**Learning networks research legacy**

# Leadership in networks: patterns and practices

**Michael Jopling & David P Crandall, NCSL**

# Leadership in networks: patterns and practices
Michael Jopling and David P Crandall

## Contents

# 1. Networks, leaders and leadership: a reflection

## Introduction

Although networks have been around in one form or another for centuries, their emergence in the field of education as a viable alternative to conventional ways of organising is a fairly recent phenomenon. A mark of the extent to which they have become accepted is the decision by government first to make, and then to deliver on, a commitment to supporting networks through the creation of Primary Strategy Learning Networks in England. It is reasonable to speculate that the confidence shown by this 2004 policy initiative was grounded in the success of one of the most ambitious experiments in intentional network building, the Networked Learning Communities (NLC) programme of the National College for School Leadership.

Historically, arrangements among schools that called themselves 'networks' have been either narrowly focused (eg on improving writing instruction) or practical and rather prosaic (eg co-operative purchasing or maintenance schemes albeit among schools). Few have long histories, given that the typical impetus for creation is the pursuit or promise of additional funds. Some are local in scope, some are national, a few are international. There are requirements for participation, structures to facilitate operations, and role specifications, however traditional. There is usually a stated mission or purpose, expressed in lofty rhetoric.

The aspiration of most networks, be they partnerships with a corporation or a school in another country, is too limited to be of much interest to this enquiry. At a time when many networks exist, an explicit priority on 'learning' as the purpose of a network is unusual. This is not to suggest that going beyond the conduct of meetings or events formally to debrief and reflect with the hope of learning are totally foreign phenomena. Such activities are certainly present in some networks, if not typical. However, to launch a major project like networked learning communities, the explicit purpose of which is *learning* is unique. Furthermore, the conscious and differentiated emphasis of the programme is on learning at multiple levels, radiating from a central concern for students and extending to a responsibility to the larger community of colleagues, rather than the clichéd 'higher student achievement'. In this context, those who accept, seek, or demonstrate leadership are of special interest.

### 1.1 A network's stage of development
When attempting to understand the dynamics of a network, an overlooked aspect is where they are in their development, their relative maturity and stability. This can be represented as a five-stage continuum which characterises a network's progress in the course of its existence (Crandall & Stoll, 2005, p 7). While arrayed as a linear continuum for presentation purposes, cycles forward and back are likely in the real world. The five stages are:

**Exploring** – This initial stage is where people who might get more seriously involved begin to gather basic information with special attention to 'What does this mean for me?'

**Developing** – Here, one would expect to see the emergence of some leaders and a gradual build-up of interest and excitement as well as initial work on the network's structures, etc. A compelling idea will have emerged to energise collaboration.

**Deepening** – At this point, the basic structures and operating parameters of the network have generally been sorted, widespread participation is evident, and focused activity directed at creating learning opportunities and trying out new practices will be well underway.

**Bedding down** – As the network stabilises, widespread participation is underpinned by high levels of trust, clear indications of payoff for staff and schools and benefits for pupils. Frequent communication with a range of stakeholders moves the mature network towards a confident future.

**Sustainable** – As benefits to pupils accumulate and the capacity of staff and school grows, the larger network realises collective rewards, and sets its resource decisions around a priority of maintaining a network that is vibrant. Its projects are regularly reflected upon and often reviewed, and always focused on learning.

That these can be imagined as occurring over a period of time is readily apparent. Thus, if one were observing a number of networks, they might array themselves along this continuum as well. This theme is examined in more detail in the companion legacy paper, *How do school-to-school networks work?* (Stott *et al*, 2006). Since networks are not static endeavours, it is not much of a leap to imagine that the demands of leadership of a given network might vary depending on its stage of development.

The balance of this paper will explore selected aspects of the individuals and their actions. It will first touch briefly on the broad topic of leadership and then turn to those dynamics that seem most important in an enterprise committed to shared and distributed leadership and learning for all. In the subsequent chapters, data drawn from the participants in networked learning communities will build on and interrogate this opening discussion. A concluding section will offer a commentary on the interplay between the chapters and conclude with observations and questions to ponder.

## 1.2 Leadership as a critical element

Interest in leadership goes back centuries, and formal research on the subject has been undertaken for more than 100 years. Despite such apparent staying power, the quest for a single unifying theory about its essential elements based on empirical research eludes consensus. Conceptions rise to prominence from time-to-time, none ever fully displacing its predecessors but adding to the intellectual stew surrounding the subject. Amazon.com lists more than 18,000 titles under the subject. One has only to turn to the third edition of Stodgill's *Handbook of Leadership* (Stodgill & Bass, 1990) to get a sense of the scope of the endeavour. A more recent compilation, *The Nature of Leadership* (Antonakis *et al*, 2004) is more manageable.

We have come a long way from the time when charismatic leadership was dominant, although individuals like General Electric's Jack Welch have achieved celebrity status, at least in the star-smitten United States. Trait theory held sway for a considerable period but more recently, situational leadership and behavioural approaches focused on the day-to-day behaviours of leaders remain in contender position. The discussion that follows aims to use the evidence gathered from the NLC programme to examine the ways in which leading learning networks reflects many of the characteristics of what MacBeath *et al* (1998, p 28) call '*the new meaning of leadership*' in which notions such as paradox, ambiguity and uncertainty become an integral part of the task of leadership. Concepts such as 'transformational leadership' (Leithwood *et al*, 1999; Leithwood, 2005), 'post-transformational leadership' (Day *et al*, 2001), and 'quantum leadership' (Morrison, 2002) have moved us away from the charismatic leader model towards

notions of encouraging latent and lateral leadership and building leadership
capacity at multiple levels. The intention is to examine the extent to which network leadership
in all its manifestations and with all its challenges offers an environment in which the gap
between the rhetoric of new leadership forms and the reality of traditional hierarchical
structures (as opposed to leaders) can be bridged. Transformational leadership is congruent
with the organising principles of the Networked Learning Communities programme, in
particular its requirement that their networks have co-leaders and its emphasis on the notion
of *distributed* leadership. Co-leadership in networks involves experiential and situational
learning: 'learning on the job'. This involves a willingness to facilitate the learning of others and
to recognise and work with, rather than attempt to reconcile, the tensions that are heightened
by operating as a network:

> *'The co-ordinators, or facilitators, or co-leaders of networked learning communities are
> the artisans who keep the net in good order, know which knots are best for what, notice
> the breaks, the fraying threads, and seek to renew them. They watch out for broken
> threads, knot together appropriate activities, put out new threads to new participants
> and initiate new knots, so extending the net. They are net workers who foster and
> promote networked learning.'*

(Jackson, 2004, pp 12-13)

Distributed leadership has been treated in depth and eloquently elsewhere (see for example
Gronn, 2000; Spillane & Sherer, 2004) and need not be repeated here.

## 1.3 What is being 'distributed' in networks?

In reflecting on distributed leadership in networks, the dynamics of most interest seem to be
those of power, passion, perspective and permission. At the outset, it could be predicted that
participants would report that the formal leaders possessed relatively 'more' of each than they.
Over time, different responses would be expected, especially in a network operating with
distributed leadership as a key principle.

**Power** -  While often undiscussed, power issues are invariably in play in any human endeavour
where some individuals can affect the circumstances of others. In traditional
organisations, employer-employee relationships provide the prime arena of conflict. In
social service endeavours there is a tendency to talk as if there are no meaningful
power differentials. Sharing the common cause is supposed to neutralise the reality
that there is always a boss. While the answer to the question, 'Power to do what?' may
vary, the dynamics that are observed as the question gets explored, even if it is
addressed explicitly, are strikingly similar regardless of specific setting. In the case of
networks of schools, the answer is the *power to decide* – to decide such matters as:
What is our purpose? What is our plan? Who will do what? How will resources be
allocated? How will success be determined?

**Passion** - Relatively under-examined in educational contexts, or overshadowed by a focus on
personality or style, it is not just *what* a leader says but *how* it is said that is important.
When we recall Martin Luther King, we certainly remember his words. But it was the
emotion, the passion with which he conveyed his vision that lifted people out of their
lethargy and ignited hope – so, too, in the case of the most effective network leaders.
They believe in what they're involved in, they have embraced the vision of a more
collaborative and morally focused school that truly promotes learning for all, and they
convey that commitment by the way they talk about it.

**Perspective** - By its nature, a network is larger than a single school. But for most participants,
their primary motivation for involvement is rooted in the reality of their individual
school and its challenges. Concern for the larger enterprise is at best secondary and at

worst irrelevant, but for the true potential of a network to be realised, a
larger perspective must become part of the daily reality. Being part of something larger
than oneself, something that is socially significant beyond the walls of one's classroom,
is a new experience for many educators, but until a more all encompassing perspective
is shared, the fabric of a network will not be strong.

**Permission** - Most of us have been socialised from an early age to seek permission before doing
certain things: as a child, it may be permission to leave the dinner table; as a student,
it may be permission to leave the classroom to go to the bathroom; as a teacher, it
may be to bring a live chicken into class; as a head, it may be to close the school early
and organise a school-wide field trip. Educators are especially prone to a 'May I …'
mentality that can lead one to becoming a risk-averse adult. Showing or taking
initiative is more likely to result in rebuke than reward, reinforcing a culturally-
supported passivity that is the antithesis of innovation. Participation in a network
provides protective cover for experimentation because one is not acting alone: the
network creates a 'tent of tolerance' for mistakes that would otherwise invite criticism.

If these dynamics are active in a network, and can both be seen as subject to decisions by
formal leaders as well as participants and as varying or changing depending on the network's
stage of development, what else might affect them?

## 1.4 Engagement with the external environment

Leadership does not operate in a vacuum. Leaders operate in multiple environments, the
interpretation of which is crucial to success, and involvement in networks only increases this
multiplicity. The multi-faceted external environment imposes constraints because one is clearly
not in control of events or the actions of others that might impinge on the specific arena of
action, the network. Network leaders come into contact with the external environment every
day and must develop perspective about its relevance to the network. Indeed, not to engage
with an ever-expanding external environment risks missing information vital to the network's
well-being and eventual success.

Those who engage in such excursions, armed with the perspective of a network leader, serve as
scouts whose reports back to their followers provide those individuals with a deeper
understanding of factors relevant to their network's work. The leader is an interpreter of such
events and, to the extent that the interpretation rings true, enhances his credibility with the
members of the network. The beauty of distributed leadership as it evolves is that the
leadership burden is shared. Potentially *all* members of a network can contribute to an
informed perspective that is developed as a result of shared engagement with the external
environment.

In the early stages, the formal leaders will be the primary actors or initiators. They have been
given *permission* to convene and communicate the opportunity represented by the network.
The initial tasks involve formulating a specific purpose, securing commitment and making
initial plans. They bring a larger *perspective* to the group about the vision of a network devoted
to learning at multiple levels which they communicate, ideally, with clarity and *passion*. As the
designated leaders, they obviously possess *power* in the eyes of the prospective followers.

Perhaps the most critical thing for leaders to do is listen well to their followers, for it is they
who will carry the burden of bringing the network to life and realising its intent. Structuring
meaningful dialogue and framing questions that elicit concerns and make explicit the
perspectives of the followers are essential to successful network leadership. The importance of
listening, coupled with an appreciation of development stages and the question of what is
being distributed by leaders of networks brings us finally to an examination of behaviours.

## 1.5 Facilitative or directive leadership?

A rather 'macho' image is often attached to our preconceptions of leaders. They are leaders not followers, doers not thinkers, actors not re-actors, initiators not responders etc. Fortunately, these dominant characterisations and preferences are not prevalent in networks. In fact, the most successful network leaders are those who can adjust their behaviour to suit the stage of development of their network and its members. The result, if observed over time, should reveal a diminishing of directive, initiating behaviours and an increase in facilitating behaviours.

As the network develops, and the designated leaders' offer to share leadership and *power* is taken up by others and translates into giving themselves *permission* to exhibit leadership behaviours, their investment or ownership of the enterprise will be reflected in an increase in their *passion* (about the network and its mission) as well as a broadening perspective. As the big picture becomes a *perspective* that they fully embrace and in so doing enrich, the need for forceful leadership lessens dramatically and self-direction becomes the norm. Over time, assuming steady progress on the substantive agenda of the network, we would expect to see network meetings where identifying the formally designated leaders would require reference to an 'official' memorandum – it would not be obvious from observing the group.

## 1.6 Leadership of and in networked learning communities

The evidence from the Networked Learning Communities programme suggests that, when it works well, co-leadership has the qualities of being anti-hierarchical (in contrast with traditional notions of school leadership) and non-directive. Networks are allied, not opposed, to the organisations from which they are constituted and they present different needs and challenges. Co-leaders have benefited from the knowledge they have brought from their previous leadership experiences and fused it with what they have learned about leadership through their involvement in networks. They use their authority when they have to, notably when networks are being established, but they are much more likely to use influence, persuasion and collective decision-making. The next chapter of this paper, on co-leadership and distributed leadership in networks, will attempt to examine this in more detail. Although some reference will be made to the experiences of headteachers who may not have formal leadership roles in the network, the paper will focus on the experiences and practice of co-leaders of networks and network members, or middle leaders, in formal or informal distributed leadership roles.

The equation of co-leadership with co-ordination and facilitation underlines the fact that the notion of leading networks is misleading in some ways because it suggests that a sense of individual agency is not applicable in many networks. If it is envisaged as facilitative co-leadership, however, the retention of the notion of leadership is combined with the sense of collaboration and co-construction that plays such an important symbolic role, as well as sharing the burden of co-ordinating the network. The programme's emphasis on leadership learning is also crucial in reminding participants that learning operates at all levels in the network. The third chapter of this paper examines how leadership learning has played out in networks, followed by a concluding look at the influence of network leadership on school leaders, schools and their interaction with the wider system.

## 2. Leadership in networks: co-leadership and distributed leadership

### 2.1 The importance of interaction to network leadership

Before looking in detail at how specific forms of leadership have developed in the Networked Learning Communities programme, it should be noted that network leadership in general depends on interaction, on the interplay of relationships between network members. To illustrate this, Spillane and Sherer's framework for distributed leadership has been used in this paper as a way of making sense of the multiple ways in which this interaction operates. Although Spillane and Sherer's concern is with distributed leadership, as the remainder of this paper should demonstrate, there seem to be sufficient areas of overlap between his conception and shared network leadership to justify its use and adaptation. The model has three types of distribution (Spillane & Sherer, 2004, p 18):

**Collaborated distribution** denotes where one leader's practice becomes the basis for another leader's practice and vice-versa. The practice takes place in the interaction among leaders and there is a reciprocal interdependency.
(This is reflected in collaborative leadership operating at multiple levels.)

**Collective distribution** refers to two or more leaders who work separately but interdependently in pursuit of a shared goal, and their interdependent activities generate leadership practice. (This covers additive leadership where leadership activity may be separate but its sum is greater than its parts.)

**Co-ordinated distribution** denotes leadership practice in which different leadership tasks must be performed in a particular sequence for the execution of some leadership function – the interdependency among tasks and the leadership practices responsible for executing these tasks is sequential. (This suggests leadership by specialisation, typically, but not exclusively, exemplified by initially directive forms of distributed leadership in networks.)

In reality, these characterisations are interdependent: leadership will move between the three types and will be made up of both formal and informal leadership activities. They do seem, however, to provide a useful frame through which to view the patterns and practices of shared and distributed leadership in networks and to address one of this paper's fundamental questions: Is network leadership really leadership at all? The next section of this paper examines co-leadership in detail.

### 2.2 Co-leadership in networks

The pragmatic impulse behind the co-leadership model is simply that the job is too large and complex to be done by a single leader. The fact that co-leadership was one of the non-negotiable elements of the Networked Learning Communities programme design, suggests a conviction that networks need dedicated, shared leadership in order to function. Relatively little guidance was given to new NLCs on how the co-leadership model would operate (Anderson *et al*, 2005, p 5) because it was intended to be a developmental role, mutually co-created by leaders and their networks. This section looks at co-leadership in networks in practice and some of the characteristics that network leaders have developed. It aims to explore the experiences of network leaders and attempt to answer the following overarching questions:

- What does co-leadership in networks look like?
- Can you lead networks without sharing leadership?

After providing some detail about the kinds of people who have been co-leaders and their descriptions of the role, the section will investigate co-leadership as facilitative leadership. It will do this by focusing on key practices: creating vision; brokering; building momentum and consensus, measuring progress; and managing complexity and conflict.

Networked learning communities were required to operate on a co-leadership model, at least for the first year, in which two or more people provided strategic leadership and facilitation for the network as a whole. There is no evidence of networks abandoning the co-leadership model, at least formally, after the initial year and networks are exploring ways of adapting and expanding co-leadership in their new collaborative arrangements, for example extending it to middle leaders of enquiry groups (Cantwell, 2006, p 5). Co-leaders have been characterised as '*key knowledge brokers between external programme developers and colleagues within the schools*' (Anderson *et al*, 2005, p 4). While most co-leaders have been headteachers, a range of people in other positions have also taken on the role, including assistant headteachers, deputy headteachers, classroom teachers, SENCOs, local authority representatives and HEI staff. As the table below demonstrates, the overwhelming majority of co-leaders are based in schools and there are more female co-leaders than male, a proportion which has increased during the course of the programme:

| Co-leader location | 2003 | 2003% | 2004 | 2004% | 2005 | 2005% |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Home based | 30 | 9.4% | 5 | 1.7% | 11 | 3.5% |
| HEI based | 14 | 4.4% | 11 | 3.6% | 7 | 2.2% |
| Local authority based | 22 | 6.9% | 17 | 5.6% | 21 | 6.7% |
| School based | 253 | 79.3% | 270 | 89.1% | 274 | 87.5% |
| | | | | | | |
| Co-leader sex | | | | | | |
| Female | 181 | 56.7% | 175 | 56.1% | 186 | 59.2% |
| Male | 133 | 41.7% | 130 | 41.7% | 126 | 40.1% |
| Unknown | 5 | 1.6% | 7 | 2.2% | 2 | 0.6% |

### How co-leaders describe themselves

The intention in presenting leaders' self-descriptions is to learn something about the ways in which co-leaders regard themselves. Although it is important to note that networks are likely to attract the kind of people who are most open to the notion of collaboration and therefore will benefit from the opportunities it offers, this should not minimise their. The NLC programme design imagined co-leaders as '*context-specific facilitators*'; '*capacity builders*; '*leadership developers*'; '*co-ordinators*'; and '*communicators*' (Worrall, 2003, p 3). Co-leaders and other leading network figures interviewed as NLCs were being established talked about passion, commitment and drive. They saw some overlap between the role of leader and lead learner in which the role is facilitative, raising questions rather than offering answers. Many of the characteristics they described clustered around creating shared purpose, focusing on '*encouragement, development, entitlement*' (Co-leader, N270) rather than authority. Others spoke of energy, democracy and being enthusiastic and '*slightly manipulative*' (Co-leader, N263), reflecting the idea that some vestiges of direction may be useful in the early stages. Many of these qualities reflect Court's association of co-leadership in schools with shared social responsibility (Court, 2004, p 187).

Later interviews emphasised the notion of leader as model: "*Talk it, walk it, do it, show it, let people have a go at*" (Co-leader, N211), along with more practical co-ordination issues, for example overcoming common barriers such as lack of time and commitment. Flexibility in approach was also recognised. One successful co-leader characterised his contribution in the following terms: "*Persuasion, brokerage, idea generation, monitoring, designing structures within which things are going to work, relationships with other networks, relationship with the NLG,*

*production of artefacts in some cases*" (Co-leader, N311). Network co-leadership
seems to require improvisation: "*I didn't have a preconception of how I would co-lead and the
roles kind of developed over the time we've been doing*" (Co-leader, N278), and qualities such as
resilience, resourcefulness and belief have also been highlighted, along with motivational and
influencing skills: "*It's just kind of taking that facilitation role wider really*" (Co-leader, N278).

## What does co-leadership in networks look like in practice?

Church *et al*'s (2002) notion of 'facilitative leadership' in networks has been chosen to provide a
theoretical frame in which to examine the development of co-leadership in networks. In this
paper, it is suggested that the enduring effects of hierarchical school leadership create a
tension in networks of schools which networks must mitigate or exploit. One of the ways they
do this is by dispersing leadership throughout the network, rather than locating it in a small
number of key individuals. Building capacity through building relationships in this way
characterises all the elements in the following table, which adapts the original concept of
facilitative leadership slightly, and exemplifies them with some of the co-leadership practices
which have come through most strongly from the evidence:

| Elements of facilitative leadership | | Co-leader practices which examine and exemplify this |
|---|---|---|
| Creating a vision and enabling network members to participate and contribute | Building capacity by building relationships | Creating structures; modelling learning; encouraging risk-taking; breaking habits; legitimising voice of all network members |
| Brokering and focusing on input rather than control through creating opportunities for networked learning | | Challenging notions; acting as information broker (Wohlstetter *et al*, 2003); developing new language |
| Balancing the creation of forward momentum with the generation of consensus | | Mobilising people, creating alignment and encouraging ownership; modelling learning; sharing responsibility and power |
| Monitoring progress | | Shared responsibility and commitment to network's purposes; enquiry orientation |
| Understanding the dynamics of conflict and the complexity of networks | | Addressing turbulence, tensions and paradoxes of leading networks |

## Creating vision

Evidence from interviews with co-leaders and other leading network figures from the beginning
of the programme reflects their pragmatic approaches to establishing a vision for the network
and their attempts to model the learning and encourage the '*creative abrasion*' (Leonard-
Barton, 1995, p 89) necessary to introduce new perspectives. The drivers behind this shift have
been described in the following terms:

- '*Working in a network of schools generates new objectives for leadership.*
- *Working in a network of schools creates new conditions in which these objectives might be achieved.*' (Anderson *et al*, 2005, p 3)

This echoes Harris and Lambert's emphasis that: '*The central leadership task is therefore to
generate the conditions and create the climate for improvement to be initiated and sustained*'
(Harris & Lambert, 2003, p 7). Part of this is using a vision to co-ordinate on Spillane and
Sherer's model, creating social capital and developing '*cultures that support networked learning
such as high levels of trust, mutuality and openness, freedom for risk-taking, sense of ownership*

*over process, egalitarianism, mutual respect and respect for diverse perspectives'*
(Kubiak & Bertram, 2004, p 6). Co-leaders saw themselves as "*guardians, really, of the vision*"
(Co-leader, N245) once they had realised that it was impossible to do everything. They often
acted as the network's driving force: "*I suppose you've got to feel you're on a mission really, so
that there's something that fires you up and make you stick at it*" (Co-leader, N245), reflecting the
passion already identified by David Crandall. Others saw their role as prioritising from a clear
vision, creating flexible structures and processes in partnership with other network members.
Introducing wider perspectives and avoiding prescription were also seen to be valuable,
although this was not necessarily viewed as appropriate at the early stages of establishing a
network, where co-ordinated approaches were often used: "*initially the co-leadership had to be
in some ways – it's not the word I'm looking for – but slightly dictatorial* "(Co-leader, N237).

However, the Networked Learning Group's enquiry into adult learning in 2004 found that
strategic planning of adult learning and continuing professional development (CPD) by leaders
of networks was still at an early and limited stage in most cases. The more successful networks
adopted one of two strategies: '*either gaining an early commitment to a broad focus which each
school could then develop in relation to its own needs, or incrementally moving towards an
agreed set of themes from which schools could select a number to pursue in depth*' (Hadfield *et al*,
2005b p 11). It also found that '*successful networks quickly move away from ad hoc
arrangements and into the realm of strategic planning. Leaders of schools and networks need to
be the drivers of this planning*' (Hadfield *et al*, 2005b, p 32).

As the networks developed, co-leaders began to take a broader view, abandoning some
directive habits in favour of more collective and collaborative approaches to shaping the vision
and culture of the network. One co-leader spoke, not without frustration, of his network's
'European Union' model of leadership:

> "*Everyone is an autonomous state, if you like, in a school and they can ultimately do
> what they want to do. The power of veto is quite strong. So that's the difference, whereas
> in my own school, as long as you get a consensus behind you, you can do most things.*"
> (Co-leader, N181)

By this stage, co-leaders were speaking of bringing their ideas about structures and vision to
the network to talk to its members to get them to co-shape them. The co-leadership model
allowed leaders to bring complementary skills to the network, as in this example of a network
with three co-leaders, which demonstrates how a co-ordinated approach can function as a
precursor to more collaborative activity:

> "*So while it's expected that I will have the vision, have the understanding of what the big
> whole process is about, they will help to make sure that we've got the evidence. So
> between us, we've got a visionary and a mover and a shaker and a completer-finisher.*"
> (Co-leader, N188).

This has already taken us quite a distance from the heroic leader model.

The most recent set of interviews with leading network figures talks about the need to
"*articulate the vision and keep articulating it*" (Co-leader, N296). The language used has shifted
subtly, but significantly, away from a unified vision: "*I ended up being the person who set the
values and expectations, and I think it only works like that, I think people have to have confidence
in you having a very clear vision that you persistently go back to*" (Co-leader, N247). Another
leader spoke of the importance of setting the right culture and tone. These remarks suggest
that network leaders gradually adopt a wider view as network activities proliferate and
leadership is dispersed, recognising that the pursuit of a single vision is no longer appropriate.
As some of the preceding comments suggest, one of the indicators of growing network maturity

may be the movement from minority visions, however flexible, towards dynamic, mutual, *enacted* values.

## Brokering

Network leaders have an important interpretative role in facilitating knowledge and relationships, challenging established notions and developing a language for network engagement and leadership. Network leaders act as cross-cultural brokers, drawing on expertise, evidence and knowledge from outside and, increasingly, inside the network: "*I think as a facilitator you just help things to happen, to take place, where I think as a leader, you have to drive them much more, and there are times when you do both*" (Co-leader, N296). Achieving this balance between shifting roles such as facilitation and leadership is difficult but crucial and depends on building contacts and establishing good lines of communication to move the network towards more collective and collaborative activity (Co-leader, N278).

Interviews with co-leaders after almost two years of the programme offer more mature reflection. As co-leaders became skilled at brokering new perspectives in the network, there is an increasing recognition of the shifting roles noted above as collective responsibility is established: "*Sometimes I feel like a bit like a coach, and a bit like a mentor sometimes and sometimes like a facilitator, but we still have that shared responsibility*" (Co-leader, N188). Others felt they were becoming "*a centralised point of knowledge*" (Co-leader, N196). The responsibility for attempting simultaneously to adopt these multiple roles is overwhelming at times: "*As co-leader we've actually got to come up with ideas, initiatives, strategies, things we can put in place which suit them, but which they can all use, and that's quite hard*" (Co-leader, N278). By this stage, co-leaders were speaking of their role in terms of clarification, of seeing the big picture: '*Co-leadership helps to synthesise the choices that need to be made*' (Holmes & Hart, 2005, p 11), with the co-leadership model enacting this synthesis.

In more recent interviews, network leaders speak of a range of brokerage strategies: "*It's just about making connections. It's just talking to people, having relationships, and finding out what they need, and then scrabbling round in my mind for what might help*" (Co-leader, N270). Some of these strategies are essentially aimed at distributing leadership by moving people into collective and collaborative decision-making: "*I don't like the word empower – but give them control of the situation so that they feel they are the shapers of services rather than [the local authority] coming in and doing it to them*" (Co-leader, N258). Research has emphasised the importance of the lead learner role in facilitating this collaborative shaping (N258, Enq03). By this stage, co-leaders are beginning to broker network relationships beyond networks into the wider system and their increasing influence is cited more frequently. This has important ramifications for the way network leadership operates: '*If leadership is an instance of influence, then, like influence, it need not be expressed in ways that are obvious to the naked eye*' (Gronn, 2000, p 330). This notion of invisible influence is one to which this paper will return.

## Building momentum and consensus

Evidence from interviews with network leaders, facilitators and co-ordinators from towards the beginning of the programme focused inevitably on the challenges facing leaders in mobilising people in a network in David Crandall and Louise Stoll's 'exploring' and 'developing' phases:

> '*This image of leadership is one of mobilising people to understand the problems they face and to tackle these problems together. This can only be achieved if leaders demonstrate emotional sensitivity and intelligence in their interactions with others.*' (Harris, 2003, p 22)

The drive towards building common purpose and sharing ownership is led by co-leaders at this stage who at the same time use the network's focus to begin to increase collaboration and create alignment between schools in the network, often by emphasising inclusiveness: "*I've got*

*to make it cohere. I've got to. So the best thing, rather than having a group of six schools who were the networked learning community which would have been really divisive, I want to bring everybody into that to make it eleven schools*" (Co-leader, N226). Research has identified the external pressure on schools in this network, which forced it to focus on improving coherence '*by increasing teachers' repertoire to respond to student needs and thus increased their confidence*' (N226, Enq04). This suggests that networks built momentum '*by drawing new partners into the network, built continuity and coherence through negotiating shared purpose and policy and created opportunities for teachers to connect*' (Kubiak & Bertram, 2004, p 12). It is at this stage that co-leaders have focused on '*building social capital through collegiality and collaboration*' (Worrall, 2003, p 5), a process in which again co-leadership has functioned as a model. There is evidence from some co-leaders that they regretted failing to spread ownership widely enough in the early stages because it made it more difficult to draw on extended leadership capacity later on.

Developing shared language is another means of creating consensus and coming to terms with the complexity of networks. In one network, the creation of '*a language of common understanding*' (N247, Enq03) could be said to have brought power and permission together. One co-leader has spoken of the "*oxymoronic theory of leadership that you have to pull off the reconciliation of opposite tensions*", developing this further by stating that:

> "*You need to think outrageously and yet act calmly at the same time, and if you lose either one of those dynamics, and you get either one of those out of balance, the whole thing becomes either dead or completely spirals out of control.*" (Co-leader, N311)

The other side of this is attending to what others are saying: "*listening in a way that isn't tokenistic*" (Co-leader, N258), reflecting David Crandall's introduction. This image of achieving dynamic balance summarises the challenge quite succinctly, while the risk of losing control introduces the notion of barriers to consensus-building. Before examining some of these barriers in more detail, the next section will briefly look at the central notion of reciprocity.

### Building momentum through reciprocity

Reciprocity is a term that Sergiovanni uses, invoking Linda Lambert, to characterise leadership's capacity '*to construct meanings that lead to common purposes*' (Sergiovanni, 2001, p 41). It is not, however, a notion that fits easily with traditional notions of leadership: '*The language fails us here, because the terminology that comes most readily to the surface in discussions of policy and management is the language of control rather than the language of reciprocity and mutual dependency*' (Elmore, 2000, p 24). The evidence seems to suggest that as networks develop, power and permission combine and evolve into co-dependency or "*leadership by consent*" (Co-leader, N269) in which traditional notions of leading and following no longer hold: '*the abandonment of fixed leader–follower dualisms in favour of the possibility of multiple, emergent, task-focused roles necessitates a reconceptualisation of the nature of influence and its relation to activity*' (Gronn, 2000, p 325). One of the ways in which co-leaders build trust and transparency is by modelling mutual activity such as collaborative enquiry, in a way which would not be possible in a single leader structure: "*We've done a lot of talking about basic relationship building, so these ideas of openness, trust – reciprocity is a word that we've used and laughed about it because it's quite an interesting word*" (Co-leader, N258). This forces co-leaders to recognise they are dependent on others' leadership and participation in the network in a way that does not occur in schools: "*The vulnerability of all your networking is that you are dependent on having those figures [enthusiasts], and you've got to support them and at the same time you've got to provide the challenge, getting that right*" (Co-leader, N269). Evidence shows that teacher involvement in networks depends to a large extent on the degree of their headteacher's commitment (Hadfield *et al*, 2005b, p 32). However, co-leaders have suggested that networks' combination of modelling and partnership offers a potential solution: "*It has to be about co-construction. Building concepts and understanding together. We have to model*

© NCSL, 2006

*through our decision-making a way of working that is collaborative"* (Co-leader, quoted in Holmes & Hart, 2005, p14).

### Barriers to building momentum

It would be misleading to suggest that co-leadership in networks is straightforward. The preceding discussion has already implied some of the barriers, such as restricting engagement or failing to develop a common language. Barriers occur both inside and outside the network:

> *"So that was me intensively working with a group, and one of the things was developing social relationships and just seeing how that could break down quite a hostile culture in a school and enable positive learning outside of department walls."* (Co-leader, N289)

As networks moved into the deepening and bedding-down phases, there is evidence of network leaders becoming more aware that networks do not develop in linear ways and that different phases require different responses from networks and their leaders. There was also a growing recognition of the danger of co-leader fatigue, particularly if networks do not ease the demands made of co-leaders by building lateral leadership capacity (N289, Enq03). Some of this stems from the pressure of external forces such as Ofsted inspections when network leaders may have to reduce the time they can devote to the network. In such cases, the co-leadership structure acts as a '*shock absorber'* (Anderson *et al*, 2005, p 14), especially if there are more than two co-leaders, enabling the network to adapt and renew itself. This echoes Gunter's contrast between self-managing teams and self-organising networks in, and between, schools (Gunter, 1997, p 103). There is evidence that less resilience is built up where networks are overly reliant on a single co-leader, as the following vignette demonstrates:

---

**VIGNETTE 1: Reinforcing the co-leadership model**

"*When I first read the bidding documentation for [the network] I was struck by the bid coming from two obviously able and committed deputy heads. The fact that I found that one of them had already been appointed to headship was something I almost anticipated. The other co-leader could do the same thing. The model of two co-leaders in this network became very fragile even before they attended their first co-leaders' meeting. The group has wrestled with this issue and established a co-leadership group which includes the remaining deputy head co-leader, two headteachers and an in-school network co-ordinator.*" (Taken from N315, Enq03)

---

Research into network development has found that flexible structures are necessary: '*Network leaders attempted to design elements of their networks but remained open to the emergent properties of their network'* (Kubiak & Bertram, 2004, p 7). As a result, a range of voices far beyond the formal leadership of the network has been legitimised: "*I wouldn't say I've done a lot of formal leadership, but within our group, when we're having discussion and things, everybody's voices, we're all able to say things, we don't feel any one person is leading everybody else and not giving them a chance*" (Headteacher and former Co-leader, N271). Engaging teachers in action research had a significant impact in that network in spreading ownership and overcoming the early hostility identified above (N271, Enq04). One of the ways in which networks can do this is by encouraging risk-taking and thus subverting the 'permission' culture of schools and educators which David Crandall has already identified. Risk-taking depends on mobilising large numbers of people and creating momentum: *"In essence it's about trying to keep people going as much as possible, trying to keep people excited as much as possible with what's possible, and trying to take the lid off people's imaginations and allowing people to risk-take"* (Co-leader, N311).

### Progress

The previous section began by suggesting that evaluating progress or effectiveness in networks is a complex task. Accountability in the recognised sense does not operate because the unit of accountability is not the network, but its constituent schools. Thus, it is extremely difficult for

networks and network leaders directly to connect improvements in student attainment, or even teacher retention, with networked activity. Although many networks have employed external consultants formally to evaluate their progress, network leaders see the network as a space in which they have '*permission to take risks'* and '*ignore certain things'* (Jopling & Cotgreave, 2006), notions which do not correspond with traditional ideas of accountability. Indeed, the commitment to shared responsibility that has already emerged as a feature of the co-leadership model suggests that these traditional notions may be too narrow to be more than starting points in the context of learning networks: '*It is essential, therefore, that the whole staff should be involved in a process of evaluating practice, so that their views are similarly valued*' (Andrews *et al*, p 9). This begins to resemble more ambitious notions like Lauren Resnick's concept of '*two-way accountability*' (Resnick, quoted in Jackson & Street, 2005b, p 63). This issue is discussed further in 'Securing accountability' in a later section of this paper.

It is important to emphasise again the role played by enquiry in monitoring progress. Enquiry has been described by one network leader as the 'DNA' of networks, and the development of enquiry-mindedness on all levels of the network is crucial in this context. The explicit connection between enquiry and networks' pupil learning focus underlines this: "*I feel very committed. I'm extremely accountable because I'm accountable to my pupils really*" (Deputy, N192). Collaborative enquiry also creates collaborative evaluation in multiple forms: "*And it also involved sort of co-planning, co-teaching, you know, co-evaluating and popping in and out of each of those classrooms doing stuff together*" (Co-leader, N226), which accompanied the network's '*significant shift in leadership focus to teaching and learning*' and distribution of leadership by creating learning strategy managers (N226, Enq04). It involves those characteristics associated with questioning, problem-solving, reflection and knowledge-creating that are associated with learning at all levels, but particularly among leaders. What network leaders in effective networks claim to have relished is having the space to experiment, backed up by the trust that has been established in the network through the devolution of power from the network's co-leaders:

> "*Now what was great about the way in which the NLG allowed us to set up our networks was that if somebody came along with an idea like that, we were not to get on the phone to anybody, and we were not to call the facilitator and say this is a good idea, can we do this? which you do have to. And this is one of the key distinctions between this process and the special school process where everything has to come back to the plan and everything has to come back to the outcomes that you've featured in the plan.*" (Co-leader, N311)

## Complexity and conflict

As the previous quotation hints, many of the activities and tendencies that network leaders use to create momentum, consensus and additional capacity, such as encouraging risk-taking and subversion, also create conflict and magnify complexity. Network leaders have become skilled at recognising, managing and even exploiting the complexity that networks seem to magnify. It is interesting that networks, rather than more linear strategies, have been identified as the means of reconciling school improvement with complexity theory (Morrison, 2002, p 117). Networks of schools increase complexity because they are focused on achieving change, and in the process create challenges around areas such as co-ordinating multiple agendas and stakeholder groups; addressing networks' foundation on social interaction; and reconciling competing policy agendas at national and local levels. This paper does not have the scope to examine the repercussions of all of these elements but will concentrate on those that network leaders have emphasised. It is noticeable that they seem, in many cases, to have been able to make sense, and sometimes take advantage of, this complexity:

> "*What it does is, it tackles another issue which we raised earlier about understanding and appreciating and recognising complexity, but knowing that in terms of action, in terms of*

*doing something and making a change you have to have clarity, you have
to have a simpler picture and you have to have a clear focus and set of standards, and it
provides that. It recognises that complexity but, in terms of action and doing something,
it achieves that goal as well."*

(Co-leader, N262)

This echoes Fullan's comment that '*effective leaders tolerate enough ambiguity to keep the
creative juices flowing, but along the way […] they seek coherence*' (Fullan, 2001, p 6).

In the network referred to above, the co-leader has focused on both creating leadership
opportunities across the network and inclusivity: '*This flexibility on the part of the network is
indicative of the vision that each school should be a professional learning community and the
network should therefore allow each partner the opportunity to respond to the needs of its
immediate community*' (Worrall & Crowe, 2006a).

Is there something about co-leadership in networks that encourages this kind of clarity? Earlier
research suggested that uncertainty '*may also be viewed positively as a way of trying new
approaches to leadership*' (Anderson, 2005, p 17). Sergiovanni is informative in this context,
returning us to the earlier power/permission dynamic: '*The management of paradox is easier
when leaders look to ideas, values and visions of the common good as a moral source of authority
for what they do and when they know the difference between power over and power to*'
(Sergiovanni, 2001, p 53). Networks' foundation on collaborative common purpose and shift of
direction towards 'power to' may explain their capacity for engaging positively with complexity.
One co-leader has emphasised the importance of the '*merging and blurring of titles and roles*'
(N236), which is a response to the multiple demands that are made on networks of schools and
highlights networks' capacity to challenge hierarchies. The task is essentially that which has
been used to characterise post-transformative leadership: '*constantly and consistently managing
several simultaneously competing sets of tensions successfully*' (Day *et al*, 2001, p 52). The tension
between school hierarchy and network fluidity is one of the most visible:

> " *I think that there's always this tension between living in this ideal world of networked
> learning communities and that realisation that actually every head in every school is
> mainly focusing on their school and what they want to do. And we've made a lot of
> inroads.*" (Co-leader, N196)

However, enquiry saw the network as having helped to '*make sense of the complexity of a
number of strands of local and national policy in particular, the Key Stage Three Strategy and the
local authority-wide focus on Assessment for Learning*' (N196, Enq04). Other leaders speak of a
growing resilience, which Gunter has preferred to a concern for stability (Gunter, 1997, p 103),
and the importance of both recognising boundaries and looking beyond them. This is closely
linked to the need to learn and unlearn new relationships and explore new perspectives and
new areas of knowledge: '*The uncertainty of the role of co-leader is seen as an advantage because
it provides a way of breaking "old" models and concepts of leadership*' (Anderson, 2005, p 8).

Co-leadership itself is a source of complexity. In the early stages of network development, the
emergent nature of the co-leadership model created turbulence, particularly as network
leaders attempted to extend leadership capacity both vertically and horizontally. This caused
both conflict and '*tension between different co-existing factors, such as, role identity; role and
organisational performance; values, beliefs and execution*' (Anderson & Thomas, 2004, p 9),
although it is important to note that there is no evidence that all co-leaders have experienced
this. The following vignette outlines some of the issues that made co-leadership problematic in
one network:

---

**VIGNETTE 2: Barriers to co-leadership (N196)**

There have been some significant difficulties in establishing the work of the community that have been barriers for the co-leadership. Especially problematic has been the need to engage a wide representation at programme-level (national and regional) learning events. This is a pressing challenge for co-leaders (and for the NLG, because I am convinced that there is powerful learning taking place in [the area] that needs to be shared widely). My early reflections on why this situation has emerged are based upon the place that co-leaders occupy within the local authority – they enjoy a more limited scope for independent decision-making than those co-leaders in a school leadership position – and the clarity of perception that network heads have over the role of the co-leader/Key Stage Three co-ordinator – one area of work is compulsory while one is not.
(Taken from N196, Enq04)

---

The fact that networks are founded on personal, professional and social relationships also means that these multiple perspectives create conflict and uncertainty:

> "Whereas in a network there isn't the job description, there is no sort of designated role and so you're making it up as you go along. And that's alright as long as everybody making it up as they go along is all making up the same thing, or roughly the same thing. And it's when people have different perspectives of your role that I guess you can get into conflict. So that's where the unpredictability bit, I guess, can come in." (Co-leader, N296)

This is explored in more detail in the chapter on leadership learning. Networks themselves reflect the uncertainty of this 'learning by doing' approach, and one network leader identified the creativity of learning networks at their most effective with the "*ebb and flow between tensions*" (Co-leader, N296). Networks also mirror the plural nature of the roles within them, in that a network exists at the intersection of multiple networks and collaborative initiatives.

Before moving into a discussion of distributed leadership, it is important to return to this section's opening question:

- Can you lead networks without sharing leadership?

The evidence suggests that the co-leadership model has been effective because it has allowed networks to apply it in practice in multiple ways. This has allowed them to make sense of the complexity of networked learning but also to '*fundamentally alter perceptions of leadership, resulting in a qualitatively different approach which both reflects the logic of networking and adds capacity at all levels*' (Anderson *et al*, 2005, p 13). There is no evidence of networks formally abandoning the co-leadership model, and while many networks may have what might informally be termed a 'key' co-leader, research shows that they are still supported by one or more less visible co-leaders, as well as by other leaders in the network. The value of the co-leadership model is indicated further by the fact that some co-leaders have emphasised its potential for leading schools. It has been suggested that shared leadership would transfer well to those aspects of school leadership that are concerned with the kinds of complexity that networks both create and mitigate:

> "I think co-leadership would work very well on curriculum issues, learning and teaching particularly, whereas I think on some of the other issues which are sometimes on a more mundane level but absolutely vital – things like which member of staff goes where in the academic year and remember in a special school, you're talking about three to four times as many assistants as teachers –. somebody has to have the final say on that." (Co-leader, N237)

However, even shared network leadership puts considerable strain on the individuals involved unless they build the additional capacity indicated above, as the following comment from the first annual review report on NLCs emphasises:

> *'NLCs may need to invest in the development of leadership skills to ensure that the early momentum of the networks is maintained and capitalised on in future years. Investing energy and skill in a small number of leaders is a risky strategy, as leadership change or burn-out will then have huge impact.'* (Hadfield *et al*, 2005b, p 24)

The next section looks in more detail at how distributed leadership has developed in networks.

## 2.3 Distributed leadership in networks

Peter Gronn asserted not so long ago that *'All of the indications are that distributed leadership is an idea whose time has come'* (Gronn, 2000, p 333). This section examines the extent to which learning networks have benefited from and contributed to this development. It is structured around the following questions:

- Why is distributed leadership important in networks?
- What does distributed leadership in networks look like in practice?
- Can you lead networks without distributing leadership?

It is important to look at what is meant by distributed leadership. Many definitions exist but Bennett *et al* (2003) have approached a synthesis in their study by emphasising:

- its emergent property within a group or network of interacting individuals
- its suggestion of the openness of the boundaries of leadership
- the notion that varieties of expertise are distributed across the many not the few

These three characteristics are all evident, if not ubiquitous, in networks. A further useful perspective is added by Spillane & Sherer (2004, p 8) who emphasise that *'A distributed perspective presses us to consider the enactment of leadership tasks as potentially stretched over the practice of two or more leaders, followers and their situation'*. This notion of stretching leadership capacity seems to have particular relevance to the context of learning networks. Spillane has also written elsewhere that distributed leadership relies on co-production and interactivity: *'A distributed perspective frames leadership practice as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and their situation'* (Spillane, 2004, p 2). While the distributed nature of networks and network leadership problematises the notion of 'followers', the emphasis on the importance of situation and context is valuable.

## Why is distributed leadership important in networks?

Here are three preliminary attempts to explain why distributed leadership is so important in networks:

- *'The nature of networks themselves shares many of the characteristics of what have been termed "complex adaptive systems" (Minas, 2005) in that they have multiple levels of organisation, have open or fuzzy boundaries, their behaviour emerges from complex sets of interactions over time and they are characterised by non-linear causality due to the interaction of feedback loops, external constraints and the nature of initial conditions from which they emerge'* (Hadfield, 2005, p 2). This suggests that networks cannot be led on all levels by a small number of individuals. Distributing leadership is a way to increase leadership capacity from inside the network.

- Distributed leadership is *'an important analytical tool for thinking about leadership and re-orienting thinking about its nature'* (Bennett *et al*, 2003, p 7). Thus, it is about

challenging expectations, adding new perspectives and making lateral
and latent leadership practice more visible. It is also important to emphasise that
distributed leadership is '*a product of a conjoint activity such as networked learning
communities, study groups, enquiry partnerships and not simply another label for that
activity*' (Harris, 2004, p 15).

- Distributed leadership offers a new way of talking about leadership in which the voices
  of relatively unrecognised leaders are legitimised and the language of leadership is
  extended. In this respect, there are echoes of the concept of parallel leadership with its
  roots in shared responsibility: '*Parallel leadership is a process whereby teacher leaders
  and their principals engage in collective action to build school capacity. It embodies
  mutual respect, shared purpose, and allowance for individual expression*' (Crowther *et al*,
  2002, p 38).

The remainder of this section will scrutinise the validity of these statements and the questions
previously posed in the light of what has been learned from the NLC programme:

### How have networks encouraged leadership to be distributed?

David Crandall's piece has already positioned distributed leadership in the context of a shift
away from the heroic leader to more differentiated notions of leadership. It has a role to play
in what Elmore (2000, p 13) has called '*de-romanticising leadership*'. His notion of distributed
leadership is essentially founded on the notion of '*continuous learning*' (p 20) in which
individuals in positions of responsibility model learning values, behaviour, roles and activities,
rather than creating institutional structures. This section aims to examine the evidence using
David Crandall's dynamics of power, passion, perspective and permission to trace not only how
distributed leadership has been encouraged but also how it has developed over the lifetime of
the programme.

**Power** - The central questions in this context are who distributes power in a network and how.
There is a range of possible answers. Some network leaders sidestep the question by
denying that the exercise of power has any place at all in their sphere of activity:

> "*Nobody is in charge.  Co-leader is a fascinating term to look at because there is no one in
> charge. […]  There's no power in it, there's no power-base. That's why imposing networks
> doesn't necessarily work. Networks are not hierarchical, they're more sort of changing:
> they rely on trust and personalities being open*.

<div align="right">(Co-leader, N200)</div>

This emphasis on networks' openness is crucial. Evidence from a second network underlines the
empowering function of funding: "*The other thing is power, I suppose. This school has a huge
budget, but we can be creative with that and allow things to happen and sometimes we can
afford to be generous*" (Headteacher, N248). It is important to emphasise that power is
characterised here as being exercised both benignly and collectively. While the drive to
empower network members is a feature of network leaders' perspectives from the earliest
interviews, reflecting the '*shift from leadership as* power over, *to leadership as* power to',
*(*Whitaker, 1993 p 89*)*, it takes time for networks and network leaders to move from
empowering others to allowing others to take leadership opportunities for themselves. Where it
works well, this becomes one of double loop processes so evident in networks whereby
leadership is constantly renewed and challenged. However, school staff are not necessarily used
to subverting the established hierarchy and having it recognised as leadership, as the following
observation from a headteacher underlines:

> "*And I said, 'Oh, you're talking about leadership.'  It was like: 'Oh no, no we're not,' with
> arms folded. 'No, we're not talking about leadership.' I said, 'You are, because what
> you've found is you want to make changes and to make changes you need to be able to*

*lead people, to inspire them and convince them.' But they still weren't sure
about that."* (Co-leader, N283)

The tension here between co-ordinated and more collaborative activity is created by perception rather than reality. Distributed leadership had not become part of these teachers' professional identity at this stage. Evidence suggests that reversing this is a gradual process: *"They've always come but they're now saying more and they've been involved in leading, which in the very earliest point wasn't where they were"* (Co-leader, N282). Although much of the discussion centres on the creation of processes to encourage the development of middle leaders, it is striking that some networks were already seeing considerable developments at this stage. For example, teaching assistants were already taking on responsibility for driving projects in several networks, with subsequent reports of *"the profound effect this is already having on the TAs' self-esteem, value and self-worth simply by being included in the initiative"* (N278, Enq04).

By the end of 2004, evidence from co-leaders suggests that their perspectives had deepened, emphasising the importance of *"a kind of other leadership work going on without actually leading the network"* (N196) and power being dispersed to take in increasing instances of student leadership and a growing concern with equality of leadership opportunity in networks. Recent evidence from leading network figures has underlined the importance of giving everyone the power to decide on the network's direction: *"So what we do is at the beginning of the year we have a big meeting with the heads and with the sort of leader from each school and we thrash out what is going to be the focus. And everybody has an equal say in that"* (Co-leader, N190). Co-leaders seem to have accepted the gradual diminution of their control and what is frequently described in terms of chaos, even *'organised anarchy'*, echoing Sergiovanni (2001, p 55). Although it is not described in these terms, the evidence also suggests that leaders have an important role to play when the network is still in the exploring and developing phases, in co-ordinating and mobilising middle leaders. Passion has a role to play in this.

**Passion** - Tim Brighouse has written that 'At the heart of successful leadership must be a passion for learning' (Brighouse, 2001, p 1). Learning networks seem to add an extra dimension to this, connected to how they encourage collective and collaborative interaction. Distributing leadership has increased the motivation and capacity of teachers in some cases, even those who believe they have no interest in undertaking school leadership roles:

*"Things haven't been labelled as leadership responsibilities; it's been more about developing skills and then people seeing the skills they've got. I think there's been lots of people who have been enthused by that and who have gone on to be promoted to more traditional leadership roles. So it's just a slightly different approach to it, whereas if you'd said to those people before, 'Can you do that role or do you want to apply for that?' they probably wouldn't have."*

(Co-leader, N196)

The parallel here is with headteachers whose careers have been revitalised by their engagement with networks. It is related to the effect of extending perspectives discussed below. It is clear that passion needs to created at all levels to maintain momentum: *"I think that it's something that I suppose I feel is the only way to kind of get things moving, to actually believe in what you are doing so if you can get other people to see that as well, then you've kind of cracked it"* (Lit Co-ordinator, N271).

One of the themes that emerges from network leaders' perspectives on distributed leadership is the preference given to 'growing' leaders as opposed to recruiting them, with all the implications that this brings in terms of control. This is also reflected in a slightly different form in the observation that: *"There's a lot of young teachers out there who started their careers in*

*network schools who've known no different"* (Co-leader, N296). In both cases, involvement in and exposure to distributed network leadership is said to have an enduring impact.

Language also has a function in this context, both the language of networked learning and the language of network leadership – issues that are picked up in other parts of this paper. Language both reflects and instils passion – as already noted, the dialogue which is often seen to be such a crucial element in successful collaboration is about the 'how' as well as the 'what' of its expression – but it is difficult to evidence. A flavour can be found in one co-leader's reflection, appropriately, on the experience of distributing leadership in her school: "*I also found it really invigorating and energising, and actually the word, I think, is liberating"* (N283). This is the kind of language which pervades network leaders' accounts of their experience and reflects their commitment to the values of learning networks. Although in this case the experience was elsewhere, it fed into her experience as a co-leader and echoes two of Brighouse's crucial leadership tasks: creating energy and building capacity.

*Perspective* -There is some evidence that successful, sustaining networks maximise their reach across participant organisations, and their depth, involving people at all levels of these organisations. Distributing leadership has a role to play in encouraging the creation of relationships between schools at different levels and allowing broader perspectives to influence and subvert existing organisational hierarchies: "By bringing other people in from schools, the heads get bypassed, which is not a bad thing, and things have developed much better as a result" (Co-leader, N296). In this network this was the result in part of a conscious effort to create greater engagement and self-sustained energy by participating in a NLG capacity-building project (N296, Enq04). One network found very early that network leadership is a combination of multiple perspectives and emerges from multiple directions, a process they supported with a peer mentoring structure:

> "*We hoped that from our base of co-leaders we would lead up to teachers and pupils. We have flipped the cone now. We realise that information travels around the cone now – it is more two-way. It's a bit like servant leadership. Teachers and pupils feed to the steering group."* (Co-leader, N258)

Enquiry also has a crucial role to play in this context, along with other components of leadership learning discussed in the following chapter, in that it fosters new ways of thinking. Middle leaders in enquiry groups have been compared to co-ordinators in communities of practice: '*well-connected and credible "insiders", knowledgeable about the community's domain*' (Anderson & Kubiak, 2004). Enquiry and 'enquiry-mindedness' challenge and undermine existing school leadership structures without destroying them, and help leaders and others both to focus on the task in hand and to monitor progress. Enquiry has also been an effective way of moving from collective aspiration to meaningful school-to-school collaboration: "*We began as leaders of our school enquiry groups in our individual schools and ended as a closely knit collaborative*" (Andrews *et al*, p 15). When it works, collaborative enquiry encourages everyone to take on leadership responsibilities: "*I feel much more involved in what's going on […] I don't think that we were working as closely together as we could have done, whereas now, now we've all started talking about it we're all coming in it from the same sort of direction*" (Teacher, N236). This is confirmed in a second network (N255):

> '*These outcomes for staff have been significantly supported by the headteacher's use of coaching, encouraging working as a team, distributing responsibility and accountability and leading others (especially "blockers") through change, moving the school forward despite resistance from others.*' Carter *et al*, 2004, p 21)

© NCSL, 2006

This underlines again the empowering function of formal leaders, particularly in the early stages of networks. The fact that networks operate at one remove from schools allows adults to take on leadership roles in networks that they would not necessarily want to adopt on a more formal basis in schools: "*I mean they're confident enough to go out, and they work with other schools, and they will network, and they would lead groups – they would do that. But I don't think any of them wants to become a school leader*" (Co-leader, N283). The scale of the impact on these middle leaders has been said to have surprised some headteachers in the network (McGrane & McGregor, 2006).

*Permission* - Involvement in enquiry seems to be connected with the issue of permission, as the following words from a Gifted and Talented co-ordinator involved in an enquiry project underline:

> "*I think I kind of think that way a bit anyway, but it's almost given you permission to do it, and it's sort of showing you that other people are doing that too. Yes, I think it's been quite a big influence. It's changed you from being a teacher who just stands up and delivers things and having a very rigid format of what you're going to do into being a bit more open and letting the children sort of set the agenda a little bit and find out for themselves.*" (N302)

This emphasises networks' capacity to allow space and opportunities for risk-taking that would be much more threatening in a traditional school environment. There is likely to be a phase difference here in that the size of secondary schools may provide more opportunities for middle leader autonomy than primaries. The tension between network fluidity and school hierarchy plays a crucial role. Even if network leaders work to increase the opportunities for people to undertake leadership roles, teachers and others taking them have to overcome the tendency to wait for permission. It is interesting to trace the effects of this co-dependent relationship in the context of network leadership. Resistance to leaders' efforts to share power and ownership has not been uncommon, particularly in the early stages of network development: "*So the messy bit was them then saying, 'Well, what are we here for? What we doing here? Why aren't they telling us what to do?' Well, we didn't want to tell them what to do, that wasn't the idea. So they had to knock that out*" (Co-leader, N297). Concern was expressed about the lack of attention paid to the leadership development of the lead learners at this stage (N297, 2004 Enquiry report).

This is not to say that headteacher support is not vital for a school to play a part in a network or that distributed leadership does not depend on the support of the formal network leaders. It is often the network's headteachers who have sufficient distance from the day-to-day leadership of the network to identify the contributions of middle leaders:

> " *I think there is a number of leaders, and I think that is the way I would prefer it, rather than it being centred on one person who then gets promoted outside of the school. If it is all centred around her or him then you are back to square one pretty much, so I think there is a solid foundation within that group of leaders who are comfortable within themselves, and gaining in confidence, across the whole school.*" (Headteacher, N307)

Interestingly, the fact that network leaders have to let go means that the relationship begins to become both more collaborative and more reciprocal:

> "*You can't drive people's networks. People have got to move sometimes. You can encourage and stimulate and all the rest of it but ultimately you're dependent on people taking it where you want to go, and that's probably quite healthy.*"
>
> (Co-leader, N269)

The value of building capacity and commitment this way is also reflected in the literature on distributed leadership: '*The most important contribution that senior leaders can make to the development of emergent distributed leadership is to create an inclusive, purposeful and optimistic culture in which initiatives can easily come forward*' (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006, p 123). The following vignettes indicate some of the ways in which networks have done this:

### VIGNETTES: Building commitment through middle leaders

---

**VIGNETTE 3**

Each school has an identified lead learner who is paid an additional allowance from the Networked Learning Communities programme. Schools made their own decisions on key appointments in line with commonly-agreed criteria for selection and recruitment. It is notable that each school has one such lead learner regardless of the school's size or context. Co-leaders see this cadre of learners as being crucial to the future success of the network. They are seen as central to a strategy of building commitment to the learning in each school and in building ownership of the network beyond the highly committed headteacher group. Co-leaders aim to utilise lead learners in their aim of creating a critical mass of learners who will have a tipping impact on the learning culture of each school and the community as a whole. (Taken from N315, Enq04)

---

**VIGNETTE 4**

A further group emerges around leadership being in everyone: staff and students. Descriptions emerge across the various clusters – of pupils as leaders of learning, of heads of year and heads of department refocusing their leadership around learning, and examples of building internal capacity for leadership learning to take place, of the development of middle leaders and emergent leaders, of the roles classroom support staff take in leadership within these schools. Not only is the idea of dispersed leadership tangible but network activity provides opportunities for that to be enacted at all levels within the schools. (Taken from N247, Enq04)

---

## 2.4 Can you lead networks without distributing leadership?

The previous vignette's emphasis on distributed leadership being enacted through the network is echoed in Helen Timperley's implicit contrast between co-leadership's concern with vision-building and distributed leadership's concern with achieving things: '*The activity focus of distributed leadership, however, places the lens on the things people do to enact those visions and create coherence*' (Timperley, 2004, p 4). The language here is important. Coherence depends in part on the network creating ways to allow different forms of leadership to co-exist. This is emphasised by the multiplicity of names for middle leaders in networks, which reflects the range of roles they fulfil:

> '*They include pioneers, theme champions, advocates, activists, action learners, leading links, lead learner co-ordinators, lead learner practitioners, lead co-ordinators, teacher enquirers, and research group leaders. The emphasis seems to be on distributed leadership with 27 per cent of networks emphasising the importance of classroom practitioners taking a leadership role in networked learning.*'
>
> (CUREE, 2003, pp 14-15)

The following two examples look at how distributed leadership is enacted from the perspective of two co-leaders. The examples support Hargreaves and Fink's (2006) concept of the distributed leadership continuum and Bennett *et al*'s (2003) notion that delegated leadership is a component of distributed leadership, and sometimes a precursor to it, but not as wide-

© NCSL, 2006

ranging a concept. The first conveys the learning she took from her experience as a network leader into a new position in the broader system:

> *"And what I felt more confident about doing was letting go of some things, and that idea of delegation is a really important one, that it's no good delegating and still keeping your big nose in and checking up every five minutes. You've got to really delegate it and let people come back to you with something that they've created. And I think by working with people in different ways you build up their confidence that enables them to go off and do that. And that's the bit that makes me really proud when they come back and you think that's exactly how I would have done it myself, that's brilliant."* (Co-leader, N258)

It is interesting that she still uses the term 'delegation' but describes a much broader process than is usually conveyed by that term in which individuals are self-reliant and energised by the process. However, the outcome is still seen from the perspective of the empowering leader and assessed according to her expectations, suggesting that she has only partially relinquished control. This is not to claim that this is inappropriate in any way: networks need to offer and use a range of leadership practices. However, a more radical view of the possibilities is prefaced by a clear distinction between delegation and distribution in a network which has emphasised inclusivity through the diversity of involvement and opportunity for both adults and pupils in its schools (Worrall & Crowe, 2006a, p 13):

> *"It's quite a different process, distributed leadership, to delegating responsibility to somebody, to gradually having an increased role in enquiry, in monitoring, in finding out what's happening in your subject area, and then you go up a gear when you start to work collaboratively with the head in developing an action plan, to the final aim, I feel the final [goal] is that people should be completely autonomous, that's, if you like, the vision."* (Co-leader, N262)

The intention here is not to privilege one example over the other, but to suggest that networks offer a range of opportunities for distributing leadership and that networks are unlikely to sustain or renew themselves in the long term if distributed leadership is absent.

## 2.5 Is network leadership really leadership at all?

The purpose of returning to this question is not to suggest that networks do not require leadership in a recognised sense but to propose that network leadership is qualitatively distinct from traditional notions of hierarchical school leadership. While with its emphasis on the power of influence and persuasion, network leadership does not resemble traditional notions of hierarchical school leadership, the evidence suggests that networks, or at least networks of schools, require some form of leadership, even as they move towards more plural, distributed and adaptive forms. Network leadership is distinct from traditional leadership forms because it is facilitative rather than directive, it is about leadership emerging from interactions and relationships between people, rather than charismatic individuals, and, crucially, because it seems to work best when it is distributed and therefore more responsive to context. The evidence suggests that further research needs to be done into the potential for shared leadership, as well as the multiple forms of distributed leadership characteristic of networks, to contribute to resolving some of the capacity issues facing school leadership in general over the next few years. One of the key issues to have emerged from the research is that network leaders have learned experientially, through the practice of leading networks as they have evolved. The next chapter looks in more detail in how leadership learning has developed.

## 3. Leadership in networks: leadership learning

This chapter examines the claim that networks offer a space in which contextual, situational and experiential leadership learning can be both encouraged and extended. They offer opportunities for sustained and collaborative leadership learning which supports Linda Lambert's notion that '*leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively*' (Harris & Lambert, 2003, p 17). The preceding discussion of co-leadership and distributed leadership presents them as enacted forms of leadership learning and underlines the fact that networks potentially allow leaders to move away from the centralised compliance model of inspection frameworks (Demos, 2005, p 32) towards a more open, personalised approach:

> '*Participants are encouraged to work in networks in order to share and interpret the issues they are facing. Together they find ways of bringing the learning from the network into their own contexts, thereby accelerating innovation and creating new knowledge across the system.*' (NCSL, 2004, p3)

However, it is also important to recognise that the rhetoric of leadership learning is not always realised in reality, something that the NLC programme focused on from the beginning: '*Although school leaders often plan together to facilitate the shared enquiry and development of others, they rarely spend much time on their own learning*' (James *et al*, 2003, p 7). The same paper on collaborative leadership learning went on to outline one of the reasons for this reluctance: '*As the leader in a traditionally hierarchical environment it is challenging to move from independence to interdependence in a learning group*' (James *et al*, 2003, pp 7-8). Perhaps as a result, leadership learning is under-used, under-developed and relatively under-examined. This chapter offers the opportunity to look more closely at the concept, while recognising that leaders in networks found this a challenging area with which to engage. The exploration is structured around the following questions:

- What have leaders learned?

- How have they learned?

- In what ways is leadership learning in a networked environment different from learning in other contexts such as schools?

It is important, first, to outline the place that leadership learning took in the NLC programme design. Leadership learning was held to be fundamental to learning networks, allied to but distinct from the leadership of learning. Leadership learning is one of the six levels of learning operating as a framework for the programme:

> '*The programme seeks to invest in the capacity of head practitioners, network leaders and other schools to create the enabling and facilitative conditions for networked learning. The programme assumes there is a much wider pool of latent leadership talent than the system currently harnesses. The programme seeks to offer opportunities for that to be developed.*' (Jackson & Street, 2005a, pp 5–6)

It operates in all leadership areas '*but particularly collaborative headteacher learning*' (Jackson, 2004, p 4). The levels of learning framework is '*a mechanism for both focusing and aligning the learning activities within a network*' and '*also provided a mechanism for the core team to engage network leaders in discussions about how they are strategically co-ordinating the range of learning activities in their network*' (Hadfield *et al*, 2004, p 7). A levels of learning survey was undertaken in 2003 and 2004 to provide networks with both a baseline for the programme as a whole and an enquiry activity to promote reflection on learning and teaching.

## 3.1 What have leaders learned?

Harris and Lambert describe a combination of understandings and skilfulness which addresses both knowledge development and its subsequent implementation: '*The skilfulness addressed here refers to those skills of leadership that allow other teachers to capture the imagination of their colleagues, enable them to negotiate real changes in their own schools and tackle the inevitable conflicts that arise from such courageous undertakings*' (Harris & Lambert, 2003, p 14). This overlaps with some of the characteristics and attributes identified by leaders in the previous chapter, especially as the experiences of network involvement and collaborative enquiry are linked so closely, with some emphasis being placed on the broadening of their leadership experience: "*It's certainly built into the complexity of me as a leader*" (Co-leader, N283).

As an organising framework, this discussion will attempt to apply Spillane and Sherer's (2004) three dimensions of leadership distribution to leadership learning. In all dimensions, leadership learning combines both formal and informal structures and activities.

### Leadership learning through co-ordination and specialisation

The most prominent examples of co-ordinated leadership learning seem to be found in distributed leadership in enquiry groups. They can be classified as co-ordinated because they were generally mandated by the network leadership, even if membership was voluntary, although they generally aspired to, and often achieved, much deeper collaboration over time:

> "*There were a lot of ways that they used to teach us good leadership skills and I have used the same techniques back in school to do the same thing, like a model for learning. It's not just a matter of telling people what to do, although you might have to do that occasionally, it's about empowering them and giving them responsibility and motivation to do it and to see problems for themselves that need solving.*" (Teacher, N225)

One network found at the end of their first annual review that there were problems with how the steering group of headteachers communicated their commitment to the NLC. Subsequently, a day's training was held for network co-ordinators on running effective network planning meetings. Six months later, the teachers involved were enthusiastic about their professional and personal growth: "*The workshop was great. I know what to do now. The group has really come together and we get lots done together. I was afraid to lead before but now I just do it*" (N251, Enq04). Those involved had led staff meetings in other schools, opened network events and addressed local authority colleagues. In another network, the principal method of building leadership capacity has been through school inquiry groups (SIGs) which have been the main focus of the network's classroom-based enquiries. SIG co-ordinators lead and co-ordinate each SIG team of researching teachers: '*The precise nature of the SIG varies from school to school, another indicator of the network's determination to generate a shared focus with enough flexibility to be adapted to the needs of each member school*' (Worrall & Crowe, 2006b).

One of the common themes emerging from the programme's research in this area is that networks are a breeding ground for distributed leaders because opportunities to lead and take risks in a supportive environment emerge at different levels:

> "*It's distributive leadership really. It's the fact that there isn't a leader of the network – it's that we are all committed to the aims of it and so different people take on different roles. […] In terms of running the teacher researcher co-ordinator meetings, it varies from person to person. We just take it in turns. We decide what the agenda is going to be, then somebody will lead it one session, another person another session.* (Assistant principal, N193)

More recently, one lead learner has spoken of how she has developed through working on and leading collaborative enquiry and training in other network schools: "[*Being involved in the network*] *has changed me as a person […] I have tremendous professional confidence. I can justify what and why we do what we do. It is not that it is comfortable, it is a learning journey*" (Jopling & Cotgreave, 2006). There is no suggestion that this learning journey is anywhere near its conclusion.
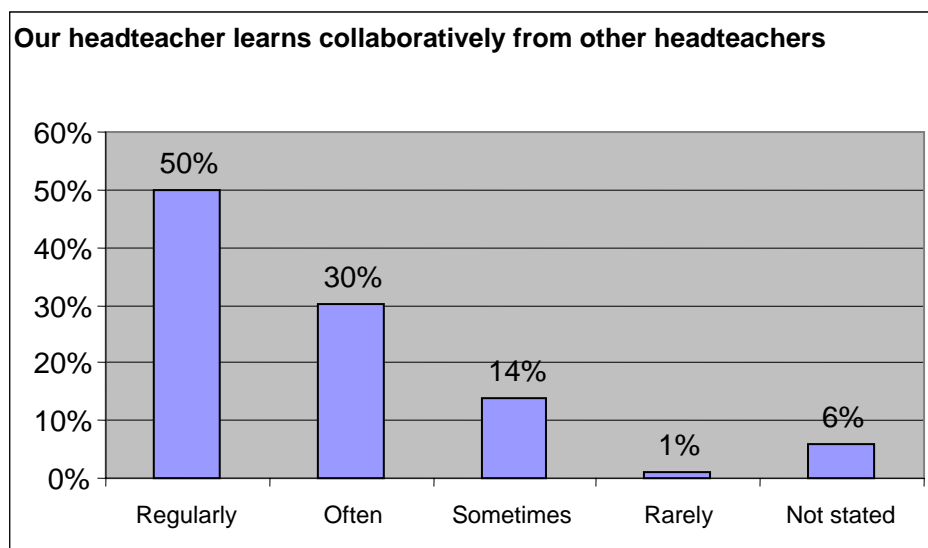
### Collective leadership learning

The primary example of collective leadership learning, by which is meant the kind of unmandated additive learning that may begin uneasily but then develop into deeper collaboration, is that which has occurred in headteacher steering group meetings. As has already been emphasised, this was a focus of the NLC programme's notion of leadership learning. There is evidence from many networks of headteacher meetings evolving quite quickly and dramatically to focus on, and model, learning rather than management: "*I think one of the key groups which I wrote down here that I've learned from has been the steering group*" (Co-leader, N311). One network described its meetings in the following terms:

> '*The first hour of the network's steering group (SG) meetings were reserved for leadership learning activities. These were facilitated by the HEI link who often used recently published materials as a starting point. All SG members highly rated these meetings as a vehicle for leadership learning and also reported that they were more likely to take risks as a result.*' (Cantwell, 2006, p 2)

This is not a unique perspective by any means: "*In our network we have regular meetings of the headteachers, not just, there's a steering group and then all the headteachers are involved. And for me the learning that's gone on in that group, just sharing what's happening and sharing ideas beyond what's happening has been very useful*" (Headteacher, N217). However, networks achieved this in the knowledge that the increasing collegiality that may precede collaboration can impede deep learning. The fact that many networks found it challenging to move their headteacher groups away from administrative issues suggests that they suffered at least initially from '*contrived collegiality*' (Hargreaves, 2003, p 130).

The co-leadership interviews conducted in December 2004 are informative in this context, speaking of collaboration providing "*a way forward to provide new thinking*" (N283) and offering opportunities to observe and use a range of leadership styles. Spillane's notion of 'stretch' also appears in these interviews, not only in the extension of leadership capacity at multiple levels but also in the more straightforward notion of stretching existing leaders' skills and abilities and enabling them to develop new individual capacities. Time is seen to have been the key barrier: "*We promised to do it for quite a long time and there were always lots of reasons why we didn't... We called ourselves model learners and therefore we had to do a bit of modeling*" (Headteacher, N267). However, evidence from the 2004 levels of learning survey (which had 5,352 respondents) suggests that headteachers were having some success in moving from collective to collaborative leadership learning:

**Our headteacher learns collaboratively from other headteachers**

| Category | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|
| Regularly | 50% |
| Often | 30% |
| Sometimes | 14% |
| Rarely | 1% |
| Not stated | 6% |

Many networks found it difficult to align leadership learning with pupil and adult learning (Hadfield *et al* 2005b: 8), with one network recommending trying to "*get the headteachers and leaders of the group to see their own learning as being as significant, if not more significant, than anything to do with the management of the whole thing*" (HEI link, N271). This is also linked to the common observation about headteacher isolation and the recognition that it is learning together that has the potential to make collective leadership learning of this kind more collaborative: "*I think for me the value is that we can learn from other people, so we are actually making contact*" (Headteacher, N270).

### Collaborative leadership learning

The year one annual review report stated that specific learning methodologies, such as the Collaborative Leadership Learning (CLL) programme, '*were also cited as supporting NLCs to consider the nature of the leadership required to make networks successful and how they should be evaluated*' (Hadfield *et al*, 2005b, p 28). This, allied to the fact that leadership learning is hard to realise, prompted the NLC programme's creation of a formal development and enquiry project focusing on collaborative leadership learning. Its protocols emphasise the importance of enquiry, reflection and commitment to action, focusing not on delivery but on '*an interrogation of practice which seeks innovative ways to perform differently*' (Cotton, 2004, p 5).

In creating a collaborative model, CLL attempts to create space for schools' leaders to come together and learn. In many ways, CLL was an attempt to formalise the more successful examples of leadership learning in networks. The following testament from a school leader involved in CLL suggests some of the ways that the programme has made a difference in both networks and schools:

> "*It's impacted hugely on how I work with my senior leadership team. We've created three school improvement teams. They make decisions about future direction and report back to all staff. I'm not involved and find myself comfortable with that. Staff feel valued – we feel we've covered a year's work in a term and have new teams and new topics organised for the spring term. I'm not directing, I'm enabling it to happen and I believe that the work that has come out of those groups is making a difference in classrooms.*"
> (Quoted in Woods & Jones, 2005, pp 10-11)

Another co-leader has spoken of the interdependence of leadership learning and the leadership of learning: "*You know, we have learned an awful lot as well as being the co-leaders to generate other people's opportunity for learning and the children's opportunity for learning. You know, it's been, I don't think you can measure what we've learned from it as well*" (Co-leader,

N278*).* It is also important to emphasise that the new perspectives on leadership that networks provide are not limited to that context, as one co-leader emphasises:*"I wouldn't be so outrageous as to say that everything I've learned about leadership, I've learned through [the network] but a huge amount of it has been"* (Co-leader, N311).

## 3.2 How have they learned?

The evidence about how leaders have learned indicates that a range of formal and informal strategies and methods have been used. Three ways of learning appear to have been particularly important: problem-based learning, sharing experiences and establishing a culture of enquiry.

**Problem-based learning** - Huber's (2003, p 284) notion of problem-based learning, which he describes as 'co-operative, interactive, participative, and, to a certain degree, group- and self-organised' describes the benefits that leaders at all levels gain from engaging with genuine issues as they occur. Network leaders' primary resource has been learning understanding and skilfulness from each other, with collaborative leadership learning increasingly replacing courses for all the reasons associated with situational learning that have already been identified: "It was very much on the job I have to say. I'm sure everyone says that, but it was in dialogue with other leaders" (Co-leader, N296). Partnerships with HEIs, originally envisaged as supporting enquiry and access to the public knowledge base, are frequently cited, as is theory in general. The Networked Learning Group's provision of support and network-to-network events is also often noted, along with such specifics as the promotion of networked study visits. The programme's promotion of the three fields of knowledge also had an impact in shifting leaders' perspectives: "I think the whole notion of like three fields of knowledge and that knowledge I've got now, informs the way I work all the time" (Co-leader, N196). The fact that this is a common observation among co-leaders is testament to the value of collaborative learning:

**Sharing experiences** - One of the ways in which leaders have developed understanding is through sharing experiences: "So, we actually did leadership, we did some leadership work with them the following year, which we ran, because they were saying, 'Well, shall we get them from the college?' I said 'No, we can run it, because this is about sharing leadership stories and just talking about what leadership is'" (Co-leader, N283). The underrated leadership skills of observing and also securing feedback have also been cited, as schools transform themselves into learning communities:

*"Openly seeking feedback from other people about your style of leadership I think it's ever so important, and I think you have to be extremely comfortable with your staff in order to do that, and very often people suspect your motives when you're wanting to do that. […] What is a school about if it's not about learning, and developing that notion of a learning community?"* (Co-leader, N247)

Networks' defining interdependence is also important in that the tendency for networks to provide large scale CPD in-house has allowed a multiplicity of learning and development to occur:

*"I think the greatest impact has been that word 'learning' because it's just totally changed here, and I think it's true of all our schools, the way in which people perceive what they're being taught. Before, we were being told what to do, so you were absolutely in awe of anybody who was an expert, and experts were outside your school, not within your schools, even though we all knew we'd got them. But the emphasis was on learning which delighted us because we're teachers, not people who deliver subjects."* (Co-leader, N261)

**Establishing a culture of enquiry** - Michael Fullan has emphasised the importance of 're-culturing' to the change process (Fullan, 2001, p 5), and the previous quotation highlights the importance of establishing enquiry cultures in some of the more effective networks. This has also been important because it embeds the levels of learning into the network and incubates the enquiry mind-set that encourages network leaders to take their learning wherever they can get it: "I've learned a lot from people working outside of education and other services" (Co-leader, N247). Time for reflection is often cited as one of the luxuries that is jettisoned first when other priorities intervene. With its focus on enquiry, networked learning was designed to provide space and opportunities for such reflection, and developed as part of the experiential learning thrust of co-leadership:

*"I've learned to be more reflective and I think whoever said that was absolutely right. I think it's only now when I look back, and I think [the other co-leader] would probably say the same, that we actually have any notion of what co-leadership actually is now, and it sort of develops along the way."* (Co-leader, N283)

Some of the more recent interviews with co-leaders suggest that as networks matured, reflection was increasingly linked to the need to provide evidence of impact through deep questioning: "*Well, the ability to pose questions and reflect is critical, and the need to ground what you do in evidence. And those are the two things that I think are enhanced by working with others*" (Co-leader, N289). Interestingly, the network's research programme has also been seen to have had an impact on teacher retention and motivation (N289, Enq03).

This has also been linked to becoming more analytical about the nature of leadership in general. One co-leader in particular connected this with developing confidence in both himself and in others: "*And I think learning to lead is through confidence and in knowing that other people have confidence in me*" (Co-leader, N247). Effectively, network leaders have been given permission to learn: "*It's given me masses of food for thought. It's given me a massive amount of ability to think and diversify my thoughts and broaden my horizon, broaden my vision*" (Co-leader, N283).

The following vignette indicates some of the ways in which horizons have been broadened through the creation of a learning forum in a network, which involved more middle leaders in applied, non-hierarchical leadership learning:

**VIGNETTE 5: Distributed leadership learning**

Intriguing in this culture of a learning school was the appointment of three lead learners. These are temporary posts awarded for one year as a result of competitive submissions. Once again there was a sense of opportunity created amongst the three lead learners – the chance to reflect on their work, to answer their own questions and in the learning forum they had the opportunity to share that learning across the school. In discussing their responsibility as lead learners and the various positions they occupied I was struck by the non-hierarchical nature of the role. Leadership learning at Prudhoe High is not confined to those who hold elevated positions in a hierarchical structure.

Other examples of leadership learning peppered the teachers' accounts of their work in [the area]. They talked about their work on the middle leaders' programme which their colleagues at [two other schools] led on within the network and I met two teachers who had been provided with the opportunity to become facilitators for De Bono's generic thinking skills. As well as talking about what they had learned they enthused about how they were beginning to apply that learning, working with adults and children in school, and the huge potential they saw for the difference it was going to make to learning in their school: *"It provided superb thinking tools for focusing meetings and creating positive outcomes. I can't wait to see it working at management level" (t*aken from N247, Enq03).

## 3.3 How is this different from other leadership learning?

The difficulty with addressing how leadership learning in networks is different from that in other environments is that the evidence is uneven. Research and enquiry have a role to play in this context because they introduce new perspectives and embed the notion of learning through questioning throughout all levels of the network: *"I think that if teachers get involved in research it has a really really strong impact on their leadership"* (Co-leader, N190). Early interviews with network leaders and facilitators support this view in that they tend to be aspirational and ambitious in their plans for leadership learning. Later evidence confirms the suspicion that it can sometimes be quite difficult to get leaders to mirror teachers' adoption of collaborative learning:

> *"Where it hasn't impacted so much is at the leadership level. There wasn't a lot of leadership learning going on because the structures we'd had were very much about steering group meetings being information-sharing."* (Co-leader, N181)

The network in question overcame this difficulty by establishing a leadership learning course with a local business school for a range of adults across the network. Another network leader recently suggested that the co-leadership model itself has a crucial role to play, along with learning from other network leaders, particularly as the network is being established:

> *"It has been very helpful having a co-leader, another person, to have those discussions and the reflection times. It's certainly been really good to touch base with NLC, and I know that that's, I mean certainly in those first early days, it was important to have meetings and discussions with other people in similar positions around the country."* (Co-leader, N283)

It can be stated with some confidence that the position of learning at the heart of learning networks is both crucial and dominant and often held to be the distinctive difference from other collaborative ventures: *"I think what made our network different was that it was focused on learning and that didn't mean just learning for children, it meant learning for everyone in the establishments. And that was the difference"* (Co-leader, N190). The next chapter traces how this difference has had an influence on leadership practice in schools.

# 4. Network leadership's influence on schools and school leadership

This chapter takes as its starting point the principle that network leaders and school leaders are essentially focused on the same objective: '*to build the capacity for individuals to flourish, for schools continually to improve and change and for young people to be the best they can be*' (Harris & Lambert, 2003, p 8). The central question is: What are the benefits to individuals, schools and the wider system of engagement with network leadership? This chapter highlights and examines network leadership practices that have a positive influence on schools, teachers, school leaders and beyond. It suggests that the central notion of co-leadership, which makes a virtue of the fact that network leaders cannot do everything, has a potentially profound effect on schools and school leadership. These questions are explored by examining how involvement in networks and network leadership enhances the knowledge and skills of school leaders and aspiring school leaders in relation to the key areas for leadership learning (Stoll, 2004; NCSL, 2004) and the associated National Standards for Headteachers (DfES 2004). These have been chosen because they offer an external framework for headteachers' and other leaders' practice that is sufficiently broad and flexible to cover most of the benefits and challenges that networks offer.

## 4.1 How were NLCs trying to influence schools?

At the outset of the NLC initiative, each networked learning community was tasked to meet the following objectives:

- to raise standards by improving the learning of pupils and staff, and by supporting school-to-school learning
- to develop leadership for learning by developing and harnessing the leadership potential of a wide range of people
- to build capacity for growth and continuous improvement by schools enquiring into their practice and by sharing both process and product outcomes.

(Jackson, 2004, p 2)

On one level, this was an attempt to set school leaders free: '*Networked learning activity offers the opportunity to free school-based personnel from the confines of their context, to emancipate them from their relational histories and to liberate new forms of leadership*' (Jackson, 2004, p 14). But what kind of liberation was this and has it been achieved? The complexity of networks, which operate on multiple levels and in multiple contexts, has only increased as collaborative initiatives have proliferated during the life of the programme. This makes it a challenging question with which to engage. This paper will attempt to do so by focusing on leadership practice, taking into account Spillane and Orlina's (2005, p 8) warning that:

> '*Most work that addresses leadership practice tends to equate it with the acts or actions of leaders. In contrast, from a distributed perspective, leadership practice is framed in a particular way; as a product of the interactions of school leaders, followers, and aspects of their <u>situation</u>.*'

Ofsted inspections of schools in NLCs between 2003 and 2005 reveal that 76 per cent of schools were rated good, very good or excellent for overall leadership and management and 88 per cent of headteachers were rated in these categories. However, we can only speculate about the degree to which involvement in networks has contributed to these results. This section of the paper is based on interview evidence, although further evidence is anticipated from the NLC programme's external evaluation. Much of the evidence in this paper has come from co-leaders, the overwhelming proportion of whom are headteachers, but evidence from 'other leaders' is also included, a category which covers both headteachers not in formal positions of

network leadership and teachers and other adults in schools who have taken on leadership roles in their network. This reflects the paper's assertion that network leadership is facilitative, shared and distributed in successful networks. Moreover, the juxtaposition of co-leaders' and other leaders' perspectives helps to draw out the constant tension between shared network leadership and the traditional hierarchy of schools which runs both through this paper and through networks of schools in general. The fluidity and emergent nature of network leadership serves to '*render existing leadership constructs problematic*' (Gronn, 2003a, p 33). Of course, this tension creates opportunities for learning, as well as challenges:

> *'This learning arises from the application of leadership beyond school, where the reach of hierarchical power may not be as pervasive and also from the enactment of leadership behaviours with another leader who may bring different skills to the work.'* (Holmes & Hart, 2005, p13)

## 4.2 Assessing benefits through the key areas for leadership learning and practice

The National Standards for Headteachers (2004) are framed as:

- Shaping the future

- Leading learning and teaching

- Developing self and working with others

- Managing the organisation

- Securing accountability

- Strengthening community

NCSL's (2004) Strategy for Leadership Learning: Learning to Lead, to support school leaders and leadership teams, sets out the six non-hierarchical areas in broadly similar ways:

- Leading Learning and Teaching

- Developing Self and Working with Others

- Creating the Future

- Managing the Organisation

- Strengthening Community

- Accountability

The main part of this paper examines network leadership in the light of these areas and uses them to trace how the tension between school and network leadership functions. The preceding discussion of the nature of leadership and distributed leadership in networks has suggested that leadership in this context is emergent and more dependent on context than hierarchy. An inclusive approach is taken, assigning distributed leader status to anyone who has taken any kind of leading role in the network at any time. Finally, it should be noted that these six key areas are interdependent and overlapping, even more so in the context of networks, and evidence given in one area is likely also to be relevant to others.

## Leading learning and teaching

This area is couched in terms such as setting high expectations; developing a successful and personalised learning culture; and supporting CPD and debate about effective learning and teaching. The central issue is whether network leadership has enabled network and school leaders to lead learning and teaching more effectively. This is distinct from the leadership

learning examined in the previous chapter. The NLC initiative's emphasis on enquiry is particularly relevant in this context, in that successful networks have adopted an enquiry mindset that has achieved both depth and reach in the network and influenced practice.

### Co-leaders' perspectives

Involvement with enquiry and engagement with the notion of collaborative leadership learning has prompted much greater questioning among network leaders in general: "*I think we became much more analytical about leadership, and what constituted leadership*" (Co-leader, N247). Co-leaders are ready to acknowledge what they have learned from their experience of leading networks: "*It has also helped me to see potential in people and to encourage the people who are willing to take things on and to lead in my own school*" (N281). This is also often tied up with a belief that network leadership is qualitatively distinct from school leadership. Context is a key variable here. Co-leaders whose appointment as headteacher occurred close to their involvement in networks appear to be more prepared to see the two roles equally.

Network leadership seems also to have led to an irrevocable shift in schools' approach to professional development in many cases:

> "*I think the thing that I'm most proud of is that the schools in our network approach their professional development and improving teaching and learning in a different way now. And they would never go back to how they used to do it. And I think that is down to the leadership of our network and the participation within it, obviously.*" (Co-leader, N296)

The crucial point to emphasise here is that these changes appear to be enduring, emphasising the link between developing staff and sustainability: '*Professional development and school development that builds capacity also helps to sustain initiatives worth sustaining and to build long-term capacity for improvements, such as the development of teachers' skills, which will stay with them forever, long after the funding has disappeared*' (Veugelers & O'Hair, 2005, p 176). Other co-leaders feel the network's emphasis and impact have been focused on influencing teaching staff and their practice, rather than administration, resulting in what has been described as a culture of '*informed experimentation*' (N296, Enq04): "*What we did very quickly was to move the emphasis of the work into the classroom and away from that steering group*" (N181). The following comment captures the brokerage and translation role that is often played by co-leaders in identifying and implementing innovative ideas:

> "*Again, it's about taking this wider perspective and then translating into what it looks like in the classroom with the teachers. So I think my role as co-leader has probably had a bigger impact on the teaching staff here, than it has on my own practice.*" (N236)

It is interesting that this co-leader does not see the connection between her developing leadership perspective and its impact on teaching practice. This may reflect the tendency already noted among co-leaders to separate network and school leadership experiences. Her comments do, however, suggest that networks involve a complex interplay between visible and invisible forms of leadership and that the collective purpose of networked activity promotes collective responsibility and high expectations among staff in less formal positions.

### Other leaders' perspectives

Teachers have often seen this appeal to collective responsibility in terms of awareness-raising. This is true both of relatively inexperienced teachers and established deputies: "*It's definitely changed how I teach and I've been teaching a long time. I'm much more aware of how children learn in different ways and it wouldn't have happened if the network hadn't existed*" (Deputy, N242). Other teachers speak of having become more aware of what is going on in the classroom and adopting a more enquiry-focused approach to children's learning. One teacher – and gifted

and talented co-ordinator – reflects the power/permission dialectic identified
earlier in the following characterisation of professional autonomy. Her words demonstrate the
impact of the network leadership's emphasis on independence which she in turn passes on to
the children in her class:

> "I think things that we all learned as a staff were just the pauses, the gaps allowing time
> for children to think, not trying to cram too much in. And allowing the children to talk to
> each other about something, so I do a lot of that now – turn to a partner and tell them
> what I've just said or what you think about this – and I think a lot of us found that that
> was one thing that instantly changed and was beneficial." (N302)

This also emphasises the effectiveness of the enquiry-based approach, which seems to be most
powerful when it is constantly reinforced and modelled by network leaders at all levels.

Headteachers also tend to reflect this increased confidence both in themselves and in the
professionalism of others: "*I think for too long now we have had courses laid on, whether it be at
local level or further afield. It is actually okay to stimulate them, you have some very standard
training that's going on, but this is slightly deeper, I think, and thought-provoking. And I like that
– that's exciting*" (Headteacher, N263). Networks reduce isolation among headteachers while
simultaneously allowing schools to be more self-sufficient in their provision of CPD. This can
sometimes simply take the form of being exposed to practice in other contexts and gauging the
extent to which it can be adapted to your own: "*You'd see use of specialist teachers from another
[school]. You would try them out. You would see setting that worked and setting that didn't work
in some of the other schools. And it would help you to make your decisions by practical examples
that other schools were already doing*" (N271).

## Developing self and working with others

The previous example, identifying the impact on network schools of focused, inclusive
professional development, also relates to leaders' development of themselves and others. This
encompasses communication, relationship-building, sharing leadership and building
collaborative learning cultures for professional learning communities. As the previous chapters
have indicated, there is considerable evidence from the NLC programme in this area.

### Co-leaders' perspectives

Interviews conducted with co-leaders in December 2004 explicitly asked them how their
involvement in a network had influenced their leadership practice in schools. Most
interviewees were clear that leading networks and leading schools inform and develop each
other in a reciprocal process. In addition, many responses cluster around professional
development, developing relationships and building internal leadership capacity: "*I mean, in
the school here people often, obviously as a deputy they come and ask you, lots of different advice
and ideas and things, but I can offer them more now because of what I know through the
networked learning community*' (N278). A second co-leader from the same network emphasised
the importance of self-development through extensive contact with colleagues in other schools
in creating '*tailor-made CPD'* (N278, Enq04):

> "Because I've been involved with other schools, I've come back with different ideas,
> different thoughts and feelings about things and come back to school and said, 'What
> about this and what about that?' and 'So and so's doing this and can we?' so it's kind of
> given me more to bring back to the table in my own school.  And encouraged the staff in
> my school to get out and visit other schools in the network or otherwise, to say 'Go and
> find out what other schools are doing'."
>
> (N278)

However, one co-leader was much less sanguine about the short-term, negative impact of his involvement: "*It's actually a much bigger job than I planned, so I think it's had a detrimental effect on my own school leadership*" (N181). The strength of feeling in this co-leader is unusual, but it is a common concern that network leadership takes time and energy away from the co-leader's role in school, particularly in the early stages of a network. It is significant that he assumes that this will be a temporary problem to be resolved through distributing leadership and responsibility further: "*I think longer term it's probably going to have a positive effect because [...] I'm having to be far more considered about moving things forward given the nature of the group, and the degree of autonomy those people are used to working with*" (N181).

Many network leaders emphasise how much they have learned and gained in confidence through their involvement in the network. Some co-leaders have spoken of the confidence that comes from having introduced initiatives aimed at improving pupil learning that have proved effective. Others identify being more tolerant, thinking more deeply, and learning to work collaboratively. None of these is an easy development to measure.

---

**VIGNETTE 6: Developing capacity through enquiry**

This network was established with 11 primary schools and 1 special school in one of the smallest local authorities in the country. The majority of the schools work with children from communities with high levels of unemployment and social deprivation. The leadership and organisation of the network initially came from a group of four headteachers who form a co-leadership team within the network.

Although there have been a variety of strands to the enquiry work, it all originally centred on the notion of 'barriers to learning'. A consultant was engaged to help to identify nine key issues which research groups might be interested in enquiring about. Each school was then invited to nominate three teachers to join one of the research groups. Since then, 70 enquirers have been involved in the groups. The fact that they chose to look for volunteers and spend the money on giving time and space to the willing rather than creating new posts bought participation and commitment. The members of the steering group then felt that they had the capacity to take on the role for which they originally needed to use a consultant. This development in leadership learning mirrored and supported the progress being made through the work of the research groups. As a result, in the words of one of the co-leaders of the network: "*Across our schools we have noted the emergence of enquiry-based improvement strategies, where the thinking of groups of professionals has been stretched with little resistance.*" (taken from N217, Enq04)

---

*Other leaders' perspectives*

Headteachers frequently refer to the growing sense of support and community that the network has created: "*I pick up the phone and talk to other people, whereas I would have made a decision and stuck to it without the courage of my convictions. I use sounding boards from other people and apply it and that goes for other staff as a whole as well*" (Head teacher, N242). This not only helps to overcome the sense of isolation that headteachers frequently feel but can also be found in many of the leading network figures who have moved into advisory roles, where they are able to translate and put into practice what they have learned about working collaboratively in a system context.  Collaboration breeds further collaboration:

> "*For me as a head, it's very important that I see other contexts, other ideas, have interchange across schools and I have access to that in an open environment. That stimulates my own thinking, makes me able to compare, reflect when I come back into school, makes me able to encourage other people to go and look at things in other schools.*" (Headteacher, N200)

Other headteachers speak of becoming more tolerant and flexible: *"I look at the fact that no one person is right. I'm very interested in developing my own personal skills further. There isn't a full-stop in my career and neither is there a full-stop in our staff's careers"* (N270).

Middle leaders seem to have benefited enormously from the additional leadership roles that networks create. They have spoken of improving their questioning technique and changing their approach to teaching in general, as well as learning from their increased engagement with research:

> *"The very fact that you're involved with other people in the network means that there's a good thing to keep the momentum going. In terms of research you can't allow the inertia to build up because you've made a commitment to it. […] And we do see that as one of the things that brings life to schools and to teachers, and really, renews the vigour of lessons and gets kids on side."* (N193)

Deputies have also benefited from the increase in flexibility that is associated with involvement in learning networks and often results in reduced hierarchy. This often begins with the network leadership's commitment to enquiry, which pervades the network and leads to development at all levels: *"It is just looking back on your own teaching, and when you hear about all the strategies you wonder, 'Do I do that enough? What could I do to change that seems to work for them? Maybe it is an idea for me to try it out for myself'. You reflect much much more"* (Teacher, N307). This network's commitment to research was underlined by the fact that they employed a research consultant whose contribution was highly valued by its enquiry group (N307, Enq04).

## Shaping and creating the future

This area addresses issues such as vision-building and implementation, strategic school improvement, change and innovation. The central question is whether schools are now more able to shape the future as a result of their involvement in learning networks, which David Crandall has noted are, themselves, a newer form of organising learning within education.

### Co-leaders' perspectives

Co-leaders and network steering groups used their formal authority to build a shared vision and values around this focus in which power and authority could be redistributed (Copland, 2002, p 15) and disparate constituent groups could be mobilised. This recalls the evidence already cited which has suggested that articulating the vision is at least as important as constructing it, as well as David Crandall's insistence that how things are said is often as important as what is said. There is evidence that the co-leadership model not only allowed network leaders to model collaborative vision-building, but also, in some cases, to co-ordinate tasks in order to exploit their skills. For example, one co-leader might concentrate on establishing vision and values, while the other or others would focus on implementing, sharing and protecting them. How has this influenced practice in schools and activity in the wider system? Early evidence from a number of network co-leaders was that they were becoming *"much more outward-looking"* (N271) and adopting *"a wider perspective"* (N211). Co-leaders have spoken of a shift towards *"more innovative practice"* (N271) and claim that their vision in particular has broadened: *"I think working across schools, having more distance, you can see things and put them in perspective a bit better"* (Co-leader, N289). In terms of planning for innovation and change, schools have benefited from their prolonged exposure to and engagement with other schools, in being able to identify, share and implement effective practice. The evidence from the programme suggests that the outward-facing movement has only increased as the networks have developed, accompanied by greater involvement with the wider system: *"Our network schools are being asked to work with completely new networks now and schools who have not had this journey, and it's only when you have a conversation with people who haven't had the journey with you that you realise how far you've come"* (Co-leader, N296).

*Other leaders' perspectives*

One headteacher and former co-leader reflected the common perception that one of the network's functions is to provide the collective vision to be implemented in schools. This is reflected in the headteacher's role in negotiating with the school's governors to translate strategy in school policy: "*To influence, if you like, knowing that when the governors were to develop a policy that we would try to influence that policy by having some of the networked learning community ideals within it*" (N271). This suggests that the network's influence is to supply a perspective which goes beyond the single school and moves school planning closer to the '*evolutionary and flexible*' models of effective school improvement (Louis & Miles, 1990). Another headteacher has echoed this notion of aspiration and readiness to change: "*Our thinking has changed – our thinking is evolving. We are not set in our ways […] I am proud of the fact that somebody my age is still prepared to come in and try something different every day*" (N305). This was echoed in an enquiry report which stated that the network '*encourages reflection and creative problem-solving in a supportive yet challenging environment*' (N305, Enq03). The increased involvement of middle leaders and teachers in planning is also seen to have had a direct impact on both classroom practice and individuals' professional identity: "*I think it has definitely focused our career paths, hasn't it? And made us better teachers really, from the strategy stuff we have learnt*"(Teacher, N307).

## Managing the organisation

This covers elements such as managing resources and systems, and establishing administrative structures. For a number of reasons, management seems to be the hardest area in which to reconcile network leadership with influence on practice in schools. Teachers tend not to join networks because they want to learn more about management, and the shifting boundaries of network forms and often intangible nature of networked activity do not lend themselves to linear management. Certainly, the NLC programme has provided much less evidence of involvement in networks influencing leaders' practice or behaviour in these areas. Sharing and distributing leadership also play a part, along with the cultural shift signalled by the movement away from competition towards collaboration. It is interesting to note, however, that 70 per cent of the 403 schools in NLCs inspected by Ofsted between 2003 and 2005 were rated good, very good or excellent in terms of management effectiveness. A further 25 per cent were rated satisfactory.

*Co-leaders' perspectives*

Networked learning is often associated with increased momentum, perhaps because it multiplies schools' exposure to external influence: "*We've done things quicker and we've done things better, you see, with lots of stimulus*" (Co-leader, N269). Emphasis tends to be placed on broad, philosophical changes, rather than detailed management, partly because successful networks create the kind of enthusiasm that tends to be associated with wholesale shifts in philosophy rather than management models. The most frequently made assertion refers to new and effective 'ways of working' that many people wish to continue in some unspecified form. In many cases, reverting to an earlier mode of management or leadership would no longer be possible because everyone involved has learned and developed so much: "*I'm sure that working with [my two co-leaders] has had an impact on the way I work with my assistant head because I've got used to sharing that little bit more*" (N278). The following comment also indicates the degree to which creating time and space to develop lateral leadership capacity at all levels inevitably has an impact on how schools are managed: "*As a leader, hopefully it's made me model good leadership, and also helped me to see that I must try to develop other people to be leaders*" (Co-leader, N281). Other research found evidence of distributed leadership in the network but emphasised the need for this to be increased if the network was to be sustained. (Noden & Barrett, 2006).

*Other leaders' perspectives*

There is much less direct evidence in this area, but one headteacher and former co-leader made a very clear distinction – and connection – between the roles of co-leader and headteacher:

> *"Co-leader of the network, as it began, I think, was trying to develop an idea and an ideal. Headteacher in the school was to try to use that ideal to manage personnel, to manage pupils, to manage parents, to manage governors' policy- making.* (N271)

This suggests that leading networks requires significantly different skills from managing schools. Elsewhere, the same co-leader notes that his school was quite advanced in terms of distributing leadership and involving staff at all levels in decision-making but his contribution emphasises the fact that involvement in networks allows this kind of management practice to be shared, along with effective classroom practice. It is all too easy to ignore the impact of collaboration in this area and to overlook the powerful legitimising effect of having elements of your management ethos recognised by a broader community of schools.

## Strengthening community

Involvement in networks draws schools and school leaders into a range of communities and community relationships. The opportunities for schools to collaborate with schools and other partners have proliferated since the NLC programme was established, and many schools are now involved in multiple networks. This makes them particularly fertile ground for schools and school leaders to learn – and pass on their knowledge – about building community partnerships and involving local stakeholders. However, increasing the network connections involved also potentially magnifies the complexity of functioning as a network, as the local authorities which have become involved in attempts to broker networks to meet the demands of *Every Child Matters* have found (Mongon & Farrar, 2006).

*Co-leaders' perspectives*

On one level, increased community among headteachers is a feature of NLCs, reflecting in part perhaps an attempt to overcome the feelings of isolation which have already been identified. Some co-leaders have spoken of their relationships with their fellow head teachers becoming closer and more open than they had been in previous cluster arrangements. Lingering elements of competitiveness that had characterised relationships in initiatives such as Education Action Zones had also been overcome.  Instead they emphasise the community element: "*It's certainly changed how I look at staff in schools and how I access the benefits from other schools*" (N270).

While it obviously varies according to context, as the programme has developed, and particularly since primary strategy networks have been introduced, co-leaders have found that their influence has increased: "*I've been absolutely amazed how much influence I do have and therefore that sense of responsibility has really hit me in terms of I've got to get this right for people, because they believe that I might be able to help them*" (Co-leader, N258). An individual's influence is as beneficial for their school as it is for their network: "*I think making connections is the best thing that I do and I think I would like to have a little bit more influence, although I'm definitely getting there now –  definitely*" (Co-leader, N270). This echoes Fullan's (2006, p 4) notion of enlarging your sphere of engagement: '*Networks get you out of your own narrow world. And when you enlarge your world laterally within your own level of the system, and vertically across levels, you gain ideas and perspective*'.  There is some evidence that some networks have found that this enlarged perspective made them particularly well placed to respond to the *Every Child Matters* agenda as Worrall & Noden (2006) and this vignette indicate.

**VIGNETTE 7: A community network**

This network involves all 17 schools in a small, rural town in the north west. Since 2004, the network's objective has been to move from a network initially focused on school improvement and raising standards to harnessing the collective will of schools, other agencies and the community to deliver improvements in educational services to children and families in the area. It has achieved this by establishing cross-school leadership groups and involving members of the wider community, building capacity by distributing leadership and developing new higher-level leadership skills to respond to the needs of the very diverse users within the network. Critically, the three network leaders feel they have developed negotiation and mediation skills, along with 'political know-how' and diplomacy. Local residents and staff in schools and other agencies are now buzzing with energy, excitement and enthusiasm. They feel, perhaps for the first time, that they are involved in something that really will make an impact, that will go beyond their own family or school, as the following quotations suggest:

*"My self-perception as a community leader has been transformed as I now recognise that my part in leading a community is as a member of a team of leaders who work collaboratively to serve a community."* (Co-leader)

*"It really feels different - we're in at the start, not being brought in part-way through after things have gone wrong."* (Local resident) (taken from N312 case study)

### Other leaders' perspectives

The raised profile identified by co-leaders is not limited to them alone and can be seen in the wider system's recognition and use of the experience and skills of headteachers involved in network leadership:

> *"They're the heads who get asked to do these things, I guess, because they're usually good at them and their own schools can cope with them being out a few days, but also because they're used to working in other people's schools. They're used to working in other settings and getting to know a context really quickly."*
>
> (Co-leader, N296)

Although the notion of headteacher isolation is a common one, the 2005 Annual Enquiry found that networks of small schools seem to have made a particularly strong impact where the sense of isolation is often pervasive: *"If you're not careful, you get isolated; you don't know how you're doing… [The network] has given us the confidence to say 'Yeah, what we're doing people think is pretty good.'  In the past you would never get that feedback"* (Headteacher N261). As a result, the collective influence of the small schools' network has hugely increased their influence in what is a very large local authority. Another headteacher and network-to-network consultant emphasised the "*the value of learning together, and collaborative working*" (N270) to a small school where broadening community is valued very highly. The sense of community is also reflected most obviously in the movement away from competition hinted at in the vignette above: *"I feel that we've got mutual trust and respect, so I do not feel that there's going to be any sort of backbiting, by saying you don't understand that, whereas it could have happened in other situations"* (Headteacher, N312).

This sense of being led into collaboration is also evident in teachers' accounts of how they have changed their practice, with involvement in enquiry again being a very important factor in this context. This is also true of teaching assistants, many of whom had also felt very isolated from school decision-making prior to the formation of the network. As networked learning is embedded, it is often new teachers who are best able to capture the feeling of community that network involvement engenders: *"From moving from one school that wasn't in a network to here, it was really, really nice to have the support and to know that as a whole group of schools*

*you are working together to improve. It's a nice feeling*" (Assistant headteacher, N312). There is considerable evidence from co-leaders and headteachers alike that network and school leaders have a crucial role to play in creating the conditions in which a supportive community can emerge. The following words from a Foundation teacher emphasise how supportive this can be:

> "I talk to the other teachers and nursery nurses that have been with me and say, 'What do you think if we try this? You know, is it worth giving this a little go? Is it going to be likely to succeed?' And very often we'll try, and sometimes things fall flat on their faces, but at least we've tried, and at least we can say we're always striving to improve performance, and that's why we try. If something seems like it's totally ridiculous and certainly wouldn't work in our setting, then we don't, but if we didn't go and we didn't see and we didn't know about these other things, we'd never try them, would we?" (N192)

## (Securing) accountability

Accountability in networks can sometimes be seen as a problematic issue and hence appears to have had little influence on traditional models of school accountability. It may be, however, that received wisdom about top-down accountability is too narrow. If the notion is broadened to encompass '*deepening professional accountability'* (Stoll, 2004, p 13) and collective responsibility for pupil learning found in effective professional learning communities (Bolam *et al*, 2005), this appears to demonstrate a more widespread and powerful form of accountability linked to distributed leadership. Such accountability is founded on the assertion that '*leaders are enquiry-minded and encourage this among others*' (Stoll *et al*, 2006, p 3), as well as being committed to self-assessment, self-evaluation and continuous improvement, which suggests that schools and school leaders have been profoundly affected by their engagement with networks and networked learning in relation to this form of accountability. The relatively 'invisible' nature of network leadership makes it difficult, but not impossible, to assess impact (Church *et al*, 2002) and it may be that gathering and analysing extensive accounts of practice, success and difficulty will be an important tool.

### Co-leaders' perspectives

An emphasis on leaders working '*actively to promote among their colleagues the same sense of professional accountability and collective responsibility for students' learning'* (Stoll, 2004, p 13), comes much closer to areas where networked leadership can be influential:

> "I'd say it's probably as co-leaders we're now more facilitators rather than directors. And I think as well it's just made us more questioning. In everything we do we're thinking, well, will this have an impact on pupil learning focus and evidence? and everything we're thinking about now is like that probably."  (Co-leader, N233)

As this paper has already emphasised, many co-leaders have spoken of the impact of network leadership on their whole philosophy of leadership. The following comments indicate the extent to which this shift in mindset towards enquiry and reflection supports a version of accountability that is based on a very broad notion of pupil learning and pupil engagement:

> "It's now a way of life, a way of thought. You've got an idea, you want to develop something, you have a problem or anything, it's now much more normal to go and work and discuss with people. Likewise, particularly at headteacher level and beginning to percolate down, is the business of ownership of all our kids, which is a real big trust that we've been putting across. […] And it's now a genuine thing that we're actually concerned about every single kid in the school, in the town, which is interesting in a way as well." (Co-leader, N302)

The organisation of the headteacher's steering group, good communication and inclusive launch conferences have been identified as contributing factors to this development (N302,

Enq03). The emphasis on a new way of thinking in this co-leader is particularly common among successful co-leaders.

### Other leaders' perspectives

An assistant principal has underlined the collective responsibility that is built up through collaborative enquiry and the difficulty of tracking its effects, as well as a conviction that this mode of operating is embedded in schools, as well as in the network: "*I think if the network didn't exist, we would still keep on going with our research we're doing at the moment*" (N193). This feeling of almost inevitable sustainability echoes earlier comments and examples. Teachers have spoken of thinking much more about the purpose of everything they do in the classroom and of the impact of reflection and listening to others. Collaboration breeds collective accountability when it works well: "*So it sort of works its way down but then everybody takes part and we all take responsibility for it*" (Assistant headteacher, N312). Where it works well, involvement in enquiry builds collective responsibility by linking individuals' day-to-day practice with the network's broader objectives. Once this enquiry-mindedness is embedded in individuals, it seems to take hold very powerfully: "*Because of the research I did on review, I think about the importance of review, whereas perhaps in the past, although I knew it was important I didn't realise quite how significant it was*" (N193).

# 5. Concluding dialogue

*To conclude this review of the many aspects of leadership as observed in the Networked Learning Communities programme, the authors reflect on the paper collaboratively and discuss its implications for policy, practice and further enquiry.*

**DPC:** The paper offers a tremendous amount of depth about the complex arena of leadership in networks and the challenges that arise for the individuals involved. I want now to consider tensions, concerns, surprises and implications that have emerged for us as we have reflected on the completed paper. There is certainly plenty of evidence of the dynamics of power, passion, perspective and permission in the quotes and vignettes.

**MJ:** It was interesting how they were revealed in the statements from the co-leaders who were interviewed. I was especially struck by the sense that involvement in the network had given co-leaders and leaders at other levels a new freedom in terms of their own behaviour. When they talk about their work in the network it often contrasts with how they function in their school. They found it much less constraining on how they could behave as a network co-leader.

**DPC:** It sounds to me as if the network somehow gave them 'permission' to try out some behaviours they felt they couldn't do in their school. Of course, that's interesting, but I wonder why there's that difference.

**MJ:** It's hard to say, but there clearly is a tension. Indeed, the research has revealed several tensions for me. The first tension is between the need for formal, dedicated leadership in a network and retaining the space for new leadership forms to emerge. One of the ways in which this structural tension is revealed is in network leaders at all levels referring to an individual leader, while often simultaneously also speaking of the development of leadership as a guided, rather than mandated, process of distribution on multiple levels. Enquiry seems to have played a vital part here in encouraging a shift in the location of leadership in networks.

**DPC:** This strikes me as an inevitable tension that is ultimately productive. That is, both are likely needed for a network to remain simultaneously focused and flexible. Going to either extreme as the only modus operandi is a recipe for either dictators or ditherers. My hunch is that we would see the balance shift as the network develops and matures or when it goes through a major recalibration to a new purpose.

**MJ:** The second tension is the one that has perhaps risen most strongly out of this paper and addresses process, rather than structure. It occurs where traditional ideas of hierarchical school leadership meet more fluid notions of network leadership. This is where freedom comes in again. Even though many co-leaders stated that their leadership behaviour grew out of their experience of school leadership, it seems quite clear that they found that the experience of having to fit into a more facilitative form of leadership benefited both the network and the schools of those who retained school leadership responsibility.

**DPC:** My guess is that they felt freed by the fact that facilitative leadership was virtually a requirement. At the outset, this would give even the most traditional leader the protection of a condition they had to conform to rather than one they had to formulate and defend. Plus, they were convinced that it would be OK if they stumbled; no-one expected them to be perfect from the outset. So the parameters of the networks provided the supportive conditions to experiment with alternative ways of behaving.

**MJ:** The idea of alternative ways of behaving also suggests an obvious tension between the dynamics of power and permission in networks. The evidence suggests that it takes time to overcome existing patterns of control and develop the mutual trust that enables networks to allow its members to operate more autonomously. Like most network activity, this is not a

linear process. As networks develop and change, trust has to be constantly built and rebuilt and empowerment may have to be repeatedly reinforced via formal leadership structures.

DPC: Trust is the 'gold standard' in successful networks, I agree. Progress and success will only come with increasingly collaborative action because the actions of each and every participant are subject to the scrutiny of all participants in contrast to a more self-contained school. Furthermore, the pursuit of a common purpose requires everyone to pull in the same direction, especially as the nature and magnitude of the problems pursued are beyond the capability of any single participant. Since people are in it for the long haul, perhaps they are more willing to push beyond their comfort zones sooner than they might, as well as granting others the space they themselves realise they need to innovate.

MJ: The idea of encouraging innovation introduces the final tension, which is connected to a sense of professional renewal. There is considerable evidence that, as many networks develop, more visible forms of leadership are often subverted and usually invisible leadership, typically in distributed forms, is increasingly recognised, as the following comments from a co-leader underline:

> "I think that broader definition of leadership is important – and seeing ourselves as developing leaders across the network. I think to have made some of the invisible processes visible, and some of the leaders that were invisible more visible, and to raise the profile of different sorts of leaders has been important."

This is also paralleled beyond the network in the case of some co-leaders who have been increasingly recognised and engaged by the wider system.

DPC: I see this one as more positive than subversive. What you're calling 'invisible leadership' I'd label 'latent leadership'. A central intention of most network efforts is to activate the potential of participants and this often manifests itself in behaviours we label 'leader-like' or reflective of leadership. This more general term accommodates the conception that it's a combination of encouraging conditions mixed with a confident, competent facilitator (aka the formal leader) who activates that which was there all the time, just kept dormant by convention or tradition.

MJ: What are your primary concerns as you look to the future of leadership in networks like these in the UK?

DPC: I have three interrelated concerns. First, I worry for the individuals who have demonstrated leadership, whether they are those formally designated or those who have emerged. Those leaders, especially those who have just begun to display leadership proficiency, need ongoing support to reinforce their progress toward becoming true collaborative leaders. Such individuals are still not the majority in the larger educational system. Second, I worry that the sustained focus on learning may fall victim to more mundane priorities. It will be far too easy to slip into a less challenging set of 'co-ordination and co-operation' arrangements that travel under the network banner but lose the moral purpose that made networked learning communities so unique. Lastly, I think networks as an organisational form remain sufficiently unusual in education that leaders need continuing support until they become thoroughly bedded down and sustainable as a legitimate way of organising education that is committed to continuous improvement. There doesn't have to be a huge infrastructure, but these are still fragile enterprises in many cases and they, as well as the leaders involved, are still developing.

MJ: There does seem to be some positive evidence of networks and network leaders addressing the sustainability issue not by attempting to continue as they are, but by transforming themselves via new collaborative arrangements such as primary strategy networks or local authority clusters. Further research will be needed over the next few years into whether these attempts are successful and, if they are, how they achieved this.

**DPC:** I certainly hope there will be some follow-on research that would study the next period of transition of these networks. My hunch is there will be some quite robust next generation networks and some that will quickly degenerate into business as usual. This period will offer a new round of challenges to the leaders of the networks. To elaborate on my previous response, their new relationships and new-found freedom can easily become diverted from the primary intent of the NLC networks: to be steadfast in focusing on the learning of pupils and adults while pursuing significant problems that are beyond the capabilities of any single participant. While it may be necessary to use the additional capacity that comes from collaborative arrangements to tackle a wider range of problems, if a true learning focus doesn't pervade the work of a group, it will fail to realise its potential as a transformative endeavour.

**MJ:** As you've observed the NLC programme, has there been anything that's surprised you?

**DPC:** A few things were surprising: first, the calibre and creativity of the individuals – simply top drawer. Not just the staff from the programme, but the co-leaders and participants, as well as many local authority people. As the programme grew and the number of networks increased, the quality of participants didn't seem to diminish. Next, the mobility: I'm amazed at how quickly some leading individuals were recognised as having something to contribute at the next level and, the next thing you know, they have a new position. The good news is that they can insinuate their enthusiasm, experience and expertise into the larger system much faster than might otherwise seem likely, at least in the US. I leave this chapter of the adventure with great admiration for its accomplishments and great optimism for its continuing influence and contribution.

**MJ:** I would like to tie this concluding dialogue up with some of the key findings which have emerged from this work:

Firstly, it seems that the co-leadership model has been proved durable and effective, as has been suggested by the number of networks choosing to extend the model as they move into their new configurations. This seems to have been reinforced, rather than undermined, in most cases by the fact that co-leaders had to learn as they went, forcing them to model collaborative leadership learning.

Secondly, we have found evidence of networks distributing leadership on a range of levels throughout the network, a development that has been highly dependent on involvement in enquiry. Networks seem to have been successful in providing leadership opportunities that do not arise in such numbers in individual schools. Further research is needed to trace the future developments of these new leadership forms.

Finally, the fact that leadership capacity has been transformed and extended in these ways has significantly influenced schools and school leadership practice. Co-leaders' reporting that their practice has been changed irretrievably may be self-reported, but it is reinforced by other adults in the network and other research. Similarly, there is considerable evidence of network leaders at a range of levels becoming increasingly influential in the wider system. As some co-leaders are moving into advisory or consultant positions in their local area, there is evidence that the increased leadership capacity they have created is filling in behind them, a development which may have important implications for succession planning as the current leadership cadre moves towards retirement. However, the evidence suggests that there is no simple, single solution to leading networks. One of the factors that make the leadership models that have developed so powerful is that they are so responsive to their defining context.

**DPC:** Those work for me. This collaboration has been thought-provoking and enjoyable – I hope we can do it again sometime.

# References

Anderson, M, 2005, *System thinkers in action? The leadership of networks of schools.* Paper prepared for a symposium for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, Montreal

Anderson, M & Thomas, N, 2004, *Facilitating leadership development for learning networks.* Paper prepared for a symposium for the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference, Manchester

Anderson, M, Kubiak, C, Creasy, J & Hadfield, M, 2004, *Building leadership and facilitation capacity in networked learning communities.* Paper prepared for a symposium for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, San Diego

Anderson, M, Hadfield, M and O'Leary, D, 2005, *Developing adaptive leaders: the "co" in the co-leadership of school-to-school networks.* Paper prepared for the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) Conference, Barcelona

Andrews, J, Gillam, K, Harrington, P & Day, C, 2004, *Changing teaching and learning relationships in the classroom: a cross-school collaborative action research project*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference, Manchester

Antonakis, J, Cianiolo & Sternberg, R J (eds.), 2004, *The Nature of Leadership.* Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications

Bennett, N, Wise, C, Woods, P & Harvey, J, 2003, *Distributed Leadership,* Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Bolam, R, McMahon, A, Stoll, L, Thomas, S, Wallace, M, with Greenwood, A, Hawkey, K, Ingram, M, Atkinson, A & Smith, M, 2005, *Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities,* DfES Research Report RR637, University of Bristol
www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR637.pdf

Brighouse, T, 2001, *Passionate Leadership*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Cantwell, T, 2006, *Network metamorphosis: an ordinary network's tale of survival.* Unpublished report to the network

Carter, K, Feeley, A, Jeffries, C, Jones, J & Taylor, C, 2004, *Striving for sustainability: re-designing leadership for learning in networked learning communities*. Paper presented to the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement, Rotterdam

Church, M, Bitel, M, Armstrong, K, Fernando, P, Gould, H, Joss, S, Marwaha-Diedrich, M, De La Torre, A-L & Vouhe, C, 2002, *Participation, relationships and dynamic change: new thinking on evaluating the work of international networks*, London, University College London

Copland, M, 2002, *Leadership of inquiry: building and sustaining capacity for school improvement in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative*.
http://www.springboardschools.org/research/documents/LeadershipMonograph.pdf

Cotton, C, 2004, *Protocols: the need to organise for learning, collaborative leadership learning toolkit*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership, unpublished

Court, M, 2004, Talking back to new public management versions of accountability in education: a co-principalship's practices of mutual responsibility, *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* Vol 32 (2) pp 171–194

Crandall, D & Associates, 1982, *People, policies and practice: examining the chain of school improvement*, Vols 1–10, The Network, Andover, Massachusetts

Crandall, D P, Eiseman, J W & Louis, K S, 1986, Strategic planning issues that bear on the success of school improvement efforts, *Education Administration Quarterly*, Vol 22, No 3  pp 21–53

Crandall, D & Stoll, L, 2005, About networking for learning: notes for participants. In Crandall, D and Stoll, L, *Networking for learning: a learning tool to support primary school collaboration,* London, DfES Innovation Unit and National College for School Leadership

Crowther, F, Kaagan, S S, Ferguson, M & Hann, L, 2002, *Developing Teacher Leaders: How Teacher Leadership Enhances School Success,* Thousand Oaks, California, Corwin Press

CUREE, 2003, *Early messages from the networked learning communities: some implications for policy, September 2003*. Unpublished report for National College for School Leadership

CUREE, 2004, Second *annual report of the networked learning communities: some implications for policy*'. Unpublished report for National College for School Leadership

Day, C, Harris, A & Hadfield, M, 2001, Challenging the orthodoxy of effective school leadership, *International Journal of Leadership in Education* Vol 4 No 1 pp 39–56

Elmore, R, 2000, *Building a new structure for school leadership,* The Albert Shanker Institute, http://www.shankerinstitute.org/Downloads/building.pdf

Fullan, M, 2001, *Leading in a culture of change,* San Francisco, Jossey-Bass

Fullan, M, 2006, *Spreading innovation across local authorities: testing systemic solutions,* Nottingham, National College for School Leadership and DfES Innovation Unit

Gronn, P, 2000, Distributed properties: a new architecture for leadership, *Educational Management and Administration* Vol 28, No 3, 317–38

Gronn, P, 2003a, Leadership's place in a community of practice. In Brundrett, M, Burton, N, & Smith, R (eds.)*, Leadership in Education*  pp 23–35

Gronn, P, 2003b, Leadership: who needs it? *School Leadership & Management* Vol 23 No 3 pp 267–290

Gronn, P & Hamilton, A, 2004, 'A bit more life in the leadership': co-principalship as distributed leadership practice,  *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, Vol 3 No1 pp 3–35

Gunter, H, 1997, *Rethinking Education: The Consequences of Jurassic Management,* London, Cassell

Hadfield, M, 2005, *Middle leaders and the nature of distributed leadership in networks.* Paper prepared for a symposium for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, 2005, Montreal

Hadfield, M, Spender, B, Holmes, D & Bavington, T, 2004, *Leading networks: the dynamic between processes and structures. What works?* Paper prepared for a symposium for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, San Diego

Hadfield, M, Stott, A, McGregor, J, Spender, B, Noden, C & Anderson, M, 2005a, *The Leadership of adult learning in school networks*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership, unpublished

Hadfield, M, Kubiak, C, Noden, C & O'Leary, D, 2005b, *Network building; a review of the formation stage of networks in the NLC programme,*  Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Harris, A, 2003, The changing context of leadership: research, theory and practice. In Harris, A, Hopkins, D, Hargreaves, A, Hadfield, M, Day, C & Chapman, C (eds.) *Effective Leadership for School Improvement,*  pp 9–25, London, Routledge

Harris, A, 2004, Distributed leadership and school improvement – leading or misleading? *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 32(1), 11–24

Harris, A & Lambert, L, 2003, *Building Leadership Capacity for School Improvement,* Maidenhead, Open University Press

Hargreaves, A, 2003, *Teaching in the Knowledge Society,* Maidenhead, Open University Press

Hargreaves, A & Fink, D, 2006, *Sustainable Leadership*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass

Holmes, D & Hart, J, 2005*, Desperately seeking fusion: two perspectives of leading learning in a networked learning community*. Paper prepared for the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) Conference, Barcelona

Huber, S, 2003, School leader development: current trends from a global perspective. In Hallinger, P (ed), 2003, *Reshaping the Landscape of School Leadership Development,* pp 273–288, Lisse, The Netherlands, Swets & Zeitlinger

Jackson, D, 2003, Foreword: Building Leadership Capacity. In Harris, A & Lambert, L, 2003, *Building Leadership Capacity for School Improvement,* Maidenhead, Open University Press

Jackson, D, 2004, Networked learning communities: characteristics of 'networked learning' – what are we learning? Paper prepared for the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) conference, *Building Bridges for Sustainable School Improvement,* Rotterdam

Jackson, D & Street, H, 2005a, Introduction to Street, H & Temperley, J (eds.), *Improving Schools Through Collaborative Enquiry,* pp 1–8*,* London, Continuum

Jackson, D & Street, H, 2005b, What does collaborative enquiry look like? In Street, H & Temperley, J (eds.), *Improving Schools Through Collaborative Enquiry*, pp 41–70, London, Continuum

James, K, Mann, J & Creasy, J, 2003, *Collaborative leadership learning: developing facilitation skills for collaborative learning in leadership learning groups*. Paper presented at Educational Innovation in Economics and Business (Edineb) Conference, Salzburg

Jopling, M & Cotgreave, G, 2006, *Janus NLC case study*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Kubiak, C & Bertram, J, 2004, *Network leaders' perspectives on the growth of networked learning communities*. Paper prepared for a symposium for the British Educational Research Association (BERA) Conference, 2004, Manchester

Leithwood, K, 2005*, A review of transformational school leadership research*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, Montreal

Leithwood, K, Jantzi, D & Steinbach, R, 1999, *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*, Maidenhead, Open University Press

Leonard-Barton, D, 1998, *Wellsprings of Knowledge: Building and Sustaining the Sources of Innovation*, Harvard Business School Press

Little, J W, 2005, *Nodes and nets: investigating resources for professional learning in schools and networks*. Unpublished contribution to Networked Learning Communities Research Seminar, National College for School Leadership

Louis, K S & Miles, M, 1990, *Improving the Urban High School: What Works and Why,* New York and London, Teachers College Press

Lownsborough, H & O'Leary, D, 2005, *The leadership imperative: reforming children's services from the ground up,* London, Demos

MacBeath, J, Moos, L & Forrest, J, 1998, Time for a change. In MacBeath, J (ed.), *Effective School Leadership: Responding to Change,* pp 20–31, London, Paul Chapman Publishing

McGrane, J & McGregor, J, 2006, *Southampton Leading for Learning case stud*y, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Mongon, D & Farrar, M, 2006, *Spreading innovation across local authorities: creating a national network,* Nottingham, National College for School Leadership and DfES Innovation Unit

Morrison, K, 2002, *School Leadership and Complexity Theory,* London, Routledge Falmer

NCSL, 2004, *Learning to lead: NCSL's strategy for leadership learning,* Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Noden, C & Barrett, H, 2006, *Sevenoaks Talented and Gifted (STAG) NLC case stud*y, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Sergiovanni, T, 2001, *Leadership: what's in it for schools?* London, Routledge Falmer

Spillane, J P, 2004, *Distributed leadership and networked learning communities: the subject matters*. Unpublished paper produced for National College for School Leadership

Spillane, J P & Sherer, J Z, 2004, *A distributed perspective on school leadership: leadership practice as* stretched over *people and place*. Paper prepared for presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Association, San Diego, April, 2004

Spillane, J P & Orlina E C, 2005, *Investigating leadership practice: exploring the entailments of taking a distributed perspective*. Paper prepared for a symposium for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Conference, 2005, Montreal

Stodgill, R M & Bass, B M (eds.), 1990, *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research,* New York, The Free Press

Stoll, L, 2004, *Leadership learning: designing a connected strategy,* Incorporated Association of Registered Teachers of Victoria (IARTV), Seminar Series no 135

Stoll, L, Bolam, R, McMahon, A, Thomas, S, Hawkey, K & Greenwood, A, 2006, *What is a professional learning community? A summary,* London, Innovation Unit, DfES, NCSL and GTCe

Stott, A, Jopling, M & Kilcher, A, 2006, *How do school to school networks work?* Nottingham, National College for School Leadership (Learning networks research legacy paper 4)

Timperley, H, 2004, *Situating networked learning communities in international research coherence* and *Networked learning communities: a distributed leadership perspective*. Unpublished paper prepared for National College for School Leadership

Veueglers, W & O'Hair, M, 2005, Networking for learning and change. In Veueglers, W (ed.), *Network Learning For Educational Change* pp 173–180*,* Buckingham, Open University Press

Whitaker, P, 1993, *Managing Change in Schools*, Buckingham, Open University Press

Wohlstetter, P, Malloy, C L, Chau, D & Polhemus, J, 2003, Improving schools through networks: a new approach to urban school reform. *Educational Policy* Vol 17 No 4, pp 399–430

Woods, R & Jones, A, 2005, Making space to learn: the development of the NCSL facilitation for Collaborative Leadership Learning Programme. Paper prepared for a symposium for the International Congress for School Effectiveness and Improvement (ICSEI) Conference, Barcelona

Worrall, N, 2003, Oiling the wheels and cleaning the plates? Reflections on the first year of being a co-leader of a networked learning community. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association (BERA) conference, Edinburgh

Worrall, N & Crowe, V, 2006a, *Penryn Partnership Plus NLC case study*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

Worrall, N & Crowe, V, 2006b, *Primary Schools Learning Network (PSLN) NLC case study*, Nottingham, National College for School Leadership

## Methodology and acknowledgements

This paper was produced as one of a series of four research legacy papers based on comprehensive analysis of all the research conducted and commissioned by the Networked Learning Communities programme. The other papers examine pupil learning in networks; adult learning; and how school-to-school networks work.

This paper is based on extensive secondary analysis of data collected during the Networked Learning Communities programme, primarily 78 case summaries and transcripts of interviews with network co-leaders and participants conducted between March 2004 and December 2005. The data set includes:

- 16 verbatim transcripts from interviews with leading network figures conducted in March 2004 for the 'Growth – structure – leadership' research project

- 19 verbatim transcripts from interviews with leading network figures conducted for the 'Leadership and facilitation' research project in April–May 2004

- 12 verbatim transcripts of interviews with network co-leaders conducted for the 'Co-leadership' research project in December 2004

- 20 composite network case studies (cohort 1a only) produced for Phase 2 of the External Evaluation of the NLC programme in January and February 2005. Each contains sections of verbatim transcripts from interviews with a range of staff in one school in each network studied

- 11 verbatim transcripts of interviews with network co-leaders conducted in December 2005 for the 'System leadership' research project

The data was analysed to identify issues pertinent to leadership practice and leadership learning in networks and further examined and triangulated with reference to other documentation from the programme. The 2003 and 2004 enquiry reports written by Networked Learning Group facilitators about each network (coded Enq03 and Enq04) were most useful, along with the more formal enquiry case studies of 10 networks produced by the NLG Research team in 2005 (referenced individually). In addition, a range of previous research reports and conference papers, produced or commissioned by the programme, was also examined, along with networks' submission documents.

It is acknowledged that there are challenges and issues associated with analysing data collected throughout the programme for different purposes. However, it provides a more longitudinal perspective than addressing each data set in isolation and should be regarded as collectively offering thick description of leadership practice in networks, rather than a comprehensive overview.