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"When a school is regarded as the centre of change, strategies for change need to take this new perspective into account, focusing upon expanding the capacity (the internal organisational characteristics) of the school to take control of its own development (the 'inside-out' theory).

"A key component of any modern concept of capacity will involve socially and contextually distributed forms of leadership to support teaching and learning, which can also be further utilised through the dissemination of 'good practice' between schools."

NCSL National College for School Leadership

"… differences between schools in outcome were systematically related to their characteristics as social institutions… All of these factors were open to modification by the staff, rather than fixed by external constraints… The implication is that the individual actions or measures may combine to create a particular ethos, or set of values, attitudes and behaviours which will become characteristic of the school as a whole."
Rutter 1979

"School capacity can be defined as the collective competency of the school as an entity to bring about effective change….It is now clear that for school improvement, leadership needs to focus on two dimensions – the teaching and learning focus on the one hand and capacity on the other."
NCSL Think Tank 2001

"Our distributed perspective focuses on how leadership practice is distributed among positional and informal leaders as well as their followers. Understanding how school leaders work together, as well as separately, to execute leadership functions and tasks is an important aspect of the social distribution of leadership practice. (Such a) distributed view of leadership incorporates the activities of multiple individuals in a school who work at mobilising and guiding school staff in the instructional change process."
Spillane, Halverson and Diamond 2001

The quotation from Michael Rutter and colleagues above, taken from Fifteen Thousand Hours, is one of the most optimistic statements on schooling that we know. It emphasises that it is the quality of the school as a social system that is the key contributor to the effectiveness of the school and that this can be modified and enhanced by the actions and aspirations of its members. It was this belief that gave impetus to the first wave of school improvement efforts and which laid the basis for the emphasis during the last two decades on issues relating to school culture and climate as concepts which lie at the heart of school improvement endeavours.

However, other factors have moved those of us who work in the school improvement and leadership development fields to look beyond these concepts to something deeper. Culture and climate remain comparatively static concepts, yet the world in which schools find themselves is turbulent and uncertain – containing forces that act in dynamic interplay with the climate of the school. The list of such forces is well known: the ubiquitousness of change; the pressures from succeeding waves of standards-based reforms; the imperative to respond to the impact of digital technologies; new understandings about the nature of learning from brain research; school level autonomies; workload issues; public accountability pressures; the expansion of paraprofessional roles. All these factors (and others) have led to a focus world-wide upon attempts at school restructuring, redesign or reengineering.

In simple terms, the requirement to handle continuous multiple change has altered our emphasis. Modern complexity means change, but above all it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, non-linear change (Fullan 2001). Before we have ever become skilled at the management of change, this has itself become an inadequate or outmoded concept. Similarly, the establishment of an appropriate culture or climate is still a necessary but nonetheless an insufficient foundation for success. Contemporary discussions are focusing far more on the concept of school and system 'capacity' – as mentioned in the second of the two opening quotations, from NCSL's Think Tank report (2001). In this paper we will argue that 'capacity' is the key construct in creating the conditions within the school to enhance both leading and learning. We will also argue that a key component of any modern concept of capacity will involve socially and contextually distributed forms of leadership – as suggested in the third of the opening quotations. In developing the argument we will:

- trace the evolution of the concept of capacity within the school improvement tradition
- explore different conceptualisations of capacity
- propose a model for capacity and identify strategies to develop it
- suggest that networking – such as advocated within the Networked Learning Communities design - is one powerful way of developing and enhancing capacity
- conclude by identifying the key implications of the analysis for leading and learning

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The OECD International School Improvement Project – antecedents

A major impetus to the development of school improvement as a strategic response to the challenge of educational change was given by the OECD through its Centre for Educational Research and Development (CERI), which between 1982 and 1986 sponsored an International School Improvement Project (ISIP). ISIP built on previous OECD/CERI initiatives such as The Creativity of the School (Nisbet 1973) and the INSET (Hopkins 1986) projects. Although school self-evaluation was regarded as an important strategy for school improvement, the ISIP took a more holistic and systemic view of educational change. At a time when the educational system as a whole faced not only retrenchment but also pressure for change, a project that focused on school improvement – at change at the meso level, at strategies for strengthening the school's capacity for problem-solving, at making the school more reflexive to change, as well as enhancing the teaching/learning process – was seen as both important and necessary. More detail of the knowledge that emanated from ISIP is found elsewhere (van Velzen 1985, Hopkins 1987, 1990),

ISIP proposed a very different way of thinking about change than the ubiquitous 'top-down' or 'outside-in' approaches. When the school is regarded as the 'centre' of change, then strategies for change need to take this new perspective into account, focusing upon expanding the capacity of the school to take control of its own development. School Improvement, for example, was defined in the ISIP as (van Velzen et al 1985:48):

"A systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions....with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively."

School improvement as an approach to educational change, according to ISIP, therefore rested on a number of assumptions, among which is a key focus on the 'internal conditions' of schools. These include not only the teaching-learning activities of the school, but also its organisational norms, professional learning systems, knowledge transfer processes, leadership arrangements and its receptiveness to external learning (Hopkins et al 1994:69). This conception is very close, as we shall see later, to current views and research findings on school capacity.

The ISIP occurred at a fruitful time for the evolution of school improvement more generally. During this period some large-scale studies of school improvement projects were also conducted. The 'Study of Dissemination Efforts Supporting School Improvement' (see the ten volume report, People, Policies and Practices: Examining the Chain of School Improvement by David Crandall et al 1982) was particularly important. This mammoth study was responsible for the fine-grained analysis of Innovation 'up close' (Huberman and Miles 1984), and an analysis of policy implications (Crandall et al 1986). Much was consequently learned about the dynamics of the change process during this period. In particular, there was an increasing interest in the internal organisational characteristics of the school – what we are now referring to as 'capacity.'

This has led to a widely accepted notion of school improvement – that it is a strategy for achieving positive educational change that focuses on student achievement by modifying classroom practice whilst simultaneously adapting the management, leadership and learning arrangements within the school to support teaching and learning (Hopkins 2001).

Increasing understanding about the nature of school improvement, though, has in itself proved insufficient. Understandings about the component parts from the ISIP analysis have led to a need for clarity about how to put them together in practice. The early emphasis upon 'know what' has moved to a need for 'know how'. The shift to school ownership of change inevitably leads to a requirement for greater understanding about the processes of capacity development – how to create 'capacity.' It is, therefore, to an exploration of capacity that we turn in the following section.

Capacity – an exploration

As has been mentioned above, the idea of capacity as a crucial change metaphor occurs in the writings of a range of theorists and practitioners involved in school improvement over the last two decades. During this period it has been linked with a variety of overarching constructs and concepts. These range from Meyer's (1992) general notion of 'readiness', or a staff's preparedness to deal with change, through to Senge's (1990) institution-related image of the 'learning organisation'. Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) concept of a 'learning community' seeks to embrace both of these, and is a way of viewing capacity that we will return to later in this section.

The phrase, 'the school's capacity for development' is, then, one that we would be likely to find in writings as diverse as texts on educational theory through to OfSTED reports – and yet the concept remains as problematic as Rutter's 'ethos' or Fullan's 'culture'. Without a clear focus on 'capacity', a school will be unable to sustain continuous improvement efforts or to manage change effectively. That we know. It is therefore critical to be able to explore, explain and illustrate the concept of 'capacity' in operational terms – and this is more complex and elusive than it might seem.

What follows is an attempt to do this from a number of perspectives. We are seeking to avoid simplistic attempts to 'define' capacity, but rather to reflect its complexity and multidimensionality by taking a number of 'cuts' at it from different aspects of our work and that of others in the field. Finally, we present a conceptual model arising from recent research undertaken at the National College for School Leadership which we have found to be helpful as an organising construct or 'tool' in our work with schools and school leaders.

Our IQEA work during the last ten or twelve years has demonstrated that without an equal focus on the internal conditions of the school, innovative work quickly becomes marginalised. These supporting 'conditions' have to be worked on at the same time as the curriculum or other priorities the school has set itself. Conditions are the internal features of the school, the 'arrangements' that enable it to get work done. In terms of the IQEA project, it is these 'conditions' that have provided a working definition of the development capacity of the school over the last decade or more (Hopkins 2001, 2002).

The work of Newmann, King and Young (2000) provides another perspective on building learning capacity that complements that of the IQEA work. They argue that professional development is more likely to advance achievement for all students in a school if it addresses not only the learning of individual teachers, but also other dimensions of the organisational capacity of the school. They define school capacity as the collective competency of the school as an entity to bring about effective change. They suggest that there are four core components of capacity:

- Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions of individual staff members
- A Professional Learning Community in which staff work collaboratively to set clear goals for student learning, assess how well students are doing, develop action plans to increase student achievement, whilst being engaged in enquiry and problem-solving
- Programme Coherence – 'the extent to which the school's programs for student and staff learning are co-ordinated, focussed on clear learning goals and sustained over a period of time' (p.5)'
- Technical Resources – high quality curriculum, instructional material, assessment instruments, technology, workspace, physical environment etc

Fullan (2000) comments that this four-part definition of school capacity includes 'human capital' within the first bullet, the knowledge and skills of individuals, but he concludes that no amount of professional development of individuals will have an impact if certain organisational features are not in place to support and to connect the work.

He maintains that there are two key organisational features in this conceptualisation. The first is the concept of 'professional learning communities'. This provides the 'social capital' aspect of capacity. In other words, the skills of individuals can only be realised if the relationships within the schools are continually developing. The other key component of organisational capacity for Fullan is what he calls programme coherence. Since complex social systems have a tendency to produce overload and fragmentation in a non-linear evolving fashion, schools are constantly being bombarded by overwhelming and seemingly unconnected innovations (Fullan 1999). In this sense, the most effective schools are not those that take on the most innovations, but those that are able to integrate, align and co-ordinate innovations into their own focused programmes – to achieve coherence and alignment.

A third perspective on capacity is provided by Corcoran and Goertz (1995:27). They point out that the term also relates to 'the maximum or optimum amount of production' and in so doing relates to issues of efficiency – the 'optimal amount of production that can be obtained from a given set of resources and organisational arrangements'. In other words, this perspective includes not only the capacity to manage more, but also to perform optimally in whatever we have to do. It relates to enhancement of process (efficiency) and outcomes (effectiveness). This in turn leads to questions about how the product of the school, which is viewed as being high quality teaching and learning, can be enhanced, within 'a given set of

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resources', and how the 'organisational arrangements' can be so designed as to generate synergies, interdependencies and efficiencies much as in Fullan's concept of programme coherence.

A fourth and intriguingly compatible analysis of capacity components is provided in the work of David Hargreaves, through which he explores the notion of 'capital'. Like Corcoran and Goertz, he works backwards from the imperative of 'outcomes' (however defined), seeing three dimensions as critically linked in a causal chain. In order to improve outcomes, schools need to increase 'leverage' – the ability (or capacity) of teachers to enhance student learning. In order to expand leverage a school needs to be able to increase its intellectual capital (what teachers know and can do – the knowledge, skills and dispositions of Newmann, King and Young's definition), which it does especially by developing its ability (or capacity) to create and to transfer knowledge. Critical to effective knowledge-creation and transfer, though, is social capital – especially a school's ability to generate trust and to sustain both internal and external networks (Hargreaves 2001).

There are some unifying concepts across these four sources and perspectives that can lead us towards an operational model – a conceptual tool for use in school development work. One is the importance of the people, the leaders, educational professionals and students, and the expansion of their contributions. A second relates to the alignment and synergies created when internal arrangements, connections and teams are working optimally. A third corresponds to the organisational arrangements (the 'programme coherence' and the 'internal networks') which support personal and interpersonal capacity development. The fourth is more subtle, but crucially important. It is the intangible or 'higher order' domain – the territory of shared values, social cohesion, trust, well-being, moral purpose, involvement, care, valuing and being valued – which is the operational field of 'leadership'.

This last dimension of capacity returns us to the opening discussion of 'climate', 'culture' and 'leadership' (and takes it further). It also sets it within a coherent whole that is not independent of people, the interpersonal and the organisational components of schools. It further gives us tools to begin to construct a model.

The two key components of such a model will be the concept of the professional learning community (the people, interpersonal and organisational arrangements working in developmental or learning synergy) and the idea of distributed leadership capacity as the route to generating the moral purpose, shared values, social cohesion and trust to make this happen and to create impetus and alignment. There is also a third – one that we will consider later – which is the extension of professional learning community and moral purpose beyond the school as the unit of focus, and the formation of learning alliances between schools – not professional learning communities, but Networked Learning Communities.

NCSL's research – developing a model

Shortly after its launch in November 2000, the National College for School Leadership in England initiated a research programme entitled 'Building Capacity, Developing Your School' (NCSL, Hadfield et al 2002). The intention was to draw from theory (on the one hand) and from successful schools' practice (on the other) in order to develop a model for thinking about capacity, and a tool that could have practical and applied utility for schools. In saying this, we are committed to a view that, in defining capacity as a variable in schools, we need to go beyond passive descriptions of school conditions to analysing the processes that build such conditions, and, beyond that, to the ways in which those conditions are mobilised and released in the creative and dynamic enactment of change. Ultimately, all capacity-building notions need to be related to processes of change. Whilst maintenance and management is important in school improvement, it is in the creative operationalisation of change that capacity is most powerfully expressed (NCSL, Hadfield et al 2002).

This is not the place to enlarge upon the National College's applied research orientation, nor the methodological details of this particular study. It is important, though, to emphasise the College's preoccupation with the application of knowledge – with the translation of theory and research into active tools and models able to support school leaders with the process of improvement and raising student achievement. The discussion of the capacity model (as with the Networked Learning Communities design) needs to be seen in this light. It is derived from theoretical

underpinnings, but is not intended to provide an advanced theoretical model – quite the reverse. The model is an attempt to offer a template within which operational images of successful practice arising from the research can be located, and which can be used as an analytical and planning tool by leaders, both within schools and across networks of schools.

The model is built from a framework, which contains five elements which, taken together contribute to what we understand by capacity:

- foundation conditions
- the personal domain
- the interpersonal domain
- the organisational domain
- external opportunities

The synergies, interconnections and the emotional and spiritual glue that arises from and surrounds these components is the heartland of capacity.

The ***foundation conditions*** represent the infrastructural stability without which capacity building has no foothold. Without these in place, there is little or no security, respite, time or space to move forward. Managing complex change, and juxtaposing internal and external forces, is inconceivable without stable systems, a safe and secure working environment, an appropriate level of orderliness, managed pupil learning behaviours and a clear sense of purpose and direction. This is not in itself 'capacity' – it is the starting point! In our research we have found, too, that it may need to be addressed both as a separate component (tackling the volatile or the unacceptable) and simultaneously, as a part of the personal, interpersonal and organisational development – as represented in Figure One.

The three interconnected elements – ***personal, interpersonal and organisational*** – are, as has been argued earlier, at the heart of capacity at the operational (rather than the emotional and spiritual) level. They are the key elements of the Professional Learning Community concept, which has little meaning unless grounded in the reality of these interdependent dimensions. As Mitchell and Sackney (2000) argue: 'Scholars often speak about building capacity without explicating what capacity actually means, what kind of capacity, or capacity for what. That is, there has been insufficient attention to what we might call a curriculum of capacity' – a curriculum built around three pivotal components: the personal, interpersonal and organisational.

In Mitchell and Sackney's terms, building ***personal capacity*** relates not only to knowledge and skills, but also to the active and reflective construction of knowledge – a personal and potentially transforming phenomenon.
Interpersonal capacity involves working together on shared purposes – and taking collective responsibility for each other's learning and well-being.
Organisational capacity is concerned with building, developing and redesigning structures that create and maintain sustainable organisational processes. ***Organisational capacity*** entails creating a flexible system that is open to all sorts of new ideas. It is about honouring diversity and about opening doors and breaking down walls.

Organisational capacity is about building a system that invests heavily in professional learning and relationship building.

When a school resolves to build its ***personal, interpersonal and organisational*** dimensions, it is not about simply sharpening the edges of what it already does. It is about doing completely different things – and about doing the same things completely differently. One cannot build a professional learning community by developing in one area and expecting that to suffice. Rather, there needs to be direct, sustained and focused attention on building strength in all three areas so that the synergies can develop. NCSL's work, (and that of Mitchell and Sackney) suggests that the element requiring first attention is probably context specific. That is, whether a school starts to build personal, interpersonal or organisational growth will depend on the needs of the individual location – and indicators as to where the most leverage will be obtained.

Finally, schools operate within a context of outside forces, which we have called ***external opportunities*** in order to emphasis their positive potential to contribute towards improvement.
They are the change forces and reform directives which can be paralysing, destabilising or debilitating. However, as capacity grows within the organisation, a school develops greater confidence to work in creative and resourceful ways with external agencies and initiatives.
It becomes entrepreneurial about opportunities to use external change for internal purposes. External factors can

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then be used, within the existing framework of organisational imperatives, in order to enhance (rather than to divert or fragment) current ways of working. It is relevant here to pick up on Firestone's (1989) notion of 'capacity to use reform', as this fits well with the idea of internal capacity aiding the utilisation of 'external opportunities'. Firestone states that if 'will' refers to the commitment to a decision, 'capacity refers to the wherewithal to actually implement it. The capacity to use reform is the extent to which the [school] has the knowledge, skills, personnel, and other resources necessary'. It relates to Fullan's (1991) idea of schools that are 'entrepreneurial', who exploit external change for internal purposes, or Jackson's complementary (2000) concept of 'intrapreneurialism', as applied to schools that are connected and creative about opportunities for development, both internally and externally – and for finding synergies between the two. In addition, capacity growth within the school increases the likelihood of consultants and external facilitators being used; it strengthens linkages within networks or with universities and other partners and opens the school up to learning from and on behalf of others.

As school leaders are well aware, these components are inter-related elements of complex change, rather than separable ingredients as '…ultimately, building a professional learning community involves ongoing attention to the interdependent elements of a model of capacity-building' (Mitchell and Sackney, 2000).

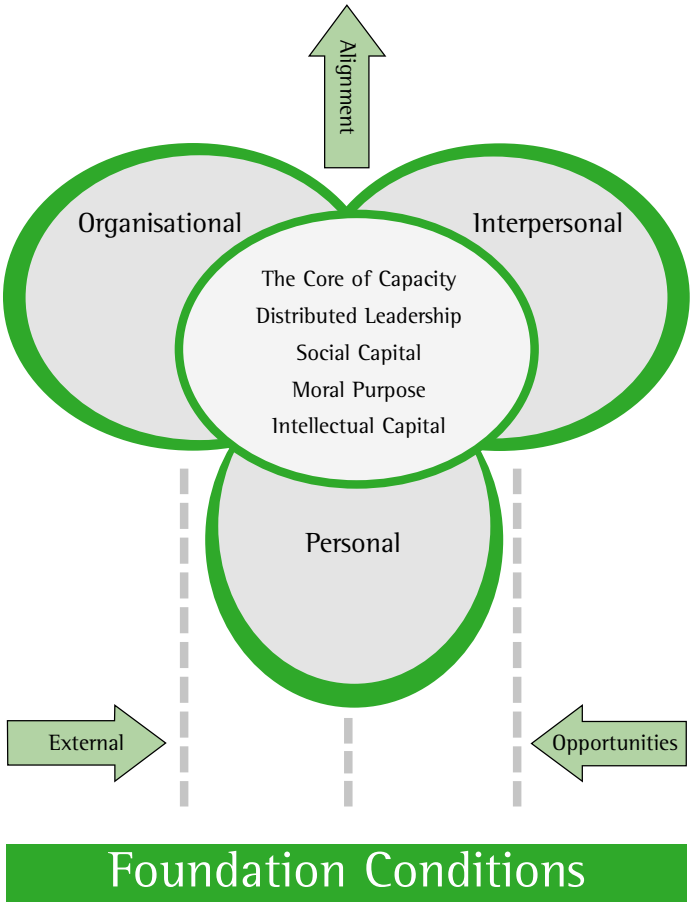
What we have called the heart of capacity – and we are uncomfortable about the terminology – is, as discussed earlier, an outcome of the integration of the above three. (The stronger and more interconnected the elements of professional learning community, the greater the school's capacity.) It involves values, moral purpose, social cohesion and includes also leadership of the capacity building process itself. It includes the depth and breadth of leadership. It arises from the synergies, interdependencies and 'connectedness' between the other core elements. Its four core components are:

- Distributed leadership
- Social capital and cohesion (and trust)
- Values coherence and moral agency
- Intellectual capital – knowledge creation, transfer and utilisation.

From our work, the critical dependent variable amongst the four is leadership.

The components can be formulated into an interconnected model, as represented in *Figure 1* below.

Figure One – A model for capacity building



The model does not seek to be definitive. It is, though, helpful to us in our work. It is both a representation of a complex reality and a tool to help schools with analysis, understanding, collaborative planning, alignment and purposeful action. In this way the model becomes an active agent for school leaders and external facilitators to make sense of the world of the school or network and the capacity-creating process.

For this reason, within NCSL's applied research project we have differentiated between capacity itself, a static concept, ('the school's potential to give form to strategic possibilities') and the process of capacity building, an active one, ('those strategies that allow the school to harness the abilities, skills and knowledge acquired during one process of change to facilitate subsequent changes'). It is this latter process that leads to capacity (Hadfield 2002). Such a concept of capacity building is not new. It is closely related to Senge's (1990) notion of the school becoming a 'self developing force'. NCSL is keen also to extend this beyond the school, to take in the notion of networks and external relationships and partnerships, a broader sense of 'self' – and this is consistent with the College's other Research and Development Programmes, which include a focus upon networks, and upon the particularities of context (Jackson and Southworth 2001).

This strategic and active view of capacity also raises an issue (hinted at earlier) that is only rarely addressed, both in the research literature and in policy initiatives. Much school improvement work assumes in practice that all schools are the same, and that any strategy will work as well in one school as another. Yet evidence of the research on school effectiveness is unequivocal - schools are differentially effective (see for example, Teddlie and Reynolds 2000). This leads to the conclusion that schools at different levels of effectiveness, or in different contextual environments, require different school improvement strategies. When circumstances exist that are less supportive of change, it is necessary to concentrate much more in the initial stages of development work on creating those foundation conditions within the school that facilitate development. Work on the priorities of deeper capacity-creation may be limited until these conditions are in place.

This is not well trodden territory. Nor is their space here for a full consideration of what is complex terrain. However, the model is specifically framed in such a way that it can recognise both the developmental 'growth state' of a school or network and the contextual factors that impact upon its developmental capacity. It is perhaps sufficient to say here that we know that different kinds of school require different kinds of intervention (Hopkins et al 1997). We also know that for professional learning community growth and external support (two elements of the model) schools require both internal and external networking – a theme that we have also written about elsewhere (Hopkins 2001), and one which is represented in two of the Networked Learning Communities 'levels of learning'.

The argument so far

So far in this paper we have considered briefly the recent history of school development approaches – the last two decades, in particular. In doing so, we have sought to illustrate how the continued acceleration of change in education has meant that the dominant models, with their emphasis upon managed change, rational planning and cyclical school improvement rhythms, are becoming increasingly outmoded and inappropriate to the task. Multiple change agendas, enacted in unpredictable environments, and with increasing pressure for transformative rather than incremental outcomes, require different organisational, leadership and improvement paradigms.

We have identified three such paradigm shifts for consideration in this paper, because of their central relevance to the Networked Learning Communities design. The first, the concept of capacity and capacity building has been explored above in depth through consideration of complementary strands of theory. This, in turn, led to the identification of two key concepts – professional learning communities and distributed leadership norms. The first has been embraced within the discussion on the model of capacity emerging from NCSL's recent research. The second will be the subject of the final section of this paper. Prior to that, though, we want to explore briefly the point made earlier, that professional learning community and moral purpose in combination lead inexorably not only to models of 'within-school' learning, but also to a commitment to 'between-school' learning – to learning networks as an organisational form that holds rich promise not only for school improvement, but also for system learning and wider capacity building.

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The role of networks – supporting improvement and building capacity

There has recently been much international interest in the role of networks in supporting school improvement (eg OECD 1999). There are, however, various interpretations of the network concept. Although networks bring together those with like-minded interests, they are more than just opportunities to share 'good practice'. The following definition of networks emerged from an analysis of effective networks identified by the OECD (quotation and discussion in this section based on Hopkins 2001, chapter 10):

"Networks are purposeful social entities characterised by a commitment to quality, rigour, and a focus on outcomes. They are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change. In education, networks promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance the professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations and systems."

It is an adaptation of this definition that has been adopted to inform the Networked Learning Communities programme. The qualities exhibited by such networks are, however, not easily acquired. A number of key conditions need to be in place if networks are to realise their potential as agents of educational innovation. However, the argument advanced so far in this paper is that networks in education present an organisational form that has a key role to play in supporting innovation and school improvement and in building both school and system capacity.

Accordingly, networks need to be regarded as support systems, new organisational forms for innovative schools, not only in disseminating 'good practice', but also in helping schools to share and understand 'good process' – the capacity-creating collaborative processes that lead to quality practice. They are also important in overcoming the traditional isolation of schools, and to a certain extent even challenging traditional hierarchical system structures. In the past, most school systems have operated almost exclusively through individual units; be they teachers, departments, schools or local agencies. Such isolation may have been appropriate during times of stability, but during times of change there is a need to 'tighten the loose coupling', to increase collaboration and to establish more fluid, flexible and responsive structures.

It is important to realise, however, that networks do not just facilitate innovation. By offering the possibility of new ways of working, the development of network forms will also be an innovation in itself. This is particularly important in contemporary educational systems, as there is currently a tendency to reduce 'middle-level' support for schools. It may well be that these support structures – the role that local education authorities or school districts, local universities, and other agencies have traditionally played – are also more effective at buttressing the status quo, than supporting change. They may serve both schools and the system better by adapting to a facilitation mode that is respectful to and adds value to the efforts of school-to-school networks.

What might be needed in the future is not outmoded institutions in tiered power relationships, but more creative and responsive strategies and relationships for adding value to the collective activity of networks of schools – for working with and between schools. Networks can in this way provide a means of facilitating innovation and change whilst simultaneously contributing to large-scale reform.
They offer the potential for 're-inventing' the middle tier support by promoting different forms of collaboration, linkages, and multi-functional partnerships. These are sometimes referred to as 'cross-over structures' (Fullan 2000). In this respect the network activity enables stakeholders to make connections and to synergise activities around common priorities.

One key reason why national reforms may not yet fully have had the desired impact is because government policy on education historically has not always been adequately informed by what is known about how schools improve. This provides a strong argument for government to embrace networks, not only as a strategy to assist in the implementation of its reform agenda, but also as a capacity-building innovation in its own right. Without some form of networking, it is highly unlikely that the aspirations for governmental programmes of educational reform, particularly in decentralised systems, will be realised.
If one issue is certain it is that the future of schooling requires a systemic perspective, which implies a high degree of consistency across the policy spectrum and an unrelenting focus on student achievement and learning. Networks, as a natural infrastructure for both innovation and the informing of government policy, provide a means for doing just that, which is highly consistent with the capacity-creating theme covered already in this paper.

Implications for leadership – distributed leadership as capacity building

In our recent research with school leaders, they have favoured the concept of capacity 'growth' rather than 'building', preferring ecological rather than construction metaphors (NCSL, Hadfield 2002). Although the model that we have evolved appears to some extent to be 'constructed', this distinction fits with our own evolving thinking. The core elements (the personal, interpersonal and organisational) together create the components for professional learning communities – cultural forms which are grown, not made. Equally, the components at the core of capacity as we have described it (distributed leadership, social cohesion and trust, shared values, moral purpose and intellectual capital) are all organic organisational and communal qualities.

As we have described it, capacity is fundamentally a metaphorical concept. In this it has much in common with notions of 'leadership'. Such an analysis clearly has profound implications for the headteacher's role, for leadership so viewed is not positional. As described in the third of the opening quotations (Spillane et al 2001), it is a socially distributed, widely enacted and contextually particular function. Of central importance, though, is the notion of distributed leadership. Above all, we have argued throughout for a concept of capacity that demonstrates flexibility, adaptability, responsiveness and adroitness in processing continuous change in a volatile and unpredictable environment. It is a notion of capacity that is both synonymous with and dependent upon concepts of distributed or – perhaps even more compatible with the metaphor – 'dispersed' leadership.

The concluding section of this paper explores issues relating to this core capacity component – distributed leadership – and its interrelationship with the organisational, interpersonal and personal components of schools. Distributed or dispersed leadership is central to capacity creation; we have hopefully established that. However, we would also contend that distributed leadership cannot happen if schools stay as they are. This section explores this paradox and its implications both for networking and for capacity growth.

Despite more than two decades of writing about organisational learning (Argyris 1976; Senge 1990), community leadership (Sergiovanni 1994) and servant leadership (Greenleaf 1970; Spears 1995), we are still in a position of needing to develop understandings about what leadership really involves when it is distributed, how schools might function and act differently and what operational images of distributed leadership in action might look like (Spillane 2001).

There are some basic questions we need to ask in order to clarify thinking and to offer a basis for debate. To us the key questions would seem to be the following, and, having set them down, we will go on to discuss each of them in turn:

- What do we mean by leadership when we are talking about distributed manifestations?
- What are the organisational implications?
- How might distributed leadership operate in practice?
- What is the role of the designated 'leader' – the headteacher?

What do we mean by distributed leadership?

Leading is an enacted activity. It exists only through its manifestations. It is also profoundly interpersonal, operating via direct impact upon or exchange with others or through their perceptions of leadership actions. When we talk with teachers about their headteachers, for example, they describe what he or she does, how he or she relates with them or others. They are as preoccupied with what leaders do as with the rhetoric of what they say – they want to see the talk walked!

Looked at from a different angle, the idea of 'leader effectiveness' cannot be said to exist in a literal sense. If it did, independent of context, then effective leaders would be equally successful whatever the context. (The history of football management tells us that this is not the case.) So if leadership is lived and enacted, does not reside in one person (which is a contemporary truism) and is not independent of context, what is it?

Leadership is more complex than leading. It is as much akin to potential energy as it is to kinetic. Leadership is about the latent as well as the lived and enacted expressions of leading. As metaphor, it has much in common with the notion of intellectual capital – the residual and available capability to be drawn out, and the interest that can be added! It represents the

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potential available to be released within an organisation. In essence, then, it is the intellectual capital of the organisation, residing (sometimes dormant or unexpressed) within its members. As such it potentially exists very widely within an organisation. The role of the Leader is to harness, focus, liberate, empower and align that leadership towards common purposes and, by so doing, to build and release capacity. In a sense, it doesn't need to be distributed – in its potential form it already is. Only the structures and limitations that we put upon its expression prevent distributed leadership occurring naturally.

The logic of this argument takes us to another aspect of the question.
If leadership is a shared function, and if it only expresses itself with and through others, who 'allocates' it and how does it come to be 'distributed'? When considered in this light, growth metaphors become important – and the organisational implications of this are profound.

Firstly, increasing the capacity of leadership is clearly not about key, hierarchically highly placed leaders getting better – it is not about training the few. Rather, it is about creating the spaces, the contexts and the opportunities for expansion, enhancement and growth. It is about creating the spaces between the pebbles in the jar.

Secondly – and this is a crucially important concept – leader-follower relationships cannot be imposed. Leadership has to be bestowed, given wilfully by those who are to be led. We allow ourselves to be led, just as we allow ourselves to be coached. Leading and following are reciprocal relationships.

As such, and thirdly, it cannot be delegated. Growth in leadership is about empowerment – opportunity, space, support, and capacity for growth. Jobs and tasks are 'delegated' (passed down a managerial structure) but roles and the scope they offer provide the invitations for leadership.

As so far described, leadership capacity can be seen as being an amorphous concept. Its purposefulness (and its accountabilities) comes from the tightness around values and the moral purpose (shared beliefs and higher order purposes). Its expansion lies in the intellectual capital (the combined and shared and expanding knowledge-base) and the social capital (relationships and trust). "Schools need to be culturally tight and managerially loose. Teachers and other school workers respond much more to their values and beliefs, to how they are socialised and the norms of their work group than they do to managerial controls" (Sergiovanni 2001). It is tough love, leadership!

Shared values and high mutual expectations create a context for tight but distributed leadership. There are, though, also other concepts critical to distributed leadership. One is synergy, allowing fluidity and flexibility between people – variable leadership patterns and flexible teams. Another is alignment, moving this distributed function in a common direction.

Such leadership patterns not only liberate leadership, they are emancipatory for the person in the professional. Those who work in schools give of who they are as well as what they do. The release and expression of potential through leadership creates the context for personal as well as professional realisation. Leading the growth of leadership capacity is an intensely human and social process – deeply emotionally and spiritually intelligent. Tending to leadership capacity is a caring and authentic business.

What are the organisational implications?

Distributed leadership is multi-directional. It can function down an organisation, can grow up an organisation or can operate across an organisation. Problems occur both vertically and horizontally.

Paradoxically, the most complex and difficult form of leadership for distributed and capacity building models is that which operates down through management systems, because it then becomes entwined with power relationships and job responsibilities. It is not that leadership and power are incompatible, but, having noted earlier that leadership has to be bestowed, power (or authority) does not necessarily facilitate this – the right to lead has to be earned, granted by the followers.
The conflation of power (managerial relationships) and empowerment (leadership relationships) proves problematic. The more hierarchical the management structure, the more the liberation of leadership capacity is likely to be stifled. This has huge implications for the organisational arrangements of schools. The more the status and worth systems of schools relate to position in hierarchy, the harder it is for distributed leadership to operate. Peter Senge (1990) argues that in learning organisations leaders have to leave their status at the door. Even more problematic, though, in hierarchically structured organisations, is for others to leave the leader's status at the door.

Lateral leadership is also problematic. For leadership to operate across an organisation, opportunities for collaboration between adults of different role and status levels need naturally to occur across and between what might otherwise be organisationally separate and balkanised cells or units (departments, faculties, phase teams etc). Organisationally, schools find this hard.

So, if leadership cannot readily be delegated down the system (because people have to be empowered), and if opportunities to lead across the system are problematic (because of organisational barriers) then, for leadership to grow, the argument is that 'school as organisation' must adapt and reshape its practices in order to generate natural contexts for people to take responsibility by working with and through others. What is needed for this is the development of internal networks (DEMOS 2001).

How does distributed leadership function or operate in practice?

There is a relationship between leadership and learning. Opportunities for collaborative learning are the core activity for the expansion of leadership capacity (Lambert 1998). For Linda Lambert, the key element in the development of leadership 'is the notion of learning together, and the construction of meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively'. Similarly, Michael Fullan (1998) offers an insight into the organisational conditions that can give rise to multiple forms of leadership when he writes that:

"All change is a hypothesis – a process of action, enquiry and experimentation to create a cumulative and collective knowledge about what works and how it works from within. Engaging staff in this process is a means of reculturing. This change to the ways of working - the norms, values and relationships – is a process of restructuring. …There are no clear solutions. Life is a path you beat while you walk it. It is the walking that beats the path. It is not the path that makes the walk."

Leadership opportunities such as enquiry partnerships, action learning sets and study groups generate this context within schools. This model of capacity creation – knowledge driven, socially cohesive, purposeful – encourages the study of practice and the collaborative generation of ideas. It involves collective meaning-making in the light of emerging knowledge and understandings from enquiry. It is where leadership and organisational growth collide; where knowledge-creation and the implementation of change connect, because "Such leadership also creates action that grows out of these new and shared understandings. This transformative dimension (positive and purposeful change) is the core of leadership – and, by definition, it is dispersed or distributed" (Lambert 1998).

Taking this one stage further, Silins and Mulford (2001), in a major Australia study, concluded that dispersed forms of leadership are characterised by, 'shared learning through teams of staff working together to augment the range of knowledge and skills available for the organisation to change and anticipate future developments'. As importantly, they also discovered a positive relationship between such forms of leadership learning and student achievement.

It follows, then, that groups of teachers, working together on collaborative enquiry or planning activity, led by someone whose leadership is not entwined with role status, provide opportunities for the expression and growth of leadership capacity. It also provides the lateral learning impetus required to break down organisational barriers and to foster cultural norms hospitable to internal networks. Knowledge-creation and knowledge-sharing are processes at the heart of distributed leadership.

The role of the designated leader

Leadership is not trait theory – leadership and leader are not the same thing. Leadership is about collaborative learning that leads to purposeful change. This learning has direction towards higher aspirations and shared purposes. Organisational redesign, as suggested above, is required to develop contexts in which such leadership and learning happen naturally. Such design change within school can facilitate professional engagement.

Everyone has both the potential and the entitlement to contribute towards leadership. The designated leader's role in the scenario described in this 'think piece' is to facilitate this entitlement – to create the organisational conditions, the climate and the support for all members to be able to contribute their latent leadership – to release both the kinetic and the potential energy of leadership. Leading is a skilled and complicated undertaking, but one that every member of the school community can learn in a supportive context.

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Leadership, after all, is democracy in action; community members acting out their roles with and for others. It involves the valuing of the multiple voices that make up the lived experience of school – and in this way will inevitably begin to embrace pupil voices, too.

Expressed as such, leadership becomes a collective endeavour. School change is a shared undertaking, and change theory speaks eloquently about 'shared ownership'. The improvement journey requires the capacity that shared, inclusive and collaborative activity can bring. Leadership of this order requires the redistribution of power and authority. It follows that in organisations seeking to learn together, school leaders give away power, distribute leadership and support others to be successful.

Consistent with the changed forms of leadership action outlined in the above discussion, the images in Joseph Murphy's (Murphy et al 1993, adapted) metaphors for modern school leaders have resonance:

- Headteacher as Leader
- School Leader as Moral Agent
- School Leader as Organisational Architect
- School Leader as Social Architect
- School Leader as Educator
- School Leader as Servant
- School Leader as Member of a Community
- School Leadership as Capacity Building

In organisations where leadership is liberated, available to all, related to collaborative processes and learning, the role of the symbolic leader (the headteacher) is, as Murphy suggests, pivotal, but not superordinate. In moving towards distributed leadership models, the leader becomes the critical change agent – the guardian and facilitator of transitions. Transition management is the new focus for transformation.

Such leaders, then, will create the social capital that facilitates distributive leadership and collaboration – a social capital built on trust. Trust relationships allow open engagement and knowledge sharing – active growth of the intellectual capital (Hargreaves 2001). Such leaders will unite the school around shared values and higher order purposes – the achievement of all students, learning with, for and on behalf of others, for example. They will be articulate in mobilising values-identification and alignment and in expressing and re-affirming beliefs. They will 'disseminate eloquence' (Weick 1976) and will hold people accountable to shared value commitments.

They will have the moral courage progressively to re-structure the school and the system around key strands of higher order purpose – distributive leadership, professional values, equity and social justice and collaboration within and between schools.

Extended conclusions

Schools, as has been suggested, are not currently well designed for capacity creation, distributed leadership or school-to-school learning. Some are weak on the foundation conditions – turbulent, under strain, riven by conflicting pressures. Others are rendered incoherent by the forces of external change, the reform agenda and the expectations of multiple accountabilities. Some schools are inarticulate about shared values, unclear about the beliefs that unite them. Most (secondary in particular) have structures designed when stability, efficiency and the management of stasis were the expectations. They are unsuited to a context of multiple change and creativity. Distributed and lateral forms of leadership require flexible organisations, metabolisms rather than structures, purposeful permutations of teams and collaborations – and widely available opportunities for leadership. Few schools currently function comfortably in that kind of way.

Schools are not currently structured in ways that facilitate either the growth of leadership or lateral directions of leadership travel. Predominantly, leadership is locked into management structures.
If we are to achieve distributive leadership models, we must therefore re-design the internal social architecture of schools. Such re-design should normalise collaborative learning in which leadership can be widely available and unrelated to role status.
It will need to involve a separation of management (maintenance) and leadership (learning and development). Organisational routines and processes will require re-design to facilitate widespread leadership and knowledge-sharing within and between schools.

Through the liberation of leadership in this way, a premium will also be placed upon alignment and common purpose. Highest order alignment comes from shared values, beliefs and purposes. Designated leaders (headteachers) in such schools will enact and live out the values, both as leader and follower. They will take seriously their own learning – educational, pedagogical and interpersonal. They well be coach, facilitator and social architect within school, networker, educational architect and community builder beyond it.

Distributed leadership is the fluid that occupies the spaces between the pebbles in the jar. It is the cohesion that surrounds the management structures, the coherence, and it grows within and works across schools. It requires spaces. Leaders in networked schools will orchestrate and nurture these spaces – create the 'shelter conditions' for the leadership of collaborative learning. Whilst management structures provide the organisational stability, distributed leadership formations provide the lubricant for community and social cohesion. It requires schools that place a premium upon social capital, trust and emotionally intelligent internal relationships. It requires spiritual alignment, too – schools in which people work together for higher order moral purposes and the benefit of all children in all schools. Distributed leadership also requires shelter from external pressures and accountabilities – and leaders who will deflect, interpret and energise the school by being opportunistic, optimistic and aspirational in the interpretation of public expectations.

Final thoughts

Distributed leadership, capacity building and networking are the themes of this paper. As set out, they have a combined contribution to make to enhancing learning – classroom learning, teacher learning, leadership learning, organisational learning and school-to-school learning. Together they are crucial to building stronger learning and educational communities for children. In combination they offer a means to mobilise, to grow and to expand the capacity of schools to manage multiple changes and diverse expectations and aspirations. The evidence from working with schools on capacity-creating processes suggests that together they also offer a key to creating coherence from potentially fragmenting external pressures; to a re-building of the profession's self-esteem; to developing more effective knowledge-sharing systems; and to building stronger equity bonds between schools.

Bold claims – but certainly a journey worthy of the travel.

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