February 2012 Exec event

On 9th February 2012 the Exec came together for a day to explore the way forward for the business, and how to engage the wider leadership group in developing and implementing strategy. This wider group was later to be called the Global Leadership Team (GLT), in line with Weick's emphasis on social meaning (Weick, 1995: 17-61), where dialogue is key and labels are symbolic of shared meaning. The Exec was planning to signal a major shift in the process of leadership across case P. I observed the meeting and took notes, which I subsequently used to write this description.

The CEO set the scene by referring to the need to get everyone to step up to lead more effectively across case P, and he also noted that his father would retire at some stage and that they had a responsibility to have an effective succession plan in place.

The discussion covered several topics, including their roles as leaders, and how they could individually be more effective, and how they could operate more effectively as a leadership team. Their focus on their own team cohesion being an important pre-requisite for the change in leadership behaviour more widely across the organisation is interesting. It suggests that team-based collaboration won't emerge if not demonstrated in practice at the most senior levels. This links to shared leadership, where the mutual 'influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence' (Pearce and Conger (2003), cited in Avolio, 2009: 431).

They also discussed how they could help the next level (the brand MDs and the heads of the central functions) to step up during the year, enabling everyone to manage less detail and to operate with a more strategic perspective. This would involve leadership training

as well as involvement in a collective planning process. This emphasis on leadership capability, enabling senior managers to take on more decision-making and collaborative responsibilities, reflects the planful approach to introducing DL described by Leithwood and Mascall: 'Let's call it intelligent hierarchy to reflect the opportunities that this approach affords to ensure that such organizations take advantage of the capabilities and strengths of most of their members while ensuring careful coordination of effort in a common cause' (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a:553).

This discussion led to them agreeing specific plans to adapt their roles to become more enabling and less directive as leaders at the forthcoming inaugural meeting with the wider leadership group. From these discussions we can see that their intentions were shared and specific in terms of devolving decision-making power whilst at the same time creating a more coherent and collaborative approach across the business to ensure decision-making was joined up. This relates to the two criteria for increasing DL as set out by Leithwood et al.: competent managers and a planful approach (Leithwood et al., 2008b: 227).

The results of these conversations were in part a more coherent Exec team, as reported by this middle manager: 'There is much more clarity coming out of Exec meetings, which is incredibly helpful.' But at the time the key challenge was the fragmented nature of the operating model, as described by two middle managers: 'I think it would be better if the Group felt like a slightly more collaborative place. And I think again there has been some improvement there, but I think brands can still feel a bit silo-y, a bit that my way is the best and only way and I don't really want to look at something else.' And again: 'What's inhibiting internal collaboration, I think, is probably the internal competition that we have between the different brands.' The HR Director expressed the problem as '... the evolution of the business and the tension between the brands and the centre, which is not

an HR issue but a global organisational issue ...’ turning this tension into a collective strength was at the core of intended transition towards DL, in the CEO’s view, ‘to create a world class brand management company’ that acted coherently in order to realise the benefits of having so many strong brands under one roof. This was the clear vision the CEO and the Exec were working out how to achieve it through a more distributed approach.

Another stimulus for this conversation was the promotion of the new CFO to the Exec team, with particular responsibility for strategy, and her agreement with the CEO on the need to broaden the involvement of senior managers across case P in the strategic planning process. In fact there was some scepticism expressed by other members of the Exec before this initial event about how much change in leadership approach was likely to happen in practice in a private family-run company: one Exec described it thus: ‘... to be really very realistic, it is a family business and you have got to do what the family want.’ The CEO recognised this scepticism, as reported to the author, but continued in the belief that his subsequent actions with the GLT would demonstrate his genuine commitment to making the shift to a more distributed and coherent approach to leadership and strategic decision-making. A later comment from an Exec member suggests that the CEO was right to persist: ‘the biggest thing for me is [the CEO] stepping back, I think, so my sense was always that [he] felt the need to be the visible leader in charge. He had to have all the answers and I think that's the biggest thing from whether I was sitting here or not, it's undeniably different.’ The CEO ‘stepping back’ was a physical and cultural symbol of the coordinated sharing of power that was beginning to occur.

An explicit desired outcome of the shift in leadership approach was to increase the level of performance of the business overall, and to achieve higher degrees of accountability for

results across the brands and functions. As one Exec member put it: ‘You don’t need to suffer mediocrity within the organisation like this, but I think we do in areas.’ Another said at the time: ‘[Our leadership challenge is] managing a drive for performance in line with our values.’ Through increased levels of clarity of purpose, positive (values-based) behaviour, collaboration, shared information and decision-making, the Exec felt that they would increase the business’s overall performance. This relates to both the importance of clear strategic purpose and the clarity of what good behaviour looks like based on the guide provided by the company’s values.

6.3.2 March 2012 MDs/HoDs Meeting

On March 12-13th the brand MDs and the functional heads came together for the first time, a group of 30 senior managers from across the business. The event was designed to engage them in a discussion about some key topics, including a review of the company’s leadership brand, the definition of what good looks like for leadership capability across the business, discussion about the vision and strategic priorities for the company as a whole, what success criteria it would be helpful to agree on (so that they were clear about what they needed to get right to achieve their vision) and how they could work more effectively together across the brands and functions going forward. What the CEO and exec had set up was in my interpretation an opportunity for this wider leadership group to make sense about the organisation in which they worked as a social process of storytelling, discussion and making sense of complexity together (Weick, 1979b:410) . Weick suggests that it requires agents at multiple levels of the organisation to adapt their role, to change their mind-set and behaviour, it requires many coordinated responses to occur in some degree of unison to succeed. This meeting was the first of a series that gradually involved more

agents from across the brands and functions to get involved in the process of making sense of the more collaborative ways of operating that the Exec were seeking to introduce.

The event was widely seen as a significant step forward, according to both the feedback received internally and the later testimony of the CFO, the CEO and the COO. The reason for this was the way in which the group of senior managers pulled together to discuss how to operate as a joined up business rather than as a series of independent brands. This was an important and visible demonstration of collaboration in practice, according to the CFO.

The participants requested more transparency from the Exec about the strategic direction of the business, how each brand was seen in the portfolio, and the expected contribution levels across the brands. The Exec took this on board and responded in the April follow-up meeting (see below) with more information about these topics, actively demonstrating the importance of having shared and accurate information on which to make strategic judgements and more distributed decisions. This seemed to improve trust in the process and in the Exec, and was in line with the authentic leadership principle of ‘relational transparency’ defined by Walumbwa et al (2008: 92).

This increase in the availability of sensitive commercial information was a significant step forward, and marked a change with the past for the CEO in particular, for whom the previous working assumption was to keep commercial information as secret as possible in order to protect the commercial interests of the family. The CEO recognised, however, that it was essential to share more information to enable others to make well-informed decisions in the best interests of the business as a whole. Here is a quotation from a middle manager later in 2012: ‘I think [decisions] are probably more fact based than

maybe they have been in the past, more commercially based than I think maybe they were in the past, previously they were a little bit more emotional.’

There were some cautious voices at this meeting, particularly from the three most senior brand presidents who perhaps had most to lose if they were expected to operate in a more collective manner than had previously been required. The move towards DL requires sharing of power and influence, which reduces individual autonomy. These voices persisted throughout 2012, saying that it was not in the organisation’s best interests to restrict the most successful brands by expecting them to collaborate with other brands or what they perceived to be the ‘controlling’ central functions. Here is a quotation from the COO, about this issue: ‘if you’re [running] a powerful brand ... as long as you’ve got your own way, you’re creating organisational complexity. So if [brand name] wants to do things one way and for example we have to configure our system to do that we have to get guys in central functions doing it a certain way, we’re just creating a lot of complexity where sometimes it doesn’t need to be there.’

Another quotation from a middle manager supports this perspective: ‘When I joined it was called fortress [brand name], very difficult, like you were going into, you know, your swipe card didn’t work to get in. (I’m joking.) Culturally it was seen as being a world of itself.’ In this quotation we can see the follower’s identification in terms of sensemaking shifting from the brand to the organisation. Weick suggests that individuals make sense of their immediate environments and form their identity ‘out of the process of interaction’ (Weick, 1995: 20). As the dialogue changed during the course of 2012 the way people increasingly identified with the organisational direction and purpose (rather than their own brand or function) became evident.

Later in 2013 the brand president for this brand in fact left the business based on an agreement with the CEO. This was interpreted within the business as showing that no person was bigger than the interests of the whole company. I interpret it as demonstrating that the move towards a coherent implementation of DL needs strong commitment from the most senior figures in the organisation as well as a corresponding shift to a more collective approach from those in positions of power within the organisation. Sharing implies giving something up, hopefully in order to gain something else more important. An alternative interpretation could be that the CEO is continuing to exercise power over others, and potentially manipulating the situation to remove those that challenge his views. The main reason I do not adopt this view is the length of time that the CEO took in discussing with the brand president the need to operate in a more collaborative manner, over several months, seeking to achieve an outcome whereby the brand president could have stayed in post. The exercise of power by the CEO in the end was in his view in the best interests of the business and made with considerable explicit regret.

The CEO asked for a review at the end of the meeting so everyone could understand what each other was thinking about the meeting itself. On the positive side, managers used words such as 'engaged', 'involved', 'renewed focus', 'challenged' and 'inspired'. Some also expressed a word of caution: 'hesitant as to how tough it is' to make this work, 'expectant of change, but what to stop?' and wondering whether they had 'bitten off more than we can chew?' The sense of having been involved in a break through event and yet with a sense of hesitation about whether the route ahead was going to be successful can be detected in these comments. This is a measure of the significance of the changes that the CEO and the Exec were seeking to orchestrate. Their strength of commitment helped to build momentum, especially in the early stages of the transition.

Interestingly, the CEO adopted a very different role throughout the event: he would normally have led from the front, be involved in all discussions and offer a steering view whenever he felt it appropriate. At this event he consciously stepped back (as he had said he would do at the February Exec meeting), encouraging others to speak, to take the lead, and offering only a summary of what had already been said at the end as a form of confirmation that he embraced the views that had been expressed throughout. The CEO was ‘enacting’ (Weick, 1995: 31) the sharing of power and influence among the cross-functional group present. As one middle manager put it: ‘[he] is encouraging people to have a voice and communicate and challenge where necessary in terms of the direction of the organisation and decision-making there.’ This was symbolic of the shift towards DL, and it took until towards the end of the second GLT meeting for some of the participants to believe that he was serious. As the manager indicated in his quotation, the CEO was demonstrating through a change in behaviour that he did not subscribe to a ‘heroic’ (Badaracco, 2001: 120) style of leadership and that he wanted to introduce a more collaborative, interdependent strategic and operational approach for the business as a whole. He maintained this style throughout the research period, according to colleagues, providing a role model for the shift from centralised strategic planning to a more shared approach.

6.3.3 April 2012 Event

At the end of the March event, the Exec and the wider GLT expressed a shared desire to maintain the momentum generated, so the CFO organised a follow up event for April. At the April event there was more disclosure of information that had previously been kept secret to the Exec, including, for example, the way each brand was categorised in the overall brand portfolio, with underlying assumptions about its role and performance

expectations. The Exec had worried beforehand that some brand MDs would be demotivated to learn that their brand was categorised as having, for example, limited global potential and that it should therefore be managed for short term profitability. Once this was in the open, however, the brand MDs welcomed the increased clarity about the performance expectations and their place in the wider strategic portfolio of the organisation. This was an example of improved information enabling middle managers to collaborate and make improved decisions based on clear performance expectations.

The different 'brand clubs' went into discussions to make sense of the data and were subsequently able to collaborate more effectively based on a shared set of expectations. An example of improved decision-making included joint planning for entry into new markets, such as Brazil and Malaysia. There was widespread approval for this greater openness from the CEO and the Exec in that it enabled the brand and functional leaders to understand the assumptions being made, challenge them where appropriate, and work through the implications for each brand and between brands. The functional heads were able to clarify how best to support each brand and each brand club explicitly with the brand leaders, and to identify ways to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the way they did so. The emphasis on dialogue by the Exec was helping to increase the 'social' sense making among the wider GLT (Weick, 1995: 38) as they developed a shared meaning of where case P was going and how they were instrumental in defining its course and intended outcomes.

In addition the Exec provided some feedback on where they had got to working on the outputs from the March event, including updates on the evolving vision and strategic priorities. The Exec were careful to introduce this content as work in progress and open to further input from the wider group. In fact the wider group pushed back and asked the

Exec to get on with it, as they saw it as the Exec's responsibility to take their input and to decide on the long term ambition for the whole business on behalf of everyone else in the organisation.

This reveals the way leaders at a particular level can welcome leaders in more senior roles taking the decisions that belong at that level, which I believe is consistent with the concept of the 'intelligent hierarchy' (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 533). At case P an increasingly coherent and effective strategic planning and implementation process was beginning to emerge through the GLT process in 2012.

One of the key barriers to increased DL in case P was the isolation of brands as separate entrepreneurial units. This exec quotation exemplifies the issue: 'People see themselves as part of their brand and it's their passion and yeah they're in the race on their own as opposed to "hey guys, success looks like we all finish crossing the line together".' The various groupings (brand clubs and functional groups) therefore gave and received feedback at the event to and from each other on how they could play their part as effectively as possible in the more collaborative and distributed world. This exchange of feedback helped to strengthen the relationships of trust between the functions and the brands, reducing the sense of mistrust that had been present beforehand according to interviewees. 'We [IT] spend a lot more time now in a proactive manner talking to the brands. So there's that openness. I think that it's starting to happen across the business, which is nice. I think a lot more collective work rather than just the entrepreneurial [individual brand] work that is encouraged within [brand name] and the business, I think, which is interesting.' The IT function were helping to develop an increasingly 'shared meaning' with the brands by focusing on 'subtleties and interdependencies' (Weick, 1995: 52).

The April event was called the Global Leadership Forum (GLF) for the first time, indicating that it was a forum for dialogue and thinking on behalf of the whole business. The CFO commented about this meeting that ‘the sense of shared ambition became more obvious’ as the dialogue progressed. This is echoed in this quotation from a GLF member: ‘Now I see how from that Global Leadership Forum and down, you know, things are being done differently with much more common sense of purpose.’

6.3.4 July 2012 GLT Event

By July the group that had attended the previous events were formally entitled the Global Leadership Team (GLT), which was a significant endorsement of their collective role in the business and of their responsibility to provide a coherent leadership to case P as a business. This use of language to signal change was also symbolic of the shift that the CFO and the rest of the Exec were seeking in mind-set and consistent with helping people to make sense through dialogue and developing new patterns and ‘common language’ creates shared meaning (Weick, 1995: 39). This shift was from one of separate brands operating under an umbrella organisation to a more coherent brand management business.

At the end of the April event the Exec had invited a sub-group of the GLT to work with them on the vision, purpose, and ambition for case P, and this sub-group presented its outputs to the whole GLT at the July meeting. Their presentation of what became known as the 20/20 vision was well received and the GLT supported the Exec in moving forward on this basis. This was an example of shared responsibility (Pearce and Conger, 2003, cited in Avolio, 2009: 431) and collaborative achievement (Gronn, 2009: 430), with the Exec taking the ultimate decision on the long-term goals of the business but working hard

to take the wider GLT group with them through involvement (via the sub-group) in both the creation of the goals and the explanation of them to their colleagues.

The Exec also shared more information about the strategic intent of 20/20 in terms of how the various brand forecasts added up to more than the £2bn of wholesale sales target, giving overall confidence to the GLT about the extent to which the 20/20 vision was achievable. There was some animated discussion about how, in previous brand strategy reviews, there was a frequent ‘hockey stick’ syndrome in the proposed revenue and profit forecasts, with a dip short term leading in the future to ever-increasing revenues and profits longer term. The CFO called out the innate optimism in this approach and demonstrated with data how the longer-term forecasts were typically not achieved in practice. She saw this discussion as another opportunity to introduce more fact-based dialogue and decision-making, and in fact the hockey stick syndrome has become ‘a powerful tool for change’ now that it is out in the open, requiring each leader to be more realistic in their planning and more honest about the problems which they were seeking to solve. This is also an example of CLT (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011) and the need for the strong ‘administrative function’ (as demonstrated by the CFO) to balance and hold accountable the ‘adaptive function’ (as demonstrated by the brand leaders). The CFO requested increased alignment of the planning process and more realistic forecasting from the various brands, thereby ensuring the coherence of planning across the whole business, strengthening the overall administrative alignment of the organisation as a result.

Throughout this process the CEO was seen to play the ‘enabling function’, encouraging respectful and honest dialogue to get to the best possible outcomes for the business as a whole. This was his stated intention, and this is what other members of the GLT perceived to be happening.

At the July event each brand MD made a brief presentation of his or her strategic business plans (SBPs), and received feedback from everyone present, as part of the strategy forming process. The HoDs repeated this process at the September event as a response from the central functions to the needs of the brands, as articulated by their strategic priorities. In this way the Exec was orchestrating a reciprocal dialogue between brands and functions, resulting in a more coherent strategic alignment and building more concrete trust of intentions between both the brands and the functions and between the brands themselves.

There was also input from external speakers to place what was going on with the GLT in context, to explain how it was part of the move towards DL, and to demonstrate to the participants that case P was not acting in a random way, but rather consciously introducing a different approach to leadership and using it to create a more interdependent organisation capable of achieving its goals based on shared priorities and ways of working. This was the first time the CEO had made his intentions fully explicit to the GLT as he judged there was now sufficient momentum to introduce the concept with some credibility.

6.3.5 September 2012 GLT event

As mentioned above, the HoDs presented their strategic plans at the September event in response to the brand SBPs. Before the meeting the HoDs had coordinated their strategic planning so that they were able to present a more coherent set of plans to support the brand businesses in achieving their business goals. This was reasonably well received by the brand MDs, some of whom were now seeing the functions as genuine supporters rather

than what some had previously described as the ‘controlling centre’. There were, however, dissenters including this senior brand president: ‘That's where I think there is still a need to culturally change the perspective. I'll be very controversial, I'll say there's more people in the centre than there are in the brands and design ...’ He was voicing the view many shared that the central functions were too large and too costly. This led to a helpful if challenging debate about the cost and value add of each function. The COO had already provided a cost breakdown for each function at the June meeting to enable more distributed decision-making through an increased degree of openness and shared information among the group, which in this case led to a more balanced dialogue.

The changing perception of the role of the HoDs is captured in this quotation: ‘I think the Heads of Department feel like they are allowed to be leaders now, if that makes sense? So they've gone from servitude to kind of having to force their way to the table with the [brand] MDs to meet up with the brands.’ The transition in the HoDs role was still partial, and the term ‘force their way’ suggests it was not yet totally welcomed by the brand leaders, but it was clearly in train and their increased ‘minority influence should result in better argument’ (Weick, 1995: 142).

At the September meeting there was some dissent with the presentation of the group vision and purpose, with one key Brand President declining to present it, rather asking the CEO to do so, which led to a slight return by the CEO to the more paternalistic style of ‘telling everyone the answer’. Some present saw it as a retrograde step in the progress towards DL. However, the overall impression is summarised in this comment from a middle manager: ‘Ok, there has been a change in humility, so whereas previously, I felt that the CEO believed he had to have the answers, now I see someone who is much more

comfortable about asking the questions and not fighting opinion and challenge. And because of that I believe that the rigour of our thinking increased.’

At this event the GLT also spent more time on considering how they were collectively role modelling DL as leaders of the whole business and how they could individually demonstrate greater commitment to the organised devolution of responsibility and decision rights across the organisation. Leadership per se was more on the collective agenda, according to a middle manager: ‘... there is much more focus on leadership today, than there probably was ... the fact that we are measuring people against things like the 360s that we did. It feels like there is some substance to it, rather than it just being words or principles.’ Leaders recognised at the meeting that their behaviour on a day to day basis would influence whether the intention to shift to a more distributed approach was actually believed back in the business, which in turn would influence whether it happened or not.

There remained some scepticism, with one senior brand MD stating that ‘we have partly decentralised brands with a light touch centre, and partly an increasingly centralised approach (the parent dips in and out) ... [the] centre should focus on helping the brands succeed.’ This reveals the tension in the relationships between the brands and both the Exec and the functions, what von Clausewitz called ‘friktion’ (Bungay, 2011: 26), in which human interaction in war is messy, unpredictable and specific to the context. Officers in the field need the freedom to act within a framework set by the generals in advance, based on clarity of mission and the acceptable parameters of flexibility. The brand MD was articulating a concern that the focus was still on centralised control (albeit in a different format) rather than on ‘helping the brands succeed’.

If we use the CLT theory to interpret the situation, the brand MD is demonstrating concern that the administrative function is stronger than the adaptive function, which in turn suggests that the enabling function is not operating in balance (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 305). In such a rapid and top-down shift in approach it is perhaps natural for this to be the case, but an underlying question is whether it actually undermines the authenticity of the move towards DL, in that the assumption of increased adaptability enabled by the centre is to a greater or lesser extent false. To quote another senior brand MD, there was still ‘some distrust of the exec due to its level of control (the COO is too powerful and controlling)’. There is perhaps an inherent paradox in the notion of a top-down introduction of more devolved decision-making and collaboration. But to go back to the literature, Leithwood (2006: 55) references Harris & Muijs (2004), who has some pertinent things to say about the dangers of implementing DL. ‘There are three main objections from Harris & Muijs: 1) DL threatens those in formal power positions by relinquishing power to others, 2) current ‘school’ (but by extension organisational) hierarchies as they exist (i.e. in hierarchical structures) are naturally preventative of members lower down the hierarchy gaining access to positions of power, and 3) DL implemented from the top down can create mis-delegation of responsibility.’ We can see the first two in the interview comments above. My interpretation of the comments about the COO above is that there is not a ‘mis-delegation of responsibility’, rather an ironic playing out of a top-down implementation where the senior figures are to some extent using their positional power to get others to assume more decision-making responsibility and a more collaborative approach, rather than simply inviting others to do so and waiting for their voluntary response. If leadership is a ‘social process’ (Bolden, 2011: 252) and a ‘a dynamic, interactive influence process [...] This influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence’ (Pearce and Conger (2003), cited in Avolio, 2009: 431), then the Exec figures are exercising

leadership, but this may also be tinged with a subtle form of coercion. If we however introduce the balance between hierarchy and adaptive intelligence in Leithwood's model of DL we have a more satisfactory interpretation of what went on in case P.

Certainly, the CEO is seeking to orchestrate the situation by encouraging others to step forward and to collaborate more. In my opinion, the underlying intent demonstrated by the Exec is in line with the philosophy of DL, a democratic and enabling approach to create a different organisation that is a role model for best practice (as described in the DL, CLT and ALT theories). But the risk in this transition is that it is still initiated from the top, from the centre, and therefore there is an intrinsic irony in the way a senior team seeks to move towards DL: it is seeking to influence others and in so doing they are exerting positional power to achieve their ends. On the other hand, the work by the Exec that went into creating a stronger community among the GLT, and which is in line with the wider emphasis across case P on it being a 'family community', provided a wider context of shared identity that helped people trust the process as being 'genuine'.

6.3.6 Strong Values

One thing that almost all interviewees agreed on was that an underlying factor in the move towards more DL in case P has been the strong set of values that underpin the business: passion, courage, creativity and always learning. The CEO is a keen advocate of these values, and the underlying sense of family, as described by a fellow exec member: 'I think there are a fundamentally wonderful set of values that [case P] absolutely lives by for most of the situations 99% of the time. I believe they put a huge amount of effort and [the CEO] genuinely believes and they put their money where their mouth is on that, without thinking about the return on investment.' The CEO expects authentic (values-led) leadership from

himself and others, as demonstrated by everyday behaviour and decision-making. In the middle of 2013 the CEO provided telling evidence of this in practice. A long-standing Exec member and close friend of the CEO left the business. ‘His leaving sent a strong message about what really matters, i.e. our values (he was the CEO’s best man and an old friend).’ The departure of this senior executive was caused by the way they demonstrated in their behaviour a different set of values to what the CEO saw as being true to case P. It sent a signal to others across the organisation that the values were not optional.

A perceived down side of the strong values-based approach at the GLT has been a tendency to avoid challenging or difficult conversations. As one senior manager stated, ‘we need more challenge in the strategic review process – it’s too comfortable’. The tone in meetings was of a group of senior leaders wanting to make it work, not wanting to upset the process, and therefore being unwilling to cause ‘dissonance’. Another manager said ‘there is a danger of group think, so we need more challenge.’ The intolerance of behaviour out of line with the values was both a sign to others of the CEO’s commitment to those values and a demonstration of the consequence of stepping out of line. The paradox of creating a tolerant and yet fiercely values-based culture is apparent, with the effect being reduced levels of honest debate, ironically out of line with the espoused values of case P. This is a helpful example of a pitfall for leaders seeking to move towards DL in a way that is primarily top-down, especially where there is also an emphasis on values (in line with ALT). Strong displays of intolerance of discordant behaviour provoke compliance, which is inconsistent with the underlying principles of DL. They are however in line with the creation of a strong sense of community (Edwards, 2011: 308), which in case P was seen as an important part of the ‘family business’ mentality.

Perhaps a helpful quotation to indicate the nature of the challenge of inconsistency for leaders came from this manager: 'It would be good if people said thank you rather than being the critical parent'. Diddams & Chang (2012: 599) argue that moderation of the leader behaviour could avoid having a disengaging and unfruitful effect among followers. 'Greater moral modesty will moderate the effects of moral identity such that authentic leaders with greater moral modesty and moral identity will have followers who report that their leaders have ... a) higher levels of empathy; b) increased levels of forgiveness; c) increased likelihood for offering apologies.' We can conceptualize an enhanced authentic leadership construct that makes room for leaders to strive toward a strong moral identity and practice high moral standards (Avolio et al., 2004: 807), while nevertheless acknowledging moral modesty toward their own moral sensitivity and moral action. As Dunning (2005: 136) wrote, 'seeing ourselves as no more ethical and altruistic than others is the merest decency'.

If we relate this to the case, there is a need for a balanced approach from senior leaders on the journey to DL, especially when it comes to the enforcement of the organising framework of purpose, strategic direction, and values. Too much reinforcement can come across as controlling and 'critical parent' (Berne, 1964), whose ego state model describes the critical parent state) which can provoke a rebellious 'natural child' response; too little can lead to a laissez-faire situation where distribution of leadership leads to inconsistency and strategic incoherence. The CEO in case P is seeking to tread this line with care, but, even so, he is not pleasing all of his managers. When his COO is seen as 'controlling' this is in danger of exacerbating the situation. It is perhaps helpful to refer to the feedback loops made famous by Argyris & Schön (1974); if the CEO were to seek feedback on a double loop basis he would receive more balanced information about the symptoms and the underlying systemic causes of managers feeling criticised or afraid to challenge.

6.3.7 Budgeting end 2012

The next stage in the move towards DL involved a shared effort across the GLT to align the SBPs of both brands and functions with the annual and longer term budget for the whole business, coordinated by the CFO and the Exec, but executed with the active involvement of all brand MDs and HoDs. This brought the process to a natural outcome with a shared vision and business plan to achieve it.

By the end of 2012 the CFO and the CEO agreed that the foundations were in place, but the CFO also recognised that ‘there is a long way to go ... 2012 was an important start, and the challenge in 2013 is to build on it with more concrete action.’

One problem that they still faced was the need for a depth of management capability for DL to work in practice. As one middle manager put it: ‘Distributed leadership is great but we need to develop capability to take it as well.’ An Exec said in 2012 that ‘ELP, SLP and high performing team work are helping to break down the barriers and build leadership capability across the group’, but there was still some way to go. SLP, ELP and high performing teamwork are examples of leadership development programmes put in place during 2011 and 2012 to support the move to DL. They were an important investment in building capability but we can hear from the middle manager that there was a lag between investment and effect. This echoes Leithwood’s suggestion that one of the prerequisites for the introduction of DL is capable managers who are able to take responsibility and to exercise it effectively (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 532-533).

In case P, execs and managers described the way leadership capability is seen to have increased at different levels in the organisation, starting at the top. One exec said that ‘the CEO is much more open to debate and this has increased trust. It seems like we are maturing as a business.’ Another said that ‘the CEO has changed enormously in the last 3 years – more thoughtful, more powerful by doing less, less in the detail.’ Regarding the wider leadership groups, ‘The exec is showing greater openness about issues and willing to face into them more – more receptive.’ And ‘the bench strength of leadership is going up and there is more intolerance of mediocrity’ ... ‘higher calibre people in teams are not tolerating command and control style anymore.’ I would suggest that the chain of command has become a chain of increased expectations, performance and effective leadership.

6.3.8 2013: Engaging the wider business – stage 2 analysis

The CFO and the CEO reported that engaging the rest of the business in the 20/20 vision and associated business plan was the next challenge. In January 2013 the GLT actively supported a communication process of the plans to the various brands and functions through shared briefings and discussion groups. The GLT were now enacting what they had experienced through their earlier GLF meetings with their wider followers, in line with Weick’s ‘sensemaking is a social process’ (1995: 39). Important to this was the overall company business plan, including the purpose, vision, strategy and values, as well as the individual brand and functional plans, so that people across the business were able to establish a line of sight for themselves and their teams to the overall goals.

This, according to the CFO, started in 2013 with a cascade of workshops to involve everyone in what the 20/20 plan looked like. Instead of the CEO doing his roadshow

presentations as he had in previous years, he led a series of interactive events around the various locations which led to increased levels of engagement across people in the whole business as their employer rather than in their specific brand or function. ‘The briefings this year, for me, were a lot more captivating, a lot more engaging ... it made me sit back and think, “Okay, I get this now. So what is it that my team can do to contribute towards this?”’ said one middle manager. The increased engagement in the 20/20 vision was one factor in the subsequent achievement of being a Great Place to Work in 2013 (see more comment below).

This suggests a shift in follower identification from the brand or functional ‘silo’ to the wider organisation, which I would argue is an important requirement for DL to work in practice. For DL to work it needs to work across the whole entity (whether this is a whole organisation or a discrete division) as it requires concerted influence between agents to achieve collective outcomes. Exec members reported to me that ‘we are more focused with a ‘one team’ feel’ and ‘we are knitting together better’, ‘a common ambition for the group has emerged; the shared vision and alignment around it has had a big impact, ‘we have clarity now with the 20/20 vision which is transforming the business, with clearer expectations for the brands, clearer goals’. One middle manager reported: ‘Doing the [case P] way is important: inclusive, informative, more on the why as well as the how and the what.’ Another described ‘radical changes with a clear 2020 vision and a more engaging approach – more strategic and motivated.’ What I heard from middle managers was a positive initial response to the changing approach to leadership planning and engagement, with no recorded scepticism or mistrust of the process. This reflects what Weick would call the ‘sensemaking aspect of identity construction’ through which each person makes sense for themselves ‘how I/we align with this organisation, how does it give me meaning and build self-worth?’ (Weick, 1995: 21).

The shift in identification that the middle managers and Exec members above described was a result of the previous work at Exec and GLT levels and a basis on which to engage the wider organisation on the DL journey. The clear purpose and vision in the 20/20 plan and the involving style of communication that the Exec and GLT members used were beginning to achieve the response from others to increase their engagement with the wider organisation.

One middle manager described how ‘more involvement for a lot of people leads to a shared understanding of the priorities ... so we have stronger alignment now between the company plan, the departmental plan and individual PDRs.’ Another stated they appreciated the ‘clarity of what the group expects and our role as a brand is really helpful, more alignment, more meaning, less silos – this is a massive shift.’ Several middle managers also highlighted the value of increased involvement in the creation of a collective vision and a plan to achieve it: the ‘GLF has brought a new focus and more collective effort,’ and ‘there is a more regular framework for involvement in strategic discussions’. This reflects what Weick calls ‘enactment’, so that action helps people to test assumptions and create a new personal version of reality (Weick, 1995: 30). By getting managers across the organisation involved in the activity of business planning and strategic discussion their engagement with the outcomes has increased as they made sense of these outcomes in the process of co-creation.

Some managers described how the perceived increased quality of plans was enabling improved collaborative achievement: ‘more realism coming through now’ and ‘it feels more planned, less reactionary so we can plan and be better equipped to deliver’.

Important to this was the sense that they had been involved via the collaborative planning

process in 2012: ‘being involved in strategy rather than being told is a huge change’, and ‘now we feel we have our [case P] strategy – previously we had [the CEO’s] strategy.’ There seem to be several related factors reinforcing each other in the descriptions from middle managers above: the clarity of purpose and strategy, the participative way they were created, and the increased levels of personal and collective effectiveness these caused.

Another area of comment from Exec members and middle managers alike during the first half of 2013 related to the quality of relationships and dialogue. One Exec member highlighted this by saying ‘this [change in approach] enables us to have better more honest conversations with each other with clarity of roles and expectations’ and another stated that ‘the Exec is showing greater openness about issues and willing to face into them more; [being] more receptive’. Similarly, a middle manager described the ‘increased honesty’ that they saw coming into the dealings across the business. The positive impact DL has had on working relationships also came out in the 2nd stage interviews. People cited improved motivation and support across the business: ‘we have a better structure for working with the functions, so more positive and trusting relationships are now in place’. And again, ‘we are more focused with a ‘one team’ feel ... We are knitting together better.’

Communications have also improved, according to an Exec: ‘communications generally are much better, more interactive’. And from a manager: ‘we have clearer messages now, more aligned, makes more sense’ and ‘communications has (sic) increased internally and to the customer.’ This reflects what Weick describes as social sensemaking, whereby we make sense through interaction and dialogue (Weick, 1995: 38). Human thinking and social functioning are intertwined and through increasing the level of dialogue in case P

leaders have enabled the wider management population to make sense for themselves of the strategic narrative and the opportunity for increased collaboration across the brands and functions.

However, I also heard misgivings from interviewees, based, in my opinion, on a sense of frustration that problems still remained given such progress was being made. An Exec member stated: ‘we need more openness about the problems still, facing into issues.’

Another Exec member said that ‘there is a danger of group think, so we need more challenge ... we need to remove the remaining leaders who don’t behave in the right way ruthlessly.’ This last comment refers to the values which were very prominent in the presentation materials used to engage with people in early 2013 and this Exec member’s frustration that there were still those in senior positions who, in his view, did not buy into the values or the more collaborative approach. This was echoed by one middle manager who said ‘the relationship between the brands and the functions is far from ideal, they don’t really value each other.’ This suggests that the interpersonal and political relationships between key people in the brands and the functions was an important mediating factor in the transition to a more distributed form of leadership.

The shift to a more distributed approach to decision-making and the implied sharing of power, which the CEO and Exec were orchestrating during this period, was commented on by many respondents. ‘The GLT has started to devolve engagement and commitment lower down, to varying degrees (e.g. [brand A] ahead, [big brand B] behind).’

This has been accompanied by improved quality of decisions, as reported by two Execs: ‘We are making decisions more on the basis of facts and data now’ and we are seeing ‘increasing maturity and quality of decision-making via the GLT’.

The need for increasingly capable managers was noted by an Exec member: ‘Higher calibre people in teams are not tolerating command and control style any more’. This is reflected in comments by middle managers. For example, one described having ‘a lot more autonomy in the last 8 months ... more enabling with the space to do more ... with associated expectations’. Another described having ‘more autonomy now’ with a ‘dramatic impact in some areas’ with ‘everyone taking a step up.’

The result was a more thoughtful and considered strategic planning process, which was joined up across the brands in the portfolio and with the functions that support the brands. Managers cite an increasingly balanced approach to decision-making, in line with authentic leadership theory (Luthans and Avolio, 2003): ‘we are using more data in decisions’; managers describe ‘more realism coming through now’, and ‘more information sharing and empowerment.’

This focus has also had an impact on performance management and accountability across the business, as stated by an Exec member: ‘the most powerful output of the new approach is the creation of a clearly articulated 20/20 purpose and ambition – a powerful vision. This enables us to have better, more honest conversations with each other, with clarity of roles and expectations.’ Another Exec stated that ‘we’re getting better at dealing with negative leadership behaviour ... we are constantly raising the bar.’ This is a positive momentum confirmed by Execs and middle managers alike, following the lead provided by the CEO with the departure of two senior executives during the period in question.

The transition towards DL has thus far led to more robust and well-understood plans for the business, leading to wider commitment to implementation and to more aligned action

across the brands and functions. Concern remains about the depth of change, as witnessed by questions from managers such as: ‘Are we really getting economies of scale across the brands?’ But the more frequently cited effect of DL was on more coherent planning and performance: ‘It feels more planned, less reactionary, so we can plan and be better equipped to deliver.’

There were comments suggesting that the whole orchestration of the changes was ironically more centralising. One Exec said ‘it’s becoming too centralised (with good intentions), more governance than before, we’re losing some connection with the brands, more prescriptive about what’s good for us – we need more dialogue’. Another said that there was still a strong level of control emanating from the head office: There is still a [head office location] mind-set – we need to think and act more global.’ This relates to the theoretical debate about whether the introduction of DL can be planned and coordinated centrally, or whether it needs to emerge from people in the organisation assuming more decision-making power. Given that the starting point is often a less devolved position, with the power in the hands of the ‘elite’, I would argue that a planned and coordinated approach as advocated by Leithwood and Mascall (2008b: 227) is likely to lead to increased psychological safety among those taking more responsibility and power and therefore to accelerate their feeling safe enough to take it on board. Leithwood & Mascall (2008b: 227), in their review of the DL evidence, confirm that ‘planful alignment [of DL] seems more likely to contribute significantly than other patterns of alignment to long-term organizational productivity.’ There is, however, an implicit contradiction in distributing power in a coordinated way, as the act of distribution and maintaining consistent standards of behaviour such as collaboration and sharing knowledge, is an exercise of power in its own right. This invokes the need for the mediation of the enabling function from CLT (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 305), whereby the

senior leaders create and maintain a balancing influence between the desire for cohesion of action by agents and the desire for independent action to adapt to localised circumstances.

There were mixed views about implementation, such as one Exec who suggested that ‘we need more follow through’ to see the benefits coming through. A middle manager also suggested that quality of decisions was related to the calibre of the managers involved: ‘We need to improve the quality of decision-making – it’s partly a training issue.’ It seems the nature of the devolution is an important aspect of the move towards more DL, particularly the capability and access to good management information of those taking more responsibility for decisions and follow through.

Central to the CEO’s stated intentions regarding the change in leadership approach was to increase the level of collaboration and collective effort (based on what Gronn (2002: 430) described as the ‘aggregation of individuals towards concertive action’) across and between the brands and functions. As stated above, this was seen to be increasing among both Execs and middle managers during the first half of 2013. Exec comments at this time included ‘we have a better structure for working with the functions, so more positive relationships, ‘more shared responsibility for achieving 20/20’ and ‘brands are more engaged with [case P] – feels more like a group’. In other words, there was an increasing sense of community and belonging (Edwards, 2011: 308).

There was also evidence from middle managers of the increased levels of collaboration as a result: ‘The service functions are getting closer to the brands, more commercial and consistent’, but some reservations, especially in regard to the three largest and most powerful brand MDs: ‘[there is] a more peer to peer feeling now – the global [function]

heads are talking about how to help the brands succeed ... are the brands accepting this input though? The bigger brands are difficult to help; smaller brands are more open to it', and 'slight shift and some change [in how the functions work with the brands] in actions but too early to say.'

These views are reflected in those of other middle managers who stated: 'I see a much more integrated approach', and, 'there is a new breed of leader emerging, more collaborative style, and the forums have removed barriers and the top down approach.' This second quotation supports the idea above that the capability of managers to assume more decision-making responsibility is indeed an important factor in the successful introduction of DL.

Another manager commented on 'more collaborative ways of working – e.g. sharing information, resources – we need to demonstrate the financial benefit more'. This need to demonstrate success and tell the story to encourage others is well documented among change management writers (e.g. Kotter, 1995: 1-20).

In particular, a middle manager said that 'there's a lot more collaboration between the brands and [the organisation] now', and another said that 'GLT has brought more cross-brand working through the power of the group – more openness – but we need to leverage it into action.' The reservation in the last clause is repeated by another manager who wanted more application across the brands and singling out the most powerful brands as having perhaps the most to give up: 'We need more drive to make it stick, especially buy-in from the bigger brands for whom this is a distraction. Like MUFC [Manchester United Football Club] – no player is bigger than the club.' In the move to DL it is not just the senior elite that has to devolve power to others, thereby in some people's view reducing

their importance, it is the powerful leaders of divisions and functions that have had more discretion due to their success in the past. DL suggests the need for consistent application across the organisation if it is to be sustainable, and this requires all those in power to ‘give up’ at least some of it in practice, which may not suit some of the agents involved. It was a work in progress.

A final theme that emerged from the stage 2 interviews was the increased level of learning and agility in the organisation as a whole. One of the benefits of increased learning has been sharing of knowledge across the brands. One middle manager gave a specific example: ‘there is a tendency for the brands to collaborate more, e.g. the compression project.’ The compression project was described as being a cross-brand initiative to share technological innovation across products relating to compression engineering. Another manager stated that ‘we are sharing knowledge across the business more – witness the SharePoint project – the collaboration portal is an exciting addition to comms.’ Overall there seemed to be ‘more information sharing and empowerment’ than before. This shift is in line with both DL and Authentic Leadership Theory, which Avolio defined as ‘a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behaviour that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers’ inputs’ (2009: 423).

But there were also comments about the reduced agility experienced in some of the brands, and the level of resistance to change. ‘I believe [the organisation] is in the middle of a transition’, said one middle manager, while another suggested that ‘there is some resistance to the changes (driven by attitude or capability) but most people realise the intent’. The frustration of a senior brand MD is captured in this comment: ‘Where is the growth culture? Too much compliance and process.’

6.4 Creating a Great Place to Work

In 2012 at the June GLT meeting, senior managers decided to enter the UK Great Place to Work (Great Place website) award scheme as an external measure of progress to becoming a truly joined up organisation at one with its values and purpose. In 2013 they were listed in the ‘top 100 large companies’ category, in itself a significant achievement in their first year of entry. In 2014 they were listed in the top 10 at number 8, showing remarkable progress in a short period of time. Case P saw this as external measurement of progress towards becoming a coherent and distributed organisation, a role model in my view of the ‘intelligent hierarchy’, with strong core values, purpose and strategic intent, with highly devolved and yet coordinated ways of doing business in the brands and functions. As one middle manager put it: ‘there’s a lot more involvement now, there’s a lot more I suppose responsibility and empowerment at management level and senior management level to be part of that process.’ The CEO and the Exec had succeeded in moving towards greater distribution of leadership and decision making, with ‘less top down decision making, we are more involved now, with fewer surprises ... A lot more autonomy in the last 8 months ... more enabling with the space to do more ... with associated expectations.’ Another middle manager stated that this shift has had a ‘dramatic impact in some areas.’

According to the Great Place to Work website (2013)¹, ‘a great workplace is one built on trust. Trust drives engagement and engagement drives business performance.’ Typical of the benefits such workplaces experience, according to Great Place to Work research, relative to average companies in the UK, are 8% greater productivity, 16% greater profit margin, 19% greater operating income, 2.6 times EPS growth (Earnings Per Share), 12%

¹ Great Place to Work, 2013 (www.greatplacetowork.co.uk) – accessed 10/08/2014 10:01

greater customer advocacy, 50% fewer sick days, people 87% less likely to leave the organisation. Employees 'go the extra mile, willingly help others, even if it is not their job to do so, go 'above and beyond for their customers', fix problems and suggest improvements to the way things are done, feel supported by and trust their immediate managers and have confidence in the senior leadership and direction of the organisation' (2013).

These were the criteria on which case P was assessed by external consultants to compare them with other organisations across the UK as well as drawing on an international database. Within 2 years the business has become the 8th best place to work in the UK according to these criteria. This helps to substantiate the internal views expressed through the interviews quoted above that case P has taken a significant step towards realising the engagement benefits of DL and CLT.

Other results indicate a successful trend in business results. The company was awarded The Queen's Award for Enterprise in the International Trade category for 2013, and in 2014, it won Top European Family Business of the Year at the European Families in Business Awards.

6.5 Summary

The insights this case provides are varied and relate to several of the leadership theories discussed above, not just DL theory. As stated earlier, the CEO used the term 'DL' as a short hand title for the overall shift in the way he wanted the business to operate, including devolved decision-making and adaptive practice, coupled with increased collaboration and coherence across the brands and functions, supported by improved relationships based on

the case P values. The case demonstrates how case P made considerable progress during 2012 and 2013 to put these changes into practice across the business, achieving remarkable business benefits in doing so.

A summary of the themes from this case in relation to my research question can be organised into the following themes: maintaining coherence, the importance of values, how decisions are devolved, achieving concerted action across diverse structures and adaptability.

6.5.1 Maintaining coherence

The importance of the 20/20 vision in the transition towards DL is reflected in various quotations used above, with repeated references both to the process of definition via the GLT meetings and communication to the wider business to increase alignment. Within the ‘vision’, case P actually included a definition of the purpose of the organisation: ‘To create stakeholder value by building one of the world’s leading brand management groups in sports, outdoor and fashion’ (CEO, 2012). The CEO drew a set of scales onto a flipchart at the end of the June GLT meeting to illustrate the importance of balancing commercial outcomes with the wider purpose and values. At the September event there was considerable discussion and ultimate agreement to the purpose statement for case P.

In this way the CEO enabled the organisation to be clear about why it exists (purpose), what it is trying to achieve (vision) and how it behaves (values). This balanced definition of intent is suggestive of the inspirational and visionary style in transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985; Jansen et al., 2009). Exec colleagues described him as being ‘wonderful’, ‘outstanding’ and ‘amazingly accessible’. The CEO started by telling

stories of how other businesses had approached some of the challenges case P faced back in 2012. He then developed others in the GLT to share stories with their teams, spreading the ideas about 20/20 (the purpose and vision) and engaging people in dialogue about what they meant. He was creating a ripple of 'sensemaking' across the organisation, which 'involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action' (Weick, 2005: 409).

6.5.2 The importance of values

The organisational values mentioned above were a foundation for the CEO as he embarked on the journey towards DL. The CEO describes case P as 'a family business driven by family values'. He believes he demonstrated these values in the way he agreed to terminate the employment of two senior executives on grounds of divergent behaviour founded on different values. There is a risk that these actions are seen by others as intolerant and impatient. However, in both cases, the CEO invested considerable time and energy in trying to influence the two executives to behave in ways that were more consistent with the values of the organisation. There is a paradox in being robust in maintaining the values of an organisation in that it may require the ultimate exercise of intolerance (eviction) in cases where people persistently choose not to behave in a way that is consistent with the espoused values. This would be an interesting area of future research.

A key outcome of the series of GLT meetings during 2012 was an increase in fact-based or balanced decision-making. The increased sharing of commercially sensitive information and the use of it in reaching more 'rational' decisions was seen through the June and September meetings in particular.

The focus on values and increasingly balanced decision-making evident at case P are characteristics of authentic leadership theory (Luthans and Avolio, 2003), which espouses values-based leadership based on open and transparent relationships (Walumbwa, 2008: 120). However, the potential need for intolerance in extreme cases of values misalignment, discussed above, seems at odds with the underlying intention of the case P values themselves (passion, courage, creativity and always learning). The trade-off that the CEO had to make was that he believed that upholding the values was more important to the cultural strength of the organisation than both the individual contributions of both Execs and the possible fall-out from the act of removing senior players.

6.5.3 How decisions are devolved

The journey that the Exec embarked on used the shift to a more joined up and yet devolved approach to strategic decision-making as its main point of navigation. The formation of the GLT, the use of the GLF for peer to peer review of strategic plans, the increasing level of integration between the group functions and the brands, these were all aspects of a shift to a more distributed approach to decision-making along the lines of the 'intelligent hierarchy' (Leithwood, 2008a: 553). This is the form of DL that seems to fit best with the complexities of an organisation such as case P.

This balances the need for a central strategic cohesion for a large organisation to operate efficiently with the desire to push decisions 'down' the organisation to the appropriate level, as close as possible to the customer. The CEO role modelled this in the early meetings of 2012 by supporting others to step forward to influence more the strategic direction of the business, by reinforcing the purpose and values that were not negotiable,

and by encouraging increased dialogue between leaders of brand and functions to achieve more 'joined-up' thinking and decision-making.

This approach is also consistent with the combined effect of the administrative, adaptive and enabling functions of complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 305). The central group functions represent the administrative function, seeking to provide consistency and order to the organisation, and the brands represent the adaptive functions, pushing for localised decisions in the best interests of their customers and consumers. The CEO and the Exec represent the enabling function, seeking to balance the other functions and to create a culture where they can co-exist in sympathetic tension.

6.5.4 Achieving concerted action across diverse structures

There is consistent evidence from the stage 2 interviews that devolved decision-making could only work across case P when it was based on improved working relationships and increased trust between brands and between brands and functions. In the leadership development programme for senior leaders, which was launched in 2012, there was considerable emphasis on collaborating, sharing best practice and working well across teams, in order to create the mind-set across the business that a shared and team-based approach was the right way forward.

This is consistent with both DL and shared leadership theory (Pearce and Conger, 2003); the latter describes the importance of working together as teams to achieve shared outcomes. The leader's role is to enable teams to operate effectively and to work well along the whole process. In case P there were improvements in team working and

collaboration across teams (in both brands and functions) to create an environment where shared accountability for results was possible.

6.5.5 Adaptability

Finally, the CEO had embraced the idea of the VUCA world before the changes described in this chapter took place, and this provided an important context for the discussions at both the Exec and the GLF about the need to change the ways of working fundamentally. At the April and September GLF meetings there were specific discussions about the implications of being in a VUCA world and how it required a more adaptive and yet connected approach from across the brands and functions.

During the stage 2 interviews there were descriptions of increased levels of alignment both strategically and behaviourally across the business. I have already noted reports from interviewees of the improved learning that was emerging in 2013 through sharing knowledge and expertise that fuelled innovation across brands (e.g. in product technologies) and within functions (e.g. improved financial reporting for all brands).

This is consistent with both the adaptive function in CLT and learning organisation theory (Crossan et al, 1999; Senge, 2002). Both theories describe the importance of organisations finding ways to continuously improve and adapt to changing circumstances in line with their purpose and direction. The leader's role is to encourage learning, improvement, and adapting within the strategy agreed, creating an environment where others are encouraged to make sense of what is going on and to respond in a way that reflects their shared sense of meaning (Weick, 2005: 409).

Initially, through the forum that the GLF created, and then at more junior levels across case P, brands started to research challenges such as new market entry together, talk to more experienced colleagues to learn about the pitfalls to avoid, and develop joint plans to exploit opportunities with key distribution parties. This was also in line with the CEO's vision for case P to become a truly competitive global brand management business, rather than a collection of separately managed brands.

6.5.6 Conclusion

This case provides us with a rich insight into the journey towards a more distributed approach to leadership. Throughout the period of my research there were moments of break through and periods of slower progress, which is as one might expect in a complex human system such as a company of case P's scale. As I have discussed, certain factors appear to have been significant in making the journey largely productive in terms of achieving more distributed leadership.

The CEO himself was a central player in the whole narrative, working with the Exec to orchestrate shifts in decision-making and ways of working through the formation and development of the GLF, through changing the basis of strategic planning and review, through creating increased transparency of information to enable managers to make more informed decisions.

There were also factors that appear to have accelerated the journey towards more distributed leadership, as summarised in table 5.1 below. In this table I have sought to define the main influences on the successful transition towards increased levels of distributed leadership in case P, as they emerge from my case analysis above. I have

provided a reference to the main theory which supports each factor, drawing on the literature review I described above. Finally I have summarised in my own words the key elements of each factor in case P, as a way to summarise the main characteristics I have derived from my research.

Table 6.1: Summary of the key factors in case P

Factor	Theory links	Key elements
Senior leader commitment	Authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa et al., 2008)	Determined and persistent DL action ALT role model
Maintaining coherence	Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985)	Inclusive process Clarity of vision & purpose
The importance of values	Authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa, 2008)	Values are solid foundation Balanced fact-based decisions
How decisions are devolved	Intelligent hierarchy (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a) Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)	Coordinated and devolved decision-making
Achieving concerted action across diverse structures	Distributed leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007) and shared leadership theories (Pearce & Conger, 2003)	Quality relationships Collaboration & team work
Adaptability	Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)	Adaptive process Sharing aids innovation and learning

I will use this summary in the cross-case analysis as a starting point for the next stage in making sense of the data and moving towards conclusions regarding theoretical contribution.

Chapter 7 – Case M

7.1 Introduction

In this second case analysis I will use a similar structure to that used in the previous chapter for the case narrative, describing how the case evolved over the period of my longitudinal study. I will relate this to my research question and draw out insights that help to provide answers to this question and inform our understanding of the draft theoretical framework.

I start with an overview of the organisation, looking at the key agents as they relate to my research, the timeline and the impetus for the transition towards DL as a revised approach to leadership. I then relate the findings from my research in a chronological order, tracking the journey the organisation undertook during the period 2011 to 2013, and then describe the main themes that came from the data. I reflect on the indicators of success that the senior leaders in this case used to assess their journey, and I conclude with a review of the factors that help us make sense of the changes that were reported by interviewees during the research process. Where appropriate I have sought to make the link between the data and the theory, as described in the literature chapters above.

I have made all references to people and places anonymous in this chapter and in the cross case analysis chapter, so as to maintain the level of confidentiality I agreed with the organisation's leaders.

7.2 Case overview

Case M is a leading university with thousands of academics, administration and support staff. It has an excellent reputation for research and is a member of the Russell Group of top universities.

The university was formed from a merger of two previous institutions, which ‘created a once-in-an-institutional-lifetime opportunity to re-think the idea of a major research-led university in the 21st century’ according to the new university’s 2015 Strategic Vision document (The University of [Case M], 2011: 8). The merger was a critical moment in the recent history of both institutions and was a catalyst for a series of changes in governance as described later on. There was a second key moment in history when the Vice-Chancellor (VC) who led the post-merger integration retired in 2010, handing over to the current incumbent.

7.2.1 Key agents

The key agents in the period between 2011 and early 2013 in which I conducted my data analysis included the VC, who was relatively new into role and who wanted to develop her own style of leadership whilst ‘respecting’ that of her predecessor. They were both therefore key players in effect, one present in body, one present in spirit. In our early discussions in 2011 the current VC stated that ‘the journey’ they were on to improve staff engagement and the student experience would require significant change to the way the university was lead. In our discussions about the transition to a more distributed approach to leadership and increased levels of engagement, the VC expressed her desire to move in this direction, to increase collaboration and what Gronn (2002: 431) had described as the ‘aggregation of individuals towards concertive action’. This is particularly relevant in a university context, where identification with the institution is often seen as less important

to individual academics than their discipline or school (which is discussed below in section 5.3.5), which reflects what Weick would call identity construction (1995: 20).

Interestingly, in the 2013 stakeholder feedback survey (Simpson, 2013: 7) one external stakeholder suggested that ‘the impact of [the new VC] cannot be underestimated. They are very lucky to have made that appointment.’

Other key players included the senior leadership team (SLT) whose meetings I was able to observe and who all participated in two sets of interviews (stage 1 and stage 2). These included the deans of the main faculties, the deputy VC, the registrar who ran the professional services (all administration and support functions across the institution) and the VPs of key areas such as research. At the beginning of my research the SLT was just forming due to several changes in personnel after the new VC’s appointment. In fact the VC cited in particular two key appointments she made ‘were [name of dean] to turn around [a ‘failing’ faculty] and [name of registrar] to do the same with PSS [professional support services]’. The VC used the term ‘failing’.

I also interviewed twice a selection of managers from across the university, including heads of school, associate deans for key areas within faculties, and heads of administration in faculties and schools. Although senior in their respective areas, they were representative of middle managers in the whole institution due to their position in the overall structure.

7.2.2 The starting point and timeline

My interviews started in 2011, not long after the change in VC, and this is significant in terms of the context within which the longitudinal data collection took place. As I clarified in the Methodology chapter above, I am viewing my cases through the lens of contextualism, so it is important to understand the context and the history of each case in order to understand better the contextual influences on current leadership behaviour and its impact on others in the organisation (Scapens, 2011). This helps us to make sense of the intentions of senior leaders and the consequent responses of middle managers in the organisation (Weick, 1979: 409). I will explore in this chapter how the overall context within which the transition towards DL is happening influences its effectiveness.

The overall timeline for this case can be split into three main phases, two of which predate my research involvement. The first is leading up to the merger before the previous VC was in place (2003 to 2004), the second is post-merger when the previous VC was in role (2004 to 2010), and finally from then to now under the leadership of the current VC (2010 to 2014). From the various interviews in Stage 1 I would characterise the first phase as two traditional institutions focused on their own concerns with a climate of loose control and considerable autonomy to academics in particular. The second phase can be characterised as being driven by the previous VC towards rapid integration, with increasingly centralised control and with great emphasis on the VC's singular 2015 vision of becoming a top 25 university by 2015. The third phase, under the current VC, has been described as being 'more involving', more consensual and with an interesting combination of some increased delegation of control to the faculties but with a broader sense of 'increased centralisation' as a whole institution.

7.2.3 The impetus for change in leadership approach

A quotation from a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) captures the difference that the current VC was seeking to establish during the period of my research: the ‘massive operational review with a highly inquisitorial annual piece of theatre that [the previous VC] had, has moved to a sort of reduced level of documentation and a more conversational annual event with [the current VC].’ The current VC was seeking to embed a ‘more positive, inclusive and rational’ approach than under the previous VC. In the 2013 stakeholder feedback survey (Simpson, 2013: 7) she is described with enthusiasm: ‘Extraordinary plaudits for [the VC]: “she has taken [the university] to a new level with her warmth and energy”.’

Interestingly, however, interviewees mentioned the different but similarly charismatic styles of the both the previous and current VCs. The new VC was seen by some as ‘[the old VC]’s protégé’ intent on ‘continuing his legacy’. I will go on to describe some of the stylistic similarities between the two VCs, as well as the distinction that the current VC was more ‘post-heroic’ than her ‘heroic’ (Badaracco, 2001: 120) predecessor. Although the new VC was keen to introduce a more collaborative and distributed approach to leadership across the organisation, she did not follow it through with a determined focus. Her focus was rather on the benefits it might deliver, such as increased engagement and improved student outcomes.

7.3 The journey

In this section I describe the series of changes in structure, process and leadership style that, according to the stage 1A interviews, the VC wished to use to cause a shift in the way

the organisation operated. Factors driving this desire to shift included ‘poor student experience results’ via the National Student Survey (NSS), the desire to become a top university on the world stage (2020 strategy, 2011: 4) and the increasing competition in the sector caused by the funding changes (student grants) and improving standards in other institutions.

7.3.1 Leading up to the merger phase

Prior to the merger the two institutions were proud independent universities in their own right, with one in particular having relatively high levels of reported identification and engagement among staff. In 2012 a middle manager (from the more engaged place) described it thus: ‘It was very strong in [the previous institution], there was a strong feeling of identity there. At merger there was a big problem because everybody that came from [the previous institution] felt disenfranchised, nobody felt part of it, and that has now changed.’

7.3.2 Post-merger phase (2004 to 2010)

The previous VC arrived with a specific mission to integrate the merged entity and create a new institution able to compete in the top 25 in the world by 2015, the ‘2015 Agenda’, as described in Georghiou’s article (2009: 9). The merged university’s mission was ‘to make [case M], already an internationally distinguished centre of research, innovation, learning and scholarly inquiry, one of the leading universities in the world by 2015.’ The strategic plan goes on with ‘[Case M] in 2015 will be a people-centred, research-led, innovative, learning, liberal, independent, international, inclusive and engaging institution, and finally a [local] institution.’

Many interviewees focused on the influence of the previous VC in this and subsequent stages of the organisation's recent history. According to one interviewee the merger 'gave us the opportunity to start again'. The then VC's style was described by interviewees as having a 'leader-driven agenda', 'he needed to drive change, he was a real shock to the system ... his way was the way', and finally that it felt 'appropriate in 2004', given the context.

He demonstrated the importance of strong central leadership in achieving engagement, which is at least partly related to the 'hierarchy' in Leithwood's 'intelligent hierarchy' form of DL (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553) and the administrative function in CLT (Uhl-Bien et al, 2007: 305), although it was out of balance in relation to both theories. He did not demonstrate the other key elements which include decentralised power and mutual influence or 'leadership as a social process' (Bolden, 2011). He united people around the 2015 Agenda, which worked well in the post-merger situation where there was a need to strive to become 'more than the sum of the parts'. But he became the hub of influence and control, creating an organisation deferential to his views. People were receptive to a centralised leadership style due to the context, i.e. the perceived need for a 'visionary heroic' style uniting people in a common mission around the 2015 Agenda.

This phase of my research highlights the critical role of context in looking at leadership generally, and distributed leadership specifically. The merger was a catalytic event that provided a platform for a driving 'heroic' style of leadership to create a new institution. Interviewees described the 'post-merger crisis' which needed a 'transformational leader' (Bass, 1985) to pull together disparate elements of the two previous institutions.

7.3.3 Leadership in the current phase (2010 to now)

The more recent history of the institution is marked by the transition to a more ‘collegiate’ style at senior levels under the new VC, but requiring significant adaptation by those around her to be effective. In this chapter I will explore to what extent the style of leadership interviewees described to me which I relate below is consistent with a full or partial move towards the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ model of DL described by Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553). I will also relate it to other leadership theories as appropriate.

A major strategic issue for this and other universities in the period of my research was the change in funding arrangements for students and research. I heard different views from different people in stage 1 interviews about what they felt was an appropriate leadership style from the VC in this new ‘crisis’. For example, middle managers said ‘We need a much deeper level of engagement now with more complex issues. It can’t be a detached leadership taking a launch pad from a merger.’ ‘The execution mechanism is weak.’ [The new VC] is, according to an SLT member, ‘much more approachable ... I have more respect for [her].’ Another SLT member commented that ‘she is very consensual – sometimes others take advantage of this. Even when a decision has been taken they think it is OK to barter their way out of it.’

These comments from stage 1 interviews indicate a split view: people around the VC valuing her more inclusive approach but also being concerned whether she lacked the will and ability to see it through. This reflects a high level of reliance still on the single leader, the ‘hero’ figure of Badaracco (2001: 120), which may in part be a legacy of the previous charismatic VC. But they also reflect I believe a desire among the VC and the rest of the SLT to drive change and to retain control. One SLT member recognised this issue: ‘So

obviously people on the ground in the schools will want a decentralised model ... [yet] in the university as a whole ... individuals talk about the centre making decisions without appropriate consultation, you will always get that in an organisation.' His acknowledgement of the desire for power distribution and the reality (in his mind) of the need to centralise power and decision making is a useful insight into the way the SLT was orchestrating change in the way they felt most helpful to achieve their vision for the institution. They wanted to be inclusive but they also wanted to make changes quickly.

The evidence from the Stage 1 interviews was that people in the senior SLT group liked working with the current VC and respected her, but shared some concerns about the level of cohesion at the top of the university, and its impact on progress against the strategic plan. They described a transition from the 'heroic', 'autocratic' and 'command and control' style of the previous VC towards a more inclusive and less dogmatic style under the new VC. 'Before, with [the old VC], it was on a one to one. [The new VC] is okay with things being challenged in meetings at the senior level.' Another interview described it as 'a real breath of fresh air' with the new VC.

In stage 1 interviewees had described the previous VC as 'a tough figurehead', 'confrontational', with a 'well-articulated, ambitious vision', 'disciplined, he drilled into the detail' and 'controlling'. This description is of a 'heroic leader' (Badaracco, 2001: 120) who centralised power and influence around himself; he was described by many of the same people as 'strong and visionary', 'admired by the board', 'a price worth paying' and 'fit for the time'. This last quotation reflects the importance of context again.

The new VC stepped into this situation when her predecessor retired, and she 'is in some ways carrying on his mantle, as she was his protégé, and aligned to his ambitions for the

university. [She] is however less dogmatic, listens more, seeks to communicate widely, and is less decisive than [the old VC].’ Other interviewees commented: ‘[The old VC] was a hard act to follow ... [the new VC] needed to put down a marker’, she is ‘much more approachable’, ‘a lot more engaged and consultative’, she ‘delegates’ more, but there is ‘no ownership of the leadership agenda now.’ This creates a picture of a leadership style from the new VC which was both a welcome transition away from the dogmatism of her predecessor and yet not sufficient to replace the strength of leadership he demonstrated. The underlying issue was that there was a ‘lack of consequence’ under the new VC, as suggested by this stage 2 quotation from an SLT colleague: ‘what are we going to do differently to try to improve the KPIs and communicating those in the plan? I don’t think we do that well enough at university level.’

This transition from old to new can, I believe, be characterised as a spectrum interpreting the style of leadership at case M, drawn from an autocratic approach on one side to an approach characterised by shared influence on the other. Leithwood and Mascall (2008a: 553) writes ‘the pattern of leadership distribution evident among the highest-achieving schools in our study ... is a hybrid composed of the autocratic prototype (influence rises with hierarchical level) and polyarchic prototype (high levels of influence for all) ... a best-case scenario. Let’s call it intelligent hierarchy to reflect the opportunities that this approach affords to ensure that such organizations take advantage of the capabilities and strengths of most of their members while ensuring careful coordination of effort in a common cause.’ In case M there was a desire expressed by the VC to move to a more collaborative approach and yet a strong emphasis in practice by the SLT on maintaining and developing a more ‘autocratic’ approach.

The centralised end of the spectrum is characterised by clarity, vision, control, discipline, drive and accountability, confrontation and challenge. The other end can be described as having clear devolved power and shared influence, clear accountability and collaborative coordination of activity to achieve shared goals. Stage 1 interview feedback suggested that the university was currently part way along the spectrum, in an 'in-between' state, combining an increasing level of trust, a mix of consultation and centralised decisions, with a lack of coherent coordination and control. Stage 2 interviews suggest a more effective level of coordination and more engaged staff, but still a level of centralised decision making at both the university and the faculty levels that is more autocratic than polyarchic.

Throughout my research I was given lucid and largely positive descriptions of the VC as a leader. Here is a sample from the SLT. 'Her strength is enthusiasm for the job, her strength is a clear command of the facts, and her strength is using her senior team to support her and the university going forward.' 'I don't know how she does it but she meets obviously everybody in the university and there's never a hidden agenda in any meeting.'

Here are some similar examples from middle managers. 'I think she has had a very positive role in the university as a whole.' 'I think she is fantastic. I think she's a wonderful role model. She's incredibly hard working. She's very responsive.' 'You get the sense of a real human being who cares about the staff as individuals. She gets to know people as individuals, she knows us by name, which I think is really impressive. She has very strong leadership qualities. She is clearly of the good and great persuasion as well. So there's this tremendous consistency and I think it's her humanity actually.' 'She just has that combination of warmth and kind of empathy for staff that makes her a fantastic leader.'

The words used by both groups describe character as much as capability, which relates to authentic leadership theory (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). The VC provided a style of leadership based on her core values and personal integrity, her respect for others as well as her love of research and learning. This has helped to accelerate the changes in the way leadership is enacted in the university because she provided such a strong role model. As another SLT member put it: 'I think of course [the VC] leads from the front, sets the tone, like I said, for honesty and transparency, openness, willingness to engage. I think all of SLT follow that example in our own different ways and I think that's had an effect.' The ripple effect of her authentic and balanced approach has filtered through into faculties and schools. It has inspired people to engage differently with the place, even as she and the SLT were centralising decision making and driving changes in structure and process.

7.3.4 Wider leadership capability

Several interviewees in stage 1 suggested that there were capability gaps at various management levels in the university. Leithwood would suggest that critical to the successful movement to the 'intelligent hierarchy' are capable managers at all levels in the institution to deliver 'careful coordination of effort in a common cause' (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553). Both Leithwood and Locke suggest that there are two main conditions for successful distribution of leadership: capability of leaders and a planned approach (Locke, 2002; Leithwood, 2008a: 535, 557).

This requires an effective and united senior team to act as a 'guiding coalition' (Kotter, 1995: 1-20), for change as well as competent and willing managers throughout the hierarchy to take responsibility, to deliver changes and to remain consistent with the

strategic plan articulated by the guiding coalition. It also requires effective performance management (Jansen et al., 2009) to provide the framework for goal-setting, coaching and performance review on a regular and coordinated cycle across the organisation in line with the strategic plan in order to ensure personal accountability and coordinated action across a devolved structure. This is more in line with transactional leadership theory (Jansen et al., 2009) than DL, but it is consistent with Leithwood's emphasis on competent managers able to take effective responsibility for devolved decision making in line with organisational priorities (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008: 532). The evidence from the stage 1 interviews was that the university needed to develop capability in all three areas.

Comments from stage 1 regarding the competence of the SLT included 'we can be a passively resistant group', 'it's not a high performing team', but 'the SLT is more of a team now than previously'. I observed an SLT meeting in November 2011 and noted a 'generally polite' group 'working professionally through their agenda'. Contributions were uneven, ranging from 3 and 4 inputs from the lowest contributors to 46 from the highest. Decisions were not articulated explicitly, seeming to be assumed as the discussion moved onto the next agenda item, with scope to increase the level of rigorous debate, clear and collective decision-making, and holding each other to account. The SLT at this time (stage 1) was relatively new, and a consequence of this was that they were still developing the collective ability to provide the strength of direction and purpose provided by the previous VC.

In stage 2 interviews the SLT was described in much more positive terms, summarised by this from an SLT member: 'I think the senior team is [now] very good. I think the senior team is very supportive but still challenging, it can still be more challenging but I think that that's something we're still working on but I think as a team, and I think the

governors have noticed this, and the feedback from the Board of Governors is that the team is working as a team now, whereas previously it wasn't.'

In terms of management capability across the organisation, there was considerable comment from several interviewees in stage 1 about the need to appoint and develop professional managers in the Schools, both heads and managers of departments.

Regarding the head of school level one interviewee suggested: 'I worry about the capability at the next levels down after the deans,' and another suggested the need to 'inject a group of trained and equipped senior and middle managers between the deans and the heads of school. They can engender change in their schools and make a dramatic difference.' Another stated: 'it's static. It holds us up enormously in managerial terms. The culture of deliverables and timescales is not part of the organisation'.

Regarding the heads of department, 'no fourth tier' was the mantra at the merger, i.e. heads of department ... but in fact these roles have been ignored,' and 'the need to penetrate to the School level is a real issue now.' There were concerns about the SLT's lack of visibility about 'what's happening between the heads of school and the heads of discipline areas.' One issue was the natural propensity for academics to manage: 'My personal view on it is I think a lot of people who come in to do an academic role don't come in to manage. We don't join it in the same way that you might join a corporate law firm and expect to want to be a partner and that that is a sign of success. Our signs of success are actually not about managing, we're about research, reputation and teaching.'

A consequence of this mixed level of management capability was inconsistent communications with people across the organisation. Communications as a two-way leadership process is key to supporting collaboration and engaging people in the priorities

of the institution, such as improving the student experience (Heck & Hallinger, 2010: 871). In stage 1 one manager said ‘the student communication aspects have been very poor’. This suggests that the level of shared meaning across the institution was low, in that ‘sensemaking is about organizing through communication’ (Weick, 2005: 413) and the quality of communication was inconsistent. This is likely to have restricted the ability of the SLT to orchestrate more coherent action across the organisation.

Eight out of 18 stage 1 interviewees cited performance management as a key issue: an SLT member said ‘performance management is important and it is not happening’, and a manager concurred with ‘my key improvement would be performance management that did something about good and poor performance’. Another SLT member said ‘At a previous DRG [the VC’s direct reports group] the number one priority that people mentioned was performance management.’ But ‘there is no culture of accountability (personal and team) or follow through on poor performance’.

The result, as an example, was ‘no movement’ on NSS scores for three years due to a lack of coordinated and concerted activity (‘shuffling the deck chairs didn’t help’) and mixed levels of engagement across the university.

During stage 2 some respondents commented on the increased emphasis on performance management as ‘tackling this issue’, although there was also manager feedback that it was limited to measurable outcomes which was causing frustration for those uncomfortable with such a binary approach. The approach to performance management being introduced across case M lacked in some people’s view the sophistication to support conversations about a wider range of topics than simply the measurable output from work. This was perhaps a reflection of the more general lack of management capability cited above across

the institution, which would also hamper the movement towards greater distribution of power and increased levels of collaboration and more sophisticated forms of cross-functional working (as discussed in the next section).

7.3.5 *Structure and collaboration*

Two related themes emerged from the research data that affect the level of distributed leadership across the university: power being concentrated in the deans and a call for stronger cross-functional working. On the first issue, example quotations from middle managers included ‘most of the faculties have too many people and are too big’, and ‘we don’t really know what decisions are implemented in the schools’. Regarding the deans in particular, managers said that ‘deans are autonomous in their own domain and this causes disconnect. [There is a] licence to ignore decisions taken without consequence’, and ‘Deans have to be engaged as having a responsibility at an institutional level over and above their faculty’.

This all may have caused a weakness in consistent implementation (consistent with the data above on centralised decisions) which was highlighted in the 2010 Stakeholder Survey conducted by the Knowledge Partnership: “Stakeholders want clarity of intent and focus: not “What are we going to do?” ... but “How are we making it happen? ... What are our results?””

Several middle management respondents in stage 2 interviews also referred in some way to a power blockage at the faculty level: ‘The Deans are the tier [the VC] has to work through’. To achieve an intelligent hierarchy the organisation needed to have consistent central leadership (the VC *and* the SLT) as well as widely and consistently distributed

power and influence across the university. Both are limited by the localisation of power and discretion at the head of faculty level. The VC recognised that when she stated that the faculties were ‘fiefdoms’ and needed bringing together through the SLT, which she believed in 2013 to have been achieved. Others expressed a less optimistic evaluation.

The call in stage 2 for stronger cross-functional working was related to this, and was represented by quotations from managers such as ‘there are still silos’, ‘there is an increased need to work across the four faculties ... the focus on customer needs is now more prevalent so process improvement is required,’ and an SLT view that ‘we need to get linkages working across the university (such as between schools and institutions) to increase collaboration on key themes.’ This would suggest that the VC’s judgement was not entirely accurate about the level of achievement in 2013. Collaboration is made easier when it is happening between agents with a sense of community and shared identity. Neither was consistently strong in the university.

Distribution of the leadership role requires effective coordination in an intelligent hierarchy, rather than powerful faculties and weak policy vice-presidents. There was debate in stage 1 about the move to a matrix structure (along the lines of life sciences) with some advocating and some questioning whether it was scalable. The need remained, however, by stage 2, for more programmatic ‘cross-functional working’ to address core priorities such as increased efficiency, improving the student experience and integrated research activity.

7.3.6 Engagement and identification in an academic institution

Engagement is affected by what people identify with (Hargreaves & Harris, 2011: 50). If they identify with the university they are more likely to be engaged with what the university is trying to achieve. Several interviewees cited in stage 1 the particular issue with academic institutions that ‘a lot of people see themselves as self-employed’. The academics in particular ‘identify with their discipline first, and their colleagues’. What emerged was not one community, but a loose collection of networks across the university based on discipline, location and personal relationships more than engagement with one institution with its unique purpose, vision and values.

This was played in out in terms of how academics tended to identify with decision made at the university level. One middle manager in stage 2 said of the way planning and decision making had become more participative: ‘So it is better than it was but the vast bulk of academics would not feel engaged with the university’s decision making processes.’ But an SLT member spoke for many (also in stage 2) when he said ‘I think there will always be an element of cynicism around the institution, and that’s the nature of the people ... in universities, with an over-critical way of looking at the world.’ This had an impact on the way academics were likely to make sense of the decisions made at senior levels based on their lack of identification with the institution (Weick, 1995: 21), reducing their commitment to enact these decisions in a coherent manner. .

Interviewees described the need for increased engagement among the wider university management in the institution’s vision, and its potential effect on the engagement of the wider employee base: ‘the single biggest thing I would like to change at the institutional level, it’s about clarity of vision to achieve and engaging in that overall vision and to be able to make decisions’. Several interviewees described the higher levels of identification

most employees had with their discipline or school colleagues, especially among academics, and their lack of identification with the wider university's agenda.

This lack of community identity (Edwards, 2011: 308) is an issue for university leaders in increasing engagement generally, and requires further research to understand how the academic's self-image can be aligned both with their discipline and their organisation. Strang & Kuhnert (2009: 2) describe how higher order development links to performance, which is closer to authentic leadership's emphasis on developing 'openness and comfort with paradox' through positive reinforcement of the individual's identity. This may provide an insight into academic engagement, and it is noteworthy that the investment in management learning and development at case M was seen as 'low'. Interestingly the responses from SLT members to the stage 1 question 'how do you describe your role?' were diverse, suggesting a lack of shared identity among even this senior group.

7.4 Increased engagement outcomes

If we use the results from the organisation's employee satisfaction survey over recent years as a measure of both the engagement of employees and of leadership effectiveness, we get some interesting insights.

In 2010 the level of satisfaction with leadership among employees of the university was measured at 38% (satisfied or very satisfied) according to the 2010 opinion survey. This was the same in the previous survey data (2008) and significantly lower than the 60% score for job satisfaction (2010). Such a discrepancy between employees' views of leadership and their level of job satisfaction suggests an underlying issue of confidence in leadership across the university. The range is also significant, with the highest area scoring 52% and the lowest 32% for leader satisfaction.

The overall leader satisfaction score was until recently the same in both the old and the current VCs' tenure, suggesting perhaps a lag between the intent of leaders to change engagement and increase confidence in leadership and the actual impact on these measures across the organisation.

However, in the 2013 survey there was a dramatic improvement in results, with, for example, 94% agreement that 'it is good to work at the university'. One senior leader said: 'the external company that run the survey for us told me today that we'd probably be in the Top 10 of all the several hundred response they've had from any company, any sector. So in terms of satisfaction with working in the university it's incredibly high.' In the employee newsletter where the results were published it was reported that in fact this meant the university ranked first out of the 28 higher education institutions surveyed by the survey company used in 2012/13.

The main KPI was the percentage of staff satisfied with their job - with a target of 80% by 2015. In fact the organisation exceeded that target in 2013 year with 81% of staff saying they were satisfied. In addition, 92% said they are proud to work at the university, 95%

said they felt safe and secure on campus and 88% said they knew what they were expected to achieve in their job.

We see here significant evidence of an improvement in engagement and confidence in leadership. This may be caused by a wide range of factors outside the scope of this research, but I would suggest that the changes in leadership approach I have described above, albeit work in progress, will have either contributed to these improvements or at the least been neutral.

One SLT member offered an example of the increased levels of engagement: ‘... something like the Investing in Success project, which was piloted last year, I think the response from that demonstrated a real high level of engagement with university’s broad strategic ambitions.’ A somewhat more ambivalent endorsement of the progress on engagement was offered by an SLT colleague, who said ‘the survey says, in a numerical sense, that people feel that they’re listened to. They don’t necessarily feel that their views are taken on board but they feel that they’re listened to.’

On the other hand a middle manager was not convinced, even in stage 2: ‘I’d say at school level most academics feel the university is remote, its decision making processes are remote and don’t feel engaged with it at all.’ And another: ‘it is better than it was but the vast bulk of academics would not feel engaged with the university’s decision making processes.’ This is evidence again of a partial improvement, partial movement along a more engaged road, but with some way still to go.

An interesting point about this case is that the organisation has been on ‘a journey’, as the VC put it, moving towards a more joined up way of working, sometimes with more

distribution of leadership, sometimes the opposite. The emphasis appears to be more on building a coherent and engaged 'hierarchy' than on developing an 'intelligent' and adaptive learning organisation. The overriding focus seems to be on the continued transition of the organisation towards its 2020 vision.

The improved engagement results above are a helpful signal of internal progress alongside the external achievements such as new scientific breakthroughs, and '[external prizes] are still viewed as main recent achievement, professors have been seen widely on TV/radio to reinforce brand vitality and physics flagship' (Simpson, 2013: 9). In the external stakeholder report Simpson quotes an international alumnus: 'I think the university has come through the last few years extremely well and its enlightened view to consolidate into one campus is very exciting. I think the mental attitude has gone up dramatically; there's been a ripple effect with hiring [prize] winners (and winning them), and the whole place feels better and amplifies an outstanding level of excellence.'

In stage 2 interviews there was a broadly consistent view that the university is a better place to work than in previous years among both SLT members and senior managers. This is attributed by many to the increased quality of leadership, both at the VC level and the dean/registrars level. I heard several comments suggesting that leaders are more considered and engaging, and that the quality of dialogue and involvement has increased. Middle managers mentioned away days with higher attendance and more effective consultation processes as examples of how engagement was being manifest; 'I think [attendance at the faculty away day] was a good thing and that demonstrates that there is more engagement and more sense of ownership and pride in the faculty than there has been.' There may also have been a degree of expectation regarding the attendance of

faculty away days which suggests that this may be an indicator of both increased engagement and increased coercion on managers to play an active role in the faculty.

One SLT member stated that 'we are now a strong and coherent team', while another said that 'we make decisions based on what is best for the university, for example, with the estates plan'. Middle managers stated that 'this is better place to work than a few years ago' and 'we are enthused'. These comments are representative and reinforce the results from the 2013 survey. Another middle manager said: 'So we've gone through this process of setting a strategy and thinking about all the different areas and what our individual KPIs are and the sort of 2015/2020 strategy consultations and things like that. I think it is a change in our faculty. I think we are taking it more seriously.'

The VC commented: 'Well obviously you've got the staff survey but you've got people who are... you get the feeling of people being proud of being part of the university. You get the feeling that people want to be engaged. You know my open meetings, there's over 100 people always turn up. You get good interaction. You get some probing questions. People are not scared to send me emails. People are not scared to stop me in the street. You know there's a buzz about the place and there's other things like when we put things down for consultation you get a lot of information back.' Another SLT member added: 'I'm fully engaged and I can see other people fully engaged as well.' In the majority of stage 2 interviews I got the sense of an improvement in engagement overall. There were several who disagreed, and the level of engagement in open meetings with the VC may not be a very representative measure of wider levels of engagement across the institution, but the general trend was toward increased engagement driven by the more involving and coherent leadership coming from the SLT and through the faculty leadership teams.

Overall the stage 2 interviews indicated significant progress has been made towards a more collaborative, coherent and effective organisation and a significantly improved climate for many of those interviewed. Broadly this appears to be in line with the style of leadership the VC indicated she wanted in late 2011, with the possible exception of the increase in centralised decision making. This is discussed further below.

7.5 Summary and relation to theoretical model

The insights this case provides are varied and relate to several of the leadership theories discussed above, not just DL theory. As stated earlier, the VC described her desire to engage more effectively with the organisation's employees (and through that to engage better with students) through a shift towards DL including, for example, improving leadership behaviour across the organisation such as planning, participation and collaborative achievement.

The case demonstrates how case M made some progress between 2011 and 2013 to put these changes into practice across the business, achieving improved performance on some key metrics such as employee engagement in so doing. The VC saw the journey as 'quite a way to go' yet 'good progress', which is consistent with my analysis above.

A summary of the themes from this case in relation to my research question can be organised into the following themes which are consistent with case P: maintaining coherence, the importance of values, how decisions are devolved, achieving concerted action across diverse structures and adaptability.

7.5.1 Maintaining coherence

The increased alignment of planning in line with the 2020 vision reported in stage 2 interviews was seen by the SLT as a positive improvement in the agility and ability of the university to respond to changes in funding and other environmental factors. One SLT member said ‘there is increased coherence in the strategic planning process, through the faculties and gradually to the school level.’ Another said that ‘PSS is now a very effective part of the university and well aligned to our needs’. Middle managers concurred, with one saying that ‘the budgeting process is becoming more effective and joined up.’

Another said the 2020 vision was ‘giving a consistent message, so being really clear about the direction we’re going in and that’s something that’s just starting to happen in the last six months to a year, so being consistent in the message that we’re giving out to others.’

There were, however, dissenting voices, such as this middle manager: ‘I think it’s a bit disjointed at the moment. Again, I think we’re starting to get to grips with it, and I’m talking about it from my own perspective really. Strategic planning, I think we have quite a good mechanism. But it sometimes goes in fits and starts.’ The process was reaching into the schools by 2013, as a middle manager describes: ‘Well the faculty sets out the main activities through the annual performance review and the 2020 vision and so on and the plans associated with the 2020 vision. [The dean] has come up with a faculty strategic plan, which I think is, I don’t know if it’s on version 3 yet but he keeps churning them out, and he’s got all the schools to write strategy documents as well.’ The tone may be a little sardonic, but the evidence of a more joined up process which managers have involvement with is clear.

An issue though that came from stage 2 interviews was the lack of coordinated implementation across the university: ‘there are mixed levels of implementation of the

strategic priorities across different parts of the university'. Planning was also described as more 'centralised', however (see below), which is inconsistent with DL if the areas being centralised are not the core strategic decision topics that need to be held at the centre to enable 'coordination of effort'. As Leithwood wrote, 'Let's call it intelligent hierarchy to reflect the opportunities that this approach affords to ensure that such organizations take advantage of the capabilities and strengths of most of their members while ensuring careful coordination of effort in a common cause' (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553).

So we see an improved strategic planning process associated with increased levels of engagement (as suggested by the 2013 survey) and yet more centralised decision making. The vision and planning process appears to be an important factor in achieving higher levels of engagement and could be linked to a more distributed approach to leadership and decision making if it is combined with a gradual and planned devolution of decision rights within the more coherent organisational structure.

7.5.2 The importance of values

The most significant factor in this case regarding authentic leadership was the personal impact of the new VC on the leaders and people around her. The praise for her was almost unanimous, as was the respect for her integrity and commitment to the institution above her own self-interest.

Two other SLT members were singled out in my interviews for particular praise by several people. One was the new registrar, who was described as a strong complement to the VC: 'He's very, very good at making sure that discussions that take place in SLT never get concluded without a clear statement of what the actions or outcomes are and that's a good

compliment to [the VC]'s style because, not so much now but certainly initially, when she came into office she would sometimes preside over a discussion of quite important and complex issues but then sometimes there'd be a risk that we'd get to the end of the discussion, everyone was exhausted and no one had anything else to say, so we'd move to the next item on the agenda, but there was a danger that we wouldn't be sure what it was we'd agreed to do. That's entirely impossible if [the registrar] is in the room.' This revealing quotation describes someone who enacts both the administrative and enabling functions in CLT terms, helping the team to reach a conclusion, make a decision, and agree a course of action, whilst being respectful of other team members. He was also credited by colleagues with enabling the increased collaboration between PSS and academics: 'the value in PSS and the role they play and the way they shape academic decisions I think has definitely improved.'

The other person singled out was a new dean, appointed by the VC, to turn round one of the faculties. One of his team had this to say. 'Oh I think [the dean] is absolutely fantastic. He's such a contrast to many leaders I've had or managers I've had in the past. He has very, very clear strategic vision. He's extremely positive in his interactions. He's just set on positive. He gives a very clear message, which is absolutely consistent with the rest of the senior management of the university, which is this kind of model of moving from good to great. So we know where we're trying to get to, we know what the overall aim is and he's very facilitative in trying to look for opportunities to make that happen.' Again, we see the description of an enabler, an authentic and ethical leader (Kalshoven et al, 2011) who can inspire others, and perhaps also represents some of the attributes of a transformational leader (Wu et al., 2010: 90). My interpretation of the data was that these three figures helped to accelerate travel on the 'journey'.

7.5.3 How decisions are devolved

Interviewees reported in 2011 (stage 1) that the National Student Survey results had been static for three years, and low compared with the rest of the Russell Group, suggesting a low level of student engagement. Engagement was therefore a strategic issue for the institution at this time, and one that required effective leadership to address. The way this has been addressed is an example of continued (or even increased) centralised problem solving, as characterised by one middle manager: ‘Let’s take the NSS problem. ... The university isn’t doing anywhere near as well as it needs to be in the NSS student satisfaction. ... So what happened was there were a number of policies formed, there was a lot of conversation with the Students’ Union and with the centre, not with the faculties or the schools ... Essentially the schools were told this is what’s happening.’ He uses this as a way to demonstrate ‘creeping centralisation’ across the university. This however has produced some positive results: ‘it’s getting better but there are still difficulties [with the student experience].’

One middle manager in stage 1 commented: ‘the decision-making process is an issue – room for significant improvement! We are good at working parties, findings are endorsed, then it disappears into a black hole – e.g. CPD – ratified by committees but no coherent strategy for everyone to implement.’

One interviewee described it thus: ‘the SLT is an informal body. Decisions sometimes seem unclear, needing clarification. People sometimes leave with very different views on what has been decided.’ Another stated: ‘the SLT tends to say “we need more data” as an excuse for inaction or prevarication.’ There is a knock-on effect from this slowness and opaqueness throughout the organisation. To cite one example: ‘The deans are not held

accountable for decisions that are made but not carried out. Student satisfaction scores are not good but where a Head of School takes responsibility the scores have gone up. There are no consequences from leadership messages that are ignored.'

A typical comment from stage 2 interviews was from one SLT member: 'decision making has become more centralised.' A middle manager agreed: 'Things are more centralised now.' The SLT member went on to say that this was a good thing 'to help drive efficiency and the agreed strategic agenda'. Whereas a middle manager stated the opposite: 'this sometimes frustrates our ability to be effective at the School level.'

The consistent comments about increased centralisation of decision making were therefore reflecting two different views on the impact that it was having across the organisation.

The SLT perspective was that it was in line with the movement towards a more coherent organisation with joined-up planning and execution. For example, 'I think decisions are made at the senior leadership team and it's what is important to the university. So a lot is on the North Campus and moving the North Campus into the development of the Engineering area but that's important to the university going forward. It's not just important for Engineering, it's where the university wants to be in 10/20 years' time and I think everyone can see that and that's what we discussed at the senior leadership team and that's the decision we've made on the priority orders.'

Some middle managers however felt frustrated as one SLT member recognised: 'so I think certainly with the process of the decision, say, to close the School of Education we could have handled that better, there's no doubt. I think the right decision was made but the staff themselves probably didn't feel that they were adequately consulted and the students didn't feel that either.' It is also inconsistent with the development of a more distributed

model. The exercise of centralised decision making (e.g. closing or reorganising schools) was accelerating initial action but can caused decreased commitment to long term effective execution. This is linked to the discussion on vision and planning above.

My interpretation is that the SLT (and the faculties in a consistent reflection of the SLT practice) were seeking more rapid action through taking decisions in an increasingly centralised way: ‘we need to be faster’ said one SLT member. The way this was received within the organisation is represented by the words of one middle manager who stated: ‘Oh it’s very clear. I mean there’s very clear strategic leadership coming top down and we have our annual performance reviews and so on and the VC and the senior team make it absolutely plain what they want to see happen and that then gets written into our strategies and we all know where we’re going. There’s no confusion there or very little confusion.’ Another said, ‘our decision making process is pretty effective.’ Compare this with a view of an SLT member: ‘I think the culture within which decisions are made in the last 18 months or so is one that’s largely positive, inclusive, rational.’ One person’s ‘inclusive’ is another person’s ‘coming top down’, a key tension in the intelligent hierarchy if the scope of decision making covers more than is absolutely necessary, and one where the ‘enabling function’ in CLT has the potential to help resolve the paradox. As one manager described it, ‘it’s a combination of discussion and direction, I guess.’

Interestingly, SLT members also expressed frustration with the process ‘above’ them based on ‘the desire to maintain the cohesion of the community at almost any cost allied to a rather unwieldy decision making process. I don’t mean the 13 people who sit in SLT; I mean the formal process that flows from that, all the committees that have to be brought on board.’ There was a tone of the SLT becoming more isolated in some way in stage 2, more tight as a team, an ‘inner sanctum’ as one middle manager put it. This is

inconsistent with the idea of devolution working well, with the need for connected decision making across the hierarchy to ensure coherent action.

The SLT then sought to enforce these decisions, but this was seen as counter-productive in the sense that it led to frustration and on occasions slower action in the schools (although in the NSS example above this opposite was reported). This suggests that the balance between ‘intelligent’ and ‘hierarchy’ needs to be carefully maintained, or in CLT terms the ‘enabling’ function needs to maintain a healthy balance between the ‘administrative’ and ‘adaptive’ functions (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 305).

One middle manager summarised the issue insightfully: ‘There’s a natural tendency to centralise, which is worrying and I don’t like it, this is speaking totally personally, I don’t like it or approve of it. Doing distributed leadership, distributed budget, distributed responsibility is hard. It’s very easy, very, very easy to give someone the responsibility for something. It’s very hard to give them the authority. ... I think this year there’s a general creep towards more centralisation and I don’t think that’s going to work out well for a university of this size.’

7.5.4 Achieving concerted action across diverse structures

In the stage 2 interviews I heard several comments that collaboration within the faculties was improving, although I did not hear many references to collaboration across the university. One SLT member highlighted, however, that this was a next step: ‘if we’re going to stop doing something or not expand something quite as quickly as people hoped then we’ve now got to start making those decisions not within faculties or PSS but between faculties and PSS and that’s quite a mature discussion to have and it’s only

possible because we've kind of progressed in the way that we have.' Achieving this level of maturity was therefore seen as a later step on the journey.

One way in which the university was seen to have improved was in the quality and volume of communication that was provided under the new VC. 'So I think communication is okay and it is getting better' said one manager in stage 2. Several people attributed this directly to the natural style of the VC, for example: 'I think the VC's weekly message is absolutely great. I don't know if people always read it but some of them do.' An SLT member reinforced this: 'From Day 1 [the VC] does this weekly blog thing where things have to be sent out to all students, that happens with all staff ... Where it's been very poor has been at faculty level because there was actually no investment at faculty level. So I think the level of communication at the faculty level ... has certainly got a lot more emphasis. So in terms of telling people about what we are doing I think it's working much, much, much better than it was. What's still not so good, you're never quite sure how to interpret this, is if you like the communication coming back. There's not a lot comes back from staff.' So some improvement, but work in progress clearly. Several people mentioned continued communications problems at faculty or school level, but overall the sense that there was 'more transparency' and 'more people involved' in communications was evident.

The collaboration within faculties was associated with increasing levels of engagement, improved structures such as the new 'institutes' which cut across schools to drive collaboration on key research themes, and leadership: 'Better leadership from the deans is encouraging more collaboration,' and 'there's a lot of promotion of shared activities across the faculty ... [the dean] really wants to see people working together.' There were

however comments from some heads of school that ‘there is a focus on the faculty priorities above ours’.

There was some evidence of increased collaboration between schools and the university. One SLT member caught the partial nature of it: ‘I’d say the level of coordination between the schools and the university has increased but I think “significantly” is probably too strong a word. It’s more of an incremental change.’ However another SLT view was more optimistic: ‘I think the issue of working in silos is virtually gone now. I think we work seriously across the faculties. So I think the management structures and working is fairly well joined up. There can always be improvement but I think it’s moving towards that model.’ This was echoed by a middle manager who described how ‘we were able to talk that through, [with a] very strong kind of problem solving approach, [I] had a real sense of that.’

There were also several comments highlighting the improvements in PSS since the arrival of the new registrar, with increased coherence and collaboration with the academic managers, i.e. on a cross-functional basis. This was attributed by some interviewees both from within PSS and from outside to the new registrar’s more ‘inclusive’ and ‘planful’ approach to leadership. This is evidence of the importance of open communication in developing collaborative ways of working, as discussed previously as well.

I also heard in stage 2 interviews a strong message from SLT members about the improved effectiveness of the SLT and how this has been recognised by the board. From ‘not a strong team’ in stage 1 to being a close-knit group in stage 2, ‘not fighting for our small patch, actually we’re fighting for the university as a whole.’ A catalyst for this increase in collaborative working was cited as working together on the Estates Master

Plan in 2012, as described by one SLT member. ‘... because we’ve also been through the process of developing the master plan for the Estate, ... and that also builds into it some explicit judgments about where the bulk of the development takes place and what the priorities are and the sequencing and the phasing and not everybody gets what they want, or if they get it they don’t get it as soon as they want. So that’s another example of a discussion where ... an observer might tag it as discussions where we’ve intrinsically got to have winners and losers ... we’ve been very open about that and whilst people have been very strong in defending their interests I think the discussions have all been very grown up, no one’s lost their temper or screamed and shouted or no one’s behaved inappropriately, but they’ve been quite direct and they’ve been quite willing to say, “Well you know, I disagree with that because of”, etc., etc. So I think it’s been okay.’

The VC stated that she ‘is happy with the SLT and how it is developing as a coherent team’. This improvement was often linked by SLT members to the VC’s enthusing and positive tone and inclusive approach. This ‘openness’ was reportedly being replicated in some of the faculty management teams. There was also comment from one SLT member that the registrar ‘helps us achieve more balanced decisions’, which is a characteristic of ALT (Avolio, 2009: 424). The themes of collaboration and team work appear to have been communicated and role modelled from the SLT. As the VC stated: ‘the challenge now is to extend the new ways of working to the Schools.’

7.5.5 Adaptability

There were not many comments about learning and adaptability in this case. ‘We don’t get enough innovative ideas’ was one comment from a middle manager, ‘not much

innovative thinking’, and ‘I do wonder if any more creative thinking you could do about how we develop our leadership by trying to get more cross-fertilisation ideas.’

Another middle manager suggested creating more space for learning: ‘I would reduce what we do. I would reduce what we expect people to do so they can do what’s on their desks well without feeling overloaded and that applies through all levels of the organisation.’ Another said ‘the thing that would make me engaged more ... with the university decision making and other types of processes, is time.’

One impact of the lack of innovation and learning may be the difficulties reported in achieving change across the organisation. One SLT member, describing the 2013 employee survey, said ‘the two most negative areas relate to the management of change and whether staff have had their performance review or not. The second one I think is relatively easy to change.’ The first perhaps less so.

7.6 Conclusion

This case provides us with a varied set of insights into the journey towards a more distributed approach to leadership. During my research period there were significant changes in some aspects of leadership and engagement, and also some areas where progress towards DL was limited or even inconsistent with the principles of DL (such as the centralisation of decision-making noted above). To conclude, it is helpful to summarise the insights into what was significant in the case as it relates to DL transition.

The VC was a key player in the whole narrative, inspiring leaders at both SLT and middle manager levels to think and behave in a way that was more orientated towards operating

as a coherent organisation. Her charisma and transparency were noted repeatedly in the interviews. She seemed to have a ‘humanising’ effect on the institution.

There were also factors that appear to have been significant in the journey towards more distributed leadership, as summarised in table 6.1 below. In this table I have again sought to define the main influences on the successful transition towards increased levels of distributed leadership in case M, as they emerge from my case analysis above. I have used a consistent set of factors with the analysis of case P so that I can use this summary to compare and contrast the cases in the next chapter. I have provided a reference to the main theory which I believe supports each factor. Finally I have summarised in my own words the key elements of each factor in this case, so that I can draw on this in the cross-case analysis.

Table 7.1: Summary of the key factors in case M

Factor	Theory links	Key elements
Senior leader commitment	Authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa, 2008)	Pragmatic approach to drive change ALT role model
Maintaining coherence	Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985)	Coherent but centralised planning Clarity of vision
The importance of values	Authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa, 2008)	Authentic role model in VC Enabler role present
How decisions are devolved	Intelligent hierarchy (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a) Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)	Centralised decision-making to drive improvement ‘Fiefdoms’ persist in parts

Achieving concerted action across diverse structures	Distributed leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007) and shared leadership theories (Pearce & Conger, 2003)	Some increase in collaboration Improved communications
Adaptability	Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)	Low investment in learning & management capability Weak innovation

I will use this summary in the cross-case analysis as a starting point for the next stage in making sense of the data and moving towards conclusions from the research.

Chapter 8 – Cross Case Analysis

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present my cross-case analysis to draw out the insights into the factors affecting the success or otherwise of a transition to a more distributed form of leadership. It provides a richer interdependent picture of what was going on, some of the patterns that we can see in the data, and an interpretation of why it was happening in this way, across both cases.

I have organised this chapter into a summary of the themes emerging from the case analysis chapters, a series of sections comparing the cases based on these themes, leading to a resulting framework that brings together the cross-case analysis and the relevant theoretical insights.

I have used various techniques such as cross-case displays and general condensation to draw out ‘increasingly consequential insight and explanation into the phenomena concerned, always in the context of the specific cases involved’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 245).

The result is a framework of factors that these cases suggest are relevant to the transition to a more distributed leadership approach. This is offered as an explanatory framework, and I recognise that it is not comprehensive because it is seeking to make sense of a human situation, with its varied context and influences. ‘Given the idea that explanations [...] in human affairs are not monolithic, but always involve a complex network of conditions and effects, the key problem is how to draw well-founded conclusions from

multiple networks ... We need a theory that explains what is happening – but a theory that does not forcibly smooth the diversity in front of us’ (Miles, 1994: 207). As I explore the two cases and seek to draw from this some explanatory insights, I remain conscious of the inherent over-simplification that such an exercise necessitates. In a different context or at a different time the explanation might differ in some way. This is one of the challenges of case based research with a contextual perspective.

I have sought to identify ‘patterns’ from which I ‘can derive constructs that underlie individual and social life’ (Miles, 1994: 4). This is in line with Firestone (1990: 123): ‘the major justification for the research enterprise is that we have the time and the skills to develop approximations of the truth that have a firmer warrant than common sense.’ I conclude this chapter with my ‘approximations of the truth’ in a way that provides a more robust interpretation of what makes successful transition towards DL more likely in practice. The resulting synthesis is a closer approximation of the truth than we have by looking through the lens of any of these theories in isolation.

8.2 Summary of case analyses

Firstly, I will review the outputs from the two case analysis chapters to help understand how they compare and contrast. The conclusions of each of the chapters are presented in table 7.1 below. These factors are based on the questions I discussed at the conclusion to the literature chapters, and which informed both of the case analysis chapters.

Table 8.1: Case analysis conclusions

Factor	Main theory links	Case P key elements	Case M key elements
Senior leader commitment	Authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa, 2008)	Determined and persistent DL action ALT role model	Pragmatic approach to drive change ALT role model
Maintaining coherence	Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985)	Inclusive and shared process Clarity of vision & purpose More joined up thinking	Coherent but centralised planning Clarity of vision More joined up thinking
The importance of values	Authentic leadership theory (Walumbwa, 2008)	Values are solid foundation Balanced fact-based decisions improved CEO active as enabler	Values less explicit VC active as enabler
How decisions are devolved	Intelligent hierarchy (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a) Complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)	Coordinated process Devolved decision-making increased	Centralised decision-making to drive improvement 'Fiefdoms' persist in parts
Achieving concerted action across diverse structures	Distributed leadership (Spillane & Diamond, 2007) and shared leadership theories (Pearce & Conger, 2003)	Quality of relationships improved Collaboration & team work across brands & functions Improved communications	Improved SLT relationships Some increase in collaboration Improved communications
Adaptability	Complexity leadership theory	Adaptive process increased	Weak innovation

	(Uhl-Bien et al., 2007)	Sharing aids innovation and learning Capability investment	Low investment in learning & management capability
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The factors above are based on questions I identified in the earlier literature chapters which help to refine my overall research question. They are therefore based on theory. Other factors that are also worthy of note include the context, the roles of different levels of leader, the extent to which the transition is planned, and levels of identification and engagement.

As I work through the cross-case comparison, I continue to draw on theories such as DL, CLT and ALT in particular, as well as the wider theoretical base discussed in the literature chapters above. In each case these three theories were most helpful in making sense of the data, especially case P, where there has been more progress on the journey towards DL. I reach this conclusion because there is more evidence of DL in practice in case P, with increasingly shared decision making and collaborative effort across the brands and functions, whereas in case M there is contrary evidence of an increasingly centralised approach to decision making at the SLT level and varied levels of increased collaboration across faculties and schools.

In the following sections I explore each of these factors in the cases, how the data from each case informs our understanding of what makes the transition towards DL easier or more difficult. I start with the main factors and then explore the ancillary factors, before concluding with the resulting theoretical framework that helps to explain the cross-case data most effectively.

I have considered alternative readings of the case studies. I outline the main alternatives here to illustrate the way they are not compelling as reasons to depart from my focus on them as cases about the transition to increased distributed leadership.

Could either case be seen as being simply about increasing collaboration or team working rather than an adjustment in the power dynamics of the organisation? In both cases there was considerable emphasis from senior leaders on the need for more joined up and collaborative ways of working, but in both cases this was not sufficient. In case P, there was an explicit commitment to ‘stepping back’ and enabling others to make better decisions in a coherent way. In case M there was an explicit desire for more concerted decision making to address, for example, university-wide issues such as weak NSS scores.

Could case M be seen as being primarily about a charismatic, transformational leader carrying on the style initiated by her predecessor? In fact the explicit intention of the new VC in case M was to create a ‘different style’ of leadership to her predecessor, one based on a more ‘collegiate’ approach, with more authentic relationships.

Could case P be seen as an act of centralised power by the CEO, exerting his influence under the guise of DL? The systematic way in which the CEO set up with his exec team and then with the GLT the process of change, with the associated alterations in his own behaviour such as staying quiet, changing the annual strategy briefing, and supporting openness to information, all suggest a genuine attempt to create a more distributed, collaborative and post-heroic approach to the way case P was run.

I am therefore confident that my overall interpretation of these cases, as agreed with the CEO/VC at the beginning of the research process, was in fact appropriate and robust.

8.3 Senior leader commitment

A widely accepted aspect of DL is that it is a shared process of influence. As Bolden describes, ‘common across all these accounts is the idea that leadership is not the monopoly or responsibility of just one person, with each suggesting a similar need for a collective and systemic understanding of leadership as a social process’ (Bolden, 2011: 252).

In both cases, however, the role of the senior leader was central to the way the narrative developed during my research. In case M the VC was an inspirational figure, demonstrating strong characteristics of being an authentic leader (Avolio et al, 2009: 423) as described in the case analysis chapter. She continued the progress started by her predecessor, with a more participative and engaging style. In case P, by contrast, the CEO was also central to the development of DL, largely because he withdrew his positional power to a significant extent, inviting others to step forward and ‘fill the vacuum’.

So we see the senior figure playing a key role but in different directions. I did not, at the start of my research, expect this to be the case, which therefore makes it all the more interesting. The VC moved forward in a more ‘involving’ way, encouraging increased loyalty and participation from those around her, demonstrating a more transformational leadership style in terms of ‘idealised influence’ via the emphasis on vision, ‘inspirational motivation’ through stretching goals, showing ‘individualised consideration’ in her interactions with people across the organisation and ‘intellectual stimulation’ through her academic enthusiasm (Wu et al., 2010: 90). The CEO in case P, by contrast, stepped back, encouraging others to take more of the authority to act, very much enacting the approach to shared leadership he was seeking to introduce (adhesion to values and working

collaboratively across the business), in line with Weick's 'enactment' in sensemaking (Weick, 1995: 32). The corresponding progress towards DL was partial for case M compared with what I would describe as significant for case P. Interviewees in the latter organisation described significantly increased shared influence, collaboration on innovation and what Spillane et al. called leadership 'stretched over people and situations' (2001a: 25). The leader in this case embarked on a specific programme of change to achieve this shift in leadership approach across the organisation, whereas the VC in case M was less single-minded and perhaps more pragmatic.

8.3.1 Impact of predecessor

The main feature of the context that comes out of the case analyses is the impact of the predecessor on the current CEO/VC. The predecessor 'shadow' in both cases was seen as significant, as related by interviewees in both groups and particularly during stage 1. A summary is provided in table 7.2 below.

Table 8.2: Predecessor shadow

	Case P	Case M
Predecessor style	'Command and control' 'Paternalistic'	'Autocratic' 'Ambitious'
Perceived impact on incumbent	Conscious adjustment while respecting legacy Managing as a stakeholder	Conscious adjustment while respecting legacy

Both predecessors exhibited an 'heroic' style (Badaracco, 2001: 120) with an authoritarian approach which was seen as 'strong' by people in both cases. In both cases the current incumbent made a conscious adjustment to be different, whilst remaining respectful of the

legacy their predecessor had established. Also in both cases the current structure and success of the organisation was in part down to the actions of the predecessor.

In case P the predecessor was still chairman, so the CEO had the added responsibility of managing him as a key stakeholder and as his father. This brought added complexity to the relationship, but it was not cited by the CEO or others as a strong factor in the leadership style transition. It was only mentioned in the context of the company's values, which the current CEO held as being highly important anyway, so they were aligned in this respect. In most comments about the current CEO he is described singly and with no reference to the chairman, even though the latter was still an officer of the company.

In case M the predecessor was held in high regard by many interviewees because of his perceived success in uniting the merged institution. Also, the current VC was seen by some as 'her protégé' with the expectation that she would continue with the same leadership style, which she did not do and which was not natural to her in any case. In fact many descriptions of the current VC were couched as comparisons with her predecessor, with references to her being 'less decisive' or that 'she listens more'. She did not, however, have the old VC as a current stakeholder, which allowed her space and time to develop her style, one with which by stage 2 she was seen as being 'comfortable'.

Given the extent to which she was seen in 2011 in her predecessor's shadow, compared to him frequently, it is indicative of her development as a leader that by 2013 she was described more frequently in her own right, and with widespread affection, both by SLT members and the wider manager population.

In both cases therefore, although the predecessor shadow was large, the effect of this does not seem to have been significant on the current incumbents. Both demonstrated the

strength of character to be themselves and to lead in a way which was congruent with their personal values and beliefs. I believe therefore that this provides evidence of the way both current leaders were able to stand above the shadow, as it were, and be themselves. Their strength of character was an important aspect of the progress each made in introducing new leadership approaches.

8.3.2 Emphasis on leadership roles

In both of the case analyses there is a great deal written about the senior figure in each, the CEO and the VC. There is also considerable emphasis on the senior leadership teams in both cases. So although my research is based on the organisation as the unit of analysis, I was led to question whether the key component in the whole research project was either the senior leader or them and the senior team. In other words, whether the concept of leadership as an organisational construct was less relevant than I had assumed, or still the appropriate unit of analysis in my research. Keeping the organisation as the focus is, I believe, in line with Spillane et al. (2001a: 25), a leading researcher in the field of DL, who describes leadership ‘stretched over people and situations’. He suggests that DL is best understood as ‘practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates activities of multiple groups of individuals’ (Spillane et al., 2001b: 13).

My research question is based on seeing the organisation as an entity so that I can analyse the movement of leadership influence and action across it. Given the topic of my research, the transition to more distributed leadership, I believe this is appropriate. I conclude that the organisation is the most appropriate unit of analysis in my research. My research confirms how leadership involves both senior leaders as significant agents in the way leadership is played out across the organisation, and followers at many levels in the

organisation who both respond to and enact the leadership process within their spheres of influence. The dynamic across the whole organisation is important when considering the way distribution of power and influence works in practice.

As I have already discussed, the pragmatic view of DL suggests that ‘planful’ introduction is important. Leithwood et al (2008b: 227), in their review of the DL evidence, confirm that ‘planful alignment [of DL] seems more likely to contribute significantly than other patterns of alignment to long-term organizational productivity.’ (Please also see a discussion on how planful the transition is in section 7.9 below.) The planning and initiation of action need to be done by someone. Given the hierarchical nature of most organisations, this person or persons is likely to be at or near the top. In case P, which was already exhibiting at the start of my research a less hierarchical approach in that the brands were semi-autonomous and able to operate with a high degree of self-determination as long as they were performing well, the process of distributing power in a collaborative way was initiated by the CEO and the Exec team. In the more ad hoc world of higher education, where academics often see themselves as self-employed agents, the process of shifting the way the organisational leadership operated also started with the VC.

Both cases were in the early stages of transition. It is therefore natural that the analysis of the transition should focus mostly in the early stages on the senior level initiators. Those further into the organisation are asked to respond, and in so doing the organisation sets up a cycle of responses which causes to some degree the transition towards more distributed leadership practice. In case P we saw this develop into more widespread effects such as inter-brand collaboration and changing function-brand relationships. In case M we saw this shift much of the decision making to the faculties, leading to a more limited shift

towards DL, and in many ways a different outcome with the sense of increased centralisation of certain decisions and processes such as budget planning.

If we assess this from a DL perspective, this suggests that the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ concept (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553) is a relevant way to interpret the way DL in practice takes form, in that the senior leader or leaders initiate and maintain a cycle of sharing power and influence throughout the organisation, which implies that they also have the ultimate right to retake the power if they decide to. If we use an ALT perspective, particularly with case M, we can see that the VC’s strength of influence based on open and transparent relationships and a balanced approach to information caused increased levels of engagement across the university.

In CLT terms the fact that there is a central administrative function is in itself a key ingredient of the organisation’s ability to operate coherently (echoes of Gronn’s concertive action (2002: 430)) as well as creating adaptive agents who can operate closer to the organisation’s perimeter and act with higher degrees of discretion in order to cope with the complexities of the environment.

The additional insight that CLT brings, as discussed in the literature chapter, is the enabling function which maintains the balance between the other two functions, allowing the organisation to function with a coherent and effective culture and ways of working. In case P we saw the CEO take on that role, balancing the administrative bias of the CFO and COO, with the adaptive bias of the brands. In case M we also saw the VC trying to play that role, but with less effect, in that there was a bias towards the ‘centralisation’ of the administrative function.

Another role that was mentioned as a key agent in both cases was the ‘number 2’ role. In case P the COO and the CFO both played key roles as mentioned above in orchestrating the process of increasing involvement, delegation and collaboration across the business during 2012 and 2013. In case M the registrar played a similarly key role in knitting together the academic and non-academic leaders and in increasing the efficacy of the SLT.

This may be related to the strong emphasis the leaders had to place on role modelling a different style of leadership, stepping back from decisions that others could make, communicating the vision and purpose consistently and persistently, encouraging collaboration and sharing of knowledge. This needed a supporting role of someone to keep the administrative function working well as well as supporting (or enabling) the transition of decision rights to a wider audience (in case P) or at least the inclusion of more managers in the planning process (in case M). In different ways both the leader and the number 2 were enablers, in the CLT sense, creating a more balanced approach to decision making, encouraging collaboration, and so on.

The overall importance of role models at senior levels is also a factor that we can see in both cases. The new dean that the VC brought into case M was a symbol of the new style that the VC wanted to inculcate across the organisation, as she made clear in her early remarks to me. The CEO in case P took the opposite approach, removing 2 close senior colleagues who were in his view not role models for the style of leadership he wanted, and the culture he valued across the organisation. This suggests that in both cases the emphasis on talent and having the right leaders in the right positions was an important way to accelerate the rate of transition. The ‘talent ecology’ (Davies & Kourdi, 2010: 93) of each organisation is an important set of processes and behaviours that influences the culture of each. In both cases we see how the CEO and VC recognised the importance of

attending to the way senior leaders are role models for the changes being introduced, or not, and how taking action provided a strong cue to others about what was important to the organisation. The way followers reacted was more mixed, with some recognising the merit of the decision to replace key figures and the increased value the replacement candidate brought to the role, whilst others expressed scepticism about the act itself of replacing key figures and whether this really demonstrated how ‘things hadn’t changed’ and that the power was still at the centre in practice.

8.4 Maintaining cohesion

In both cases the senior leaders placed considerable emphasis on the strategy and vision for the organisation, as a focus for shared sense making and activity. Both had a 20/20 vision and strategic plan, and both invested time and energy in its communication across the rest of the organisation. This is consistent with several theories, including ‘ensuring careful coordination of effort in a common cause’ in the ‘intelligent hierarchy’ (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553), the ‘administrative function’ in CLT (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 305), and the ‘idealised influence’ in transformational leadership theory (Wu et al., 2010: 90).

Thorpe et al. defines DL as ‘a variety of configurations which emerge from the exercise of influence that produces interdependent and conjoint action’ (2011: 241). Through the use of a clearly defined and communicated vision in both cases we see ‘the exercise of influence’ to achieve coherent action, but from a senior starting point. There is a paradox in the senior role holder initiating shared influence.

In case M this had been the style of the previous VC as well, as he sought to create a shared ambition for the newly merged university, to good effect according to interviewees. In case P there had been strategic plans and CEO annual presentations for some years, but it was seen as being his plan rather than the business's.

The interesting comparison between the cases is about the process and the content of these plans during my research activity. Regarding the process, in case P there was a conscious process of wider engagement and collaborative planning, with time spent on role definition and sharing areas of mutual interest between brand MDs and functional heads, as described in the case chapter. As the CFO commented at the time, 'the sense of shared ambition became more obvious'. This was an example of shared responsibility (Pearce and Conger, 2003) and collaborative achievement (Gronn, 2009: 430), underpinning the stated aim of creating a more interdependent 'global brand management business'.

In case M there was also an explicit process of engagement with a series of consultations and large management meetings, but a more centralised planning process in terms of prioritisation and ultimate decision making, run by the SLT. Interviewees placed less emphasis on the resulting levels of shared accountability for the plan at the middle manager level than in the interviews in case P.

In terms of content, both cases had a clear statement of intent about where the organisation would be in 2020. This sense of a vision to unite people in the organisation, and as a way to engage customers on the journey as well, was seen in both cases as a helpful factor. Both organisations reinforced the values in the same document, linking what they wanted to achieve with how they wanted to behave.

In addition, in case P there was an explicit emphasis in the planning process and in the resulting document on the purpose for the business as a whole. In including these elements the CEO and wider SLT (based on prolonged debate and consultation during 2012) were seeking to engage with the business on a more emotional level, connecting with each person's desire for meaning, and a sense of contribution to something they would define as worthwhile as part of their 'identity construction' (Weick, 1995: 21).

In Case M the purpose was left a little more implied than explicit, although the Strategy document does contain a sense of wider mission. The emphasis in case M's strategic vision was more on the social and historical context in which it operates, as demonstrated by the fact that the document places significant emphasis on the organisation's motto (omitted for reasons of anonymity). This also shows a desire, I believe, by the senior leaders of the organisation, to connect with each person's desire for meaning.

So, for both cases, there was a carefully constructed document and engagement process to connect with their people, to engage them in a shared vision of the future, combining collective achievement with personal meaning. In both cases this was referred to as a powerful way to create the engagement which was key to changes in decision making and collaboration working in practice.

The shift in case P during 2012-13 was in increased identification with the business, according to one manager: 'more alignment, more meaning, less silos- this is a massive shift.' There appears to be a link between the clarity of vision and purpose and the level of collaboration across the internal organisational boundaries, particularly in case P, as described in the case chapter. The more aligned people are about shared goals and purpose the more likely they are to find ways to work together to achieve them; thus

vision and purpose drive collaboration and cross-functional working ('we are knitted together better' and 'more honest conversations'). They are also more aligned in understanding what decisions to make in practice, so vision and purpose also drive effective devolved decision making. And finally they are more able to work together to create and share value (e.g. compression products and SharePoint in case P) suggesting that shared vision and purpose drive innovation and learning.

8.5 The importance of values

The importance of values as a core ingredient in the quality of relationships needed for leadership as a process of influence to be effective is well established through research. Markham et al. describe 'values-congruence' in their description of LMX theory (Markham et al., 2010: 471). In transformational leadership theory there is an emphasis on 'idealised influence' (or charisma) – followers aspire to the vision and values and identify with the leader (Wu et al., 2010: 90, drawing on Bass, 1985) which affects the degree to which leaders are admired, respected and trusted (Jansen et al., 2009: 6). Alimo-Metcalf (2013: 58) describes 'the ethical and authentic "post-heroic" models of leadership, which have focused on the values base of leadership,' which I would argue is a core requirement for the levels of trust and mutual respect that underpin DL.

Avolio defined ALT as 'a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behaviour that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers' inputs' (2009: 423). In ALT there is emphasis on the leader's ability to process information in a balanced way, in line with the values of the organisation, which underpins their ability to respond intelligently, adapting to local conditions, and able to make effective yet contingent decisions as a result. In case P we saw how the Exec had to

increase significantly the level of transparency about company information with the GLT during the 2012 sequence of meetings in order to enable them to take on board increasing responsibility for planning and coordination across the business. This was a clear indication of the importance of openness of information in the move towards DL, especially where it had not been the case historically.

Values-congruence also plays a significant role in employee engagement, according to The Institute for Employment Studies (2004: ix), who define engagement as ‘a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values. ... The organisation must work to develop and nurture engagement which requires a two-way relationship between employer and employee’. In case M we saw evidence of interviewees sensing an improved relationship with the institution based on their comments about the VC’s engaging style and emphasis on transparent communications. I recognise that much of this evidence is at one remove from the wider population of the university, and as such a perception among the managers I interviewed. In case P we saw an investment in building closer more transparent working relationships through the GLF and then the wider engagement process. In the latter case this led to increased collaboration and shared learning.

The enabling function in CLT (Uhl-Bien, et al, 2011: 475) is closely aligned, I would argue, with authentic leadership, in which the leader role is one of creating a coherent culture in which values and a shared code of behaviour are expected and in which leaders have certain attributes in common: self-awareness, a strong moral compass (based on clear values), balanced processing of information and open (trusting) relationships (Walumbwa et al, 2008: 93). These four attributes help leaders to develop increased levels of trust, which in turn supports harmony between the administrative and adaptive functions.

As discussed in the case analysis chapters, in both cases in my research we see a senior leader who is described in terms that suggest they hold and lead by a strong set of personal values. In addition, in case P we see a leader for whom the organisation's values are an important reference for how he and others should behave at work. The CEO in case P led by example and demonstrated a high degree of intolerance with those who were not able to behave in a way that was congruent with these values, which is in contrast with the need in ALT to demonstrate open and trusting relationships. In case M I saw a more tolerant and perhaps inclusive VC who led by example but who perhaps found a wider spectrum of behaviour as acceptable. This perhaps highlights an issue with how leaders interpret and demonstrate the importance of values and how the desire for behavioural conformity (as in case P) can contradict the desire for trust expressed via open and transparent relationships. If fear of rejection drives conformity it is not necessarily a sustainable way for values to be embedded across the organisation.

It is interesting to reflect on how each leader compares with the ALT characteristics, based on the perceptions of interviewees, which is described in table 7.3 where I have assessed the feedback on each and what I observed and rated each leader against each characteristic.

Table 8.3: Senior leaders and authentic leadership

ALT characteristic	Case P CEO	Case M VC
Self-awareness	High and consistently open to feedback	High and developed through feedback in post
Strong moral compass	Very high and respected by others	Very high and respected by others
Balanced information processing	Very high, 'rational' approach	Not noted as a strength; very bright but processing was 'unpredictable'
Open and transparent relationships	Evidence of relatively low transparency (e.g. with company information) in CEO role at least	High and valued highly by colleagues at different levels: 'warmth' and 'open'

From this analysis it is noticeable that both leaders rate generally very highly, but each has one area where they are perhaps less fully 'authentic' as defined in ALT. For the VC there is the area of balanced information processing which I have highlighted not because it was described as a weakness but because it was noted that the SLT functioned better with the influence of the registrar who 'helps us achieve more balanced decisions' when the VC was chairing the meeting. The VC had, either through good sense or good luck, introduced a colleague to the SLT who enabled the team to achieve an effective level of balanced processing (leading to balanced decisions). The fact that she encouraged this to happen reflects her focus on the team working well.

For case P the CEO rates slightly lower on openness and transparency. As I noted in the case chapter, there were several points of time in 2012 when the lack of transparency was an issue that the GLT wanted to resolve. The CEO and the Exec responded with increased openness but the evidence suggests that this level of transparency was not natural. It was

also influenced by the fact that the business is family-owned, so reporting internally and externally of information had traditionally been very limited.

However, in spite of these characteristics, the overwhelming sense from analysing the interview and observation data was that both leaders demonstrated a values-based approach to their role and to their relations with colleagues at all levels that was highly valued by interviewees. Whether it is the CEO 'stepping back' to role model devolution, or the VC being 'more approachable', 'consensual' and 'respected' as 'a wonderful role model'.

It seems that for each leader a values-based leadership style was natural and consistent with an authentic approach, so it was natural for both to seek what people in both cases described as 'trusting' and 'inclusive' ways of leading. Neither demonstrated an egotistical desire for the limelight, and both sought to create a culture based on mutual respect and a faith in others. In other words, it was natural for both leaders to be on the journey towards a DL approach to leadership for their respective organisations. It fitted with their values and their values enabled them to enact it authentically. Their values encouraged others to collaborate, to take risks, to make decisions, to learn and to adapt.

8.6 How decisions are devolved

The main difference in how each case was approaching the devolution of decision-making was in the focus: case P was coordinating a shift in decision making by centralising some of the process to make it consistent and shareable on a distributed basis, enabling distributed decisions making in practice, whereas case M was centralising the decisions themselves, which is the opposite of DL.

This difference is played out in the way each case approached improving their strategic planning processes. Case P introduced a concerted strategic business plan (SBP) process as a central initiative with the express purpose of creating a more joined up but decentralised approach to planning. Case M sought to introduce more consistency in the strategic planning and budgeting process which was seen as an imposition by some, and an improved process overall by others, but still a top-down process. The impact on leadership credibility in case P is captured in an exec's comment that 'the CEO has changed enormously in the last 3 years – more thoughtful, more powerful by doing less.' Delegation of power appeared to enhance the leader's stature in the organisation.

The impact of the centralised decision making in case M was cited as being more on the resulting levels of commitment from staff and students, rather than about whether the right decisions were made. One manager said 'our decision making process is pretty effective', and a SLT member recognised: 'I think the right decision was made but the staff themselves probably didn't feel that they were adequately consulted and the students didn't feel that either.' The act of centralising the decision had the effect of disempowering people affected by the decision, reducing their commitment to its successful implementation. Thus it was counterproductive. In case P by contrast, both middle managers and Exec members recognised that they were making better decisions - 'increasing maturity and quality of decision-making via the GLT' – with higher commitment levels due to the devolved approach – 'the GLT has started to devolve engagement and commitment lower down.'

Similarly with communications, which is an important component of the decision-making process, because a person making a decision needs access to relevant and accurate

information in order to make an effective choice. In case P managers described more active management of the communications process so that it was a two-way dialogue and therefore enabled more distributed decision-making. Generally Case M was described as placing greater emphasis on improved top down communications, which was helpful but it tended to reinforce the centralising tone we saw in the case analysis. The VC, however, was reported to have worked hard to improve communications in both a top down way and through regular formal and informal dialogue with people across the organisation. The conclusion I have drawn from this comparison is that in case P there was a concerted approach to improving 2-way communications, resulting in improved decisions, whereas in case M there was a less concerted approach, with more reliance on individuals to make it work well, which resulted in more ad hoc benefit.

One other aspect of the decision making processes of each case that was mentioned and noteworthy was pace. In case M interviewees described 'inaction or prevarication' and used phrases such as 'disappearing into a black hole' to describe a slow and opaque approach, whereas in case P there was no mention of pace being an issue, even though they are operating in a series of complex international markets. Some argued that this was caused (in case M) more by the bureaucracy that goes with being a publicly accountable institution with the governance processes that go with it, which has merit. Others saw this as an excuse and not a necessary position for the university to be in. The conclusion is that a planful approach to creating an environment for fast decision making helps agents to get on with their jobs, and when this is slowed down by organisational bureaucracy it can be frustrating for those involved.

8.6.1 Organisational structure

One factor that appears in both case chapters is the nature of the organisation structure. Both cases have what we might call a federal structure, with partially autonomous brands or faculties at the beginning of the research period, with words like ‘fiefdoms’ and ‘fortress’ used to describe these entities. A goal of the senior leaders in both cases was to create a more connected, ‘joined-up’ organisation, more able to deliver well to customers or students in an increasingly competitive and unpredictable market place. This implied a planful approach to developing collaboration and sharing of influence across the functional and operating units (in case M the faculties, schools and PSS functions, and in case P the brands and the central functions).

In case M I described in the case analysis the ‘power blockage’ at the level of the faculty deans, which continued throughout stage 2 as well: ‘there are still silos’ and ‘we need to have linkages working across the university.’ The faculties were large and existed with their own premises, leadership teams and functional support. Some of the schools were also reported to run like ‘fiefdoms’, with their own identity and culture. If we include in this picture the repeated evidence that ‘a general creep towards more centralisation’ was a significant concern of many in the university in stages 1 and 2 we can see a pattern of an intention to devolve being overtaken by a drive to improve results (such as NSS ratings) which led in practice to more reinforcement of the faculty (and in some instances school) ‘silos’ the VC was hoping to remove. In CLT terms the VC and the SLT chose to emphasise the administrative function as being most helpful in drawing the institution together to operate in concert, but allowed much of the power to sit at the faculty level (except for major university decisions such as the Estates Master Plan which was an SLT decision).

In case P there were similar concerns being expressed by several interviewees on both sides of this issue. During the GLT meetings of 2012 I described the ‘cautious voices’ of the three most senior brand presidents, who ran what were called the ‘power brands’ in an interesting and perhaps ironic choice of words. They were seen as businesses in their own right, which to a great extent in 2012 they were, with international distribution, entire head office and logistical functions operating independently, and with their own senior management teams. Two of the three had their own head office locations. In case P the CEO said that he saw this degree of autonomy as being inconsistent with an integrated brand management business, and he explicitly requested a more collaborative approach from the power brand MDs at the April GLT meeting.

Again, in CLT terms the CEO was seeking to play the enabling role and invited the GLT to do likewise, seeking a balance between the administrative and adaptive functions to allow high degrees of freedom in the brands to succeed in local international markets but seeking more shared opportunities for joint activity and sharing of costs to drive overall business performance. Later, when the brand MDs for two of the three power brands chose to continue to operate in an independent way he eventually chose to replace them with more collaborative leaders. Here we see the paradox again of strong intent from the CEO to achieve collaboration and mutual influence somewhat undermined by his use of power to achieve that end. There is perhaps a fine balance between a leader’s enthusiastic pursuit of a change in leadership culture and the use of coercion to achieve it in practice. This is a conundrum for leaders as they envisage a transition towards more distributed leadership, and suggests that the journey may need to be slower than he or she intended if they are to take the majority of followers with them and if they are to avoid slipping into coercive tactics to achieve progress.

The interrelationship between the structure of the organisation and the way it develops a more devolved decision making approach is significant. Where there are pre-existing power nodes, if we can call them that, as in the deans and the brand MDs, there are likely to be issues in increasing devolved or shared decision making which implies both devolution and a collaborative approach based on what the senior leader sees as being in the best interests of the whole entity. This suggests that senior leaders need to influence the views of their senior reports before embarking on a wider transition across the organisation towards distributed leadership. If there is not unanimity at the senior level then who exercises power is likely to become an issue. This is what we saw in case M with the deans assuming more control. In case P those who did not agree were eventually removed. In neither case was there therefore a smooth transition towards distribution.

In case P, for example, the CEO ultimately felt it necessary to remove the people at the nodes who were not able or willing to operate in this interdependent way, whereas in case M the VC seemed to accept this polarisation of power as a necessary cost of seeking rapid improvement in performance. Ironically, perhaps, case P has seen considerable commercial improvement in an already strong financial position in the last two years, with a significant increase in net profits declared for 2013 over 2012 (Sunday Times, 2014): ‘Chinese [consumers] have helped to spur [case P] to a 36% rise in profits. ... The privately controlled mini-conglomerate behind a raft of sports and fashion brands will report pre-tax earnings of £85m this week.’ The organisation enjoyed growth in revenues and profits during the journey towards DL, as well as significant improvements in employee engagement. We cannot perhaps draw a causal link, but we can say that the journey had not, on the face of it, impaired the organisation’s performance.

It is interesting to consider whether some of the differences in the extent and pace of devolution in each case can be attributed to the different nature of each organisation. Case P is a largely privately held public limited company, with considerable flexibility to define and execute its own strategy, whereas case M is a public institution, a university, with the associated obligations for effective governance and public scrutiny. One SLT member in case M expressed frustration with the process ‘above’ them based on ‘the desire to maintain the cohesion of the community at almost any cost allied to a rather unwieldy decision making process. I don’t mean the 13 people who sit in SLT; I mean the formal process that flows from that, all the committees that have to be brought on board.’ So the scale and nature of the university itself were mediating factors in the pace at which the organisation was able to move towards a different approach to leadership.

8.7 Achieving concerted action through collaboration

Friedrich et al. (2009: 933) describe ‘collective leadership’ as ‘a dynamic leadership process in which a defined leader, or set of leaders, selectively utilize skills and expertise within a network, effectively distributing elements of the leadership role as the situation or problem at hand requires.’ This description of DL is also context-dependent, and is linked to the adaptability of CAS. In case P the CEO was explicitly seeking to build a network of collaboration across the organisation, as a ‘global brand management business.’ He also stated repeatedly that this was, at least in part, a response to the increasingly VUCA world in which the business operated.

There is I believe a conceptual relationship between the sharing of influence in DL theory and the increased adaptability of CLT. It requires highly collaborative working practices and a team-based mind-set to succeed. If we take case P, the GLT process during 2012

and 2013 was designed to increase levels of shared influence and collaboration through developing a single team representing all the main brands and functions across the organisation. The GLT became the role model for collaborative working, with brand clubs working together and functions and brands developing shared business plans. Through this process the business became more agile and able to share scarce resources more effectively, as well as being more responsive to local markets (such as the multi-brand entry into the Brazilian market). Collaboration therefore enables the adaptive function, in this case.

In case M we see a slightly different picture. The SLT pulled together into a strong team between 2011 and 2013, with stronger interpersonal relationships and an increasing willingness to collaborate in the best interest of the university as a whole rather than faculty or functional interests (e.g. the Estates Plan). We see less evidence, however, of a wider engagement with the senior managers who operated in the faculties and PSS functions, which allowed the 'faculty bottlenecks' to remain. The institutes were an example of improved collaboration across schools, and some interviewees mentioned the increasingly collaborative approach from PSS managers across the university: 'PSS is now a very effective part of the university and well aligned to our needs.' But the evidence is less widespread across the organisation than in case P. We could interpret this as a less planful and concerted approach to the journey towards a different style of leadership, and therefore with less effect.

In both cases however, there is evidence of the importance of the functions being proactive in achieving increased alignment with the operating units (brands and faculties/schools). In case P this was perceived by a few as exerting more centralised control (particularly among the power brand MDs), but by others as being more

collaborative. In case M the influence of PSS functions was seen as increasingly collaborative; the perceived source of increased levels of centralisation was predominantly from the faculties and the SLT, i.e. the line management.

From a CLT perspective, the functions, although primarily part of the administrative function, were in effect supporting the enabling function in the way that they approached working more closely and effectively with the brands or faculties. It was initiated by them, it was described as ‘supporting’ the brands in case P, and we saw evidence of functional leaders going out of their way to align with the strategic objectives of the brands and faculties. This is evidence of an increasing emphasis on changing views of the individual from focusing on the individual’s importance in and of itself to ‘a more relational concept of self as an interdependent entity’ (Fletcher, 2004: 649). This may also be related to the enabling role of the COO and registrar in each case, both of whom were closely aligned with what the senior leader was seeking to achieve in terms of how the organisation worked.

Something we can learn from both cases is that mechanisms that are symbolic of the underlying intent, such as the institutes and the brand clubs, are helpful in accelerating levels of shared ‘sensemaking’ (Weick, 2005: 413) and collaboration if they are seen as authentic. In both instances, the mechanisms were supported by senior leaders and gave a channel for the collaboration in a way that had value and meaning to those involved. Institutes helped to address cross-discipline research issues and Clubs helped brands to leverage resource more effectively by sharing where they had common needs. They were in effect ‘ensuring careful coordination of effort in a common cause’ (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553).

In summary, the team as a working unit is important in enabling increased collaboration, but it is the extent to which this spills out to connect teams together that drives the level of collaboration required for distributed leadership to remain coherent and focused on the same goals. Cross-functional or cross-business unit collaboration knits together the organisation in the pursuit of shared goals. The vision, purpose and the values define the what, why and how for teams then to operate interdependently and effectively. Symbols of collaboration help to channel the effort into collective achievement. Thus the influence and the outcomes are shared.

8.7.1 Identification and engagement

One aspect of achieving increased collaboration across the organisation that has come out of the case analysis is the importance of follower identity: ‘sensemaking is grounded in identity construction’ (Weick, 1995:18). As noted in the literature chapter, Harris suggests that DL is best understood as ‘practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation and incorporates activities of multiple groups of individuals’ (2008b: 32). Again, Thorpe et al. cite Cecil Gibb in the 1940s, saying that ‘leadership is probably best conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group’ (Gibb, 1954, cited in Thorpe et al., 2011: 242).

In both cases studied there were issues with how followers identified with the whole organisation, which relates to the ‘activities of multiple groups’ in Spillane’s definition above. In case P we saw that interviewees described how many people identified first with the brand they worked in rather than the company as a whole, and in case M we saw people described as identifying with their discipline or perhaps their school more than the university as a whole.

Wu et al. (2010: 92) describe group-focused leadership in which the leader shapes the group identity - a shared cognitive process whereby the members define themselves in terms of group membership. This relates to self-concept leadership theory (Lord & Brown, 2004). Through having shared values and goals the group builds a collective identity which increases group efficacy, the followers' shared belief in their collective capability to perform.

Avolio et al. (2009: 426) draw on cognitive psychology and the importance of self-construct theory in understanding the area of leadership and follower interaction. They suggest there are two ways a leader influences followers: through emphasising values which motivates the follower to act in a certain way or through appealing to their self-concept, 'activating a specific identity to which the follower can relate'.

In case M interviewees discussed how academics in particular tend to see themselves as 'self-employed' and identify with their subject-based academic community more than any particular organisational construct. So the influence of leaders to increase identification with the university, faculty or school is likely to be more limited in the academic sphere. The appeal of the new VC's open and enthusiastic style seems to have had some impact, as it was cited by several managers as affecting how they perceived the university as a whole. This can be interpreted as the VC emphasising her values in a way that motivates closer identification from followers. Several positive comments I received about the VC related to her style, and how it motivated managers to be more involved as a result, I suggest because she related to their own values.

In case P there appears to be more scope for leaders to influence follower identity because there was less reference to the self-employed mind-set, and the Exec did a lot of work in stage 2 to engage with people across the business in the new purpose and vision of the company. They were in effect seeking to replace the previously brand-focused emphasis, with a strong historical context in which the brands had been run for many years as semi-autonomous businesses, which made this a significant challenge. In addition the CEO was seen as a prominent apologist for the company's family values, which was in line with the company's history, and which helped people to relate to the organisation as a whole.

The results of the Great Places to Work survey in 2013 suggest that in case P they had had some success in changing this follower identity to being more company than brand-oriented. Similarly, in case M, the staff survey results suggest a significant shift in identity and engagement in favour of the university as a whole. There may be a positive relationship between increased group-orientation in the leadership style and the level of employee engagement with the organisation, as the group focus encourages sharing and improved relationships which in turn increase engagement with the team and with the wider organisation. This would need further research.

8.8 Adapting

Fletcher (2004: 649) calls distributed leadership 'post-heroic' leadership, and finds three characteristics of post-heroic leadership: 1) leadership as practice, 2) leadership as social process, and 3) leadership as learning. Taking the last of these, we can see a direct link with the adaptive function in CLT, which is partly of value to an organisation because it provides learning ability closer to the periphery and facilitates sharing of knowledge across the organisation. Stacey (1995: 491) saw the benefit of uncertainty in causing

constant change and adaptive behaviour in organisations. This tends to increase agility and the ability to respond to changing local market or customer requirements quickly, increasing customer satisfaction and loyalty: ‘individuals engaged in networked interactions generate innovative solutions’ (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2011), which relates to the collaborative achievement in the previous section. The key for DL is that it is ‘networked’, i.e. that each agent is connected to others and knows what they are seeking to achieve collectively, so is therefore able to exercise judgement about maintaining interdependence in times of rapid change. Case examples would be working on behalf of all brands when appointing distributors in new markets for case P, and improving contact time with students in one department in a way that supports the wider NSS response across the university in case M.

Based on the analysis of case data we can see different starting points and outcomes for each case in terms of their approach to increasing adaptability. If we use learning as a proxy for adaptability, we can track to what extent each case actively sought to build adaptability in practice. In case P there was considerable emphasis on learning in the interviews, with a strong legacy and increasing investment, whereas in case M it did not feature very much at all in interviewee responses, as described in table 7.3.

In case P one of the core values is ‘always learning’, which was mentioned by several interviewees as a particular reason they were engaged with the business. The investment in learning was manifest in a variety of development programmes, the talent management process and the facilities in the main offices with learning rooms and access to learning resources, and even personal fitness facilities. Learning and sharing knowledge are related, as described by one manager: ‘one of the benefits of increased learning has been sharing of knowledge across the brands’. The SharePoint project mentioned above was a symbol

of the company's desire to invest in sharing knowledge and learning across the brands and functions, supported by another managers' comment that 'we are sharing knowledge across the business more.' This is consistent with the adaptive function in CLT, in that increased empowerment leads to increased learning which leads to increased agility.

In case M there was a different starting point: there was relatively low investment in training and development programmes, and many of the academic staff reportedly saw themselves as 'self-employed' and pursued their own research agendas. I did not hear frequent references to learning and sharing knowledge except for the institutes which were referred to as helping to increase sharing across schools in areas of related application. I compare the cases' approach to learning and change in table 7.4.

Table 8.4: Learning and Change in Each Case

	Case P	Case M
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep rooted in the values, the buildings • Invested in across the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a strong focus • Not invested in heavily
Change orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapid adoption of devolution changes • Increased agility in local markets in line with 'VUCA' thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slower and more difficult adoption of change • Ad hoc actions of agents

In case P there was a positive starting point and explicit investment in learning which was associated with a relatively rapid adoption by the newly formed GLT of the devolved and collaborative ways of working during 2012. By contrast, in case M there seemed to be slower change and it was more difficult, captured in quotations from two managers: one suggested the need to 'inject a group of trained and equipped senior and middle managers

between the deans and the heads of school. They can engender change in their schools and make a dramatic difference.’ Another stated: ‘it’s static. It holds us up enormously in managerial terms. The culture of deliverables and timescales is not part of the organisation’.

If distribution of leadership is intended to improve organisational performance (e.g. student outcomes from Spillane, 2005) through giving local deliverers more discretion to operate in the best interests of their ‘customers’ as well as the organisation, then we see more evidence of this in case P where there was concerted introduction than in case M where there was not. Looking through the CLT lens, we see in case P a relatively active and coherent adaptive function developing across the brands and the functions, in line with the intelligent in Leithwood’s ‘intelligent hierarchy’ (Leithwood and Mascall, 2008a: 553), whereas in case M this is less apparent.

Case P made more progress in this area I would argue because of the way in which senior leaders managed (perhaps subconsciously) the three CLT functions in a coordinated way, reducing the strength of the administrative function and making it more focused on the few areas only the centre could define, such as vision, purpose and values, and building up the enabling function both through the actions of senior leaders such as the CEO, COO and CFO, and through the active development of collaborative structures such as the GLF and brand clubs. Going back to Spillane’s research in Chicago schools (Spillane et al., 2001: 25), the focus on the shift to DL was in the classroom, to produce improved student outcomes. Developing the organisation’s adaptive function is the prize of DL, so that agents close to the customer are able to operate with high degrees of freedom, have effective communications to and from the rest of the organisation, and understand what the overall ‘mission’ is (Bungay, 2011: 77). Case P seems to have achieved a stronger

adaptive function during the period of my research because it combined many of the activities described in previous sections in a 'planful alignment' (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008b: 227).

8.9 Planned or unplanned

In case P the CEO was persistent and explicit about his intention to change the way the business was led in a way that was consistent with DL. He was active in pursuing this through a series of changes to planning, collaboration, managing the behaviour of others and relationships. The effect was broadly as intended, according to the majority of people interviewed, especially those in the middle manager group.

In case M the VC was less persistent about her intentions, although she was very supportive of the overall direction defined by DL. She was active in changing the culture to be more inclusive but was less robust in driving decision making further into the organisation than in case P. The effect was partial in terms of DL.

In both cases there seems to have been a corresponding effect to that intended and acted upon. In my judgement, the CEO acted in a focused and determined way, and achieved significant changes in how the organisation functioned. The VC acted with a more inconsistent approach and got more inconsistent results. On what basis do I make such a judgement?

If we use the two conditions for introducing DL successfully suggested by Leithwood et al. (2007, cited in Harris, 2011: 36): management capability and a coordinated approach, we can see that the CEO invested in management capability over an extended period of

time, and adopted a planful approach along with the CFO who helped to design and deliver the process of creating the GLT, running the series of leadership events, and changing the way employees engaged with the resulting vision and purpose. This intentional approach was in line with Leithwood's conditions.

Conversely, the VC did not invest in management capability to any significant degree, and certainly not in a way that was designed to support a shift in leadership approach. Neither did she take a particularly planful approach, preferring to rely on her own and her SLT's natural style and positive intent. The results were partial, as a consequence. There was 'increased coherence in the strategic planning process' but overall there was more centralisation than distribution of decision making.

The conclusion is that, in these cases at least, the degree of single-minded focus by the senior leader or leaders on the outcome of distributed leadership affects the extent to which it is achieved. In case P we see a CEO acting with more consistency and determination than the VC in case M, investing in activity, building capability and adapting processes to support the transition. He achieved, according to managers and execs in the organisation, consistent outcomes as a result.

8.10 Summary and resulting theoretical framework

Through this cross-case analysis I have sought to answer my research question in as thorough a way as possible, drawing on the rich insight I gained in the data collection phase of my research and the subsequent case analysis. My research question is 'what are the critical factors in the successful transition towards Distributed Leadership implementation in large complex organisations?'

In terms of critical factors I would like to focus first on the importance of the role senior leadership of the organisation play in initiating and enabling the transition. The senior leader needs to step back and provide space for others to step forward. They need the strength of character to move on from the legacy of their predecessor to create fresh momentum towards the DL outcome. The role of other senior leaders is also important, both as positive role models for distributed leadership, sharing authority and demonstrating collaboration, and as active enablers of the shift to a more devolved structure with a robust adaptive function. A planful approach, as suggested by Leithwood et al. (2008b: 227) is important and will typically come from these senior leaders due to their positional power. To a certain extent this factor resonates with transformational leadership theory, in so much as it places emphasis on the individual leader, and on their ability to inspire others to follow their course of action. But it differs in that it requires a recognition on the part of that leader to avoid the heroic role of transforming the organisation through their own inspiring behaviour, and to replace it with the active encouragement of followers to step forward and to share the leadership process on a wider and wider basis. The leader needs to trigger an assumption of power by their followers. In case P we saw how difficult this can be, with the need to take unilateral action in certain cases if followers do not want to work in the same way. In case M we saw how senior followers assumed the power but did not replicate the process by triggering more power to be taken up by their followers in the faculties and schools. So the senior leader has a difficult balance to strike between moving the DL agenda forward and ensuring that others are working in concert across the organisation.

The second factor that emerged was the importance of having a shared vision and purpose to maintain cohesion across the organisation as authority is devolved. The vision (and

associated strategy) defines what the mission is, and the purpose defines why it is important. In addition, the process of defining these statements was found to be significant, in that a more involving process, with people from across the organisation collaborating in the planning, created more shared accountability for the outcomes. Again, this factor has much in common with transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978 and Bass, 1985), as well as with change management models such as Kotter's (1995: 1-20). The key distinction, I would argue, is the process of involvement that leads to shared accountability for the outcome. This approach to the process is an embodiment of the principles of DL itself, with the shared influence being embedded in the process, so that the outcome itself has been genuinely influenced by a variety of players, both leaders and followers. This is not to say that a similar approach could not be used in Kotter's eight steps, for example, but in DL terms it is key. The outcome is part of a framework which enables others to operate with high levels of discretion over their areas of responsibility because they have clarity about the overall mission and strategic priorities of the enterprise.

The third factor was the importance of having clear values that consistently influence leader behaviour to be authentic. The authenticity of senior leaders (Avolio, 2009: 423) and 'values congruence' across the wider population (Markham et al., 2010: 471) were both important in creating a clear code of behaviour across both cases, particularly in case P. Authenticity, as defined in ALT in the literature analysis above, needs to be part of the leadership picture in the transition towards DL, in that it helps to define the relational and moral dimensions of effective leadership influence. Another theoretical source for this factor is LMX theory, where the relationship between leader and follower is a key dimension of leadership effectiveness. Chang & Johnson state that LMX theory describes how 'leaders and followers develop successful relationships, and how these relationships

lead to favourable individual and organizational outcomes' (2010: 797). LMX theory is helpful in exploring the nature of these relationships, but in the transition towards DL the fundamental shift is from the dyadic LMX hierarchy to a shared process of influence and collaboration.

I have raised important questions in the case analysis about the way having clear organisational and personal values (as in case P) can drive a degree of intolerance that undermines the leader's trustworthiness in the eyes of their followers. For some interviewees in case P the fact that senior figures left the organisation because they behaved in ways that did not reflect the organisation's values was evidence of how important the values were to the CEO and to the organisation itself. For others it undermined their confidence in the consistency of the CEO's behaviour if he could support senior figures at one time and then remove them at another. So the ways values and leader relationships play out in practice is a difficult area for leaders to navigate – if they act too strongly they risk undermining trust, or too weakly and they risk endorsing what they would describe as inappropriate behaviour.

Through the case analysis I also found that both the values and the vision and purpose were important in creating the framework within which distributed leadership could flourish. They underpin the other factors below, and in turn are reliant on the beliefs and behaviour of the senior leadership of the organisation.

The next factor relates to how decisions are made. It is important for DL to work in practice for decision making to be devolved consistently across the organisation and to the level at which each decision is best made, on the principle that senior teams should only make the decisions only they can make. To increase performance local leaders need

discretion to make local decisions within the framework provided by the vision, purpose and values. This drives pace and more responsive customer service. Local leaders also need to be equipped with the capability and the information to make sound decisions, which supports what Harris states: 'leadership needs to be distributed to those who have, or can develop, the knowledge or expertise required to carry out the leadership tasks expected of them' (Harris, 2008a: 181).

The fifth factor to emerge was the need for team working and collaborative working practices to be the norm. Collaboration knits the organisation together in the pursuit of the vision and purpose. It needs to apply within and between business units and functions, based on mutual influence. It is helpful to use symbolic mechanisms to accelerate the uptake of collaboration as the predominant way of working. It is also helpful to increase the extent people in the organisation identify with it through helping them to make sense of the purpose and values and their role in the wider group context. This factor draws on team theories such as the 'team as leader' idea (Mehra et al., 2006: 233), based on 'the possibility of leadership in teams as a shared, distributed phenomenon' and shared leadership theory, where the mutual 'influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence' (Pearce and Conger (2003), cited in Avolio et al., 2009: 431). The emphasis in this analysis is that the collaboration needs to be 'a shared distributed phenomenon' which enables the level of mutual influence that knits together the decision making process across functions, brands and faculties.

The final factor is the increase in organisational agility through developing the 'adaptive function' from CLT (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 314). This needs investment in creating a learning culture to fuel sharing of knowledge across the organisation. It also needs

managers at all levels to be able to enable change and have the confidence to support their teams to take risks within the framework defined by the vision, purpose and values. To paraphrase the CEO in case P, in the complex networked world in which we live those organisations that can adapt and relate locally whilst functioning with cohesion will be able to compete more effectively than those that rely primarily on centralised decision making and control.

Many of the leadership behaviours that encourage DL in the cases studied are described above. From senior leaders stepping back and encouraging others to take decisions, through to local leaders encouraging learning and adaptation, the behaviours are about enabling the organisation to operate on the basis of accepting mutual influence, respecting others and making careful decisions that balance the organisation's and the customer's needs.

By drawing on and integrating the leadership theories of DL (especially intelligent hierarchy), CLT and ALT I have sought to create a more holistic lens through which to see the transition towards DL. This combination of theories provides sufficient insight to explain what is happening in the majority of examples in each case. There are, however, nuances in the stories of both cases that don't fit any of these theories particularly well, as I have identified in my thesis; for example, the exercise of power at senior levels to initiate the transition, or the use of power to demonstrate the importance of values in a way that undermines trust and perceived authenticity. These human factors demonstrate in my view the difference between theory and practice, in that human systems are complex and variable because they are made up of human beings with our propensity to act wilfully and independently. In the theories I use and in the factors described above, there are ideas that are attractive in concept, but perhaps more difficult to execute. The cases demonstrate

some of the challenges of moving towards a more collaborative, devolved and learning type of organisation when the actors are humans with their own ambitions and concerns. I believe the combination of theories helps to accommodate more of this human variability, but this is only partially successful. Perhaps the key insight for practitioners is that the transition towards DL is difficult when real people are involved.

I do, however, draw on other theories such as transformational leadership, LMX and shared leadership theory in the course of my analysis, as described above. Each of these theories has relevance and brings insight into the nature of effective leadership. But my research question is focused on the transition to more distributed leadership, which I suggest requires a 'post-heroic' perspective (Badaracco, 2001: 120).

In what the CEO in case P would refer to as the VUCA world in which these organisations are operating, the need for more subtle theories is significant, as the demands of employees for more democratic and inclusive ways of working increase. CLT provides a helpful combination of functions that describe to some extent the intelligent hierarchy in practice. ALT helps us to understand the way leaders can embrace a values-based approach to their role. It is all relevant.

I have used the questions that were a result of my literature analysis in chapters 2 and 3 above in the analysis template and the consequent case and cross-case analysis which was helpful in making sense of the data and organising it into coherent themes. Through this process I have arrived at the factors above as being the most salient in providing a helpful framework for practitioners in planning for and enacting the transition towards more distributed ways of leading.

The critical success factors in transition towards DL in the cases I studied can therefore be summarised as interlocking factors with some enabling others to work in practice, as summarised in figure 7.1 below. The reasons why they are organised in this structure are as follows. The first factor, senior leaders as role models, was a pre-requisite for the transition to be successful in both cases, and is therefore foundational. It became clear from the case analysis (case P in particular) that the next two (shared vision and purpose and values-based leadership) provide the framework within which increased DL can be introduced and developed across the organisation. So these 2 factors appear above senior leadership role models. Finally, the last 3 factors describe how to orchestrate the introduction and transition towards greater distribution of leadership. They describe how to operationalise it, building on the first 3 factors, to develop the decision structure and ways of working to make distribution effective in a coherent way across the organisational structure.

Figure 8.1: Critical success factors in the transition to DL



The model is drawn as a hierarchy, in that each level enables the one above. The relationship between these factors emerged through the data analysis stage of my research. So, we start with the senior leader or leaders wanting to be role models and accepting all that that implies in terms of their no-heroic style, not making decisions that are better made by others, acting with authenticity and collaborating persistently. As we saw from the cross case analysis, this then enables the power of a shared vision and purpose and adopting a values-based approach to work authentically across the organisation. These then act as a framework for people to use as they make decisions, collaborate, learn and share. We also saw in the cross case analysis how partial achievement of the foundational factors will affect the degree of success in distributing leadership more widely. In case M there was less clear commitment from the VC, perhaps more ambiguity in the direction she wanted to move in, which reduced the effectiveness of the subsequent changes in the delegation of leadership authority and the creation of more collaborative and learning ways of working.

To summarise, we start with the leaders' intent, we see the progression of defining or reinforcing the framework of vision, purpose and values, within which agents across the organisation have freedom to operate.

8.10.1 Key indicators for each factor

If we take each factor in turn we can draw from the research certain organisational indicators which will help practitioners to identify where they are and where they need to focus attention in their transition towards a more distributed form of leadership.

During the cross-case analysis, I reviewed the overall factors that have emerged from current theories and my research analysis in order to develop a set of indicators which could help practitioners in future. I used these themes to create the following list of descriptive statements.

A. Senior leadership role models

1. The most senior leader and their team are committed to working in a more devolved way
2. They make only the decisions only they can make
3. They provide a clear role model for empowering others to make decisions and make things happen
4. They actively coach others to develop and assume more responsibility

B. Strong vision and purpose:

5. One shared vision is well understood across the organisation
6. Everyone is committed to why the organisation exists and what it seeks to contribute
7. The organisation's overall strategy provides consistent parameters for action across the organisation
8. Each person's goals are clearly linked to the organisation's strategic goals

C. Values-based leadership:

1. Managers at all levels build open and trusting relationships with colleagues
2. Managers have strong self-awareness and emotional intelligence
3. Managers act (and encourage others to act) on balanced information processing
4. Managers always act in the best interests of the whole organisation

D. Consistently devolved decision making:

1. Service oriented decisions are taken as close to the customer as possible
2. Only key strategic decisions are made centrally
3. Local decisions are based on the best response to local circumstances within the organisation's overall parameters
4. Unified management information is available to support joined-up decision making

E. Collaborative achievement:

1. High performing team working is the norm
2. It is normal to see strong and effective cross functional working
3. Reward structures are based on collective rather than individual performance
4. Open and purposeful conversations predominate

F. Agility and learning:

1. All teams work hard at continuous improvement focused on what's best for the customer
2. The culture supports experimentation without blame
3. Knowledge is shared freely to facilitate innovation and improvement
4. People are developed to do their best.

I included in this list elements of theory drawn from DL. Notably B relates to Leithwood's 'intelligent hierarchy' version of DL (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553) and D relates to the distribution of decision making and influence in DL more generally. Section E relates to shared leadership, (see Pearce, 2003) which is in turn included in some interpretations of DL (see Thorpe et al, 2011: 241). Authentic leadership theory relates to section C relates to this (see Avolio, 2009: 433) and section F relates to CLT (see Uhl-Bien, 2011).

During my later review meetings with case P, one of the senior managers asked me to develop a way of calibrating the degree of distribution of leadership that is actually happening in case P, and potentially elsewhere, as a useful way to give managers access to my research and to have something concrete to work with in terms of understanding where to focus their efforts in accelerating distributed leadership. This is a helpful example of how the set of indicators above would be of value for use by leaders and their teams to define their current position, and their areas for increased effort in their transition to towards a distributed leadership approach. I have not yet however developed the indicators into a set of items suitable for rigorous measurement or cross-organisational comparison, and this would be further work after completion of this thesis to develop a questionnaire in line with accepted standards of questionnaire design.

8.10.2 Contribution to knowledge

Academically, this thesis provides a synthesis of distributed and complexity leadership theories, as well as drawing on authentic leadership theory, in order to understand the organisational and human dynamics that influence the transition to a more distributed leadership approach. Both cases are large organisations, which means that the resulting factor framework provides relevant insight into how distributed leadership can be effective in large and relatively complex organisations. The factors that influenced the transition of leadership in each case create a model that I hope will be helpful to other leaders on a similar journey.

The way the factors apply to each of my cases is different, however, and this suggests two things: firstly, that context is important in the study of leadership and we need to relate the broad insights in each factor to the particular circumstances of each and every case; secondly, that the findings in this thesis are not to be generalised in an unthinking way. In the case analysis of each of my cases I was very aware of the interplay between the environment and history of each organisation and the character and experiences of many key agents, so that each story was in some ways unique. This is the nature, in my view, of human organisations, in that the context and the peculiarities of the players create a unique network of dynamic influences that evolve over time. My research method tracked this evolution in each case over a period of over a year, allowing these influences to play out in practice. But each had a different starting point and different end point, and in my analysis I was able to gain a particular insight into how these dynamics played out in between. I have sought to provide insight which can help others to learn from, rather than universal truths.

This thesis provides practitioners with insight at both the organisational and leadership role levels. At the organisational level, I have derived from the research certain indicators for each factor that help diagnose and plan for the introduction of a distributed leadership approach. At the leadership role level the framework provides a helpful guide to the behaviours and leadership capability leaders need to demonstrate to be successful in the transition towards greater distribution of leadership. This also helps with leader role definition so that leaders and their HR departments can define and embed these characteristics and decision rights in role descriptions for recruitment, selection, performance review and development.

The framework described above, which is informed by the empirical research, is a contribution to current theory about distributed leadership in that it identifies factors that influence the success of the transition towards DL, drawing on recent research into complexity leadership theory and authentic leadership theory as well as the existing DL research. In a society where information technology and social media are increasing the transparency of organisations to internal and external audiences, and where democratic politics are seen as a right in more countries, the relevance of both DL and CLT is likely to increase. In a society where the behaviour of individuals and of organisations is being held increasingly to account, the relevance of ALT is likely to increase. These theories are in tune with the 'post-heroic' world. My research has added some insight into how they can be introduced to large complex organisations in practice.

At the time of writing my research is being used by the major research firm Ipsos Mori in their annual research into the prevailing views of UK CEOs and HR Directors on leadership attributes in the current UK economy. The factors I have identified form the

basis for a series of questions that Ipsos Mori are using in their research to assess which are of higher priority. The results will be published in 2015. This is a helpful validation of the underlying practical value of my conclusions and the efficacy of the factors in more practitioner related research.

In looking at the exercise of power I have also developed the way we understand how individual senior leaders and senior teams can accelerate or decelerate the transition towards a more distributed approach through their style and what decisions they choose to share with their wider teams. I have also drawn out the need for leaders to create the conditions for DL in terms of emphasis on collaboration, learning and having appropriate capability and information to make quality decisions on a distributed basis.

My research outcomes show how the factors fit together, with some enabling others to work in practice, which can be of value to practitioners who are either on or contemplating the journey to a more distributed leadership approach. The set of items above can help leaders to understand their position and track progress on the journey.

The framework may also be of value in the field of leadership development, as it provides a coherent structure for developing leaders across the organisation in a range of skills and behaviours that will help to make DL work well in practice. The research findings also help to make links between various aspects of current leadership theory and how they influence follower engagement, which helps to build the case for change for leaders to embark on the journey in the first place.

Chapter 9 – Conclusion

In conclusion, I will firstly summarise the contribution to knowledge my research has made, and then describe the related contribution to practice. I will go on to describe the approach and limitations of the research methodology I used and conclude with a reflexive commentary to place my role in context.

9.1 Summary of contribution to knowledge

My research question has focused my research on the transition towards a more distributed form of leadership, rather than the end result. This has allowed me to use the longitudinal structure of my research to investigate and compare the nature of this transition in two different cases. In some instances I have seen similar conclusions emerge from the cases, in other instances the contrast has been illuminating in helping to draw out the factors that have influenced the degree of success in the transition in one case more than the other. I now summarise the contribution to knowledge that this research activity has provided.

Drawing on my connected leadership model, my first finding is a development of the DL theory in placing particular focus on the role of the senior leader in the organisation. The main pre-requisite for a successful transition of this nature, according to my research, is the senior leader and leaders being committed to the approach and to being active role models for the transition. Without this, the transition is likely to be less successful. This may sound like a truism, in that intentionality is necessary for transition to occur.

However, in my experience, it is not uncommon for people within organisations to aspire to make such a transition without having the complete commitment of senior leaders to make it work, and the resulting extent of transition has been less than the aspiration.

This first factor suggests that successful transition towards DL cannot be achieved, at least primarily, ‘from the bottom up’. It is apparent from history that at the national level revolutions can occur and radical changes to leadership approach in countries do happen ‘from the bottom up’, for example in Poland and elsewhere in Eastern Europe during the 1980s. But at the company level, where corporate governance does not require leaders to be as accountable to the employees as politicians are to the population, this type of revolution is more difficult. Hence we find the first success factor in my concluding framework to be senior level commitment to be the role models for the change they seek.

Building on this first factor, my research identified two further factors that lay a strong organisational foundation for successful transition to DL. Having a strong and shared vision and purpose provides a rational framework for ‘ensuring careful coordination of effort in a common cause’ (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008a: 553), that is the direction for shared strategy and action (vision), as well as a clear sense of meaning (purpose). The other factor, values-based leadership, provides the behavioural framework to guide people across the organisation to achieve the vision and purpose in a principled and morally satisfying way. In combination, these factors provide clarity for everyone on the organisation’s ‘mission command’ (Bungay, 2011: 77), leaving them free to operate knowing they are not acting or behaving inconsistently with the overall aims and values of the wider organisation. This is also similar in concept to the ‘administrative function’ in CLT (Uhl-Bien, Marion, 2011: 474), creating the strong core which allows the organisation to operate intelligently without losing its cohesion and shape. Although creating this framework sounds relatively straightforward, in practice it is in my experience related to the context of the organisation, the nature of its products or service,

its employee base, its customers and its history. Context is key, meaning that the way this framework plays out in each individual case is likely to vary.

Once this framework is in place, and actively promoted and embodied by the senior leaders of the organisation, my research findings suggest, the distribution of the leadership role can occur with greater effectiveness. The other three factors that are important in determining the success of the transition are consistently devolved decision making, collaborative achievement and agility and learning. Again, what these words mean for other organisations in practice will depend to some extent on their context. There is, however, a logic to the way these factors work in combination to enable distributed leadership to work in practice: devolve decisions in a coherent way, collaborate to make this work across the organisational processes and structures, and learn from the periphery to be able to adapt to changing circumstances and inform the decisions made at various levels in the organisation.

In terms of the outcomes of my research, such as the factors and the indicators, I was surprised more by some than others. The mix of what we might describe as personal (strategic leaders as role models, and values-based leadership), interpersonal (collaborative achievement) and structural (vision and purpose, consistently devolved decisions and agility and learning) is an interesting combination. It suggests a multi-faceted approach to the successful transition towards DL, and this is reflected in the mix of theories on which I have drawn to help explain the factors. This would suggest to me that the transition is both a response to an increasingly complex world (hence the use of CLT throughout my analysis) and a complex activity in its own right.

The transition requires changes in personal style, in shared processes and ways of working, in relationships at senior levels and across the organisation, as well as redefinition of the organisational narrative and changes in the power structure and how it operates. It needs leaders at multiple levels to give up power they may value, and to adopt a leadership style that is more coach than autocrat, more enabler than administrator. It is therefore not entirely surprising, perhaps, that an explanatory theoretical framework is a synthesis of existing theories, rather than one being sufficient in its own right.

Throughout this thesis I have sought to draw out the behaviours that were cited as helping or hindering the transition towards DL. If we look at the first factor, for example, the way senior leaders role model their commitment to DL is demonstrated by how well they involve others in the creation of the organisation's vision and purpose, and how well they articulate these across the business in a way that is meaningful to others. This requires humility, encouragement of others to speak up, a desire to listen to understand, and the ability to tell the story in a compelling way.

One of the particular signals of change in the approach of the CEO in case P was his active withdrawal from being involved in making decisions that did not need to be made at his level. He declined to attend internal and customer meetings where he felt his influence would be significant and inappropriate, given the nature of the decisions being made. In this way he was demonstrating his commitment to being consistent, to expecting others to take decisions that previously he would have made. He also coached his exec colleagues to do the same, following the initial discussion at the exec meeting in February 2012. The exec also supported the devolution of decisions through increasing the flow of management information to others in the brands and the functions to enable them to make intelligent decisions.

The CEO in case P also ‘stepped back’ from driving the agenda in the global leadership forum meetings throughout 2012 in order to encourage others to step into the leadership role in a collaborative way. The strategic planning process was the mechanism the exec chose to use as the focus for increased collaboration and shared achievement through more aligned planning and execution between the brands, and between the brands and functions.

The importance of team working and collaboration across teams in large organisations, often with increasing levels of remote team location and internationally coordinated project teams (Zigurs, 2003: 347) is also exemplified by the development of the cross-faculty Institutes in case M, with beneficial improvement in sharing expertise to achieve shared academic goals. Collaborative working (based on clear values) tends to increase the level of shared leadership, where the mutual ‘influence process often involves peer, or lateral, influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence’ (Pearce and Conger (2003), cited in Avolio et al., 2009: 431).

Collaboration supports distributed influence and vice versa. As the organisation builds more capability to work together across the levels, combined with devolved power to accelerate decisions and action, the organisation tends to achieve more, as seen in case P in particular. In this there is an echo of the ‘adaptive function’ in CLT, which takes us to the final factor, agility and learning, which further fuels this cycle of productive work to achieve the shared outcomes (vision) for shared reasons (purpose).

Uhl-Bien et al. described the adaptive function as ‘an informal leadership process that occurs in intentional interactions of interdependent human agents (individuals and collectives) as they work to generate and advance novel solutions in the face of the

adaptive needs of the organization' (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 314). Whether it is the brand clubs in case P working to find the best way to launch in new markets in south America or the inter-faculty development of new scientific breakthroughs in case M, we see examples of increased organisational effectiveness through the 'intentional interactions of interdependent human agents' learning and adapting together. My case examples provide some practical examples of how the adaptive function can operate in practice.

In terms of the leadership theories that are relevant in this transition, I have drawn on CLT and ALT in particular in developing my research approach and analysing the case data. I also drew on shared leadership theory (Pearce and Conger, 2003), and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) to provide insight in particular areas. Shared leadership theory is a helpful insight into the way collaboration can support distributed leadership. Transformational leadership theory is helpful in highlighting the characteristics of charismatic leaders who lead through example, even though it is in many ways in line with a more 'heroic' leadership paradigm. My contribution to knowledge is, at least in part, based on the synthesis of these theories in creating a guide for transition towards DL. By drawing particularly on post-heroic theories of leadership and bringing together the relevant parts, I have added to each theory by showing how it relates to the transition itself. The resulting factor model is also a synthesis, and as such a new perspective on each of the theories involved.

I found CLT in particular to be relevant to my research because I believe it has emerged in recent years as a corollary of the increased complexity of the networked society in which we live, which has challenged the 'heroic' leader acting in a unilateral manner without the need for accountability to employees, society or customers. 'In networked societies: boundaries are permeable, interactions are with diverse others, connections switch

between multiple networks, and hierarchies can be flatter and recursive... Communities are far-flung, loosely bounded, sparsely-knit, and fragmentary' (Wellman, 2001: 227). As organisations need to respond ever faster to these emerging communities of customers and commentators, they need to develop the agility associated with the adaptive function whilst maintaining the organisational coherence provided by the administrative function, which is made to work in practice by the enabling function (Uhl-Bien et al., 2007: 314). This is a helpful way to describe the 'intelligent hierarchy' coined by Leithwood and Mascall (2008a: 553) in studying the efficacy of DL in practice. Perhaps the aspect of CLT that is less helpful is the enabling function, which is often described as balancing the administrative and adaptive functions, as though the tension between central control and local control could be balanced by leaders keeping the two in some sort of balance. I believe this would benefit from further research, and may link to the mix of factors that this thesis describes in order to draw out more specifically what enabling means in terms of leader behaviour.

ALT was useful in providing a robust theoretical framework for the area of values, authentic leader behaviour and open and transparent relationships as important aspects of leadership behaviour in the transition towards greater distribution of leadership. The personal integrity and open style of the senior leaders in both cases were noted by many interviewees as key reasons for the change in style of leadership practice across the organisation. For the leader in case P the lack of commitment to these values by other senior leaders was sufficient reason for them to leave the organisation entirely, despite their performance in role being strong relative to their peers. As I discussed earlier, this raises a question about the extent to which the leader's 'moral compass' in ALT terms is a reason to act unilaterally to remove key agents, or whether their responsibility for creating

a climate of trust is more important to taking followers with you to successful transition in the longer term.

Additionally, the importance of middle and junior managers making effective decisions based on balanced processing of openly available management information (part of the consistently devolved decision making factor) is linked to one of the factors in ALT, namely 'balanced processing of information' (Walumbwa et al, 2008: 92). My research highlighted the importance of accurate and helpful management information if managers are to assume responsibility for greater decision making. Managers taking more decisions need to know that they are making them based on the best available information, as well as having the active support of their leaders, whatever the outcome. This requires investment in both information systems and the development of managerial capability if they are to be effective and for a climate of trust to be present. The alternative is a failure of delegation as followers are unlikely to continue to make decisions if they are not supported effectively with the tools, the training and a lack of blame if decisions go wrong.

9.2 Summary of the contribution to practice

The varied nature of the factors described in the previous section is also of interest in that it suggests that the leadership process in the context of the transition toward DL is also multi-faceted, involving personal, interpersonal and structural attributes and activities in a simultaneous movement. One factor alone would be insufficient to achieve the concerted shift in approach that DL suggests. It is the orchestration of these factors that is effective, according to both the theories on which I draw and the empirical evidence from my research. The implication for practitioners is that the DL shift cannot be achieved simply,

through one mechanism such as devolving power throughout the organisational structure or developing leaders to be more authentic. It requires a combined approach over an extended period of time, which will need in itself to be adaptive to the changing context within which the organisation is operating.

The connected leadership factors provide a coherent and rounded approach to the transition, and each in its own right has implications for leaders in practice. To become a role model for a new approach to leadership is in itself a significant decision for leaders in large organisation. If they appreciate the relationship between their context, their strategic priorities and the way the organisation operates and see that becoming more agile, collaborative and devolved is an appropriate direction to take, then they need to embrace the consequences for their own leadership approach. They need to understand and enact being clear on purpose and direction, being authentic and for their behaviour to reflect the organisation's espoused values, devolving power consistently and supporting others to make decisions, working in a collaborative and cross-functionally effective way, and supporting experimentation and learning as ways to build increased agility. For some senior leaders used to a more command and control approach to leadership, this is a significant shift in mind-set and behaviour. They will typically need considerable support from colleagues to maintain such a shift in practice. And the real test of their resolve will come when a crisis appears or when performance is under par. How CEOs and senior leaders react in these challenging times will be interpreted by people across the organisation as revealing how serious they were in the first place.

My research has two areas of focus from a practitioner point of view: the organisation in transition and the leadership roles of agents within it. At the organisational level I have contributed insight for those whose interest is in leading or enabling the transition of the

organisation towards a more distributed approach to leadership. I have drawn from the case analysis certain factors as described above that will help accelerate the transition.

I have also provided these practitioners with a set of indicators for each factor that allow each organisation to understand where they are and where to focus attention in their journey towards DL. The use of these indicators for diagnostic purposes provide an opportunity to involve others in the organisation in understanding the journey better and defining the priorities for action. In other words, building navigation skills into the wider management and employee population of the organisation, which is of value because awareness of where one is enables intelligent movement towards the destination.

The factors and indicators also provide a valuable framework for developing leadership capability across the organisation, in support of the transition towards DL. Each factor includes skills and attributes that can be developed among leaders, in appropriate ways for leaders at different levels, in order to accelerate the adoption of the distributed leadership approach. For example, in order to achieve consistent devolution of decision making, leaders need to have the skills to make intelligent decisions in the best interests of the organisation, whilst meeting the local needs of customer as effectively as possible. They also need to be able to interpret data and process information in a balanced way. They need to coach their people to be more competent and confident in making effective decisions. And they need to be able to review decisions and resulting action to maximise learning to increase the ability in their teams to make better decisions next time. These are all trainable skills which the organisation can develop and deliver programmes for in a way that suits its particular culture and context. The same can be said for each of the factors, which together create a framework for consistent leadership selection, development and reward.

If we look at my research through the eyes of individual leaders in any particular organisation, we can see how it can benefit them in terms of their personal leadership strategy. Senior leaders in particular, can use the factors to develop their own awareness of their role, and what they need to do to orchestrate a shift in power and an increase in agile, collaborative achievement through the increase in localised decision making. The factors provide a guide for leaders to use, in other words.

In the networked VUCA world in which many leaders of large organisations work, there is I believe a need to provide a guide to how to operate in a ‘post-heroic’ way (Badaracco, 2001: 120). Many senior leaders are seeking to achieve a coherent organisational culture, a strong brand position and effective implementation of strategy, as well as enabling their people to work in an agile and customer-centric way in order to achieve customer loyalty. These challenges, I believe, require the style of leadership described in DL and CLT theories. The factors resulting from my research do not necessarily apply to all situations, but they can provide a narrative on what has worked elsewhere, and allow leaders to interpret the findings in a way that takes their particular context into full account.

The connected leadership model has helpful implications for practitioners in terms of their approach to various HR process such as recruitment and reward criteria, the focus for performance management and capability development, as well as governance in practice. Taking each factor in turn, here are some of the ways in which the connected leadership model helps guide the senior HR community in large organisations to be catalysts for a more distributed, agile and collaborative organisation.

Senior HR people can have a direct influence on whether the CEO and board perceive the value of being role models for distributed ways of working. A common debate in HR social media is ‘how to earn the seat at the boardroom table’ and the Ipsos MORI research (Ipsos MORI, 2015) indicates that the CEO’s recognition of the need for greater agility is a helpful basis for HR to precipitate the discussion about the senior leadership team’s role in creating such agility.

Regarding shared direction and purpose, HR people can engage the board or executive team to clarify a higher purpose than just profit. They can design communications processes to cascade strategic objectives throughout the organisation to ensure line of sight for all, and start the conversations through line manager engagement across the business to make sense of where the organisation is going and why it’s important.

In terms of the values-based leadership, HR can hold the executive team to account for the behaviour of the organisation, asking to what extent they really live the espoused values from day to day. HR can run workshops with leaders to explore emotional intelligence and unbiased thinking to enable stronger values-based leadership capability, and discuss with people more widely across the organisation what behaviour they see and whether it’s really values-based in order to compare intention with reality.

The HR director is often a strong position to agree with the executive team the decisions only they can make and how to delegate everything else, in order to accelerate the devolution of decision making. In my experience many boards make too many decisions when experience experts in their teams are better placed and more able to make. HR can invest in building coaching skills to develop managers to step up and take more responsibility across the organisation, building the capability described by Leithwood and

Mascall (2008a: 553). HR can also develop engaging communications so managers are well-informed about the business to make more intelligent decisions, and develop managers to empowering front line teams to make the best decisions for the customer in line with the organisation's overall strategy.

HR can help to set up and support cross-functional teams to improve end to end collaboration, based on developing a coherent approach to team performance and training leadership teams to do it well. They can also coach and train senior leaders to listen really well (so they are open to mutual influence), which will open up the quality of dialogue needed for high quality collaborative achievement.

Finally, in order to increase the levels of agility and learning in the organisation, HR can set up communities across similar roles to share great ideas and develop a shared identity. They can identify where blame is common and replace it with a 'fail fast and learn' mindset through management training. They can also develop change leadership skills in their own HR people to be catalysts for change across the organisation.

In each of these areas I have described the role of HR, which typically has responsibility and budget for many of the areas above, but in some organisations the functional responsibility may vary. The key insight is that there are practical ways in which senior leaders of the organisation can be supported, challenged and enabled to embark on and accelerate progress along the journey towards being a distributed, agile organisation.

9.3 Review of methodology and any limitations

As I described in chapter 6, I have drawn on work by Buchanan (2012), Symon and Cassell (2012) and Miles & Huberman (1994) in identifying three criteria that are particularly helpful in assessing the quality of my research and its outcomes:

- Generalizability (Buchanan, 2012: 365)
- Avoiding bias (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 263)
- ‘De-centring the author’ (Symon & Cassell, 2012: 212).

In terms of generalizability, I use two of Buchanan’s modes of generalizability:

‘naturalistic generalization’ and ‘analytical refinement’. The first is when ‘we learn from case (and other) accounts and apply them to our own context’. The second is when case research informs theory. I have demonstrated ‘naturalistic generalizability’ through the use of my research outcomes to inform the understanding of leaders in other organisations. I mention above the example of a FTSE 100 retailer, where senior leaders have used the factors that resulted from my research analysis as a basis for reviewing the organisational and leadership priorities as part of a major review of strategy to become more agile and customer-centric in a turbulent international retail environment. Similarly, Network Rail, a major UK infrastructure provider has also used the factors to inform their leadership development strategy as part of a strategic review of the way they operate, with an explicit commitment to introduce more devolved ways of working in future. This is recorded in the CP5 notice of the Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR, 2014: 15-16): ‘Network Rail has made important changes in its internal structure, moving more responsibility away from the centre towards its devolved routes, and making changes to how it works with the wider industry in terms of alliances with train operators and more partnership working with suppliers.’

These examples, however, are just that, specific examples rather than general application, and with a case-based research strategy I need to acknowledge that the degree of generalizability will depend on factors such as the closeness of fit between other organisations and my cases. I recognise that for each case its context and specific internal characteristics were important in defining what I derived from the case analysis. Each case is different, but I believe from my own practitioner experience that there is also a great deal other organisations can learn from this analysis, whilst acknowledging the peculiarity of each case here.

One of Miles and Huberman's quality criteria (1994: 277) is utilisation, application and being action-oriented, i.e. it is useful to the intended audience. Again, the examples above help to demonstrate the utility of my research findings. I was able to provide guidance to practitioners of the relative priority of each of the factors, as shown in the hierarchical relationship in Figure 8.1 above, which enables leaders and advisors to apply the factors in a practical sequence, ensuring that each foundational factor is in place in sufficient strength to enable the development of the subsequent factor.

Furthermore, the indicators for each factor (described in chapter 7 above) provide a clear basis for diagnosis and planning for practitioners as they progress on the journey towards a more distributed leadership approach. It is important to recognise, however, that such a model is, by its nature, a simplification of the reality in each particular situation, and it needs to be used with sensitivity to the nuances in each case, such as the 'environmental dynamism' of the context (Waldman et al, 2001, cited in Jansen et al., 2009: 10), the approach of the various leadership agents, and the nature of the organisation's activity.

My research outcomes have added to current theory by drawing from the data from both the cases I studied factors that demonstrate a synthesis of different theories, namely authentic leadership theory (Avolio et al., 2004: 423, Walumbwa et al., 2008), distributed leadership theory including the intelligent hierarchy model (Harris et al., 2007, Spillane, 2005), and complexity leadership theory (Uhl-Bien & Marion, 2001: 389). In order to maintain a coherent research approach I have focused on the transition to a more distributed leadership approach, but I have also drawn extensively on CLT and ALT in the development of the factors and indicators above. The resulting model represents a theoretical synthesis based on the realities of the cases as discussed in the cross-case analysis above. In this way I have provided an ‘analytic refinement’, meeting the standard of Buchanan’s second aspect of generalizability (2012: 365).

In terms of avoiding bias in the use of case based research, the second of my criteria from chapter 4, I used various methods, described above, to minimise bias from sources such as seeing too much in the evidence, over-emphasis on key individuals and getting too close to the cases (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 263). In analysing complex human systems such as the organisations I used as cases, however, there is a need to identify patterns and understand consequences of actions taken that requires a degree of interpretation by the researcher. I adopted a robust and disciplined approach to both data collection and data analysis, but I also am an agent in both cases in some respects, whether as researcher of consultant, which I will discuss further in the next section.

As I have described in chapter 4 above, I refined my research question during the early and middle stages of my research activity to ensure that I could maintain a credible and transparent view of the data and how it corresponded to the theories I was using in making sense of the data. In so doing I demonstrated a primary commitment to effective research

rather than any preconceived outcomes. I remained open to what the data was saying so that I could draw conclusions with confidence and remain objective in my analysis of each case. I have included 'rich descriptions' of the cases, and 'a variety of theoretical and methodological concepts' in the research project, and have sought throughout to demonstrate intellectual rigour and consistency (Tracy, 2010, cited in Symon, 2012, 211).

Other possible limitations of my research method include a reliance on interviews and the scope of the sample I used for these interviews. I did use observation of particular meetings in both cases to supplement my data, as well as reviewing a range of different documents in both cases. There was a strong emphasis on interview data, however, which was a result of the practicalities of access: it was difficult to get more access for observation and the level of documents to which I had access was limited to what was either in the public domain or made available by each case. Because my research focus was on the human aspects of the transition, I believe the emphasis on interviews was broadly helpful, but I was careful to cross-check quotations from across the 2 levels of interviewee I met and between stage 1 and stage 2.

Regarding the scope of the sample of interviews, I was able to influence the choice of interviewees to a certain extent only. The exec team was self-selecting, and I was able to interview the majority of the team in both cases, at least in the first stage. The wider middle manager sample was agree based on certain criteria, including a range from across the different functional areas, as well as a certain proportion who were considered high performers. This gave me a mix of functions and ability. In further research it would be helpful to interview a reasonable sample of front line contributors, such as academics, administrators or team members from across the brands. This would give a third level of analysis, and provide valuable insight into the front line of each case. I did not go to this

level for reasons of managing the research scope to be realistic, and because my focus was initially on the transition of leadership from senior levels to the wider organisation represented by the middle manager population.

Another possible limitation of my research was the choice of two cases. This can be seen as a small sample. For my research I wanted to dig deep into the nuances of relationships, the nature of influence and the differences over time in the way the leadership populations were interacting. This required a lot of time dedicated to a small number of cases. In future research I would extend this to several further cases in order to increase the level of comparison and the level of generalizability I might claim.

I did not speak to the customers of either organisation, which was another limitation of my research. The intended consequences behind distributing leadership include an improved customer experience. In fact in case M I did interview the head of the student union in the first stage, and gained an interesting perspective from this interview. I was not able to continue in this vein, however, due to the time that would be been involved in extending the interview process to a wider audience. In future research I would also conduct data collection and analysis among the customers.

9.4 Reflexive summary

My final quality criteria described earlier is ‘de-centring the author’, or what Johnson et al describe as ‘has the author reflexively considered their own narrative and elements of its production?’ (Johnson et al, 2006: 131). I described my strategy to ensure that I was not at the centre of my research in chapter 4. In summary, in order to avoid ‘going native’ (Miles, 1994: 263) I held periodic review meetings with key stakeholders including the senior leadership team of each case to help validate the way I was interpreting the data throughout the research process. The senior leaders in both cases were insightful and direct in their feedback, allowing me to continue with a more validated interpretation of the emerging data.

One point of tension that did emerge with case P was the extent to which some interviewees saw me as a consultant rather than a researcher. This came apparent to me when two interviewees asked about what I was getting out of the interviews in terms of future business with the organisation. I sought to reassure them of how I was keeping my consulting activity separate from my research activity, and I believe this satisfied them. They said that they were happy to continue with the interview. But these experiences made me particularly conscious of meeting with the CEO and the Exec team on different dates to discuss the research project from those where I was with them as a consultant.

I also maintained a research diary throughout my research activity which helped in three particular ways: firstly, through writing down my experiences, insights and questions I was able to be more detached in how I developed my research understanding; by collecting these insights over time I was able to identify and correct trends in interpretation that were potentially biased (such as recognising my desire to reach a simple

set of conclusions based on a single theoretical position, rather than the hybrid theoretical synthesis which underpins my conclusions); and thirdly, my diary notes helped me to review progress, issues and insights with my supervisors on a regular basis to maintain a robust research approach. In this way I focused on the cases and what the data was saying, within the context of each case, rather than ‘going native’ (Miles, 1994: 263). With case M there were occasions when academics would express views on the nature of leadership in the university in passing, and I was careful not to record these as research data and to avoid referencing them in my case analysis.

There are several other points of interest as I reflect on the research project I have completed. I have adopted a contextualist perspective in my research. Contextualism provides a pragmatic view of knowledge, with justification dependent on the standards relevant in each context, which in the social research world is multi-faceted and based in part on the interaction, dialogue and perceptions of the people in the organisation.

By developing what I believe was a significant level of openness with the interviewees in both cases over the course of the two stage interview process I was able to explore in some depth their views on what was going on, how they chose to describe agents and activities and their own reactions to the changes in leadership approach which were happening in each case. Through this process of dialogue I believe I was able to help them make sense of their situations with a level of quality and thoughtfulness that helped me then to analyse the dynamics in both cases with greater insight. It was not quite the ‘virtual reality’ Flyvbjerg describes in case study research (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 219), but it was a rich experience and one where the content of interviews at both the senior and middle manager levels were remarkably consistent. Where they were not consistent I was able to delve further to find out why the respondent was describing events in a different way, and to

explore with them why they did so. I am happy to draw on Flyvbjerg again: when reviewing the ‘summarizing and generalization’ of scientific research he quotes Nietzsche: “‘Above all,’ Nietzsche said about doing science, “one should not wish to divest existence of its rich ambiguity”” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 219). In making sense of this ambiguity I was more able to understand how different agents in each case perceived the same event differently, often motivated by the way it had an impact on their personal situations. A power brand MD in case P, for example, saw the move towards a more collaborative approach to be a restriction on their level of independence, whereas a more junior brand MD saw it as an opportunity to be more successful by working with others in the same ‘brand club’ more closely. Context was an important factor in how each agent interpreted events happening around them.

In terms of the outcomes of my research, such as the factors and the indicators, my reflection is that I was surprised more by some than others. As described in the previous chapter, the mix of changes required in the transition to DL is an interesting combination. It suggests a multi-faceted approach to the successful transition, and this is reflected in the range of theories on which I have drawn to help explain the factors. This would suggest to me that the transition is both a response to an increasingly complex world and a complex activity in its own right. We might say that it is not for the feint hearted, or those who do not believe firmly in its efficacy. This was perhaps a key difference between the cases: in case P the senior leader was clear and unambiguous in his commitment to the transition, and all that it implied in terms of personal and organisational change. In case M the VC was less clear and less committed in practice to DL in particular.

My research has been a fascinating experience, providing the opportunity to work alongside two cases over an extended period of time to develop a depth of understanding

about the nature of their leadership journey. It has been a challenging, invigorating and ultimately deeply satisfying experience.

My hope is that the insights that have emerged have added something of value to both the theoretical and practical worlds. For academics I have explored what factors contribute to the success or otherwise of a move towards a more distributed leadership approach. I have also explored the relationship between CLT, DL and ALT in the context of that transition and provided a synthesis that it is my intention explains the main factors influencing the DL transition. For practitioners I have provided insight into the varied factors that can be helpful in considering when planning or supporting a shift towards DL. However, as my perspective is contextual, I am all too aware that any explanatory model is going to be a theoretical approximation to the truth, and that each case is different. The fundamental limitation of any research into human systems in my view is the desire to create a coherent theory that can be used in other circumstances with confidence, when I believe that ‘it depends’.

My intention is to continue to develop the indicators as a questionnaire which will be useful as a diagnostic tool for practitioners to help understand the nature of their current position, and to help guide planning for accelerated transition. I will use robust questionnaire design techniques to ensure it is as reliable and valid as possible, including extensive testing and analysis of the resulting data. This will help to further inform the outcomes of this research project.

I also intend to continue as a practitioner working with client organisations and using the insight from the whole research programme to help them to make progress in developing a leadership approach which will meet their strategic purpose in a complex environment in a

way that is consistent with their guiding values. The themes of distribution, collaboration and adaptation through learning continue to grow in my experience as concerns for ambitious organisations seeking to succeed longer term.

9.5 Conclusion

My research has highlighted several factors that influence the level of success in the transition towards more distributed leadership in large organisations. The factors are hierarchical in nature, starting with senior leader commitment to the transition itself and to being a role model for distributed leadership. Then there are two factors that provide the framework within which leadership can be distributed in a planful way: shared vision and purpose and values based leadership. Finally there are three factors that enable the transition to occur effectively: consistently devolved decision making, collaborative achievement and agility and learning. In combination these six factors help accelerate the transition and create the environment for DL to flourish.

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Appendix 1 – Interview guides

Stage 1 interviews – discussion guide

1. Introductions

- Roles, responsibilities, etc.
- My research focus summary: leadership and employee engagement
Confidential and anonymous

I am working with you as a doctoral research student in the area of leadership and employee engagement. I am conducting interviews with a range of key stakeholders to understand the current status of these topics in this organisation. I will then consolidate all the inputs into a confidential and non-attributable report for you so that you can consider how you might improve your engagement across the organisation.

I am an experienced consultant, with over 20 years' experience working in the fields of leadership and engagement with leading organisations such as Marks & Spencer, InterContinental Hotels, Asda, Orange and AstraZeneca. I have recently spoken at national CIPD conferences on engagement and have contributed to various journals on leadership and engagement.

- How would you describe your role to people outside work?

2. Key Challenges

- What are the 2-3 key strengths of the organisation?
- What are the 2-3 key challenges currently and over the next few years – own area and the organisation as a whole?
- How would you describe the implications for leadership and engagement – own area and organisation?

3. Leadership styles

- How would you describe the current style of leadership - own area and organisation as a whole?
- What trends have you seen over the last few years – and how people have responded?
- Describe the decision making processes now and their impact on people's commitment to the decisions
- Describe how communications work now and its impact on how people receive information?
- Describe the strategic planning approach now and its influence on people's sense of purpose and identification with the organisation

4. Engagement of people (*define engagement as 'a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values'*)

- Please describe current levels of engagement in your own area and across the organisation (*10. Fully engaged to 1. Actively disengaged*)
- Have you seen any changes over recent years? What?

5. Key improvements

- What are your suggestions for improvement? I.e. what is the one key thing you would change to increase how people are engaged – in your own area and across the organisation?
- What would make you more engaged?

Stage 2 interviews – discussion guide

Name:

2. Introduction

Organisation:

- Welcome back and thank you
- Confirm confidential and anonymous

Date:

Confirm I am working with you as a doctoral research student in the area of leadership. I am conducting interviews with a range of key stakeholders to understand the current status of these topics in this organisation.

3. Issues that came up in my earlier interviews

- How has the relationship between the organisation and the brands/faculties changed over the last 18 months?

4. Leadership styles

- How would you describe the current style of leadership in your organisation - own area and organisation as a whole?
- How has this changed since we last spoke? And how have people responded?
- Have the decision making processes changed since we last spoke and what is their impact on people's commitment to the decisions?
- Describe how communications work now and its effectiveness?
- Describe the strategic planning approach now and its influence on people's sense of purpose and identification with the organisation

4. Engagement of people (*define engagement as 'a positive attitude held by the employee towards the organisation and its values'*)

- Please describe current levels of engagement in your own area and across the organisation (*10. Fully engaged to 1. Actively disengaged*)
- Have you seen any changes since we last spoke? What?

5. Key improvements

- What is the one key thing you would change to increase the effectiveness of leadership – in your own area and across the organisation?
- What would make you more engaged?

Appendix 2 - NVivo Template

The template themes used in NVivo are reproduced below.

Theme nodes							
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	
...	11	23	02/07/2013 17:34	SJ	31/07/2013 18:25	SJ	
Alignment	28	76	06/04/2013 15:00	SJH	02/08/2013 16:20	SJ	
Collaboration	24	58	06/04/2013 16:36	SJH	02/08/2013 18:12	SJ	
Context	10	15	04/01/2013 17:20	SJH	02/08/2013 14:06	SJ	
History	9	14	04/01/2013 15:26	SJH	30/07/2013 16:24	SJ	
Strategic challenge externally	23	35	04/01/2013 17:21	SJH	02/08/2013 16:25	SJ	
Customer experience	4	9	25/07/2013 17:09	SJ	01/08/2013 07:41	SJ	
Decision making	25	65	04/01/2013 15:18	SJH	02/08/2013 18:16	SJ	
Discretionary power for decision maki	15	35	06/04/2013 14:55	SJH	01/08/2013 07:33	SJ	
Empowerment	13	23	11/07/2013 12:32	SJ	02/08/2013 18:17	SJ	
SLT decision making process	19	31	04/01/2013 15:18	SJH	02/08/2013 18:20	SJ	
Strategic planning process	33	84	04/01/2013 16:53	SJH	02/08/2013 16:38	SJ	
Effect of transition	3	3	04/01/2013 15:31	SJH	17/07/2013 16:54	SJ	
Implementation of decisions	10	13	04/01/2013 16:46	SJH	02/08/2013 16:36	SJ	
Innovation	9	13	04/01/2013 15:38	SJH	02/08/2013 16:25	SJ	
Engagement	35	184	06/04/2013 14:59	SJH	02/08/2013 14:07	SJ	
Identification	29	74	06/04/2013 15:01	SJH	02/08/2013 16:43	SJ	
Individual contributors	6	6	04/01/2013 15:21	SJH	02/08/2013 16:27	SJ	
Initiative	8	10	06/04/2013 15:03	SJH	31/07/2013 13:10	SJ	
Leadership style	24	51	06/04/2013 15:29	SJH	02/08/2013 16:43	SJ	
Authentic leadership (values-based)	11	18	06/04/2013 15:30	SJH	01/08/2013 06:38	SJ	
Complexity leadership	5	5	06/04/2013 15:31	SJH	16/07/2013 10:51	SJ	
Distributed leadership	26	71	06/04/2013 15:32	SJH	02/08/2013 16:33	SJ	

Theme nodes							
Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By	
Complexity leadership	5	5	06/04/2013 15:31	SJH	16/07/2013 10:51	SJ	
Distributed leadership	26	71	06/04/2013 15:32	SJH	02/08/2013 16:33	SJ	
Middle management	23	23	04/01/2013 15:20	SJH	30/07/2013 16:10	SJ	
MM capability	36	164	04/01/2013 15:20	SJH	02/08/2013 16:44	SJ	
MM performance management	26	43	04/01/2013 16:58	SJH	30/07/2013 15:30	SJ	
Organisation	11	20	04/01/2013 15:23	SJH	31/07/2013 21:45	SJ	
Communications	36	183	04/01/2013 16:49	SJH	02/08/2013 18:11	SJ	
Culture	33	157	04/01/2013 15:24	SJH	02/08/2013 16:45	SJ	
Performance management	20	42	26/05/2013 14:35	SJH	02/08/2013 14:00	SJ	
Scale & structure	26	69	04/01/2013 15:25	SJH	02/08/2013 18:08	SJ	
Strategic clarity	27	82	04/01/2013 15:24	SJH	02/08/2013 16:38	SJ	
Senior leader	3	3	04/01/2013 15:16	SJH	15/07/2013 18:28	SJ	
CEO capability	22	38	04/01/2013 15:16	SJH	02/08/2013 18:42	SJ	
CEO intentions	9	16	04/01/2013 15:16	SJH	22/07/2013 18:06	SJ	
CEO style	21	37	04/01/2013 15:16	SJH	02/08/2013 18:23	SJ	
Senior leadership team	8	11	04/01/2013 15:17	SJH	19/09/2013 16:58	SJ	
SLT behaviour as a team	19	49	04/01/2013 15:17	SJH	02/08/2013 18:46	SJ	
SLT behaviour as individuals	23	41	04/01/2013 15:19	SJH	02/08/2013 18:42	SJ	
SLT capability	28	95	04/01/2013 15:18	SJH	02/08/2013 16:19	SJ	
Theories	1	2	04/01/2013 15:26	SJH	17/07/2013 11:11	SJ	