"Follow the Leader" Capturing the Perspectives of Post-Primary Principals in the Irish Voluntary School Sector on Implementing a Distributed Leadership Framework

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of, Doctor of Education (EdD) is entirely my own work and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: *Maree O Rourke* (Maree O' Rourke)

ID No. 51150689   Date: 08/08/2022

Dedication

"Education is not filling a pail but the lighting of a fire."

William Butler Yeats

To my loving parents, who sadly passed away during this doctoral journey. My wonderful Dad, Terence (Terry) O' Rourke R.I.P in June 2020 and in February 2022, my beautiful Mam, May O' Rourke (née Byrne) R.I.P.

Though no words could ever portray my gratitude for the love, joy, laughter, knowledge, encouragement and support they shared on my life's journey, thank you for lighting the fire.

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Glossary of Terms and Acronyms

ASTI: Association for Secondary Teachers in Ireland

AMCSS: Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools

CSL: Centre for School Leadership

CPD: Continuous professional development (more recently referred to simply as "professional development")

DCU: Dublin City University

DE: Department of Education

ETB: Education and Training Board

JMB: Joint Managerial Board

LAOS: Looking at Our School

MMR: Mixed Methods Research

NAPD: National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals

NBSS: national Behaviour Support Service

NVivo: NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PISA: Programme for International Student Assessment

TA: Thematic Analysis

TALIS: Teaching and Learning International Survey

TIMSS: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

VEC: Vocational Education Committee

Acknowledgements

Abstract

"Follow the Leader" Capturing the Perspectives of Post-Primary Principals in the Irish - Voluntary School Sector on Implementing a Distributed Leadership Framework

Maree O' Rourke

This study investigates the perspective of voluntary secondary school principals undertaking the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 on Leadership and Management within the voluntary school sector. The research question asks: What is the experience of school principals in the implementation of distributed leadership in the voluntary secondary school?

The researcher conducted a thematic review of relevant peer-reviewed literature on leadership and seminal work in distributed leadership for this study. The concepts of power, motivation, and accountability emerge from the review of both policy texts and form the sub-questions within the research. The sub-questions are:

1. Does the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 change the principal's role within the school's leadership framework?
2. Does the micropolitics of a school impact the implementation of a distributed leadership framework?
3. What are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?
4. Can distributed leadership exist without distributed responsibility and accountability?

The researcher took a pragmatic approach to the research methodology, adopting a case study methodology within a mixed-method sequential quantitative > qualitative research design. The quantitative research instrument was an online survey distributed to a census population of voluntary secondary school principals in Ireland. Using Zoom, semi-structured interviews with ten voluntary secondary school principals informed the qualitative research. The findings are examined and interpreted within the context of the literature review. The researcher presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews and online survey acknowledging the implications and limitations of the study.

The research identifies recommendations on continuous professional development for principals to develop sustainable leadership capacity within the voluntary secondary school sector, the essential time to hold strategic leadership team meetings and the consideration of a generic leadership title for posts of responsibility with recommendations for further research and policy development.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1   Introduction

"Straight-backed as a Windsor chair

She stood on the top playground step

And surveyed her Saturnalian kingdom

At 8.45 precisely, she stiffened

(If that were possible), produced a key

A large, cold dungeon key-

Placed it below her lip, and blew.

No summons from Heaven itself

(It was a church school) was more imperious!

Clive Sansom (1962), "Schoolmistress (Miss Humm)"

The view of the school principal portrayed in the above poem as the embodiment of leadership associated with corresponding authority and power has evolved with the changing landscape of school leadership in Ireland into a far less commanding figure. A seismic change in the level of consciousness among the stakeholders regarding the nature and purpose of school leadership at the post-primary level introduced the concept of school leadership teams, commencing a distributed leadership model. The reimagining of school leadership ensures the roles and responsibilities of teachers and school-based stakeholders demands a significant change in how leadership is perceived and how the model functions within the post-primary school system. Bush (2014) explains, "It is in the vanguard of an emerging recognition that solo, heroic leadership is inadequate to address the complex issues facing education systems in an increasingly globalised world" (p.601). The Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 entitled "Leadership and Management in Post-Primary Schools" mandates schools to implement a model of distributed school leadership. School teachers and principals must develop the knowledge, skills, and competencies leaders need for distributed leadership. The Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 also completes a shift from the

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predominant hierarchical model of school leadership, identified by the role the criterion of seniority played in the appointment of middle leaders, to more collaborative practice.

1.2 Focus of this study

Spillane (2006) defines distributed leadership as a shift from leadership performed by individuals in specific roles toward leadership defined through interactions among individuals. Distributed leadership in schools has become a dominant policy focus in Ireland and abroad, as evidenced by significant changes in the literature on distributed leadership and the recent policy changes that have led to the promotion of distributed leadership in the post-primary school sector. This research study seeks to investigate school principals' perspectives at the post-primary level to discover how the recent change in leadership policy is playing out in practice in the voluntary secondary school sector in Ireland. The study aims to listen more closely to the voices of school principals who are implementing the policy requirements in their respective schools. According to Redmond (2016), "capturing and synthesising principal perspective has thus become an important tool in uncovering the story of modern school leadership" (p.29). Murphy (2020) recognises that while "policy reforms have influenced the preparation and development of school leaders at all levels in the system, there is little available research on principals' perceptions of their preparation to lead schools in the contemporary policy context" (p.1).

This research inquiry probes the following research question:

1.3 Research Question

The research question is: What is the experience of school principals in the implementation of distributed leadership in the voluntary secondary school as mandated in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?

The sub-questions are:

1. Does the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 change the principal's role within the school's leadership framework?
2. Does the micropolitics of a school impact the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?
3. What are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?

4. Is there a distribution of accountability and responsibility within the distributed leadership framework per Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018?

1.4 The Research Problem & Significance

According to Bonneville (2017), a gap exists between distributed leadership theory and its actual implementation in schools. This research will make a new contribution to knowledge within the school context for the practitioners in the school community. It will also complement previous research conducted within the area of distributed leadership. However, the research gap is significant as this study will focus on implementing distributed leadership in Irish post-primary voluntary secondary schools since the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. From an Irish perspective, there is a shortage of empirical evidence concerning post-primary school principals' perspectives and experiences regarding implementing the new model of distributed leadership outlined in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. This research study will contribute to growing knowledge in this area. Previous research (Kavanagh,2020) has focused on the experience of middle leaders in the distributed leadership process mandated by the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 within the Education and Training Board sector (ETB). There is no published research on the experience of school principals implementing CL003/2018 in the voluntary post-primary sector of 365 schools, representing more than half of all 723 post-primary schools in the Irish state. Dawson (2014) recommends paying attention to contextual and experiential details when conducting research. Trafford and Leshem (2009) consider that investigating a person's practice offers an opportunity for the researcher "to generate knowledge-making in context" (p.61). Murphy & Brennan (2022) observe that "given the recent adoption of DL as the national school leadership model, the Irish context is ripe for exploration" (p.2). This research study is significant as it will investigate the experience of principals within their school context and capture their perspectives for the consideration of policymakers and practitioners for the future development of distributed leadership within the voluntary school sector.

1.5 Background to the Research

For readers of this research to consider the validity of the findings presented in this study, it is essential to situate the researcher. Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) advise researcher disclosure on professional experience with the research question and an acknowledgement of how the interpretation of the data emanates from professional experience. Wellington et al. (2005) believe a researcher is not separate from the research process. They emphasise the importance of the biography

of researchers, their professional position, and the consequent perspectives they hold, which form their assumptions and their worldview, all of which have implications for their research.

The author of this research has worked in the post-primary education sector since 1991. Firstly, as a secondary school teacher, until 2003, then seconded as a Regional Development Officer (RDO) to the Second Level Support Service (SLSS) under the remit of the Department of Education (DE). In 2006 she became Assistant National Co-ordinator (ANC) of the newly formed National Behaviour Support Service (NBSS). In 2009 the researcher became the school principal of a voluntary secondary school in the West of Ireland, moving in 2011 to her current position as principal of a voluntary secondary school in Dublin.

As a serving school principal in the voluntary school sector, the researcher is a member of professional associations that enhance and inform leadership policy and practice in schools providing the researcher with an insider understanding of the system and helping to access a voluntary research sample in the participants' context through a sense of collegiality in a shared professional community. The researcher's involvement in the professional Ed.D. programme provides an opportunity for personal growth and learning and a deeper understanding of leadership theory and practice.

This research examines the perspective of a group of Irish post-primary school principals in a case study approach. It studies the principals' descriptions of how they develop distributed leadership in their schools. It captures their understanding of the implementation process and the success and challenges. The research investigates the experience of principals as leaders developing other leaders. Gardner and Lasking (2011) describe this process as an "individual who significantly affects the thoughts, feelings or behaviours of a significant number of individuals" (p.5). Gronn (2009) notes that "'the question of what it means for individuals to engage with leadership is rarely if ever asked" (p.198). The researcher considered it an opportune time to investigate the experiences and perspectives of post-primary school principals concerning the reconceptualised structure of the school leadership framework.

1.6 The Organisation of the Thesis

Chapter One: Introduction

This introductory chapter is the first of seven chapters. The chapter sets out the research topic, the rationale, and the research focus with a brief description of the changes made to the school leadership framework by the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The researcher highlights the questions and the significance of the research for leadership development within the voluntary

secondary school sector. The researcher's position within the research context concludes the chapter content.

Chapter Two: The Context

This chapter examines the specific context and circumstances that led to the most recent policy intervention on leadership within schools through the Department of Education (DE) policy circular CL003/2018, which forms the basis for the research. This chapter focuses on school leadership policy and outlines policy development in the Irish post-primary education system. As the context of the research is in the voluntary secondary school setting, this chapter examines the role of the voluntary school sector within the Irish Education system and the emergence of leadership as a phenomenon within that system through the influence of international policy contexts such as the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) and in the national policy context through the Department of Education (DE) policy and government legislation. This section also explores the involvement of teacher unions in Ireland and management bodies in developing a distributed leadership policy.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

This chapter explores the relevant literature concerning the research study. It focuses on several concepts and helps frame the research questions raised in the study. The conceptual framework, which emerges from the review of both policy texts and literature, is introduced. The themes of micropolitics, motivation and accountability within a distributed leadership framework in the school context emerge from the literature. The chapter begins with a theoretical examination of published literature on leadership in education. The chapter presents an overview of leadership styles and reviews the literature on distributed leadership by critical contributors in the field of study and explores the concept of distributed leadership through the main theoretical developments. The chapter includes literature on distributed leadership in secondary schools in Ireland, and the literature review on leadership and distributed leadership provides a framework to interpret this research study's findings.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This doctoral study aims to investigate school principals' perspectives at the post-primary level in the voluntary school sector regarding the recent changes made to the school leadership framework in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The methodology chapter defines the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance and outlines the chosen research paradigm. The researcher adopted the epistemological position of social constructivism, which affirms that interpretations of knowledge are constructed socially by people (school principals) within the confines of their cultural

space (voluntary secondary post-primary schools). The researcher adopted the research paradigm of pragmatism. The researcher deployed a case study methodology to investigate the research questions. A mixed methods research approach included an online survey for quantitative data collection and semi-structured interviews as the qualitative research method. Chapter four describes the theoretical stance, the methodological approach adopted the research design, data collection methods, and methods for analysing the data, followed by the ethical considerations and the validity and limitations of the research. Assumptions and limitations are acknowledged.

Chapter Five: Findings

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the quantitative and qualitative data. Stage 1 of the study gathered data from an enumeration online survey as part of the quantitative methodology data collection. The quantitative data presented informs the reader about the respondent's length of time as a principal and school size. The findings appear in charts and graphs with respondents' comments to illustrate the principals' perspectives on implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Part 2 presents the findings from the qualitative data collection method of semi-structured interviews, interprets the results of the qualitative data analysis, and presents evidence supporting the findings.

Chapter Six: Discussion

The chapter considers the research findings. The researcher discusses the findings within the context of the literature review. The emergent themes are examined in the research context considering the school principal's perspective on implementing distributed leadership in the voluntary secondary school. The research study gives a voice to school principals creating a professional discourse on the possibilities and challenges involved in implementing distributed leadership. The discussion chapter highlights the impact of the findings on the successful implementation and future development of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 on distributed leadership.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion & Recommendations

The final chapter summarises the previous chapters and the key points emerging from the research study. The chapter includes recommendations to advance a framework for reflection and the development of distributed leadership within the voluntary post-primary school sector. The implications and limitations of the study are acknowledged, and suggestions for future research conclude the study.

Chapter Two: The Irish Post-Primary Education System in Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the specific context and circumstances that led to the most recent policy intervention on leadership within schools through the Department of Education (DE) policy circular CL003/2018, which forms the basis for the research. The research focuses on principals working in the voluntary school sector, examining their experience during the implementation phase of distributed leadership in their schools. The research questions explore how the principals' legislative responsibilities correlate with a distributed model of school leadership in the voluntary secondary post-primary school.

The predominant emphasis on distributed leadership in educational discourse and policy documents translates into the post-primary school taking cognisance of culture and context and putting the policy into practice. Torrance & Murphy (2017) refer to the contextualisation of leadership policy in schools at the implementation phase as the policy fudge. The research questions seek to discover if the principal's role within the leadership framework changed with the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The study considers politics within the school and the fundamentally political nature of school leadership. Does the micropolitics of a school impact the implementation of a distributed leadership framework? Changing the model of school leadership requires a whole-school commitment to the process; therefore, what are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing CL003/2018? Can distributed leadership exist without distributed responsibility and accountability?

Many writers consider the Irish education system unique in its governance and management structure (Coolahan, 1981; Drudy, 2009). Political, economic, and historical factors influence education policy globally. The Irish secondary school system divides into the voluntary secondary sector, community and comprehensive schools' sector, and education and training boards (ETBs), previously known as vocational education committees (VECs).

As the context of the research is in the voluntary secondary school setting, it is necessary to examine the role of the voluntary school sector within the Irish Education system and the emergence of leadership as a phenomenon within that system through the influence of international policy contexts such as the Organisation for Economic Development (OECD) and in the national policy context through the Department of Education (DE) policy and government legislation.

2.2 The Voluntary Secondary School

"Historically, the Churches have played a major role in the provision of education in Ireland. The Monastic schools of early Christian Ireland provided education in the first millennium, and their influence continued well into the second millennium" (Hyland,2000, p.23).

Most schools are denominational and owned by diocesan or religious orders within the voluntary secondary school sector, and some of them are fee-paying schools. The state pays salaries and pensions, grants for capitation, and school building maintenance for all school sectors. The state also dictates legislation and the national curriculum. The capitation grant is less in the voluntary secondary school due to the sector's voluntary nature. "Schools within the sector must uniquely raise over 30% of their day-to-day operating costs from within their own resources" (Redmond 2016, p 5). The Board of Management is the employer; however, the Department of Education is the paymaster, and the school, while privately owned, is state-funded.

The voluntary post-primary sector is the largest constituent of schools operating within post-primary education in the Republic of Ireland, numbering 365 (Redmond 2016) secondary schools. In the voluntary secondary sector, the schools operate under school patrons' or trustees' licenses governed by religious congregations or diocesan bodies. The trustees devolve the day-to-day operations to the school management board, consisting of eight individuals who act as a corporate body without remuneration. The Board, in turn, devolves the day-to-day running to the school principal. There is also a leadership structure to assist the principal and the deputy principal, collectively referred to as the senior management team. The voluntary secondary school that provides the context for this research's focus can promote and protect its characteristic spirit, also known as ethos, under Articles 42 & 44 of the Irish Constitution (1937).

In 1972 the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) was established to represent the voluntary school sector's denominational associations and influence education policy. Until the late 1980s school principals in the voluntary sector were primarily members of their respective religious orders, and other congregational members supported the principal's workload. In 1989 the Articles of Management (AMCSS) were published to support the increasingly changing nature of school leadership, from religious principals to lay principals within the voluntary school sector. The Joint Managerial Board (JMB), the Articles of Management document, governs the voluntary secondary school education sector's management.

Sugure (2002) divides the evolving role of the school principal in Ireland into three stages; up to 1971, he considers it to be primarily an administrative role, moving into a managerial focus from 1971-1989, with the leadership concept emerging in the 1990s in conjunction with the administrative

and managerial functions. Although the Department of Education (DE) has responsibility for setting out a broad range of functions, the recruitment of the principal and staff still rests with the trustees and respective Boards of Management.

Section 22 of the Education Act (1998) and Section 23 of the Education (Amendment) Act 2012 outline the principal's role. The functions, and responsibilities of the principal, considered as a school leader, and as set out in the Education Act Government of Ireland (1998) Section (22) & (23), are wide-ranging. They range from instructional leadership to aspects of young people's social and personal development and, finally, evaluation, reporting, financial, resource, and staff management. In carrying out such duties within the voluntary school sector, the school principal is accountable to the Board of Management for financial management, human resource management, building ground site maintenance, and leading teaching and learning.

There is a considerable amount of additional legislation that includes legislative responsibilities for principals and Boards of Management relating to the governance of schools that impacts significantly on the workload of principals including, The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004, The Education Welfare Act 2000, the Children First Act, 2015 and the Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017), Guidelines for Dealing with Teacher Underperformance (2016), The Disability Act 2005, The Equal Status Act 2000-2015, The Teaching Council Act 2001, and the Teaching Council Amendment Act (2006), The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005, The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (General Application) Regulations 2007 to 2016, The Ombudsman for Children's Act 2002, The Employment Equality Act 1998, The Equality Act 2004, The Protected Disclosures Act 2014, The Construction Regulations 2013, Chemicals Act 2008 – 2010, The Organisation of Work Act 1997, Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2015, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018. The Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 on a distributed leadership model is a significant attempt to recognise the workload of the school principal and an acknowledgement that the role of leadership is more manageable and productive if there is a school culture that supports a distributed leadership framework.

2.3 The Chronology of the Department of Education (DE) Policy Circular 003/2018

The Irish education system's policymaking process is essential in understanding the school leadership context in Irish post-primary schools. Public policy is a government's response to a public issue either of national or sectoral interest. Dye (1972) defines public policy as "whatever governments choose to do or not to do." (p.2). Jenkins (1978) describes policymaking as a set of interrelated decisions taken by a group of political actors, while Ball (1993) argues that there are both agency and constraint

aspects to policy implementation. The starting point for a policy change or policy development may be a response to a problem identified by the media or triggered by a national or international event or a national or international report; as described by Walker (2000), "policy is a set of actions taken to solve a problem" (p.14). Bowe et al. (1992) suggest that while the policy text's construction may involve different parties and processes, the opportunity for re-interpretation of the text means policy does not end with the legislation. According to Bell & Stevenson (2015), a policy on leadership practice originates in the broader socio-political context. In the 1960s, increased communication and involvement with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) led to the 1965 OECD report on Investment in Education. The report highlights the inefficiencies of a dual post-primary system whereby private church-affiliated schools provided fee-paying education in the classical tradition with a strong focus on Latin and classical studies, contrasted with state-funded vocational and technical colleges. The programmes for economic expansion (1958-63) and the second published in 1963, followed by the third in 1969, began to shape and influence Irish education policy and inform policymakers' decisions. The introduction of the free education system and the provision of school transport initiated by the Minister for Education Donogh O' Malley caused a seismic shift in education policy. In 1980 a white paper on educational development signalled a decision to introduce legislative change. A green paper in 1985, "Partners in Education," further signalled the emergence of a consultative and partnership approach with stakeholders (O Reilly 2012).

However, until the 1990s, change was slow-paced, focusing on curriculum development rather than legislative change. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report (OECD, 1991, p. 44) saw the emergence of school leadership as a distinct area of Irish educational policy. Coolahan (1981) notes that seniority was the essential criterion for leadership appointments, focusing on management and bureaucratic administrative tasks. During the 1990's seismic change occurred in the Irish Education system beginning with the Green Paper on Education (1992), which referenced the language of leadership in the official discourse, leading to the White Paper on Education, Charting our Education Future (1995), which unveiled a new in-school management structure. The emergence of The Education Act (Ireland,1998) changed the landscape governing policy and practice, forming the legislative context for a development framework for schools.

The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) set out the school principal's responsibilities within a leadership and management frame for the first time, giving formal and statutory authority to the role. In addition to the legislative requirements for Irish schools, the Department of Education (DE) operated centralised control over schools (Coolahan, 1994). The issuing of circulars from the Department of Education (DE) communicates regulations around essential school planning, development, and evaluation. The Department of Education (DE) communicated education policy to

schools by issuing national plans, strategies, curricular reform, and circular documents. Such documents included Literacy & Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People (2011-2020), School Self-evaluation (2012) Anti- Bullying Procedures (2013), reform of the Junior Cycle (2014), Digital Strategy (2015) Wellness policies and procedures (2018). Department of Education (DE) circulars relate to the year the Department issued the circular; for example, circular 003/2018 relates to the third circular issued by the Department of Education (DE) in 2018.

Legislative changes and policy directives from the Department of Education (DE) meant more and more responsibilities for school management influenced by the OECD (1991) report and the White Paper (DE, 1995, p. 162). In 1998, the Department of Education (DE) recognised that the school principal would require additional support on the ground to manage the fast-paced educational change and the increasing responsibilities. A series of policy changes up to 2018 has focussed explicitly on leadership and management in post-primary schools.

Following negotiations with the Joint Managerial Board (JMB) and the secondary teacher's union Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI), the Department of Education (DE) issued a series of circulars M03/98, M04/98, M05/98, M06/98 & M07/98, for the post-primary sector in-school management structure. Under the Agreement on Pay and Conditions of Teachers under Clause 2(ii) of Annex 1 of the Programme for Competitiveness and Work (PCW) proposals concerning in-school management, a revised in-school management structure in secondary schools evolved and is outlined in the Department of Education (DE) circulars 4/98 and 5/98.

In 1998 the Department of Education (DE) issued circular 4/98, referring to the fourth circular issued in 1998. This development of the in-school management framework in second-level schools responded to teacher union claims for career advancement opportunities for teachers and increased payment for post holders. Department of Education (DE) circulars 4/98 and 5/98 required voluntary secondary schools to align the post-holder responsibilities more clearly to the central tasks of the school. There was an emphasis on the provision of opportunities for teachers to assume responsibility in the school for instructional leadership, curriculum development, the management of staff, and the academic and pastoral work of the school. Details of the calculation method of whole-time teacher equivalents to calculate the allowances of principals and deputy principals and generate posts of an assistant principal and special duties teachers appeared in Department of Education (DE) circular 6/98. The voluntary secondary-school management system evolved from when professed religious managed schools as principals and managers. The policy change in 1998 was a critical moment in the evolution of a leadership model in the context of the Irish post-primary school, and the

Department of Education (DE) CL4/98 proposed a model of in-school management to create a shared responsibility culture through management teams.

In practice, seniority played a significant role in forming leadership teams within the new post holder framework, with task-focused duties. The title post of responsibility was misleading as the role represented discrete functions and all responsibility still ultimately rested with the principal. An individual teacher undertook a particular duty or work and their teaching duties for remuneration. This view of educational leadership within the post of responsibility structure in voluntary secondary schools displayed a managerial style defined by Bush & Glover (2014) as completing tasks competently to facilitate tasks' achievement in the organisation and implies that members' behaviour is rational. Nonetheless, it was a significant development as it sowed the seeds for the concept of leadership teams within the school system. However, the nature of the post holder remained precisely task related to a defined delegated function rather than distributed leadership, identified by Hargreaves & Fink (2006) as staff making decisions and exercising initiatives within areas of responsibility and accountability.

The OECD report (2007) noted school type, in terms of culture and governance, as another possible inhibiting factor in the development of distributed leadership across the Irish post-primary system, noting the increasing emphasis on collaboration and distribution of leadership in Irish education policy documents, yet observing that the school principal continued to be the embodiment of leadership (OECD, 2007, p. 18). Daft (2001) agrees as he argues that "culture is the set of values, guiding beliefs, understandings, and ways of thinking shared by members of an organization and taught to new members as correct. It represents the unwritten feeling part of the organization"(p.116). Feldman and Rafaeli (2002) describe this as individuals acting in a context created by other participants' actions.

In 2009 the economic boom of the previous ten years was over, and the country was in a deep economic recession. The Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Act (2009) (FEMPI) heralded a period of austerity with increasing cuts to the education sector coupled with an increasing expectation of performativity, which included measuring performance against international benchmarks like PISA & TIMMS. When the Department of Education (DE) imposed a moratorium on filling posts of responsibility in voluntary secondary schools under the Department of Education (DE) policy, both the management bodies and the unions had a strong reaction, albeit for different reasons. The impact on schools was felt intensely in the following years due to the volume of retirements from senior teaching staff with posts of responsibility. In 2011 the Department of Education (DE) issued CL0053/2011, which permitted a limited alleviation of the moratorium on

filling posts of responsibility. The level of alleviation applied at an individual school level if a school made an application and was available for an interim basis.

Conway & Murphy (2013) note that the Department of Education (DE) moved to increased accountability within schools, particularly for those in leadership roles, at the same time mandating a fast pace of policy and curricular change amidst a reduction in leadership posts within the system. In an Irish Times article entitled "Secondary -school management is at breaking point," the General Secretary of the JMB outlines the increased workload for principals, "Principals are therefore carrying a growing and impossible workload as they try to cope with running schools that are suffering not just the impact of the moratorium, but a multitude of other cutbacks." He elaborates on how introducing new legislation, regulations, top-down policies, and disconnected educational initiatives such as literacy and numeracy strategy, school self-evaluation, and junior-cycle reform impacted the principals' workload (Irish Times 14/01/2014).

In January 2014, under circular 0004/2014, a limited alleviation was granted by the Department of Education (DE), which allowed schools to fill posts within an allocated threshold. In February 2014, the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), in conjunction with the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) and assisted by the Work Research Centre (WRC), submitted a proposal document to the Department of Education (DE) setting out a vision for management structures in Irish voluntary secondary post-primary schools (JMB/ACCS, 2014, p.3). They sought to create a structure in which middle management aligns with the real needs of each school and post holders undertake real responsibility for implementing their roles. This working group served as an example of professional collaboration in the policy process among stakeholders.

The document identifies the problem requiring a policy solution as the moratorium on posts of responsibility in voluntary secondary schools, stating the "twin effects of reducing the capacity of schools to cope with important functions within the schools and burdening the principals of our schools with additional responsibilities" (JMB/AMCCS, 2014, p.2). The document presents a policy framework for allocating, assignment, recruitment, remuneration, responsibilities, and accountabilities for posts of responsibility within the system. The document presents research findings on middle management structures in Scotland, Finland, New Zealand, and Northern Ireland. The policy proposal set out a middle management structure based on school needs, providing distributive leadership. "This model of distributive leadership acknowledges the contribution of teachers to teaching and learning and provides them with opportunities to build their capacity to take on leadership roles, especially in the areas of leaders of learning" (JMB/ ACCS, 2014, p.4). This consultation document formed the basis for dialogue between the management bodies and the Department of Education (DE) on developing a structure for changing leadership and management

posts in secondary schools. This document was essential in formulating the Department of Education (DE) policy CL003/2018, which presented a framework and procedure to redefine post-holders' leadership and management functions in post-primary schools. According to Murphy (2019)," the implementation of a distributed leadership model also reflects a global policy turn concerning the configuration of leadership in schools" (P.1).

According to Lingard (2014), values and ideology policy are linked to politics and framed by the "political intentions of governments, politicians, and ministers" (p.11). The socio-political environment leads to the governance and strategic direction of a policy. Drudy and Lynch (1993) note that the presence and influence of interest groups such as the Churches, employers' representatives, the teachers' unions, the educational management bodies, and the parent bodies characterise policymaking in Irish education. The Association of Secondary School Teachers Ireland (ASTI), a leading teachers union whose members are primarily teachers within the voluntary secondary school sector, instructed all union members not to undertake any duties in a voluntary capacity previously assigned to retired post holders (ASTIR, 2015). The ASTI directive increased further pressure on school management. The union indicated that the purpose of this directive was to bring about the ending of the moratorium on posts of responsibility.

The school management bodies, namely the Joint Managerial Board (JMB), the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS), and Education Training Boards (ETB), along with the two teaching unions, the Association of Secondary School Teachers of Ireland (ASTI) and the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI) exercise an example of stakeholder influence on policy circulars from the Department of Education (DE). However, a significant policy change occurred within the Department of Education (DE) Inspectorate, a prelude to CL003/2018.

2.4 Leadership Evaluation Framework

The language of the Inspectorate setting out expectations for schools' leadership and management changed from Whole School Evaluation (WSE) in 2002 to include Management, Leadership and Learning (MLL) in 2012 as leadership moved centre stage in the discourse following the OECD (2007) recommendation on leadership models in Irish Schools. In 2016 the Department of Education (DE) Inspectorate Looking at Our Schools (2016) A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools (LAOS) replaced an earlier 2003 publication and provided a coherent set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools, teaching and learning and leadership, and management within a framework for evaluating standards and accountability. The document takes a macro look at schools and sets the leadership agenda within the socio-political environment. The framework refers to school leaders as patrons, Boards of Management, principals, and deputy principals. "The term

school leaders typically refer to these formal leadership roles and include teachers with posts of responsibility and those who have undertaken roles related to the schools' priorities. The framework also recognises that all teachers play a leadership role within the school" (Looking at Our Schools, 2016, p.7).

The Looking at our Schools Document (LAOS) established a framework for the Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018, providing a solid foundation for the new leadership model for post-primary schools. The document outlines four domains to evaluate leadership practice in post-primary schools (p.12).

(1) Leading, Learning, and Teaching; School leaders, promote a culture of improvement, collaboration, innovation, and creativity in learning, teaching, and assessment, foster a commitment to inclusion, equality of opportunity, and the holistic development of each student, manage the planning and implementation of the school curriculum, foster teacher professional development that enriches teachers' and students' learning.

(2) Managing the Organisation, School leaders: establish an orderly, secure, and healthy learning environment, and maintain it through effective communication; manage the school's human, physical and financial resources to create and maintain a learning organisation and manage challenging and complex situations in a manner that demonstrates equality, fairness, and justice, develop, and implement a system to promote professional responsibility and accountability.

(3) Leading School Development and Developing Leadership Capacity. School leaders communicate the guiding vision for the school and lead its realisation, lead the school's engagement in a continuous process of self-evaluation, build and maintain relationships with parents, with other schools, and with the broader community, manage, lead, and mediate change to respond to the evolving needs of the school and changes in education.

(4) Developing Leadership Capacity. School leaders critique their practice as leaders, develop their understanding of effective and sustainable leadership, empower staff to take on and carry out leadership roles, promote and facilitate student voice, student participation, and student leadership, and build professional networks with other school leaders.

The domains are comprehensive and extensive, and it was evident that a new framework for leadership and management in post-primary schools was required. If the standards outlined in Looking at Our Schools (2016) were achievable, a leadership team with real responsibility and engagement was required; therefore, a distributed leadership model and not task delegation was necessary.

The emergence of distributed leadership theory and the need to nurture and develop leadership potential in schools had gained popularity in the Irish education system. Senior management conferences such as the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) presented workshops and encouraged practitioners to discuss practical ways to engage sustainable leadership across the post-primary school system. Conversations emerged among school leaders on how to facilitate middle management to see themselves as part of the school leadership team and empower teacher leaders to contribute significantly to school leadership (NAPD Leader quarterly 2018).

In 2018 with the publication of circular 003/2018, the Department of Education (DE) announced the changes made to the leadership structure in schools, with 1,300 extra leadership posts for leadership in post-primary schools marking a significant investment by the government in a new leadership model. The increase created a total number of 8,600 assistant principal posts across the post-primary system. On appointment, an assistant principal I(AP1) receives an annual allowance of €8,520 while an assistant principal II (AP2) receives €3,769.

The leadership structure change mandated in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 did not provide a national training programme for principals to implement a new distributed leadership model or a training programme for newly appointed assistant principals. The JMB launched a seminar for principals within the voluntary secondary school. While the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), established in 2015 by the Department of Education (DE), now included a new postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership, it was only part-funded by the Department of Education (DE) and undertaken by teachers in their own time. A mentoring programme for newly appointed principals and coaching service for school leaders focussed on general leadership and management. There is no mandated qualification for appointment as a school leader, although many aspiring school leaders obtain professional qualifications voluntarily.

2.5 Circular 003/2018 in Context

High-quality leadership is crucial in establishing a shared purpose and vision for a school and achieving high-quality educational outcomes for students. "The primary purpose of school leadership and management is to create and sustain an environment that underpins high quality in student care, learning, and teaching" (DE Circular Letter 0003/2018).

The starting point for a new policy is rarely a greenfield site. The Department of Education (DE), CL003/2018 on post-primary leadership evolved through several policy changes issued to school authorities. The Department of Education (DE) policy CL 003/2018 on post-primary school leadership is a textual intervention seeking to change individuals' leadership practice by providing a

formal structure for assigning roles and responsibilities to leadership team members in post-primary schools. The contextualisation of a national policy involves an interpretation of the framework at a micro level, described by Ball (1993) as the challenge "to relate together analytically the ad hocery of the macro with the ad hocery of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of ad hoc social actions" (p.10).

The Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 outlines the allocation of assistant principal posts of responsibility, creating a leadership team in schools where the deputy and assistant principals support the principal. It introduces a revised criterion for appointment as an assistant principal using a competency-based model, phasing out seniority as a stand-alone criterion. It also mandates a criterion for the assignment and reassignment of roles and responsibilities to assistant principals to allow school management greater flexibility to respond to their school's individual needs and priorities and an appeals procedure for appointments confined to an alleged breach of procedures in the appointment process.

Power and politics influence the discourse around distributed leadership in the specific school context of the voluntary secondary school. Deal (2009) discusses mapping the political terrain and advises leaders to be cognisant of Machiavellian concepts. Lumby (2013) considers the use and abuse of power in distributed leadership, defining power as something an individual or group has and exercises to direct another or stop them from acting in a particular way and concludes that distributed leadership is a profoundly political phenomenon. In any change process, conflicts and divergent views and opinions may surface. The policy text of the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 places the principal as a subject of the policy mandated to enact the policy and as an actor in the policy's contextualisation.

Section 6.3 of the circular states, "Assignment/ reassignment of roles and responsibilities to assistant principals is delegated by the Board of Management, as appropriate, to the principal. In assigning roles and responsibilities to teachers newly appointed to an assistant principal I(AP1) or assistant principal II (AP2) posts, or in re-assigning roles and responsibilities (to and among existing post holders), the principal will consult with the appointee or post holder and will have regard to the current needs and priorities of the school as determined by the process set out in Section 4 of this circular. These roles and responsibilities shall be commensurate with the level of the post (AP I or AP 11)."

Mc Donnell (2003) proposes that educational systems have two different structural levels: deep structures of theories, values, assumptions, and beliefs, and surface structures of day-to-day practices in the school. Foucault (1972) suggests that discourse is not only about what can be said or thought

but about who has the authority to generate or influence policy. The dominant influencers within the policy discourse can constrain what can or cannot be in the policy. The context of influence is about who can speak and who cannot; whose voices are dominant in the submissions from stakeholders, teaching unions, management bodies, interest groups, and government departments.

The teachers are also readers of the policy who also become the policy writers in their own school culture. Giudici (2020) notes that research on micro-politics focuses on the policy enactment phase whereby teachers as individual actors utilise their political scope to enact official policy in schools. Understanding the organisation's culture if a change is to be active and new thought patterns embedded is acknowledged in the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018. The circular requires current post-holders to change from completing management tasks to becoming members of a leadership and management team, expecting them to align their duties with the new model and demonstrate a change of mind towards their role. For example, a teacher may have had a post of responsibility to organise fire drills; under CL003/2018, the role moves from task-focused to a whole-school approach. Each post holder signs an agreement to support the best practice in Looking at Our Schools (2016) and the principle of flexibility in accepting roles and responsibilities. The assistant principal must also support and promote the school ethos, high quality in student care, learning and teaching, and student voice development. They must collaborate with colleagues to review and critique school policies according to school self-evaluation (SSE) principles and promote a professional responsibility and accountability culture.

This alignment can challenge principals in developing an understanding of distributed leadership among post holders who have performed specific duties in a particular task-orientated manner for many years. Spillane & Diamond (2007) note that "in doing so, we acknowledge that many schools and practitioners use the term distributed leadership and that there is considerable diversity for what the term means across users" (p.146). According to Hargreaves et al. (2014), the school must create a culture conducive to distributed leadership to facilitate its implementation contingent on a policy reading from a theoretical, epistemological, or ethical standpoint. Implementing a distributed leadership model described in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 requires the school principal to navigate the micropolitics of the staffroom and create an understanding of a leadership concept shared amongst the staff with an emphasis on collegiality. The policy requires a consultation process to achieve whole-school engagement to create a culture of ownership and responsibility amongst the teaching staff. The professional discourse provides an opportunity for teachers to engage and reflect on the broader leadership and management of the school, which impacts the work of their classroom practice and student learning. The professional discourse on the Department of Education (DE) policy CL 003/2018 moves from an initial consultation among the teaching staff to the Board of Management. The teaching staff agrees on the school's roles, responsibilities, and priorities. The

Board of Management approves or amends the list accordingly and ratifies the document. This discourse on the enactment of Department of Education (DE) policy CL 003/2018 involves the principal as policy subject and actor in "the act of influencing others in educational settings to achieve goals and necessitates actions of some kind"(Connolly et al., (2017, p,6). The Department of Education (DE) did not provide any specific training or support to the principals to implement and manage the change process within the school. However, the JMB schools within the voluntary sector could attend training workshops to explain and clarify any procedural questions. The focus was on clarity and information rather than skills training to manage the change process. Staff training on engagement with the process was an ad hoc arrangement left to the decision of individual school Boards of Management or principals.

The Department of Education (DE) policy CL 003/2018 includes a bureaucratic process of role assignment; however, the real intention of the policy text must emerge to ensure it is not merely a delegation of tasks. Bush & Glover (2014) explain that distribution can work successfully if the formal leaders support it. In the school context, such relationships are two-fold: relationships necessary for the sharing and distribution of leadership; and relationship building in the whole school community to set out and achieve the school's overall objectives. Brown et al. (2017) state that "within the framework, multiple sources of leadership emerge, leadership is considered not to be the property of one individual but rather is an organisational entity through which individuals can realise the organisation's aims and objectives" (p 3).

2.6 Conclusion

"The nineteenth-century legacies entailed in the church ownership of primary and secondary schools and the concept of school patron have dominated the policy landscape" (O'Reilly, 2012, p.269). Nevertheless, Irish education policy has remained highly centralised within the Department of Education (DE). Within this context, school leadership has evolved alongside curriculum developments in the Irish post-primary system over the last two decades, within the context of the uniqueness of the structure of post-primary education in Ireland and influenced by international policies and economic considerations. Within the Irish legislative framework for regulation and governance, the school principal remains the primary role in accountability. The Department of Education (DE) policy CL003/2018 places the school principal as the subject and actor. The principal assigns the roles and responsibilities to the post holder and reviews and monitors this performance. (Harris 2005) argues that "distributed and hierarchical forms of leadership are not incompatible" (p.167).

This study focuses on implementing the policy text in practice from the school principal's perspective. Bush (2011) refers to schools' political models as a reality as political models have features such as group activities, interest groups, conflict, and agendas. The context of this research study is on the principal's perspective implementing the latest Department of Education (DE) policy on school leadership CL003/2018 in the context of the Irish voluntary secondary school. The research study aims to understand better the intricacies of school leaders' role and practice in implementing distributed leadership in Irish voluntary secondary post-primary schools; as Spillane (2006) acknowledges, it is not easy to enact real distributed leadership.

The next chapter reviews the Irish and international literature on distributed leadership in education. It examines the role of motivation, power and politics, and accountability in establishing a distributed leadership model.

Chapter Three: The Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

"The literature review is a coherent synthesis of past and present research" (Burgess et al.,2006, p.21). The most crucial part of any work is the beginning (The Republic: Plato). First, acknowledging that leadership is exercised by multiple individuals and in multiple contexts is a good starting point (Sergiovanni, 2001).

This chapter develops to review the literature on distributed leadership by critical contributors in the field of study and explore the concept of distributed leadership through the main theoretical developments. A literature review on leadership and distributed leadership will provide a framework to interpret this research study's findings. A conceptual framework illustrates what a researcher expects to find through their research. A conceptual framework can locate the relevant texts into areas of interest. Concepts offer an opportunity to examine a phenomenon essential in defining a research question (Silverman,2001). There is a vast array of literature on distributed leadership; therefore, this review focuses on three concepts that define this research's key research questions.

For this review chapter, the conceptual framework places leadership in the context of the post-primary school. While providing a brief overview of some other leadership theories, the focus is on the distributed leadership model. Within the distributed leadership model, it is the enactment of the Department of Education (DE) distributed leadership CL 003/2018 that is pertinent to this research study.

The research question is: What is the experience of school principals in the implementation of distributed leadership in the voluntary secondary school as mandated in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?

 The sub-questions are:

1. Does the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) policy circular 003/2018 change the principal's role within the school's leadership framework?
2. Does the micropolitics of a school impact the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?
3. What are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?

4. Is there a distribution of accountability and responsibility within the distributed leadership framework per Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018?

The first question seeks to discover if the role of the principal has changed because of the introduction of CL003/2018. Does a new model of leadership involve a new model of principalship?

The second research question focuses on the fundamentally political nature of school leadership. Does the micropolitics of a school impact the implementation of a distributed leadership framework?

The third question examines motivating teachers to engage in distributed leadership practice. Changing the model of school leadership requires a whole-school commitment to the process? What are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing the Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018?

The fourth question explores the concept of accountability and responsibility within distributed leadership. Is distributed leadership possible without distributed responsibility and accountability? How do the legislative responsibilities of the principal correlate with a distributed model of school leadership?

The research study examines distributed leadership practice from the principal's perspective. The research study seeks to discover if the underlying concepts of power, motivation, and accountability fundamentally influence the principal's perspective on implementing distributed leadership. The research question and the sub-questions inform the focus of the literature review and provide the rationale for the inclusion of selected literature.

3.2 Overview of Leadership Theory

"Leadership theories represent an evolving set of constructs" (Watkins et al., 2017, p.155). While early leadership theories focused on individual leaders' characteristics and behaviours, subsequent theories focused on followers, relationships, and situations. Gumus et al. (2018) conclude that management discourse "centres on what makes an organization more effective, whereas leadership discourse has focused on examining leadership practice that can achieve the organization's desired goals" (p.27). Regardless of the lens or framework used to describe it, the literature on leadership overwhelmingly describes leadership's effectiveness as an essential criterion for organisational development. Bolden (2004) notes, "Seldom, however, has the need for effective leadership been voiced more strongly than now. It is argued that in this changing, global environment, leadership

holds the answer not only to the success of individuals and organizations, but also to sectors, regions, and nations" (p.4).

Leadership has been a concern for centuries back to Ancient Greek philosophers (Bolden, 2004). Despite its importance, it is not easy to define leadership; Leithwood and Riehl (2003; 2005) describe two leadership functions: providing direction and exercising influence. In a school context, they translate this to mobilising and influencing others to articulate and achieve the school's shared intentions and goals.

The "Great Man Theory," popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries, espoused a belief that leaders were born with inherent leadership qualities; the theory evolved into discourse about whether the traits or behaviours were acquired or innate (Kirkpatrick et al., 1991). The development of behavioural theory began to extend its influence in education post World War II. Murphy & Beck (1995) view this development to reconcile the gap between the economic and social leadership and management models.

Leadership is a multi-faceted phenomenon that presents many diverse views and theories. Sergiovanni (2007) proposes that the role, the actions, the context, and the relationships form the four pillars of leadership theory. Each leadership theory emerged in the broader societal, political, and educational arena.

3.3 Educational Leadership

No single definition of leadership exists in the literature; however, over time, educational researchers have developed specific leadership models applicable to schools and educational institutions with a degree of agreement among researchers that leadership is a process that involves exercising influence over others to achieve organisational goals (Gumus et al., p.25-26).

The school leadership models have reflected various components of school leadership and management theory, with different models becoming more prominent and popular, emphasising the nature and centrality of the role and the nature and types of relationships and interactions. Leithwood et al. (1999) explain that school leadership theory developed in the context of broader educational and social goals whereby a model of school leadership took precedence over others as the most effective one until the context changed and a more evolved idea emerged.

The dominant leadership and management model in schools, including Ireland, up to the 1990s was managerial. Connolly et al. (2017) explain that "education management entails carrying the

responsibility for the proper functioning of a system, in an educational institution in which others participate" (p.1). A managerial model's influence was evident in school leadership's bureaucratic, hierarchical, and centralised nature (Leithwood et al., 1999; Bush, 2008). The dichotomy between leadership and management in the school context is of particular interest for the school principal's role (Hallinger, 2005); while the principal must display leadership qualities, they also perform management duties. This type of leadership was task-focused and concentrated on managing existing practices in schools within a bureaucratic hierarchy (Bush, 2008). Cuban (1998), cited in Bush (2011), distinguishes leadership and management as follows, "Leaders are people who shape goals, motivations and the actions of others. By comparison, managers maintain "efficiently and effectively current organizational arrangements'" (p. 8-9).

 A significant criticism of this type of leadership was the lack of emphasis on the social and relational aspects within a school and the interactive nature of school leadership. After the 1980s, several interrelated concepts prevailed in the discourse on educational leadership, such as" school improvement, democratic community, and social injustice, and subjectivist approaches to educational administration, labelled neo-Marxist/critical theory and postmodernism" (Lunenberg, 2003, p.5). An emerging realisation of the importance of human relations (Murphy& Beck, 1995) saw the focus shift to the social and relational skills of the school leader and the movement towards instructional leadership.

3.4 Instructional Leadership

Emerging in the mid-twentieth century from studies on effective school principals (Goldman& Heald, 1968), instructional leadership became an influential theory. Gumus et al. (2018) describe leadership as an effective leader who pays attention to schools' teaching and learning aspects. Managing teaching & learning led to a theory of instructional leadership (Leithwood et al., 1999) or learning-centred leadership described by Rhodes& Brundrett (2010). The school leader's function as a facilitator of learning excellence emerged in the 1980s when definite models emerged, most notably by Hallinger & Murphy (1985). Instructional leadership focuses on the principal as the leader of learning through curriculum and instruction, described by Bush (2008) as learning-centred leadership. Gumus et al. (2018) note that this view expanded with time to develop into "leadership for learning" (p.30). Leadership was viewed as independent of positional authority, while management was linked directly. Bush (2008) refers to leadership as exerting influence rather than authority. Hallinger & Heck (2010) concur that instructional leadership is leadership for learning, focusing on the leaders' influence on student learning through teacher motivation.

3.5 Transformational Leadership

In transformational leadership theory, Bass & Riggio (2005) describe the components of transformational leadership, influence, motivation, intellectual stimulation, and consideration of individuals. There is an acknowledgement of transformational leadership's charismatic nature, which has extended to distinct literature (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). Transformational leaders use their ability to nurture followers' needs, empower them, and give them a sense of mission toward ethical and broad objectives that exceed their own goals. Vision building potentially offers the most significant capacity to influence teachers' motivation because the vision provides personal goals for the teacher and a desire to see a change in the future. Relationships and interactions between leaders and followers are at the crux of transformational leadership, which focuses on the connections formed between leaders and followers through interpersonal skills. Transformational leaders who inspire followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivation to work towards a common goal have higher performance levels and satisfaction than groups led by other leaders (Riggio, 2009). Its original purpose emerged from an industry where influencing employees' motivation and commitment was paramount to improvement and change initiatives (Yukl, 2012). The model adopted for the school context was associated with the school improvement movement noted by Fullan (2000), Hargreaves and Fullan (1998), and Leithwood and Jantzi (1999).

Transformational leadership brings about transformed or changed behaviours and functions where the leader is central to bringing about such change (Gunter, 2001; Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood et al., 2007). The model strongly emphasises concepts such as motivation and a commitment to change. Bass and Avolio (1994) consider transformational leadership achievable through participative or authoritarian leadership approaches with charisma and motivation necessary to develop a vision for the organisation. The leaders sought to develop commitments and trust among workers and facilitate organisational change (Hallinger, 2003).

When transformational leadership emerged for schools, the view was that the principal's transformative leadership would dominate as the primary agent of change and improvement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Hallinger (2003) considers that transformational approaches do not necessarily imply that leadership must be in one individual; instead, the leader's role is to build leadership capacity, distribute, and disperse through the organisation (Hallinger, 2003). In later work, Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) note that the school's political and cultural context could influence transformational leadership and the extent to which it was shared and distributed.

3.6 Ethical Leadership

According to Watkins et al. (2017), ethics and leadership practice connect, and ethics form an essential part of behaviour and actions. Ethical or moral leadership theory, whereby the leader communicates ethics and values developed, as history witnessed charismatic leaders whose actions were questionable. An ethical leader was identified through visible actions and communicating ethics and values to members of the organisation (Trevion et al., 2003). According to Bush & Glover (2014), ethics and value-based education are a factor permeating many school plans and mission statements. "Every individual brings a set of personal beliefs and values into the workplace. Personal values and moral reasoning that translates these values into behaviour are an important aspect of ethical decision making in organizations" (Daft, 2001, p.124).

Staratt (2004) describes ethical leadership as based on the principles, beliefs, and values that inform the leader's actions to achieve a moral purpose. He suggests that the leadership role is a type of stewardship or service, moving to the types of relationships expected within moral leadership; it is more of a shared and distributed practice. Moral leadership relationships and interactions generally involve developing meaningful relationships within organisational structures and processes connected to and supporting core values and visions beyond personal interests (Bhindi & Duignan, 1997).

3.7 Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership theory proposes leadership development through life experiences and psychological and moral capital. Leaders develop an awareness of themselves and their social and relational behaviours to build trust among followers (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Yammarino, 2013). The leader develops self-reflective skills to interact positively with followers to encourage transparency and inclusion. Dansereau et al. (2013) examine the nature of followers through self-expansion theory; the follower identifies with the group and the group leader. The follower recognises the leader as a resource that allows the follower to solve problems and work towards agreed goals.

3.8 Servant Leadership

Servant leadership theory is conducive to self-actualisation as it combines the motivation to lead with an innate need to serve others: aspiring to enhance high-quality leader-follower relationships, which provide a catalyst for empowerment, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, valuing other identities with the expectation of creating a healthy climate for inclusion and trust (Winston and

Fields, 2015). Furthermore, McMaster (2014) explains, "your leadership style must reflect both your personal preferences and your values about how influence should be used"(p.435).

The ongoing analysis of leadership is shifting to how leadership is effective. Collinson (2005) challenges the notion that there is a 'best' or 'most effective way of leading in a specific context. It is about an ongoing evolving co-constructed relational leadership style. Gotsis and Grimani (2016) suggest that influential leaders become aware of their perspectives and are open to diverse alternatives, mindful of connectedness and interdependencies. Supovitz, D'Auria, and Spillane (2019) highlight some areas for the development of leadership capacities, which include an awareness of the message content and tone, suggesting that being cognisant of the dynamic environment and the power differentials are necessary to promote a non-judgemental culture that fosters learning to create a psychologically safe workplace.

3.9 The Emergence of Distributed Leadership Theory

Murgatroyd and Reynolds (1984) state that "leadership can occur at a variety of levels in response to various situations and is not necessarily tied to possession of a formal organisational role" (cited in Law and Glover, 2003, p.37). Distributed leadership emerged from the school improvement movement akin to instructional and transformational leadership models. The fundamental difference is that distributed leadership theory concentrates on school leadership practice.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, distributed leadership began to emerge in educational leadership discourse. Developing teacher leadership within schools (Louis and Marks 1996; Wheatley 1999) was a broad concept, which included teachers working in teams and teachers taking various responsibilities within the school. These early studies on distributed leadership highlighted various approaches to the concept within schools by authors (Spillane 2001; Fullan 2000).

Gunter (2001) suggests that distributed leadership emerged from the literature on change and school improvement. Developing leadership capacity paved the way for further exploration of a more distributed perspective on school leadership. Parker (2015) considers distributed leadership the most promoted form of leadership practice in the twentieth century. Gumus et al. (2016) acknowledge many studies on distributive leadership in the last decade; however, only a few related studies in educational settings before 2000, "discussions about achieving more effective and efficient organizations have been overwhelming over the last century. While discussions about management types have mostly concerned what makes an organization more effective, leadership discussions have focused on understanding or identifying the leadership practices that can help achieve an organization's desired goals" (p.27).

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Gronn (2009) suggests that if the objective is school improvement, such improvement requires one person's enhanced capacity and many others. The emphasis on building leadership capacity permeates the school improvement and change literature (Fullan, 2006; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992; Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998). As legislative and curricular changes impacted schools, a strong sense of the necessity for distributed leadership emerged as leading a school became increasingly complex and demanding for one person (Spillane et al.,2001, 2005). Gunter (2001) suggests that distributed leadership emerged from school leadership literature as a school improvement and accountability mechanism. Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, (2011) agree and consider leadership too complex and challenging for an individual school leader.

The OECD report Improving School Leadership (2008b) recognised that the expansion and intensification of the role of the school leader meant that education systems needed to adopt a broader notion of school leadership and acknowledged that countries were experimenting with different ways to allocate better distribution of tasks across leadership teams. Within this context, middle leaders emerged to play a pivotal role in schools' leadership.

Middle leaders are teachers with formal leadership positions, and classroom teachers with responsibilities in specific operational areas, like subject heads or pastoral duties. Grootebboer et al. (2020) note that research is absent internationally on how middle leaders transition from the classroom into a leadership role within their schools and their support structure within a distributed leadership framework.

According to Bush (2018), distributed leadership is the normatively preferred leadership model because it spreads leadership across the organisation and empowers staff to develop their leadership capacities" (p.536.) Spillane's (2006) work is significant as it emphasises that distributed leadership is not a new theory but rather a lens through which to view leadership practice. It is generally considered a practice to complement other approaches such as instructional and transformational and, as such, does not stand entirely independent from them. It has emerged from school improvement and change efforts, but its focus is specifically on the leadership process; it aims to encourage leaders to work in more collaborative and distributed ways. Liu, Bellibas, and Printy (2018) suggest that while traditional leadership views pay attention to the individual leader, distributed leadership theory emphasises the activity and interaction among people who have a hand in leadership roles.

The distributed leadership model aligned with the discourse on the role of democracy in education and school leadership. "Research on education systems as carriers of modern orientations and democratic values worldwide predicts that educated individuals will exhibit more democratic values than less educated ones, regardless of the country's level of democracy" (Kolczynska,2020, p.3).

Political and educational systems are interlinked. Many researchers consider the role of education in disseminating democratic values globally. Sant (2019) notes that "the links between democracy and education are implicit in most historical and philosophical accounts of democracy" (p.657). Movements such as the Democracy in Education Movement in the United States of America (USA) acknowledge that Dewey's calls for democratic education in "Democracy and Education (1916)" were made in a different political and economic environment. However, the basic tenet of educating for democracy still prevails, albeit with many ontological and epistemological viewpoints.

From the discourse on an elitist version of democratic education (Fallace,2016) to a view of Carr (2008) on liberal democratic education as the dominant variant through to the strong emphasis on neoliberalist democratic education thriving in the market economy with the increasing standardisation and accountability movement (Meens & Howe, 2016) it appears that the democratisation of education is central to political policy discourse. Nishiyama (2021) argues for consideration of schools from a broader perspective as places where democratic deliberation evolves, noting that "around the 2000s, the Deweyan concept of education for deliberative democracy resonated with the growth of deliberative democracy studies" (p. 109).

Tenuto (2014) observes the movement of political systems from the 1990s and increasingly in the twenty-first century to develop national educational goals to develop democracy in schools and, therefore, in society. The dichotomy between the hierarchical, bureaucratic models of educational leadership whereby leaders appear to have primary responsibility for the organisational vision and values coupled with personal accountability for the school's performance contrasted sharply with the participatory and consultative nature of democracy. Lambert (1998) suggests that equating the concept of leadership with the behaviours of one person acts as an impediment to the achievement of broad-based participation by a school community. Therefore, the "broadening of the concept of leadership suggests shared responsibility for a shared purpose" (p.5). It also reinforces the notion that teaching democracy through the school curriculum is supported by decision-making in a participatory and collaborative fashion through shared or distributed leadership.

Spillane (2005) describes distributed leadership as the dynamic interaction of the leader, the subordinate, and the organisation's situation. The emergence of a distributed leadership model means a departure from the view that leadership rests in one person toward a more involved leadership notion. Developing broad-based leadership capacity is central to organisational change and development. Distributed leadership places leadership practice as its central component.

Spillane (2005) also advocates different distribution types within the distributed leadership model, collaborative, collective, coordinated, and parallel. Collaborative distribution stretches leadership

over two or more leaders operating in the same place, doing the same task. Collective distribution means two or more leaders perform a leadership task separately but interdependently. In coordinated distribution, several leaders perform leadership activities in a particular sequence, with parallel distribution described as two leaders approaching an issue from the same perspective.

Spillane (2012) states that schools are complex organisations with history and contexts; therefore, how distributive leadership is introduced and integrated as a leadership model in the voluntary secondary school system will determine its success. Spillane (2005) suggests this is possible by the leader's dynamic interaction, subordinates, and the situation. Therefore, consideration of how to recreate this idea in an Irish secondary school context is required. Should distributed leadership be integrated through the formal middle management structure within the school or through developing informal teacher leadership opportunities, or is it both? Formal and informal are interdependent for the development of the organisation. According to Frost and Holden (2008), there are clear links between teacher leadership models and distributed leadership. It is difficult to imagine distributed leadership working without teacher leadership in formal and informal roles; it should be a shared rather than a solo model (Bush & Glover, 2014).

Mulford (2008) notes that the actual distribution might not work as the distribution method is contextual and subject to interpretation. Spillane's (2006) work acknowledges that its implementation primarily rests on a school principal's support. Hallinger and Heck (2010) suggest that distributed leadership impacts school improvement indirectly by building teacher capacity; however, they note it is difficult to determine how leadership occurs as it is often different in each school context. Leadership practice is inhibited or developed by the contextual constraints of the organisation.

In that regard, Duignan (2006) rejects the idea of distributed leadership within the hierarchical structure of the school; he interprets this as power and authority and what he refers to as the control paradigm (p.107). Duignan (2006) aligns with Sergiovanni (1992), who refers to collegiality as an essential value in school leadership and that promoting collegiality in the school community is an essential priority for a school leader. Duignan argues that the principal must 'let go' of the idea of hierarchically distributed leadership and that concepts of power, authority, influence, responsibility, and accountability are essential to the discourse. He emphasises the role of the community by empowering individual teachers and developing a shared vision.

While distributed leadership within schools emerges from the school improvement movement, with the view that a distributed leadership model correlates with increased school performance effectiveness, Leithwood and Jantzi (1998) note that distributed leadership in schools, defined as both teachers and principals engaging in leadership work, associates with lower levels of student

engagement. Parker (2015) suggests that many headteachers in English school's view school improvement as their responsibility, and a reluctance by some headteachers to distribute leadership in English schools "may stem from a belief that it is synonymous with abdicating responsibility" (p.135).

Harris (2004) also outlines some additional relational difficulties for teachers and their colleagues in a leadership role because of the micropolitics of the staffroom, of which they are usually very aware. Harris notes the challenges of implementing distributed leadership in schools, considering how to distribute and, more importantly, who distributes leadership.

3.10 Distributed Leadership as Practice

Laherto et al. (2017) state there is "no universally accepted definition for distributed leadership" (p.220). Each school will walk the path at their own pace, putting theory into practice, engaging in dialogue, and sharing best practices. According to Raelin (2018), distributed leadership has checked in. Gunter, Hall & Bragg (2013) suggest that critical researchers examine how the realities of practice can affect schools' structure by engaging in distributed leadership. Ball (1993) argues that one should not be 'misled' into "unexamined assumptions about policy as 'things'; policies are also processes and outcomes"(p.11). The contextualisation of the policy occurs as the school community decodes the policy text. The discourse on the text in practice shapes the enactment of the policy on what Mc Donnell (2003) describes as the school's surface structures of day-to-day practices. Griffith & Groulx (2014) refer to teachers' decision-making as informed by their professional knowledge, values, beliefs, and experiences. The policy text of the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 places the principal as a subject of the policy mandated to enact the policy. Also, as an actor in the contextualisation of the policy. The teachers are policy-readers who become policy writers in their own school culture. Foucauldian critical discourse (1972) describes this process of policy enactment as interpretive and contingent on or a reading of the policy from a theoretical, epistemological, or ethical standpoint.

To create a school culture conducive to distributed leadership, Hargreaves et al. (2014) consider the school's culture and outside the school within the broader society as relevant. Brown et al. (2017) consider the task of school leaders in this regard, suggesting that "at minimum, culturally responsive leaders identify and integrate the varied cultural values and symbols of the members of a school community in order to agree and achieve organisational goals" (p.6). (Gronn 2009) suggests that a rubric of leadership that does justice to these kinds of possibilities is required. While Harris (2008) states no precise road map or instructions for distributed leadership, similarities and shared characteristics are evident.

Spillane's (2007) understanding of distributed leadership is not just a leadership model to be implemented. It is a means to analyse school leadership and management and a diagnostic tool to study and improve leadership practice. Tian (2016, p.151)) observes that Spillane's practice-centred model highlights distributed leadership as going beyond shared leadership because it comprises the leader-plus aspect (i.e., multiple individuals function as leaders) and the practice aspect (i.e., leadership generated from interactions). The principal will work with others to perform leadership functions. Other times, those within the organisation with a formal leadership role will perform different leadership functions, and in different scenarios, teachers with no official leadership role will undertake leadership activities. "Distributed leadership concentrates on engaging expertise wherever it exists within the organization rather than seeking this only through formal roles" (Harris, 2004, p.13).

The organisational and cultural acceptance of a distributed leadership model is crucial for operating successfully across the post-primary school system. An understanding of the benefits for the organisation and the potential challenges should be recognised. Bolden (2011) identifies a positive relationship between distributed leadership and teachers' self-efficacy and school climate. In their distributed leadership study, Spillane, Halveson & Diamond (2001) argue that practice stretches over leaders, followers, and situations defined by the relational or situational context of leaders and followers. Spillane & Healey (2012) refer to distributed leadership as two concepts of the leader plus and practice. The current leadership and management practice review in post-primary schools recognises the need to acknowledge a relational and situational aspect of leadership within management structures. To establish a context and agree on organisational goals, schools collectively identify their own needs and priorities before assigning roles and responsibilities to their leadership & management areas. The Department of Education (DE) circular 003/2018 is the focus of this research study.

The interactional and relational aspects of the model are apparent. The interactions are crucial as it is within the relational and interactional sphere that leadership activity occurs. Principals need to cultivate and create opportunities for communication among the school community. Social capital creates networks that support emerging leader capabilities and builds a vital resource within the school. Leadership is stretched across the school community by relational connections.

Dansereau et al. (2013) examine followers' nature through self-expansion theory; the follower identifies with the group and the group leader. The follower recognises the leader as a resource, allowing followers to solve problems and work towards agreed goals. The distinction between leaders and followers within an organisation can change depending on the context of the situation. The relationship between the leader and followers can fluctuate according to need and context.

From written documents to action, the movement from policies and practices is evident in the diagram below from Distributed Leadership in Practice (Spillane, 2006).
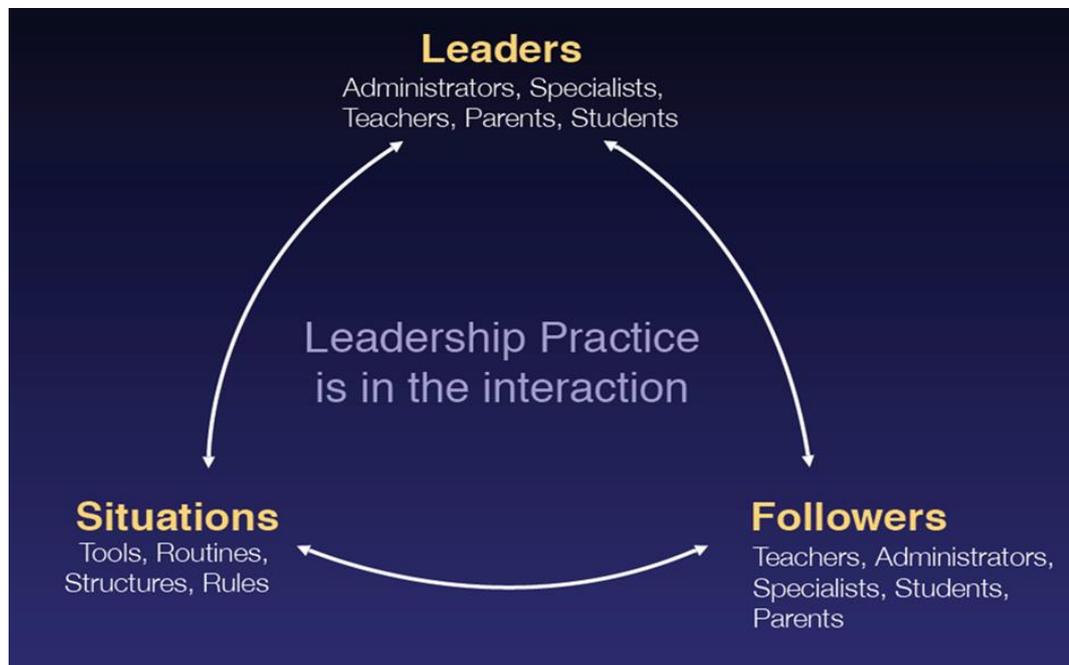
Figure 1. Leadership in Practice (Spillane 2006)

Distributed leadership recognises that the situation is not external to the leadership activity, acknowledging the social aspect of leadership with "an increased awareness of the importance of social relations in the leadership contract and the need for the leader to be given authority by their followers and a realisation that no one individual is the ideal leader in all circumstances have given rise to a new school of leadership thought" (Bolden, 2004, p.12). This new school of thought emphasises the need to develop a shared understanding of leadership and organisational goals. Feldman and Rafaeli (2002) describe this as individuals acting in a context created by other participants' actions. While the concept of distributed leadership is ambiguous and refers to a wide range of practices, Tian et al. (2016) describe two paradigms in their meta-analysis of distributed leadership theory as "a descriptive-analytical paradigm, providing an understanding of the concept of distributed leadership: secondly, a prescriptive -normative paradigm with a focus on the practice of distributed leadership" (p.149).

Liu (2020) examines how contextual variables affect distributed leadership in schools across thirty-two countries using the international evidence from the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) data. The findings highlight seven different types of distributed leadership in operation across thirty-two countries. The evidence demonstrates distributed leadership in schools with various levels of decision-making occurring with management teams and teachers. Anglo

countries emerge as possessing a high level of distributed leadership, with Nordic Europe having the highest implementation of distributed leadership. The findings support the practice-centred approach with distributed leadership depending on situations and contextual variations such as country policies and school culture (Liu, 2020).

Harris (2014) explains distributed leadership as a leadership practice distinct from the formal roles and responsibilities traditionally associated with leadership in schools; however, Spillane (2006) refers to the leader plus model of distributed leadership that incorporates the principal working with others performing leadership and management tasks. At certain times formally designated leaders take responsibility for leadership, and others with no formal leadership also perform leadership and management tasks.

3.11 Middle Leadership within a Distributed Leadership Framework in Secondary Schools

Bennett et al. (2003), in a seminal text, undertook a review of the literature on middle leadership in schools. Harris et al. (2019) published a review of the literature in the English language on middle leadership in schools from 2003-to 2017, which found the knowledge base on the topic of middle leadership in schools predominantly focused on descriptive accounts of practice with limited generalisation, "the overall number of articles on this topic remains relatively low compared to other topics with the field of educational leadership" (p.22). Hickey et al. (2022) concur with this view that "despite multiple literature reviews that sought to yield greater understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of distributed leadership, there is little focus on empirical research on distributed leadership in post-primary schools", yet it "has now become prevalent and pervasive in both policy and practice spheres" (P.1).

The Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 provides the framework for the distribution of leadership in Irish secondary schools stating that "leadership is distributed throughout the school as a key support for student learning" (p.4). The Department of Education (DE) CL/003/2018 defines the role of the middle leader within the Irish secondary school "in line with the principles of distributed leadership" (p.7), describing how assistant principals work collaboratively in teams. Furthermore, the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 recognises that the principal must demonstrate a willingness to "share and distribute leadership" (p.6). The understanding of school leadership described in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 is leadership as distributed and shared with a collaborative approach. While the document recognises that "all teachers are leaders" (p.3), the document categorically identifies formal positional leadership roles within an established hierarchy and accompanying pay scale, stating "the term 'school leaders' typically refers to formal leadership roles including teachers with posts of responsibility who carry out roles and

responsibilities integral to the administration, management and leadership of the school" (p. 6). The literature on distributed leadership recognises both formal and informal leadership roles in schools, this researcher understands a distributed leadership framework as a collaborative, collective and consensual leadership practice and recognises both formal and informal leadership as essential for sustainable distributed leadership within the voluntary secondary school sector.

"In Irish education, distributed leadership is relatively new" (King & Nihill, 2017, p.12). King & Nihill (2017) note that "social partnership was very influential in the Irish context with unions influencing many political decisions related to education and educational leadership" (p.4). Teacher union involvement is evident in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018, particularly in appointment and appeals procedures in leadership positions. Murphy (2019), in a thematic review of a decade of leadership in Irish schools from 2008-to 2018, identifies "a tendency towards the distribution of bureaucratic management activities rather than the leadership of school improvement" within the post of responsibility structure of Irish post-primary schools before the introduction of Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018.

Humphries (2010) researched distributed leadership in three Irish secondary schools from the perspective of teachers and emphasised that if "teachers are to engage in educational dialogue, they need to have opportunities to meet" (p.417). Humphries emphasises the pivotal role of the principal in facilitating leadership development and identifies a model of distributed leadership as a whole school practice outside of the formal leadership posts "some teachers were fostering a collaborative way of working and engaging in mutual learning. However, the potentially positive impact on teaching and learning that could emerge from teacher leadership is reduced" (p.155). Implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 creates a structured approach to collaborative leadership practice.

Kavanagh et al. (2021) declare that the principles of distributed leadership form part of the quality framework to "underpin a system that provides high-quality student care, learning and teaching" (p.20). Forde et al. (2019), reflecting on both the Irish and Scottish leadership policy context, suggest that "leadership professional learning has to move away from examining the role and tasks of middle leaders and the functions of middle leadership but instead to explore more explicitly the practice of middle leading" (p.297-314).

O Donovan (2015) emphasises the contextual nature of leadership in Irish post-primary schools indicating that the enactment of leadership practice in the case-study schools was "underpinned and embedded in an ethos of care, nurture, and higher-order values "(p.262). Furthermore, O Donovan (2015) purports "a challenge to school leaders to make visible and explicit the concept of distributed

leadership" (p.263). Moynihan & O Donovan (2021) discuss the vital role played by the school principal in the development and implementation of collaborative practice in voluntary secondary schools. They suggest that school principals are central to framing the construct to cultivate collaborative practice. While their work does not focus specifically on distributed leadership in a formal role, it relates to establishing professional learning communities within schools to improve teaching and learning and establish a collaborative culture extending to leadership teams.

Hamilton et al. (2018) suggest "changing practice involves not just learning new skills but potentially 'unlearning' established practices" (p.76). Kavanagh et al. (2021) suggest the middle leader role requires a transformation from a specific management role to an integral part of the school leadership team, with professional development forming a critical component for leadership development in Irish post-primary schools.

The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) was established in Ireland in 2015 to promote a continuum of professional development for school leadership at different levels in Irish schools with opportunities for collaborative professional development. The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) report (2020) outlines the planning and designing of professional development of leaders and aspiring leaders in Irish schools, emphasising collaborative practice. The report considers the leadership stages from teacher leaders to middle leaders to aspiring leaders to newly appointed leaders and established and system leaders from a national and international perspective. Murphy (2019) highlights the "challenges experienced by senior school leaders in the Republic of Ireland in enacting reform concerning the distribution of leadership. Senior school leaders cite the distribution of leadership as an urgent requirement for their professional development" (p.91). Murphy (2019) notes that principals in Irish secondary schools clearly understood that leadership moves beyond formal positions in line with the change in policy reflected in the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018. Furthermore Murphy (2019) notes that principals encounter challenges "because of the legacies of old system structures" (p.96).

In a recent study, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2016 reported cross-country evidence that advanced distributed leadership research with international data; however, according to Liu (2020), the "operationalization was still merely about shared decision making perceived by both principal and teacher" (p.786). Liu (2020) also notes that the study fails to consider the complexity of a school's full range of leadership functions. Printy & Liu (2020) suggest that teachers will undertake leadership roles if the school culture is conducive to distributed leadership and the country context is part of the contextual situation. Gurr (2019), in a study of middle leaders from Australia, Chile and Singapore, observes that middle leaders are likely

to hold positions such as a programme coordinator, wellbeing coordinator or year group coordinator, like the post of responsibility holders in Ireland.

Hurtado et al. (2020) conducted a research study on the practice of implementing distributed leadership in two Spanish secondary schools; they note that in practice, "the actions of principals in the configuration and distribution of the leadership in these centres are key" (p.9). They also observe the importance of the contextual factors and state that the use "of power as a constituent and regulating mechanism of social relations is required" (p.11).

Laherto et al. (2017) conducted a research study on distributed leadership in practice in Finnish schools. Unlike Ireland, Finnish schools have no formal hierarchical structure as the "teachers are usually appointed to the management team on a temporary basis" (p.218). In the study, Laherto et al. (2017) note that more than half of respondent teachers perceive distributed leadership as delegating assigned tasks rather than interaction among leaders. In a more advanced view, a significantly smaller number of respondents "described distributed leadership as an interaction between leaders, followers, and situations" (p.225). Those principals are more likely to believe in the actualising of distributed leadership in their schools. Furthermore Laherto et al. (2019), in their recent study, sought principals' views on the enactment of distributed leadership in Finland. They explored the principal's views of distributed leadership in Finnish schools to examine if distributed leadership is a delegation by principals or the principal and the leadership team's interaction; they suggest it is "fruitful to approach distributed leadership from a perspective of dynamic interaction between principals and teachers" (p.342).

3.12 The Concept of Power & Politics in Distributed Leadership

Politics, for Aristotle, was the highest and most worthwhile of human activity. In ancient Greece, the study of politics involved the study of ethics. Aristotle understood human nature in terms of human potential. For Aristotle, a man was a political being, and politics encompassed all communal public activity forms. For Plato, politics ordered all aspects of life, from marriage to music, per reason and justice. Politics culminated in relationships built based on shared projects. In the 16th century, however, for Machiavelli, one had to put aside one's ordinary conceptions of human decency to succeed in politics.

In the seventeenth century, both Hobbes and Locke claimed they studied human nature as it is; unlike the Greeks, they did not speculate about human potential. In the mid-nineteenth century, Auguste Comte attempted to discover the laws that govern actual human behaviour. He aimed for social science on the model of natural science. This positivist trend led to a divorce of fact from value and

political science from political philosophy. While the Greeks saw the study of ethics and politics as integrally related, the positivists saw them as essentially distinct disciplines. Lukes (1974) criticises the positivist approach to studying power. He argues that an adequate political, and scientific approach must encompass philosophical issues regarding interests and responsibilities in contemporary political discourse.

Misfud (2017) explores "Foucault's theories of power, governmentality, discourse, and subjugation" to uncover the unfolding power relations of distributed leadership in a Maltese school network. The Foucauldian concept of power is a mechanism to cover knowledge and truth. Power is an exercised strategy that is inherent in individuals and institutions. Foucault did not necessarily see power as a repressive or negative connotation but rather as a phenomenon circulating within institutions producing subjects with a mutual hold on each other. Power exists within relationships and the relational structure of an organisation or society. For Foucault, a consensus was a crucial component of power dynamics. In the study, Misfud (2017) discovers "a distribution of power, mere delegation and a playing out of democracy as a masked form of power" (p.149).

Spillane & Anderson (2019) consider macro-level policy at the micro-level in school settings. Distributed leadership is a political activity within the school community. It provides the sharing of power, which provides a mechanism through which policies and practices can move from rhetoric to implementation. Gronn (2009) asserts that distributed leadership disguises that a cohort of individuals within the organisation holds significant power. In contrast, Bolden (2011) suggests that distributed leadership is policymakers' attempt to respond to the societal desire for equity and voice. In the vast array of literature on distributed leadership, the element of power does not take centre stage (Spillane, 2007; Harris, 2007, Tian et al., 2016). However, the principal's influence as the formal leader and the school's culture or climate is deemed paramount to the successful enactment of distributed leadership (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Research shows that principals retain considerable formal power, and distributed leadership will not be manifest if principals do not support it" (Printy & Liu, 2020, p.7).

Lukes (1974), in his seminal text on power, examines the concept of power as a three-dimensional structure; the one-dimensional view focuses on behaviour, decision making, key issues, observable conflict, and personal interest, focusing on the behaviour of political actors. The second view critiques the behavioural focus of the first, focusing on bias and control. The third view provides a more in-depth analysis of power relations which is value-laden and empirical. According to which A affects B, all three views of power are alternative interpretations and applications of the same underlying concept of power.

Distributed leadership is potentially related to potential abuses of power, and critics of distributed leadership claim it is often an overlooked concept in distributed leadership research and practice. Lumby (2013) points out that "a particular focus of the critique has been the relationship of distributed leadership to power. If the leadership theories are fundamentally about power relations within an organisation, distributed leadership has generally been found wanting" (p.10). When the policy in question is the distribution of leadership, power dynamics emerge. What are the existing established social norms in the school? To what extent does the principal influence the attitudes of others?

O Shea (2021) believes that for innovation to be successful, decision making cannot be confined solely to those in formal leadership positions, suggesting that "one component of distributed leadership is the empowerment of decision-making" (p.2). Murphy et al. (2009) and Hairon and Goh (2015) research the phenomenon of power and distributed leadership in educational settings. Their findings correlate with some similar conclusions around the role of the principal as the formal leader. They claim that their findings do not support the idea of distributed leadership dispersing power through the organisation. When a teacher undertook a leadership role, the principal was aware and involved in decision-making. Tian et al. (2016) further conclude that those in formal leadership positions retain power because those in non-formal leadership roles do not have the formal authority to implement decisions within a bureaucratic educational environment. According to Misfud (2017), schools are "traditionally bureaucratic organisations with hierarchical demarcations of position and pay-scale may prove a barrier to a fluid distributed leadership approach" (p 154).

Notwithstanding the concept of formal leadership, authority, and power, the question of who wields power in a school is tricky, and consideration of micropolitics is essential. Preedy (2016) recognises that a shift in the power dynamic is essential for successfully implementing distributed leadership in organisations. On the surface, those in authority may hold the balance of power as the legitimate holders of a position. The concept of legitimate power extends into coercive power by administering sanctions and control or reward power through the distribution of affirmation and incentive. However, in a school environment, other sources of influential power emerge.

Teachers as a collective hold considerable power through their union membership. Through collective representation, they obtain procedures and protocols that permeate the working environment and considerably restrain a principal who may be inclined to use coercive or reward power to any significant degree. Law et al., 2010 (cited in Printy & Liu, 2020) suggest informal teacher-leaders could be exploited in a distributed leadership model because the traditional power relations are unclear. However, teachers can also wield expert power within their subject area, influencing the staffroom and the wider school community. An individual teacher may also hold

referent power because of their traits or resources, influencing other staff members or the wider school community of students and parents. "It would be naive to ignore the major structural, cultural and micro-political barriers operating in schools that make distributed leadership difficult to implement" (Harris, 2004, p.19). Printy & Liu (2020) propose that principals think differently about who participates in leadership activity according to the situation, tending to seek teacher leadership engagement and skill around instructional and curriculum decisions and policies and less likely when decision making concerns school organisation (p.22).

King & Stevenson (2017) discuss the concept of teacher leadership in the context of the Irish post-primary school, considering leadership from "above and below," while not identical to distributed leadership per se; the similarities are apparent. The Department of Education (DE) policy document CL003/2018 mentions teacher leadership and distributed leadership within the text. Interestingly King & Stevenson (2017) acknowledge that "schools are workplaces in which power is located within institutional hierarchies, formalised through managerial structures" (p.658). Citing (Lumby, 2016; Woods, 2016 and Sachs, 2003), King & Stevenson (2017) acknowledge that a more in-depth analysis of power and leadership practice is required.

To enact the school principal's legitimate authority into power is challenging for any school leader who must make decisions and enact policies that affect such a large and diverse group of stakeholders. Distributed leadership challenges the school principal as the formal leader to develop leadership among teachers. Preedy, Bennett & Wise (2012) recognise the increasing environmental ambiguity and the intensification of demands placed on educational leaders and the tensions between external stakeholders' demands and internal priorities. The use of legitimate power impacts the perceptions of leadership. Hardy et al. (1998) suggest that power is often asymmetric, but the exercise of power is central to leadership. According to Kelly (2008), power is a leader's ability to influence others to create and use resources to achieve one's goal.

Tián et al. (2016) state that distributed leadership requires proper leadership support, which is strongly dependent on the principal's intentional support to create a trusting climate. Trust enables the principal to distribute leadership formally and through informal empowerment. Embedding the concept of distributed leadership into practice requires proper leadership support. The principal plays a crucial role in determining change initiatives and distributed leadership by setting the direction and articulating a collegial vision to transform working relationships. It goes beyond delegation. Principals must delegate responsibilities and release their hold on power and control (Murphy& Louis, 2018). The challenge for principals is to distribute the power responsibly.

Lumby (2013) notes ethical questions relating to power and agency. Young (2009) argues a lack of research on power relations' influence on distributed leadership in schools. Tian et al. (2016) note that the principal, according to (Spillane & Healey: Spillane et al., 2003,2007, 2010), as a formal leader plays a pivotal role in developing informal leadership, yet they do not consider the power dimension or how power affects the agency of individuals. Lumby (2013) goes a step further when she argues that distributed leadership is a political phenomenon "replete with the uses and abuses of power" (p.592). At the same time, Harris (2014) suggests that power, authority, and leadership in a distributed model are collective rather than individual phenomena.

Bush & Glover (2012) reference the principal's support as a critical factor in enacting distributed leadership. Tian et al. (2016) note that research on distributed leadership has focussed on the organisational element of distributed leadership as a model rather than the idea of agency. They suggest a closer examination of the "reciprocal relationship between professional agency and organisational improvement"(p.158), the enactment stage on the ground in schools.

The Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 provides an annual review between the principal and the post holder with leadership responsibility; this has implications from the school's perspective of power relations. As there is a line management dimension to the process, critics such as Gunter (2013) argue that distributed leadership has moved to a system to transfer work to teachers, often without remuneration for those who take on non-formal leadership roles in schools.

Introducing, implementing, and nurturing distributed leadership is crucial to a successful distributed practice. Schools have horizontal and vertical hierarchies. Distributed leadership can happen as a collaborative or coordinated process. (Spillane et al., 2001; Spillane 2006). If distributed leadership succeeds, then a clear distinction between distributed leadership and delegation is required. Social capital creates networks that support emerging leader capabilities and builds a vital resource within the school. Leadership is stretched across the school community by relational connections. Priestly et al. (2011, p.270) argue that professional trust and a "genuine shift in power" are required to achieve distributed leadership for informal leaders.

Research on schools' micro-politics focuses on policy enactment and how teachers' micro-politics can shape policy enactment. Teachers' non-compliance and micro-politics may purposefully or unintentionally alter a policy's intended implementation (Giudici,2020). How schools deal with new policy texts "depends on contextual and institutional constraints specific to the enactment phase, such as school location" (Giudici,2020, p.5). Teachers' reassignment to the respective positions is a matter for the school principal, who proceeds in a consultative manner with the post holders, both new and existing, to align their skills and interests with the school's identified leadership needs and priorities.

The enactment of the Department of Education (DE) policy CL003/2018) requires a process of interpretation and translation: it thus implies "repeated negotiations about policies' meanings and ways they are put into practice" (Giudici,2020, p.5). There is a political dimension to assigning leadership roles. Some teachers may feel empowered, and some teachers who may be unsuccessful in their efforts to obtain leadership roles may feel disempowered.

Murphy (2009) notes how the principal reconciles the power imbalance of politics, whether real or perceived in leadership distribution, may determine the success or enactment of distributed leadership. In that regard, building relationships, promoting, and facilitating collaboration is crucial. King & Stevenson (2017) note that while principals possess formal power in the form of authority, power in the form of influence "was best described as the outcome of a more collaborative process of co-construction between formal and informal leaders" (p.666). Therefore, the principal must motivate teachers to engage productively and in a meaningful way when implementing distributed leadership.

3.13 The Concept of Motivation and Distributed Leadership

Understanding the link between distributed leadership and staff motivation is crucial for formal school leaders to ensure distributed leadership does not equate to delegation (Harris, 2008) and for leaders to understand why a distributed approach to leadership can be motivating and needs satisfying for those involved. Alan Mc Clean (2003) describes the motivated school as successful in implementing change initiatives. For school principals introducing a new concept of leadership to a school staff requires consideration of what motivates the staff to engage in the process and knowledge of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Torres (2018) outlines that "the most consistently documented, strongest predictors of retention with US data are teacher participation in school decision making, autonomy, an environment supportive of teacher collaboration, and leadership quality" (p.129).

Since 1900, the question of motivating employees has remained a central component of leadership. Theories on best practice have evolved from John B. Watson's Behaviourist theory in 1913, Thorndike's Law of Effect in 1911, and the Gilbreths Time and Motion study in 1914, ideas that dominated the study of work and productivity in the early part of the twentieth century. The emergence of internal factors as critical elements of worker motivation began to emerge with Likert (1932), who introduced a Likert scale measurement to ascertain employee attitudes to work. Likert (1932) concluded that money was not always the central element of work for employees. Wickstrom & Bendix (2000) note that the Hawthorn studies in the 1930s further expanded the idea that intrinsic factors were crucial to worker satisfaction.

Frederick Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor theory suggests that managerial quality, wages, business policies, physical working conditions, and job security affect individuals' dissatisfaction with work. Factors such as promotion possibilities, personal development, recognition, responsibility, and success are rewarding internal factors that effectively motivate individuals. Herzberg et al. (1959) argue for a complex interaction between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation factors and explore the circumstances under which they are most effective.

Douglas McGregor wrote about Theory X and Theory Y in the late 1950s and early 1960s, describing two distinct types of behaviour demonstrated by people at work, which involve corresponding managerial beliefs about what motivates employees and profoundly influences management and organisational communication. Theory X is negative, relying on external motivation and high supervision and oversight of workers to achieve desired goals and outcomes. At the same time, Theory Y stresses intrinsic motivation with increased job satisfaction, less direct supervision and more responsibility resting with the worker. As distributed leadership requires a distribution of tasks rather than delegation, motivation strategies aligning with Theory Y are relevant to principals implementing distributed leadership in their schools.

Abraham Maslow's (1943) basic needs theory can motivate people's physiological and psychological needs from a humanist perspective. In the 1960s, McClelland's human motivation theory, also known as the theory of needs, emphasises people's desire to be successful, have power, and relate to others. In the 1970s and 1980's Edward Deci and Richard Ryan developed the self-determination theory of motivation. Their work differentiates between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation influence our behaviour in driving us to meet three basic needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan 1985).

Alan Mc Clean (2003) considers motivation an essential component when implementing a new policy or initiative in a school. Implementation cannot happen without motivation, and motivation needs a phenomenon to implement. In that case, the successful implementation of the Department of Education (DE) policy CL 003/2018 depends on the motivated teaching staff. Motivating staff to review practice and set targets for successful outcomes is a serious consideration for school leadership. As identified by Fullan (2006), "Having a theory in use is not good enough, of itself, the people involved must also push to the next level, to make their theory of action explicit (p.3)". The principal needs to take this approach in implementing the Department of Education (DE) policy CL 003/2018. Gronn (2014) advocates trust as an essential prerequisite for establishing an environment that allows a leader to encourage staff to take risks to improve the organisation. Robinson (2008) outlines the determinants of relational trust and describes the benefits of high relational trust for a

school manifesting into enhanced commitment, more positive attitudes, and improved student outcomes.

Harnessing the individual teachers' motivation into a group or organisational motivation is facilitated through the communication process, which involves upward, downward, and horizontal flows of written, verbal, and non-verbal. Understanding individual motivations, competing goals, and reciprocal feedback are essential. Börü (2018) believes "the primary source of motivation for teachers is their desire to be successful" (p.774). The direction and magnitude of human behaviour identified by Dörnyei and Ushioda (2011, 2013) are why people decide to do something and how long people are willing to sustain the activity.

 A model for implementing distributed leadership suggested by Murphy& Louis (2018) outlines a framework for identifying the leaders, motivating them to seek leadership opportunities, and valuing and promoting their efforts by supplying practical resources and support. The principal recognises teachers with various skill sets and interests and creates opportunities to demonstrate their work to make a difference in the school by providing professional development opportunities and motivation. Fullan (2014) suggests the principal should provide this support through collaborative groups rather than working with individuals on a one-to-one basis.

Macbeath (2005) presents a developmental approach to the motivation process. Firstly, the leader identifies the current needs of the organisation and seeks people within the organisation with the skills and leadership potential to implement change; secondly, the leader sets the right conditions for innovation, creating a culture of a shared learning environment with an emphasis on collaboration and a shared vision. Communicating with colleagues can transfer the factors for intrinsic motivation from the individual to the group. Thirdly the leader stands back and motivates and supports the dynamic. The principal must trust the teachers to perform leadership roles, and the teachers must believe the principal will assist them in their respective positions. Therefore, the person at the centre of leadership in the school must decide how they use their influence to motivate teachers to engage in distributed leadership. Lárusdóttir & O'Connor (2017) and Kavanagh (2020) observe the lack of professional development for middle leaders within the Irish post-primary system.

Promoting teacher leadership and distributive leadership models is an effective motivational strategy for school leaders to improve quality. According to Bush & Glover (2014), it is difficult to imagine distributed leadership working without teacher leadership in formal and informal roles; it should be a shared rather than a solo model. School managers must consider that internal and external factors play a motivational role. School leaders have limited external motivation strategies such as rewards at their disposal. The terms and conditions, holiday entitlements, and benefits for teachers fall under

the Department of Education (DE). Resources within the organisation are deployed equitably across subject departments to ensure students have appropriate access to the curriculum and technology. There are limited promotional opportunities in the Department of Education (DE) CL03/2018 document through the post of responsibility framework. However, the title of assistant principal, a formal role within the distributed leadership framework, carries remuneration. The payment element distinguishes the formal and natural leadership roles within the school's distributed leadership model. Harris (2004) notes that this requires school principals to develop other incentives to remunerate staff who take on informal leadership roles. If distributed leadership is successful in post-primary schools, the principal must motivate teachers in formal and informal roles. According to Harris (2014), formal and informal leadership roles must be compatible rather than oppositional.

A school leader needs to recognise the culture, accepted beliefs, and norms operating within a school environment if motivation strategies to encourage increased participation and improvement are necessary. The established culture will also greatly influence the micro-politics within the school, viewed by Schein (2004) as the culmination of relatively uniform and enduring beliefs, customs, traditions, and practices that are shared by the organisation's members, learned by the recruits, and transmitted from one generation of employees to the next. Fullan (2001, 2003), Gronn (1999), Leithwood et al. (1999) outline that it is generally acknowledged and accepted within education that school leaders are required to be fervent relationship builders.

Dansereau et al. (2013) integrate both traditional and contemporary leadership theories explaining that "each traditional approach to leadership has been found empirically to be contingent on some aspect of the situation or context being examined" (p.799). Dansereau et al. (2013) further suggest a fundamental theory about leadership is the underlying concept of interpersonal relations, particularly an element "the self-expansion theory." They discuss trust as an essential component of successful leadership and how trust develops into the concept of self-expansion. A sense of shared purpose develops, and followers see the leader as a resource for their personal growth, which they understand aligns with its growth. Therefore, when there is a strong sense of individual goals, the individual sees them interwoven with the organisation's goals. They are motivated to work together to achieve group decisions. Implementing distributed leadership in the Irish post-primary voluntary secondary school will require a motivated teaching staff.

3.14 The Concept of Accountability and Distributed Leadership

Sugrue (2009) writes on how contextual factors shape school leadership practice. He summarises a "confluence of forces" (p.356), which he considers are shaping discourses and practices, including accountability regimes and school leadership entwining with school improvement in the literature.

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Accountability practices can appear in different education sectors, either as teacher appraisal (Flores 2012) or teacher evaluations (Darling-Hammond 2013). Accountability is also evident in external inspections (Ehren et al., 2013) and school self-evaluations (Hall, 2017). In formal accountability models, the system is vertical, with the flow of information one way, and the evaluation is nearly always high stakes. In schools, principals are responsible for overseeing the work according to expectations (Cerna 2014). Elmore (2004) suggests that the core of the accountability drive across educational systems relies on the premise of individual responsibility with increasing policy pressure to improve standards. Elmore (2004) considers this accountability drive, along with increasing policy initiatives across schools, requires increased capacity building; otherwise, leadership under such pressure is not sustainable.

A unique feature of accountability is answering to an external authority. Accountability holds a person responsible to another person or authority for something. In the voluntary secondary school sector, the principal is responsible to the Board of Management for the school's day-to-day operation. The voluntary secondary school operates a hierarchical accountability structure. The principal has devolved authority from the management board to delegate tasks to teachers to deliver teaching and learning and oversee financing and maintenance of the building and grounds. The management literature also emphasises the individualistic aspect of accountability. Teachers have responsibilities within their leadership roles throughout the school rather than accountability. Many people can be responsible for making something happen, but the final accounting attributes to one individual. That individual is answerable to a higher authority and must monitor the people responsible for each part. Responsibility is relevant at all levels of an organisation, but accountability is only relevant at the final stage.

 Rashin (2015) suggests mutual accountability is associated with teams whereby the team members share the liability and are accountable. However, in educational environments, Abadzi (2017) states that if workgroups are large and lack the means to reward individuals, people may feel a limited personal obligation to accountability. Collaboration across teams in schools often involves formal relations. However, many teams working relationships in education are informal and function based on goodwill and volunteerism. While teachers may take responsibility for a whole school project or activity, there is no onus on them for accountability.

Laherto et al. (2019) state that some parts of school leadership must be defined clearly, such as who takes responsibility" (p.345). The Department of Education (DE) policy CL/003/2018 describes leadership and management posts of responsibility, acknowledging that teachers take responsibility for any aspect of school leadership; however, the accountability to the stakeholders resides with the principal. Supovitz, D'Auria, and Spillane (2019) suggest three main leadership activities for school

principals, putting out fires, effective operational management, and leading meaningful improvement. Connolly et al. (2017) argue that education management carries a delegated responsibility while leadership influences others, "educational management entails being assigned and carrying the responsibility for the proper functioning of a system in an educational institution in which others participate" (p.12). Therefore, education management is a formal role with responsibilities for an organisation where others participate. However, Connolly et al. (2017) also acknowledge that even if it is a delegated role, the manager must also lead and influence others to participate effectively.

Principals may be less willing to relinquish power in a climate of accountability. It might leave them vulnerable due to a lack of direct control concerning financial, legal, and human resource issues and the school's educational operation (OECD 2008). This complexity brings the notion of educational responsibility and accountability to the fore, which Connolly et al. (2017) see as a "significant and relatively under-utilised idea in the literature on organising in educational institutions" (p.12).

King & Stevenson (2017) note that in an environment "where high stakes accountability often drives control and conformity"(p.667), it is challenging for school leaders to create conditions where teachers can exercise leadership.

Hallinger & Heck (2010) suggest that distributed leadership directly impacts school improvement by building capacity among teachers; they also state that measuring it is challenging to ascertain. Harris (2004, p.20) notes that distributed leadership places the principal in a" vulnerable position because of a lack of direct control over certain activities", for which they have ultimate responsibility and accountability. Larsusdottir & O Connor (2017), in their study on distributed leadership practice in schools, conclude that distributed leadership roles "are the gift of the principal who is ultimately accountable for all school business" (p.434).

There is an allowance paid to teachers who undertake distributed leadership roles under the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018, unlike teachers who engage in leadership roles outside of the formal structure. Does this create a two-tier distributed leadership model within the school? Are the formal leaders accountable rather than the informal leaders?

There are clear demarcation lines on roles and responsibilities within the school system. The Government of Ireland Act (1998) outlines teachers' requirements to carry out their role under the school principal's direction. The pitfalls of the practice of delegation will emerge unless the system supports distributed responsibility and accountability, and according to King and Stevenson (2017), "the climate of accountability, control, and performativity makes it very difficult" (p.660). Principals are accountable for learning outcomes and school achievement, and teachers, as noted by King &

Stevenson (2017, p.661), are often "more concerned about their classroom practice" than whole school issues. Bjorkman & Olofsson (2009) cited in King (2011) note that teachers' and principals' priorities are crucial for building collaboration to benefit the whole school.

As a quality control mechanism, external inspection in Ireland focuses on accountability and transparency, emphasising setting school improvement targets. Data gathered during the inspection process provides the evidence to inform the school of the changes needed to existing practice. (Ehren et al., 2013, p.4) describe the two main components of an evidence-based governance system as student educational achievement through testing and accountability through school inspections. The quality assurance model in the Irish Post-Primary system operates through the Department of Education (DE) Inspectorate. The inspectorate state that they "work to improve the quality of learning for children and young people in Irish schools, centres of education and other learning settings" (A Guide to Inspection in Post-Primary Schools, 2016, p.4). The inspectorate operates an external evaluation model across various inspection models, from unannounced random inspections to subject and whole-school evaluations. During school inspections, the inspectors gather data to produce evidence and publish their findings with recommendations for improvement. The data collection takes a mixed-method approach with questionnaires, focus group interviews, and observations. The inspection reports become public for transparency and accountability purposes to all stakeholders. As Janmaat, McCowan, and Rao (2016) propose considering what defines quality in educational organisations, different stakeholders often have different perspectives. The published inspection report focuses on the school's leadership and management by the senior management team, namely the principal and deputy principal, who is deemed responsible and accountable for leadership. If a meaningful distributed leadership model succeeds in schools, the inspection report's external model will need to reflect this.

For distributed leadership to be successful in schools, Harris (2008) argues for a healthy level of internal accountability with a high degree of trust across broad-based relationships (p.68). In the Irish post-primary school, internal accountability occurs within the school self-evaluation (SSE) framework. The framework "enables schools" to affirm and celebrate what they are doing well, deciding on changes they would like to make based on evidence they have gathered" (Department of Education,2012, p.3). Participating in evidence-informed practice for internal review, accountability, and school improvement is helpful in monitoring distributed leadership in action within the school. However, as this internal review process (SSE) is mandated and evaluated externally, it can raise conflicting emotions. As Terhart (2013) identifies, resistance to school reform occurs when teachers must change their beliefs and practices. The revised school self-evaluation guidelines (SSE) issued in 2016 by the Department of Education (DE) instruct schools to engage in evidence-based practice.

Hislop (2017) acknowledges there is a lot more "work to be done to embed self-evaluation in the practice of Irish schools" (p.15).

3.15 Conclusion

The literature review on school leadership is a prerequisite for the further development of this study. The literature review identifies some critical themes of distributed leadership, which assist in creating categories to examine the enactment of the Department of Education (DE) policy circular 003/2018 on Leadership & Management in the Post-Primary school. Implementing the Department of Education (DE) policy document CL 003/2018 is the focus of this research study, and the document bears the title "Leadership & Management in Post-Primary School." The policy document CL003/2018 mandates a change in the leadership and management structure of the school to a model of distributive leadership. The two phenomena, leadership and management are intrinsically linked together and interwoven through the document in a tapestry of words, yet the literature suggests that they are very different in practice.

Gunter (2014) explains the changing leadership descriptions from educational administration to educational management. More recently, educational leadership with leadership as distinct from a formal position of authority whereby teachers influence curriculum change and practice change. Harris (2004) suggests that school leadership theory needs to consider the type of leader, the leader-follower relationship, and the activity or leadership process involved. The Department of Education (DE) leadership and management policy circular CL/003/2018 aligns the two formal and informal leadership concepts.

The Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 provides an annual review with middle management and senior management on leadership progress. However, there is a line management dimension to the process. Critics such as (Gunter 2013) argue that distributed leadership has moved to a system to transfer work to teachers, often without remuneration for those who take on non-formal leadership roles. As this translates into culture and context, it will be interesting to observe as the culture and context of the organisational environment can shape individuals' priorities and attitudes toward informal and non-formal leadership roles. Leadership involves human activity and involves inter-relational activity between people. How this interaction takes place, purpose, and outcomes are at the centre of leadership theory (Bolden 2004).

When evaluating the literature on distributed leadership in schools, there is little reference to the principal's perspective on the model of distributed school leadership. The literature recognises that the principal plays a crucial role in determining change initiatives' success and distributed leadership

by setting the direction and articulating a vision to transform working relationships. Murphy & Louis (2018) suggest that principals delegate responsibilities and relinquish power and control. They must suppress power to permit others to lead. Lumby (2013) considers the role of power and politics in this task; however, a focused lens on the principal's views and opinions regarding its implementation process is not evident.

Distributed leadership is the model of leadership currently promoted by the Department of Education (DE) in Irish Post-primary schools under CL003/2018. There is a consensus in the literature on distributed leadership that it is a democratic, collaborative process that spreads leadership across various actors. It promotes a diversity of voices and opinions, talents, and skills to improve the learning experience for students and create a culture of cooperation and a sense of community. The literature reflects the organic process of contextualising distributed leadership and exhibits fluidity in adapting to the situation. The social aspect is apparent (Spillane 2006; Spillane 2012).

However, the literature also acknowledges that power, authority, and politics can present challenges to successfully integrating distributed leadership in schools (Lumby 2013). The question of power is central due to the current legislative leadership and management structure in Irish post-primary schools, which places the principal as the formal leader under the Government of Ireland Act (1998). Another significant consideration in the process is the micro-politics of school staff rooms.

The literature on distributed leadership emphasises the formal school leader as a critical player in implementing distributed leadership practice within the school environment. The school principal must convince teachers to engage in the process, motivate support and encourage leadership among the teaching cohort. The school leader must encourage collaboration and empowerment to embed distributed leadership (Murphy 2005). McMaster (2014, p.437) states that leadership brings together the right people in different parts of the organisation to make a difference. Motivation is crucial to ensure engagement.

Within the context of the Irish post-primary school system, during a Department of Education (DE) Whole School Inspection WSE/MLL, are all those involved in distributed leadership held accountable and responsible for the leadership within the school or is it the senior management team? Can there be distributed leadership without distributed responsibility and accountability? In King and Stevenson's (2017) opinion, the climate of accountability, control, and performativity makes it very difficult. The literature considers where accountability and responsibility lie in a distributed leadership model (King & Stevenson 2017). At times of crisis or risk, where does distributed leadership fit? Can distributed leadership succeed without distributed accountability? There is increased accountability and transparency across schools in a climate of school improvement,

increasing educational initiatives, and curriculum change. The external inspection model places the leadership and management inspection focus under senior management, principal, and deputy principal's formal role. The literature acknowledges the difference between formal and informal leadership roles, yet even when teachers have formal leadership roles in the school, they are not accountable within the inspection process. How does the school principal successfully implement distributed leadership to overcome the dichotomy of formal and informal leadership, accountability, and non-accountability?

The dominant socio-economic and political thinking of the day influence school leadership models and the literature on school management and leadership practice considers the ideological dimensions and the contextual nature of school leadership. It is apparent from the literature that the implementation process of distributed leadership is crucial to the outcome. Power, authority, politics, and democracy will present challenges to successfully integrating distributed leadership in schools. In enacting the policy on distributed leadership, will the pitfalls of delegation emerge if the system does not support the process of distributed responsibility and accountability?

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework & research methodology for the study on enacting the policy of distributed leadership as per the Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018 in the voluntary school sector from the school principal's perspective.

Chapter Four: The Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The search for truth and new knowledge is a starting point for all research. The ontological and epistemological stance of the researcher influences the process of the research design. The route to uncover the truth changes, and new ideas diverge down different paths akin to the words of the poet Robert Frost (1916) "two roads diverged in a yellow wood."

This chapter will describe the research methodology adopted to investigate the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 concerning changes to the leadership and management structure in post-primary schools. The research investigates the experience of the school principal implementing the school leadership framework mandated by the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Does the micropolitics of the school impact the implementation of a distributed leadership framework? Changing the leadership model requires a whole-school commitment to the process; therefore, what are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing CL003/2018? Can distributed leadership exist without distributed responsibility and accountability? This chapter will also describe the inquiry logic and the qualitative and quantitative methods adopted for this research. Finally, it will address issues and concerns raised by the methods adopted, including ethics, generalisability, triangulation, and researcher bias.

This study comprises two distinct phases, collecting quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell 2014). The mixed-methods methodology adopts a case study approach combining questionnaires completed by the principals and semi-structured interviews with principals in schools.

This research methodology chapter describes the theoretical stance and the methodological approach adopted, the research design, data collection methods, and methods for analysing, followed by the ethical considerations and the validity and limitations of the research. Research questions and hypotheses with a research design emerge to gather and analyse the data. Assumptions and limitations are acknowledged.

4.2 Origin of the Enquiry

The broad focus of the enquiry was to ascertain the principal's perspective, questioning whether the concepts of power, motivation, and accountability affect the implementation of distributed leadership

mandated by the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The underlying reason for choosing this was the researcher's current position as a school principal in a voluntary secondary school directly involved in the implementation process of distributing leadership in a voluntary secondary school.

4.3 Role and Position of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is a critical consideration in any research study. In educational research, the researcher generally assumes a practitioner-researcher role. Robson (2005) defines this role as "someone who holds down a job in some particular area and is, at the same time, involved in carrying out a systematic enquiry which is of relevance to the job" (p. 534).

The disadvantage of this type of researcher is that they may lack the confidence and expertise of a professional researcher. The main advantage of the practitioner-researcher is that they have pre-existing knowledge of both the people and the institution. The practitioner-researcher is familiar with the area they wish to study; it helps design and implement the research methods.

Kumar (2011) explains that research is more than just a set of skills; instead, it is "a way of thinking: examining the various aspects of your day-to-day professional work " (p.1). However, practitioner-researchers must be aware that this may cause problems as they may already have preconceptions about the issues and solutions. In conducting the research, a researcher must be cognisant of the influence and experience of the research process acknowledging their assumptions, insights, and understandings. As a school principal, this researcher was aware of this and mindful of potential bias throughout the research process.

4.4 Problem Statement

The research will investigate if the principals' role within the school leadership framework changes with the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Does the micropolitics of the school impact the implementation of a distributed leadership framework? Changing the leadership model requires a whole-school commitment to the process; therefore, what are the strategies school principals employ to motivate staff when implementing CL003/2018? Can distributed leadership exist without distributed responsibility and accountability?

There is no research on the principal's perspective on the impact of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 within the post-primary voluntary school sector. There is no research to ascertain if there is a consistency of principal experiences in implementing distributed leadership across

schools. There is no research from the principal's perspective on the influence of power, motivation, and accountability on implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 on Leadership & Management. The study will make recommendations for the future of distributed leadership in the post-primary voluntary school sector.

4.5 Purpose Statement

According to Creswell (2014), a quality purpose statement will contain information about the central phenomenon explored in the study, the participants in the study, and the research. This study aims to answer the critical research questions on the school principal's perspective on distributed leadership as described in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The participants are school principals in the voluntary school sector who are implementing distributed leadership in the voluntary school sector post-primary schools. The research study explores if the phenomena of power, motivation, and accountability influence the implementation of distributed leadership in post-primary schools. The research study will document participants' experiences, identify common issues, and recommend solutions.

4.6 Philosophical Assumptions

Hoy & Adams (2016) suggest that "reality exists, but our knowledge of it always remains elusive and uncertain" (p.17). An ontological stance is what we know; an epistemological position is how we know it. Our worldview emerges from our beliefs, values, and experiences. A worldview influences the methodology we employ as researchers to answer questions or test hypotheses. Ontological positions generally fall into two groups: objectivism and constructionism. Bryman (2016) explains that objectivism implies that social phenomena exist independently from participants, whereas constructionism asserts that participants continually accomplish their meaning through social phenomena. Epistemology is the study of knowledge in the social sciences. Bryman (2016) deliberates whether social science research questions are answered by applying scientific methods of positivism, explaining that interpretivism argues that the social sciences require a methodology that captures the meaning within the social phenomena.

According to Sefotho (2015), "researchers are likely to practice research following the beliefs they hold about the world" (p.25). Research paradigms are ways to view and understand the world and the phenomena. "Paradigms are polarised into positivism and post-positivism" Hoy & Adams (2016, p.17).

Hay (2006) defines pragmatism as a form following function, with ontology defined as what is out there to know and what is real. Epistemology is what is true and how we can know about it, and methodology is how we acquire it. Underpinned by different philosophical assumptions emerging from different paradigms, quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods strive to uncover new knowledge.

4.7 Research Paradigm

Charles Pierce (1948, cited in Hoy & Adams, 2016) purports four ways of knowing, tenacity, authority, intuition, and the method of science. Pierce argues that the fourth science or reflective inquiry method is the most reliable as science is self-critical and self-correcting. The researcher has an external perspective safeguarded by scientific checks, rigour, numerically measured observations, and empirical qualification. Quantitative research operates in the positivist paradigm of measuring variables. Positivist researchers believe the social world consists of a stable and unchangeable reality that can be quantified objectively, and knowledge emerges from empirical testing. Quantitative researchers adopt an objectivist stance of stability and generalisability. Phenomena are measured accurately. Queiros et al. (2017) explain that quantitative methodology obtains accurate and reliable statistical analysis measurements. Quantitative research methods are associated with the empirical scientific research paradigm and represent the dominant modes of inquiry within the positivist and post-positivist paradigms. According to Aldridge and Levine (2001, pp.55-52), quantitative methods provide a practical cost-efficient way to gather data on a large scale, with one of the widely used methods being- the self-completion questionnaire. Quantitative research focuses on objectivity, as the researcher plays a neutral role and adopts structured procedures for collecting data analysed through a statistical explanation. Quantitative research uses numerical data to explain phenomena. In quantitative research, the researcher examines the relationships between variables and utilises a statistical description in their research. A key component of quantitative research is measurement. There are three key concepts, validity, reliability, and generalisability.

O' Dwyer & Bernauer (2014) identify the strengths of quantitative methods in objectively describing and predicting behaviours and design to look at cause and effect relationships in the case of experimental research. Payne and Payne (2004) explain that quantitative methods separate the social world into empirical units named variables. Variables are represented numerically as frequencies or rates, explored by statistical techniques, and accessed through researcher-introduced stimuli and systematic measurement. Quantitative methods typically involve using surveys, close-ended questions, and experiments to collect and analyse data using population sampling (Floyd & Fowler, 2009). Quantitative research involves collecting numerical data with a deductive approach.

A benefit of quantitative research studies is the generalisability and broader impact of the findings compared to a smaller in-depth qualitative study. Cohen & Mannion (1994) allude to the benefit of quantitative research in education for the clarity and control of variables with the opportunity for comparison and generalisation across the education system. Quantitative findings are generalisable to a broader population due to the involvement of a larger sample group, "those people who have a chance of being included among those selected constitute the sample frame" (Floyd and Fowler 2014, p.15). When evaluating the quality of the sample, the first step is to define the sample frame.

Another benefit of applying a quantitative research approach is the time factor. Quantitative data analysis is often less time-consuming because it uses statistical software such as SPSS (Connolly, 2007). Statistical software packages enable researchers who were reluctant to engage in quantitative research due to a lack of statistical expertise to engage in quantitative research approaches (Hoy & Adams, 2014).

However, quantitative methods do not consider how social reality is shaped and maintained or how people interpret their actions and the actions of others (Blakie, 2007). Furthermore, a quantitative research approach tends to measure variables at a specific time, leaving out the common meanings of social phenomena. Denzin & Lincoln (1998) say there is a lack of a direct connection between the researcher and the participant's experiences and perspectives when collecting data through quantitative methods. Castellan (2010) suggests that "a drawback to a quantitative study is the inability to infer meaning beyond the results" (p.12). The use of statistical analysis and controlling variables might adversely affect the validity of the data and the difficulty of quantifying abstract ideas.

O Dwyer & Bernauer (2014) assume that quantitative research is objective, and the researcher is outside of the research; it is automatically value-free. They say it is up to the researcher to consider researcher bias and conduct the research impartially. Stating the hypotheses and employing a quantitative research design to test the hypothesis to the detriment of what discoveries may emerge during the research is another limitation. Datnow & Park (2014) caution against an association with quantitative data gathering as chasing the numbers to the detriment of the central use of data to improve teaching and learning across the system. "The thoughtful use of data cannot be divorced from reflection about one's beliefs, assumptions, and practices around how students learn" (Datnow & Park 2014, p.97). Therefore, are positivist research methods alone suitable for measuring objectively educational significance? (Hammersley 2007).

Qualitative research is concerned with words rather than numbers and is inherently inductive when considering the theory emerging from data collected. The qualitative researcher examines the issues

through the experience of the research participants; this gives greater context and understanding of the research questions. Merriam (1998) defines qualitative research as "an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p.5). Bell (2005) states that a researcher "adopting a qualitative perspective is more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world. They seek insights rather than statistical perceptions of the world" (p.7). The critical assumption with qualitative research is that people inhabiting their social worlds construct their reality, and qualitative research endeavours to comprehend that meaning. Sherman and Webb explain that qualitative research 'implies a direct concern with the experience as it is 'lived' or 'felt' or 'undergone" (cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The second defining characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary data collecting tool. All data collected is through the interviewer, allowing the researcher to adapt the tools necessary to probe other avenues of research. Qualitative research's primary data accumulation methods are interviews, observation, and extracts from various documentation. Patton, cited in Merriam (1998), defines qualitative research as follows "qualitative data consists of "direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge" obtained through interviews: "detailed descriptions of people's activities, behaviours, actions" recorded in observations: and "excerpts, quotations, or entire passages" extracted from various types of documents" (p.69).

Bryman (2016) notes that criticism of qualitative data includes subjectivity, replication, and generalisability issues. There are disparities across the board concerning gathering data in educational settings. Before choosing a research methodology for any project, a researcher considers several variables, including the area of study, the role of the researcher, the timeline for the research, the money allocated for the project, and the research question. The research questions in this research study were primarily concerned with understanding the perspectives of research participants and the school principals implementing distributed leadership in their schools under the directions outlined in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Guba and Lincoln (1994) explain that a research paradigm is the fundamental "belief system or worldview that guides the investigator, not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways" (p.105).

The nature of the research questions and the researcher's epistemological stance were strong indicators that the pragmatic paradigm was most appropriate to explore the questions posed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Therefore, pragmatism was the overarching theoretical approach adopted in the research. A purely quantitative approach would have provided data on participant management experience and practical issues experienced by schools and addressed part of the research questions; however, it would not allow the researcher to interrogate the central research question with sufficient rigour and may have missed variables that possibly influenced the participants' perceptions. The

researcher's interest in the experiences and perspectives of the school principals suggested that qualitative data was also required to investigate and gather evidence for the research.

The research questions were primarily concerned with understanding the perspectives of research participants implementing the distributed leadership model in their schools under the directions outlined in the Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018. Therefore, qualitative data was also required to capture the experiences and perspectives of the school principals and explore the cultural context. An epistemological position of social constructivism applies to the qualitative part of the study. According to Yin (2009), a constructivist paradigm believes that interpretations of knowledge are constructed socially by people within the confines of their cultural domains/understandings. This interpretive theoretical approach describes how things are experienced first-hand by the research participants.

The third paradigm for social research is a pragmatic mixed-methods approach that seeks to understand the phenomenon under investigation using quantitative and qualitative methods. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) argue that the research question should "drive the method(s) used" (p.376). Pragmatism adopts a pluralist approach to research that draws on positivism and interpretive epistemologies and regards reality as objective and socially constructed (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). Leshem and Trafford (2007) describe the conceptual framework as "a bridge between paradigms which explain the research issue and the practice of investigating that issue" (p 99). Pragmatism was the overarching theoretical stance of the research study.

The researcher's reflexivity (Lesham & Trafford,2007) is the awareness of how the researcher's involvement will affect the outcome. It is essential in qualitative research, such as case studies and interviews. Guillemin & Gillam (2004) describe reflexivity as a continuous process of critical reflection on the type of knowledge produced by the research and how the knowledge emerged. While primarily associated with qualitative research and research practitioners, Walker et al. (2013) acknowledge reflexivity as a widely underused quantitative research method. They argue that reflexivity positively impacted quantitative methods within a mixed-methods study: it enabled work to be reviewed efficiently and contributed positively to the development of research skills. The overall pragmatic approach for using mixed methods is to take advantage of each approach
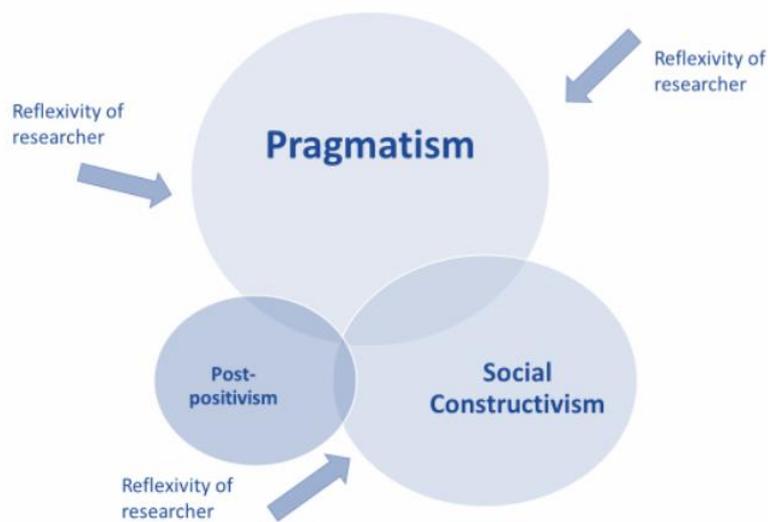
Figure 2. Overarching theoretical stance (Lesham & Trafford,2007)

4.8 Rationale for Using Mixed Methods

Creswell (2014) describes the explanatory sequential, mixed methods design as a study that begins with the quantitative strand and subsequently engages in a qualitative phase to help explain the quantitative results. The strength of this design is that the phases build on each other, although it is challenging to conduct as additional time is required to conduct each phase. Creswell (2014) notes some challenges to using this approach: there is a need for extensive data collection; analysing both sets of data is time intensive. The researcher must be familiar with both quantitative and qualitative methods. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), in a mixed-methods approach, the researcher:

- Collects and analyses persuasively and rigorously both quantitative and qualitative data (based on research questions).
- Mixes (or integrates or links) the two forms of data concurrently by combining them (or merging them) sequentially by having one build on the other.
- Gives priority to one or both forms of data (in terms of what the research emphasises)
- Uses these procedures in a single study or multiple phases of a program of study.
- Frames these procedures within philosophical worldviews and theoretical lenses.
- Combines the procedures into specific research designs that direct the study plan.

(Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011, p.5),

Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) argue that the mixed methods research (MMR) approach should "combine methods, a philosophy, and a research design orientation" (p. 5). Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004), Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2009), and Creswell (2014) identify several mixed methods design approaches to prioritise methods and the sequence of data gathering.

Cohen, Morrison, & Manion (2011) propose that mixed methods research (MMR) can improve data accuracy and analysis. It provides a complete description because results from one method often elaborate or explain the findings from the other method.

The researcher considers the research question to determine the mixed methods approach. The main research question and guiding questions to be explored in this study combine quantitative and qualitative questions, with collected data providing a deeper understanding of the leading research question.

The gathering of qualitative data in Stage 2 of the research occurred to obtain more detailed information from principals after collecting data in Stage 1. This research design involved a mixed, sequential, explanatory design within a case study approach. With partially mixed methods designs, "both the quantitative and qualitative elements are conducted either concurrently or sequentially in their entirety before being mixed at the data interpretation stage" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009, p. 267). This typology is an explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). An explanatory design argues that a single data set is insufficient to answer the research questions posed. There is a need to further explore quantitative results by gathering rich qualitative data. All research questions are explored by analysing data strands separately and connecting them appropriately.

The two-stage research design involved gathering quantitative and qualitative data. The emphasis or balance within the mixed-method approach is more on qualitative data collection than quantitative data collection. The study involved a board survey with in-depth interviews. The quantitative data gathered in Stage 1 is an online survey with a Likert scale design and includes open-ended questions generating descriptive statistics. The qualitative data collection involves semi-structured interviews conducted with ten voluntary secondary school principals.

4.9 Defining the Case Study

Merriam (1998) states "the most single defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case" (p.27). According to Gillham (2000), a case may be challenging to define, but human activity is embedded in the real world and investigated in its context. Case study boundaries with a clear definition by the researcher are required and assist the

researcher in defining the case. The case study boundary in this research is the voluntary secondary school sector and the case under investigation is the experience of school principals within the sector implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 from its introduction in 2018 to the first biennial review. Therefore, the unit of analysis is the school principal in the voluntary secondary school implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018.

A bounded context can contain a person, an organisation, a policy, or any given unit of study. According to Yin (2009), case study research typically involves using multiple sources of evidence. While it can be a person or "the primary unit of analysis", it can also be an event or entity other than a single individual. It is possible to conduct case studies on "the implementation process, and organisational change" (p.29). Located in a subjective and interpretive research paradigm (Cohen et al., 2011), case study methodology seeks to understand the world and experience of the participants. However, Yin (2009) argues that it does not exclude the gathering of quantitative evidence from its design. The case study approach obtains a more in-depth understanding of various school principal experiences, perceptions, and opinions. School principals implement Department of Education (DE) policy circulars at ground level. It is necessary to obtain contextual data to understand the implementation process.

Swanborn (2010) explains that case study methodology may be employed to study one specific instance of a phenomenon or a handful of instances to study a phenomenon in-depth. In this research, a handful of instances was more appropriate than one specific instance. Swanborn (2010) observes that it is necessary to study each instance of the case in its own specific and natural context. The individuals involved, or the "actors" as they are commonly known, include one person or people and their interpersonal relations operating on the micro-level or larger communities acting on a macro level. This case study methodology focuses on a person and their interpersonal relations on a micro-level; according to Denscombe (2010), the case study approach can use several social phenomena as the unit of analysis or case, including, among other things, an organisation, individual, and educational policy. The researcher can then explore where the respondents' opinions on the research phenomena are similar and different. A case study methodology can gather quantitative and qualitative data to analyse in-depth. Cohen et al. (2007) state that a case study is the single instance of a bounded system, for example, a child, a class, a school, a community" (p. 253). It provides an example of real people in real situations. Hitchcock and Hughes cited in Cohen et al. (2007), state that case studies contain the following hallmarks.

- They are concerned with detailed and vivid descriptions of events relevant to the case
- They provide a chronological narrative of events relevant to the case.
- It blends a description of events with the analysis of them

- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors and seeks to understand their perception of events.
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case.
- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report

(Cohen et al., 2007, p. 253)

According to Yin (2009), case study methodology can explore participants' experiences within specific school contexts. Yin's model describes the subject, the unit of analysis, the context, and the illustrative theories in a case study design. Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest using multiple cases to increase the methodological rigour of the study by "strengthening the precision, the validity and stability of the findings" (p. 29). Yin (2009) believes that evidence from multiple case studies is more compelling than a single case study. Denscombe (2010) examines the challenges of case study research for the researcher, particularly the credibility of generalisations emerging from the findings. The researcher demonstrates how the case is like or contrasts with others of its type. A multiple case study allays concerns about producing soft data, and introducing a quantitative component provides further credibility for the data. In this research, the findings emerged from quantitative and qualitative data. Braun and Clarke (2006) outline using thematic analysis to examine data gathered to provide a rich depth to the description of themes.

In this research, post-primary school principals in the voluntary school sector implement distributed leadership under the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The issue of an observer influencing a participant's behaviour is irrelevant as researcher observation did not occur.

The case study began with an online survey issued to voluntary secondary school principals. The online survey was a national survey with an invite issued to all school principals in the voluntary secondary school sector to complete the survey. Sixty-one responses were received. For the qualitative data collection, the criteria decided upon to select participants to interview was the size of the school with schools of over 500 pupils and schools with under 500 pupils. The number of pupils in the school dictates the number of assistant principal (AP) posts a school is entitled to have. The other criteria used were gender to ensure a balance of male and female principals' interview participants and the length of service under or over five years.

4.10 Significance of the Study

The Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 on distributed leadership represents a significant change in leadership policy and practice within Irish post-primary mainstream education. It is

essential and timely to explore this change at the early stage of the policy enactment to inform future policy and practice. A summary of the research findings will be prepared and sent to all relevant parties within the school community, including the JMB/AMCSS and the NAPD.

The educational research features principals in many voluntary secondary schools through a quantitative online survey and in-depth investigation through semi-structured interviews with a smaller number of case study schools. Factors such as the length of time participants served as school principals and the size of the school are factors for consideration.

4.11 Research Questions

The research question is: What is the experience of school principals in the implementation of distributed leadership in the voluntary secondary school as mandated in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?

 The sub-questions are:

1. Does the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 change the principal's role within the school's leadership framework?
2. Does the micropolitics of a school impact the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?
3. What are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?
4. Is there a distribution of accountability and responsibility within the distributed leadership framework per Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018?

4.12 Data Collection

An evidence-based approach, commonly referred to as what works agenda (Kvernbekk, 2011), considers the role of evidence as an intervention into practice within an organisation to improve the performance quality, service, or output of the organisation. Kelly (2008) presents evidence as an epistemological concept that confirms or repudiates a statement or hypothesis. Data is information and evidence gathering. Data collection, known traditionally as a datum, emerges through gathering quantitative or qualitative data. According to Denscombe (2008), solid social research requires "the use of both quantitative and qualitative research to provide an adequate answer" (p.274). This research explores the concept of distributed leadership to develop a shared understanding of the implementation of distributed leadership. This researcher employs a combination of qualitative and

quantitative data-gathering with survey questionnaires, including 'attitudinal' and 'open' questions, and semi-structured interviews. For this research, the questionnaire sought to ascertain principals' perceptions of distributed leadership and the implementation practices in their schools. The findings formed the basis for further exploration through semi-structured interviews with principals.

4.13 Research Instruments

Floyd & Fowler (2014) explain that surveys as questionnaires are beneficial to the researcher by gathering data from a relatively large number of people in a short period. They present the possibility of being replicated. Survey questionnaires can take many forms, designed to accommodate a 'closed' or 'open' approach. Survey questionnaires may contain very different types of questions administered in various ways. The style and format will depend on the purpose and use of the data.

Floyd & Fowler (2014) consider that the purpose of a survey is to produce statistics that provide a quantitative description of some aspect of the study population. The primary way of collecting information is by asking people questions and their answers constitute data to be analysed. Survey responses can help to clarify the research questions and identify interview questions.

However, questionnaires have disadvantages – as participants may leave some questions unanswered, and there is a time commitment required to complete them. For this research, the survey deployed sought to ascertain principals' perceptions of distributed leadership and their experience implementing the new model of leadership mandated in the Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018. The second phase of the data collection involved semi-structured interviews.

4.14 Piloting the Survey

The draft survey questionnaire was piloted with six school principals from voluntary secondary schools to complete and comment on the clarity of questions and the length of time it took. A pilot questionnaire will assist in decisions on the final structure and content of the questionnaire. Gay et al. (2006) issue guidelines and states that "the questionnaire should be attractive, brief and easy to respond to" (p.165). Piloting occurred in June 2021. The feedback gathered from pilot participants included identifying ambiguous questions in the questionnaire, confirming the time needed for completion, and checking the order of the questions (face validity). The researcher distributed the final instrument electronically to the broader population of all voluntary secondary school principals.

4.15 Access to Participants

To obtain a variety of experiences based on the research goal the principals of all schools in the voluntary school sector, mixed, single-sex, urban and rural, were contacted by email. While contact details are publicly available through the school websites, assistance in distributing the questionnaire through the Voluntary Secondary School management body was an option. Included in the email was a research pack, and principals could elect to take part in the research. The research pack contained a plain language statement (Appendix A) to make the research aims and methods clear to participants and an informed consent form (Appendix B). Questionnaire participants could elect to participate further in the qualitative research interview.

4.16 Survey Design

Surveys increase knowledge in the field. Hoy & Adams (2014) emphasise "the importance of using valid and reliable surveys to measure constructs" (p.113). Questionnaires allow for extensive coverage or samples Castellan (2010, p.381). A Likert scale is an established research instrument for gathering quantitative data. The questionnaire for this research was attitudinal in design. As there was no plan for detailed statistical analysis of data, the Likert scale, which places people's answers on an attitude continuum, was deemed to be a suitable data collection instrument by the researcher (May 2001, p.104). A Likert scale is whereby a number corresponds to an individual value, and all questions are closed questions., An additional comments section appears at the end of the questionnaire to add any additional comments. Open-ended questions were included, which allowed the participants more flexibility in their responses. Responses to the questionnaires helped clarify the research questions and identify interview questions. The survey began with questions to ascertain the size of the school and the number of years the respondents had served as school principals. The questionnaire asked principals to indicate their opinion on a scale of one to five, whereby 1=Strongly Agree, 2= Agree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4= Disagree, and 5= Strongly Disagree.

There was no preconceived expectation of the research outcome; instead, the data collected would reveal insights into the issues under investigation. The survey findings formed the basis for further exploration through semi-structured interviews with principals. As the quantitative study consisted mainly of closed questions, it was impossible to explore participants' emotions and feelings. As explained by Floyd & Fowler (2014), "designing a question for a survey instrument is designing a measure, not a conversational inquiry" (p.75).

Bryman (2016) argues that online surveys have become popular in recent years because of the evolving number of platforms that allow users to design surveys and analyse data. Online surveys

are now the predominant mode of survey data collection, according to Callegaro, Manfreda and Vehovar (2015). Through online surveys, a researcher can collect data quickly and efficiently. Researchers can easily design the survey and reach a broad audience through survey design platforms. The online survey allows the participant to complete the questionnaire at a suitable time and place. Bryman (2016) suggests that self-completed questionnaires should have clear instructions about responding, have fewer open questions, be relatively short and have an easy-to-follow design. The online survey for this research was designed with Qualtrics software and distributed via email with an anonymous link to the survey (Appendix 3). The multiple-choice question type allows the respondent to choose an option from a list of possible answers.

The researcher acknowledges that the disadvantages of self-completed questionnaires include no opportunity to clarify issues (Kumar, 2011, p.149); you cannot prompt or probe; it is challenging to ask many questions, and there is a risk of missing data (Bryman, 2016). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) caution that a questionnaire is always an intrusion into the respondent's life, and researchers are mindful of the ethical considerations, including formal consent and a guarantee of anonymity.

4.17 Sampling

According to Floyd & Fowler (2014), "Any sample selection procedure will give some individuals a chance to be included in the sample while excluding others. Those people who have a chance of being included among those selected constitute the sample frame" (p.1). The process of selecting people for a sample is essential for validity and from an ethical stance. Machi and McEvoy (2009) explain that "the secret to selecting any researchable interest is to isolate a particular perspective and vantage point"(p.17).

In this research, the first step involved engaging a sufficiently large group of school principals who would participate in the online survey questionnaire. Cohen et al. (2007) note that the "quality of a piece of research stands or falls not only on the appropriateness of methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy " (p.100). The authors write about four critical factors in sampling: the sample size, representativeness, access to the sample, and the sampling strategy to be used. The population in a research study are the people or events to be studied. The sample composition and size should offer considerable potential for generating new knowledge (Fink,2015). O Dwyer & Bernauer (2014) describe the target population as the ideal population that the researcher wishes to generalise; they concur that this population is not available for most researchers, and the researcher must select a sample from the accessible population.

This researcher wants to obtain data about the purpose of the study and the phenomena under investigation. The definition of the target population is school principals in the voluntary school sector. The target population consists of all voluntary secondary school principals. O Dwyer & Bernauer (2014) identify that the target population is not accessible to most researchers, so the researcher deploys a sampling strategy. However, this researcher had the target population accessible. The researcher had access to the Voluntary Secondary School principal network through the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) because of the researcher's involvement as a school principal in various sub-committees. So, the researcher decided to distribute the survey questionnaire through the JMB to the entire population cohort, a census, or a complete enumeration survey. The researcher hoped that many principals would complete the survey to generate a significant number of responses. Sixty-one principals completed the survey questionnaire generating a response rate of 16.5%.

Lefever et al. (2007) found that online survey participation rates are low compared to postal surveys and cite Comley (2000), who found that most virtual surveys showed a response rate of between 15 and 29%. When a complete enumeration survey does not receive a completed survey response from all survey recipients, the researchers must acknowledge this as a non-sampling error. The non-response error introduces a bias within the data as non-respondents may differ from respondents within the target population (Floyd & Fowler,2014). The researcher activated the anonymous response link on the online survey to prevent the researcher from identifying any respondents. The anonymous link does not collect identifying information such as name or email address. The researcher deactivated the participant I.D option on the Qualtrics platform, mindful of conducting an ethical audit trail.

Within the mixed methods research design, the results from stage one of the data collection helped develop and inform stage two. The study's second phase, the qualitative data collection of follow-up semi-structured interviews, involved a sampling strategy. The researcher used volunteer sampling as a convenience sampling method for volunteers who had participated in the survey questionnaire and had knowledge and experience about the phenomenon under investigation in this research. There is no consensus in the literature about the recommended number of cases in a multiple case study design Yin (2009) suggests two-three cases for literal replications and four-six cases for theoretical replications. Thirteen survey respondents indicated they wanted to volunteer in the study's second phase. Yin (2009) recommends placing boundaries on the case study, and a maximum variation sampling strategy involves selecting cases from a diverse population as possible. The interview participants were categorised to ensure a broad representation within spheres of gender, school size, and service length of the principal over or under five years. The researcher included an outlier or alternative case in the form of a Gaelscoil and included a non-Catholic voluntary secondary school. The size of the school was essential to reflect the number of assistant principal (AP) posts in the

school detailed in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Initially, the researcher thought six interviews would provide sufficient data; however, ten principal interviews occurred to reach saturation.

4.18 Interviewing

Conducting an interview is one method of qualitative data collection, and it has a basis in human interaction. Building a rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee helps put the interviewee at ease. Patterson & MacQueen (2021) describes the interview as a conversation between an interviewer and respondent, which sets out to prove the data of the former. The interviewer should display an understanding of the context and situation of the interviewee. However, the interviewer must acknowledge that bias is universal and therefore be conscious of their own bias and unconscious bias in the interview process. An interviewer must acknowledge their views on leadership as a practice and possibly their dominant leadership style. The interviewer cannot allow their experience to influence the interviewee's narrative. Maxwell (2013) notes that it is essential for qualitative researchers to understand how their values and expectations may have influenced the research process and findings of the study. This researcher contacted the prospective interviewees via email and phone following the quantitative online survey. The invitation email included a plain language statement (Appendix A) and an informed consent form (Appendix B) with the relevant GDPR information and interview questions (Appendix D).

The interviewer must be cognisant of their interpersonal skills to ensure they attune to a respondent's construction of meaning within their discourse. The interviewer needs to maintain the focus of the interview to ensure the conversation remains on the research topic. Mojtahed et al. (2014) explain this as "the capacity of maintaining social negotiation of meanings between the interviewee and the interviewer" (p.2). Denzin & Lincoln (2005) refer to the researcher and the respondent as co-creators of understanding. Mojtahed et al. (2014) define "an interview as a technique used by qualitative researchers to elicit facts and knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation using a series of interview questions" (p.1). In semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a list of questions or specific topics to be covered. The order of the questions can vary, and the interviewee has flexibility in their response. The interviewer can ask further probing questions in response to replies.

An interviewer is inevitably making an interpretive construction of what an interviewee says, and this must be done systematically with careful attention. According to Gillham (2005)," the validity of an account of a research interview lies not so much in whether it gives a true picture of the person, but whether it is a balanced account of the interview that took place"(p.7). Sliverman (2007) cautions against being over-eager to prove a point or seeking closure too soon when coding and deducing

from semi-structured interviews to ensure the real meaning and reality of the interviewee remains intact. The researcher transcribed the interviews (Appendix E) from the ZOOM audio recording and stored the information on an encrypted laptop. The researcher applied interview participant codes to each transcript to uniquely identify the interview participant while retaining anonymity. The researcher developed a categorical code for all interview participants with a simple, unique identifier by choosing the word "P" for principal and a number from 1 to 10 to denote the interview sequence; therefore, the code P.1 is principal one interviewed. Having studied the transcribed data, this researcher assigned preliminary codes to describe the content and search for patterns or themes across the interviews. Sliverman (2007) cautions against being over-eager to prove a point or seeking closure too soon when coding and deducing from semi-structured interviews to ensure the interviewee's accurate meaning and reality remain intact.

To gain a perspective on how the distributed leadership model will unfold over time, Hallinger & Huber (2012) suggest that rather than taking a snapshot of the organisation at a particular time, analysing the change over a period would provide more clarity on the impact of the distributed leadership model and must be done systematically with careful attention.

Janesick (2010) defines qualitative interviewing as "a meeting of two persons to exchange information and seek ideas through questions and responses, resulting in communication and joint construction of meaning about a particular topic" (p.45). Hinds (2000) concurs using one-to-one research interviewing "when more in-depth information is required or when the issue under investigation would benefit from development or clarification" (p.49). Interviewing principal teachers falls into the category described by Gillham (2000) as the elite interview, one in which the interviewee "is usually an expert person or person in authority who is capable of giving answers and insight that offer a comprehensive grasp " (p.63). He advises that such interviews are less structured to allow the interviewee's knowledge and experience to dictate the interview flow.

Yin (2009) asserts that interviews are essential sources of case study information and are a form of "guided conversations rather than structured queries" (p.106). However, Yin (2009) believes that the researcher's personal preference determines the use of a recording device. Bryman (2001) advises recording the interview to "correct the natural limitations of our memories and the intuitive gloss was that we might place on what people say in interviews" (p.321). The researcher selected ZOOM interviewing instead of face-to-face or telephone interviewing due to the ongoing COVID 19 protocols operating in schools. In a ZOOM interview, the camera function permits visual contact between the interviewer and the interviewee; however, the interview with the interviewees' permission records only through the audio record function. Audio recording also allows the researcher to examine the recording repeatedly and produce an accurate transcript for data analysis.

Yin (2009 p.106-107) recommends that questions in a case study interview have a fluid approach which allows the interviewer to pursue a consistent line of enquiry through a guided conversation within a focussed interview. The researcher can unduly affect the interview data if they fail to ask questions in a neutral tone. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) describe the interview method as one that allows the interviewees to "discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live" (p.409). Research interviews operate for data collection in a planned format in the qualitative field of research. In qualitative research, the interviewer gathers data on how the interviewee interprets the world. The two main types of interviews in qualitative research are unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016). This researcher deployed a semi-structured approach to the interview process, and the literature review informed the questions for the semi-structured interviews. The researcher provided the interview participants with the Plain Language Statement (Appendix A) and the Informed Consent form (Appendix B). All interview participants confirmed their consent before commencing the interview and consented to have the interview audio recorded.

4.19 Ethics

The ethical research code that informs and guides this study complies with the Dublin City University (DCU) Guidelines on Best Practice in Research Ethics and adopts a code of conduct that provides consistent expectations regarding researchers' actions and protects individual participants. The code of ethics allows a meaningful engagement with the research process and the participants from start to finish (Sarantakos, 2005). Research codes of ethics concern the physical and mental well-being of the respondents, informed consent of participants, the protection of privacy, the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity, deception, plagiarism, covert or hidden research and the fabrication or concealment of findings (Bryman, 2016 and Sarantakos, 2005).

The researcher allowed the participants to withdraw their participation. The process did not involve children or at-risk communities and is a low-risk study as no personal or potentially discrediting information is involved in the data collection. There is no risk of harm or exposure to physical or mental stress. Contributions are voluntary, and the researcher makes every effort to minimise intrusion. There is no power relationship between the participants and the researcher. It is made clear to participants that the study's findings will be available as Doctorate research through the University and in other appropriate settings.

Participants received a Plain Language Statement (Appendix A) and the Informed Consent form (Appendix B). Respondents knew that their participation was voluntary and could withdraw consent at any time. To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, identifying information was deleted, and the researcher assigned identification codes to each of the case study subjects. Giving

case study participants a copy of the transcript allowed them to reword their direct quotes and decide whether the reports accurately represented them, thereby reducing misinterpretation of the data gathered. The researcher stored all raw and processed qualitative and quantitative data securely for the duration of the study.

4.20 Approach to Data Analysis

The instruments used to collect the data, in this case, an online survey and semi-structured interviews, are essential tools for establishing validity. The method used to analyse the data is essential for establishing the reliability of the data. The researcher adopted a post-positivist stance and took due care to preserve the data's integrity and the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents.

4.20.1 Quantitative Data

The ordinal data emerged from a mixture of closed and open questions using a Likert scale. Univariate analysis was applied to data collection from the online survey using descriptive statistics, which, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011), allows researchers to analyse and interpret what these descriptions mean. Descriptive statistics suited the process appropriately as there was no hypothesis under investigation. Descriptive statistics can provide basic information about variables in a dataset, highlight potential relationships between variables, and be displayed graphically or pictorially. The analysis was displayed in charts and graphs as they are accessible for the reader to engage with the data.

The questionnaires were designed and distributed through the Qualtrics online platform. Qualtrics XM software facilitates survey design and distribution. The survey distribution occurs using the anonymous link without storing respondent email addresses, so there is no connection to corresponding email addresses. Respondents were not identifiable per an ethical audit trail. The email also contained the Plain Language statement (Appendix A) and the Informed Consent form (Appendix B). The researcher took care to preserve the integrity of the data and preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. A mixture of closed and open questions provided the data from the web survey to produce descriptive statistics, which Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest researchers can then analyse and interpret what these descriptions mean., Descriptive statistics are displayed in charts and graphs, making the findings more accessible to the reader. Five-point Likert scales helped determine opinions. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) advise using these scales as they "build in a degree of sensitivity and differentiation of response while still generating numbers" (p.386).

In the Text iQ section of Qualtrics, the researcher can tag the text entry responses with topics for analysis. The Text iQ section also includes a basic spell-checking system to ensure that all the responses get tagged correctly, even if the respondent has misspelt a word. The Stats iQ section analyses trends in the respondent survey data. The mean, median, minimum, and maximum and the variable's confidence interval and standard deviation appear in the numerical summary. Descriptive statistics are generated and often include a histogram and a numerical summary. The software can describe, visualise, and summarise a variable to get a feel for how the data is structured. Sentiment categorisation indicates whether the sentiment is positive, negative, or neutral. Liu (2015) defines sentiment analysis as determining the opinion, judgment, or emotion behind the natural language. According to Pozzi et al. (2017), sentiment analysis can generate knowledge to understand, explain, and predict social phenomena. Wang et al. (2014) explain polarity as either positive or negative or neutral classification. This type of analysis extracts meaning from many text sources, including surveys. The survey data in Qualtrics TSV file for importing into Excel is organised into rows and columns, each representing a different respondent. Each column is a question of the survey they answered. The data is classified and merged in Excel to generate the findings as descriptive statistics displayed in charts and graphs. As the participant ID function on Qualtrics was deactivated on the online survey platform to conduct an ethical audit trail, the researcher developed ID codes for survey participants in a classic sequential format by using the auto-filling function in Excel, starting with # 01 in the first row to #61 for the final row.

4.20.2 Qualitative Data

Nowell et al. (2017) explain that a lack of focus on rigorous and relevant thematic analysis has implications for the credibility of a research project. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that "thematic analysis provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis" (p.78). The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify patterns or themes within qualitative data. Clarke & Braun (2013) describe thematic analysis as a flexible qualitative data analysis method. Bazeley (2013) describes, "the problem in much current practice is that thematic analysis has become a label applied to very descriptive writing about a list of ideas (or concepts or categories), supported by limited evidence" (p. 191). Therefore, applying thematic analysis as a rigorous data analysis is essential to ensure reliability. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 6). This approach involves the researcher familiarising themselves with the data by reading through the transcripts several times. Bazeley and Richards (2000) describe the first step in qualitative analysis as reading and re-reading the transcripts before importing data to a software package. Transcribed interviews from the ZOOM audio recordings into Word documents are stored on an encrypted laptop and imported into NVivo

software. The researcher assigned simple identification codes to each principal as participant 1 numerically up to participant 10 to encompass all interview participants. The second step is generating initial codes to reduce lots of data into meaningful sections through NVivo.
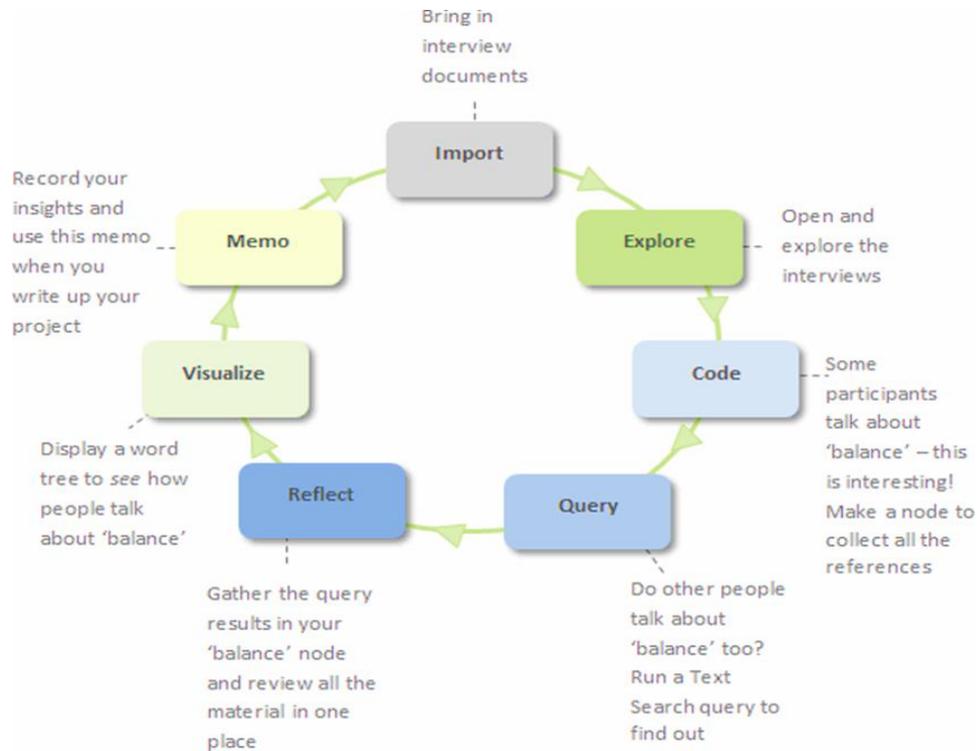
Figure 3. Thematic Analysis (Bazeley and Richards, 2000)

The application of inductive or open coding obtains the codes from the data. The NVivo software helps the researcher locate the data into sections to establish connections and patterns in the text. The software facilitates inductive coding to ascertain the frequency of words or phrases. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) describe codes as "labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p.71). According to Elliot (2018), coding involves decision making about the transcribed data based on the research context. When the researcher analyses the transcripts (Appendix E) and assigns the codes/nodes, the meaning must be precise; a count on the nodes also indicates a frequency level, as illustrated in the images below.
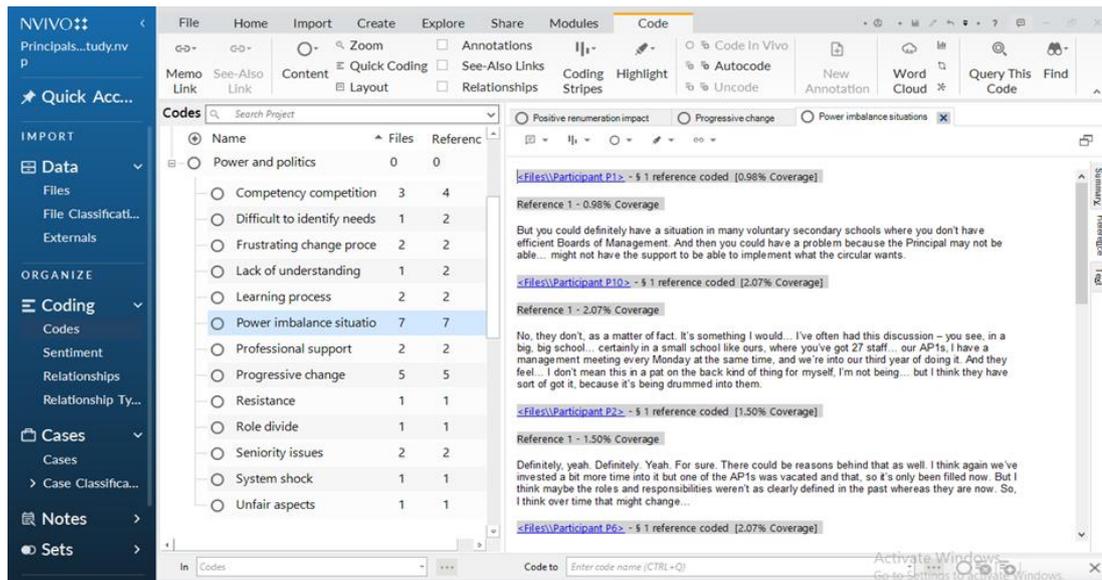
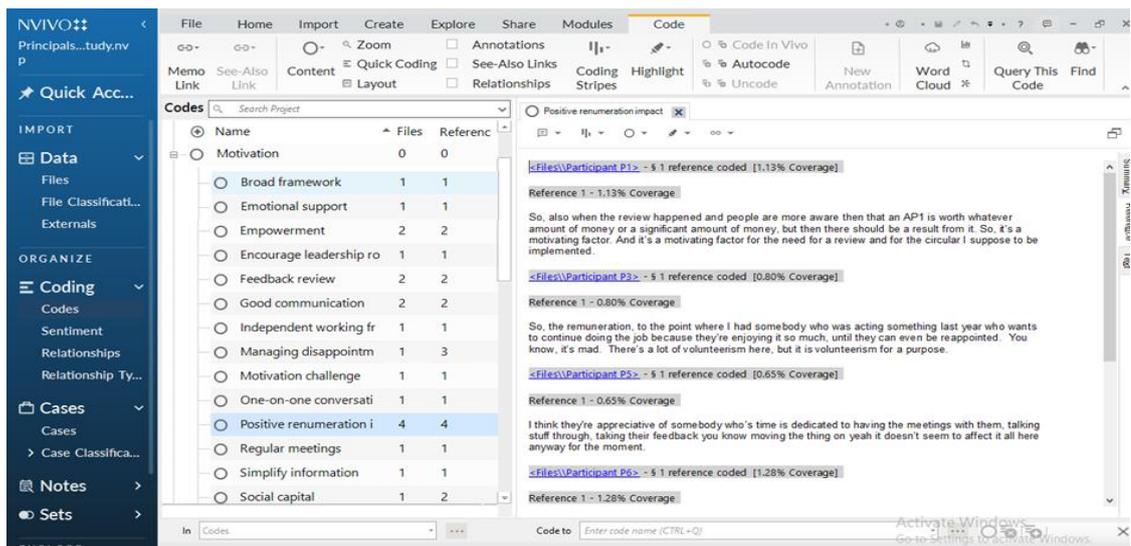**Figure 4. Coding in NVivo**

Figure 5. Coding in NVivo

As the researcher develops a thematic node structure, the researcher creates a codebook to report the nodes, and descriptions in an excel spreadsheet create themes. A codebook helps to clarify the meaning of the thematic nodes so that the researcher can apply them to the data.
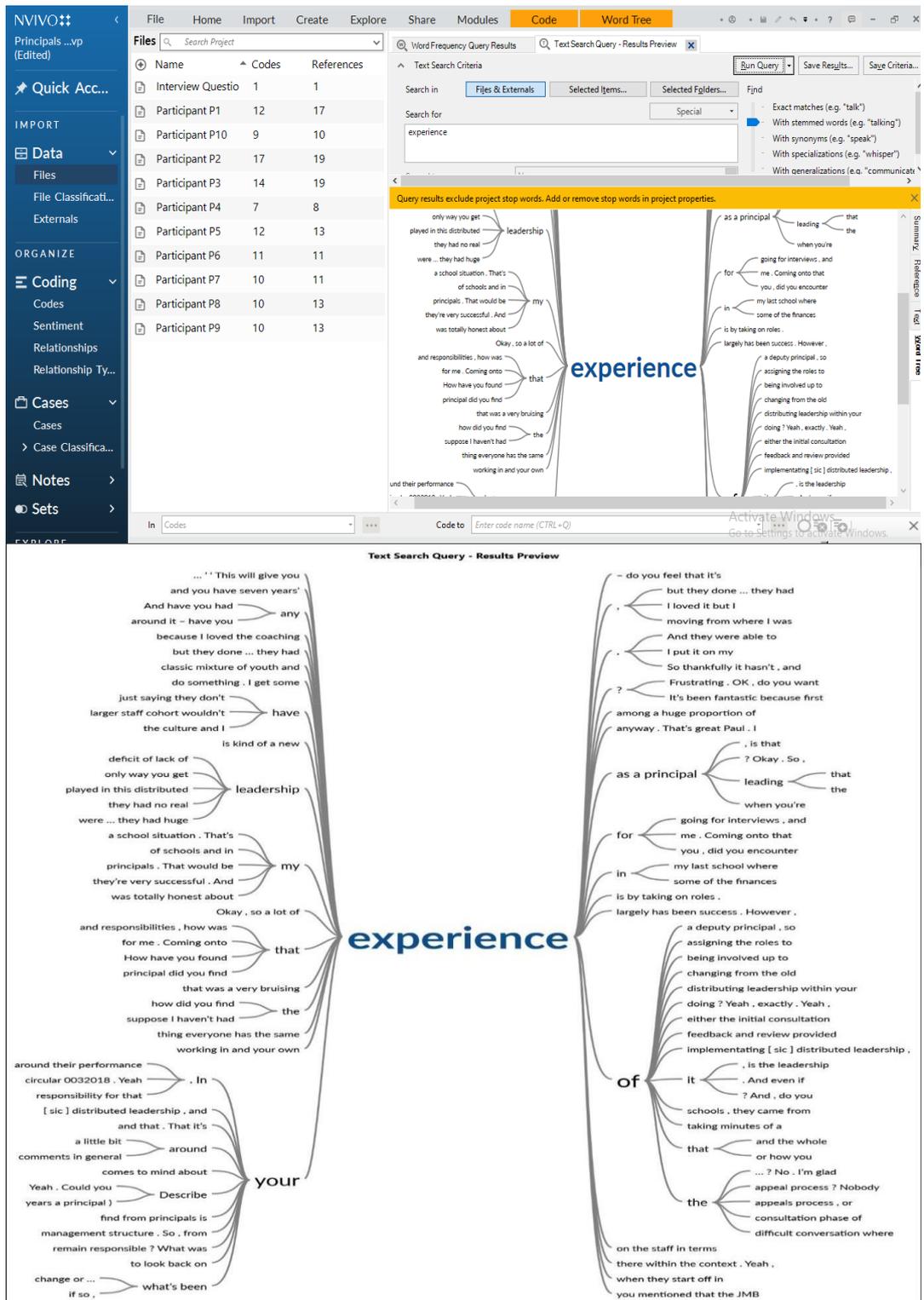
Figure 6. Text search query NVivo

The third step is searching for themes, and according to Braun & Clarke (2006), there are no specific rules about what makes a theme. The researcher examines the relationship between the codes and the emergent themes. Emerging themes are descriptive and highlight patterns in the data, as illustrated

in figure five. The fourth step modifies and reviews the identified themes and checks the data associated with each to ascertain if the themes work across all the interviews and the entire data set. The researcher also checks if there are subthemes. The fifth step is defining the themes described by Braun & Clarke (2006) as "the 'essence' of what each theme is about" (p.92). Recoding is required as the themes emerge and the researcher reviews the data. Braun & Clarke (2006) explain that coding is ongoing and fluid. The researcher then defines and names the themes. The final sixth step involves writing up the findings, which is the final analysis and includes extracts from the data and relates to the researcher's question and the literature review. Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-step framework is a seminal, clear, and usable framework for applying thematic analysis. A thematic analysis aims to identify themes, in the data, with patterns emerging used to address the research questions. Thematic analysis is not a summation of the data; instead, it analyses and interprets it. Braun & Clarke (2006) distinguish between two levels of themes: semantic and latent. Semantic themes are the" surface meanings in the data. The analyst is not looking for anything beyond what a participant has said or written" (p.84). The latent level examines the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations shaping the semantic content of the data. This researcher identified themes at the semantic level, focussing on interpreting and explaining what the respondents said.

Table 1. Braun & Clarke's six-phase framework for doing a thematic analysis

Step1: Become familiar with the data
Step 2: Generate initial codes
Step 3: Search for themes
Step 4: Review themes
Step 5: Define themes
Step 6: Write-up.

4.21 Reliability & Validity of the Research.

According to O' Dwyer & Bernauer (2014), reliability can be observed in the absence of validity, but reliability is necessary for establishing validity. Validity explains how well the collected data covers the actual area of investigation (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2005). Field (2005) describes validity as taking an accurate measurement. According to Oluwatayo (2012), validity ensures the research instrument is relevant, reasonable, unambiguous, and transparent. Face validity is how an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. Reliability considers the extent to which the measurement of a phenomenon provides stable, consistent, and repeatable results. Reliability is the ability of an

instrument to measure consistently and to show the amount of measurement error in a test (Tavakol and Dennick 2011).

Reliability is dependent on the design of the research methodology and the data collection and analysis procedure. Validity ensures that the data gathered is suitable for answering the research question and is measured correctly (Cohen et al.,2011). This researcher outlines the mixed methods approach and establishes the dependability of the data with an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) which outlines the steps taken by the researcher. The researcher acknowledges the assumptions and biases her role as a school principal could bring to the research. The methodological approach is systematic and rigorous; the same quantitative and qualitative questions appear. The transcription of the recorded interviews and the use of NVivo software helps to reduce bias through the generation of themes for comparison and analysis. Triangulation occurs by identifying consistent patterns across the quantitative and qualitative research findings; using multiple sources of evidence, including questionnaires and interviews, assists the triangulation process and allows the researcher to examine the evidence from different perspectives. The researcher examines both data sets to understand the research questions better, generating participant identification codes to assist the process. Each interview participant received a copy of their interview transcripts in this research, and no changes were requested as all participants felt the transcript provided a true reflection of their responses.

4.22 Conclusion

Distributed Leadership is currently generating a lot of debate and discussion among education practitioners who lead our schools and the management bodies that oversee them. There is no published research on the experience of principals within the post-primary voluntary school sector who are implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 on Leadership and Management.

This chapter provided details on the research methodology. This research explored the perspective of a specific group of school leaders within the voluntary secondary school community. This chapter outlined the mixed methods exploratory sequential quantitative > qualitative study, which involved two stages (questionnaire>interviews). The researcher examined the quantitative and qualitative paradigms and the benefits and challenges of these two research methods. The researcher decided to adopt a pragmatic mixed methods approach for this study. The researcher envisaged that using quantitative and qualitative methods would increase the validity of the research and provide a deeper understanding of the principal's perspective implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018.

This chapter outlined the sampling, data collection and data analysis methods for each of the two stages and continues with the ethical considerations undertaken for the study and the steps taken to protect participants. The mixed-methods approach adopted in the study provides a foundation for the findings detailed in chapter five.

# Chapter Five: The Research Findings

5.1 Introduction

The sequential research design involved gathering quantitative and qualitative data using an online survey creator and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews conducted with ten school principals in the voluntary secondary school sector. This chapter divides into two sections. Part 1 presents the data findings from Stage 1 of the study, which gathered data from an online survey of post-primary school principals in the voluntary school sector. Part 2 presents each of the individual case study profiles from the semi-structured interviews and includes an analysis of the case studies and draws on the main themes emerging from the data; (1) Micropolitics; (2) Motivation; (3) Accountability, (4) Role of the Principal. The open-ended questions elicit principals' attitudes concerning their experience implementing the circular.

5.2 Stage 1 Findings

The survey was disseminated to school principals in all voluntary secondary schools in Ireland, representing the total population of voluntary secondary schools in Ireland (Appendix C). Surveying the entire cohort of voluntary secondary school principals on this topic had not occurred before. A total of sixty-one participants completed the online questionnaire giving a response rate of 16.5% of the population. Following best practice advice (Connolly, 2007), the percentages listed relate to those who answered the question.

**Question 1** asks the participant to confirm their consent to participate in the research.

Question 2 asks the respondents the number of years of experience as a school principal. Of the 61 respondents to the survey, twenty-four (39%) have been principal for more than ten years. Twenty (28%) are between 5 and 10 years, and 17 (28%) are less than five years.
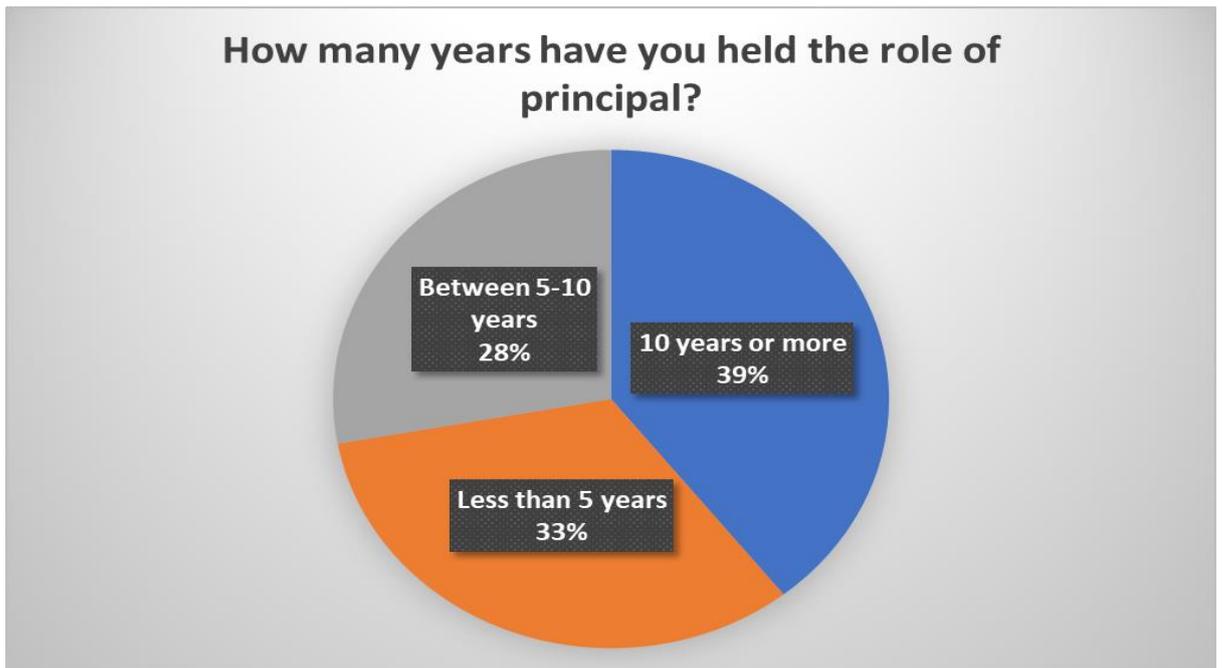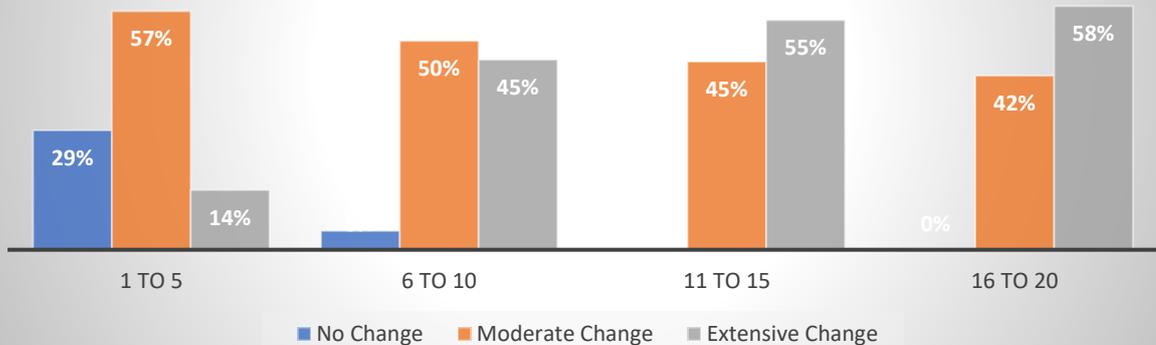
Figure 7. Response to Survey Question 2

Question 3 asked the principals to indicate their opinion on how the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 improves the middle management structure in voluntary secondary schools. The response indicated that change occurred, with 95% of respondents stating it improved the middle management structure. There are no significant differences between the responses given by the cohorts with different school sizes or lengths as principals, but there is a difference in responses by schools with a different number of assistant principals (APs). In schools with between 1 and 5 APs, 29% of respondents believe there has been no change, 57% moderate change, and 14% extensive change. There is a clear trend that as the number of APs increases, the respondents note more significant improvement.

To what extent do you think DE CL003/2018 has improved the middle management structure in Voluntary Secondary Schools?

- No Change 5%
- Extensive Change 48%
- Moderate Change 47%
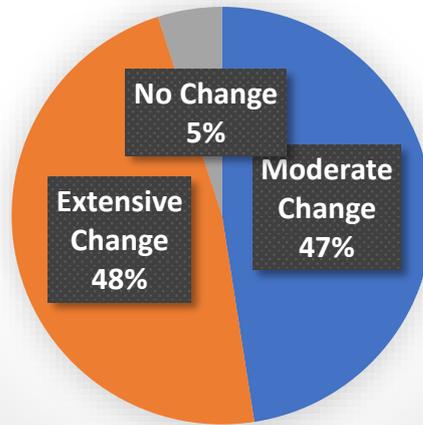
To what extent do you think Cl003/2018 has improved the middle management structure in Voluntary Secondary Schools? - split by number of APs
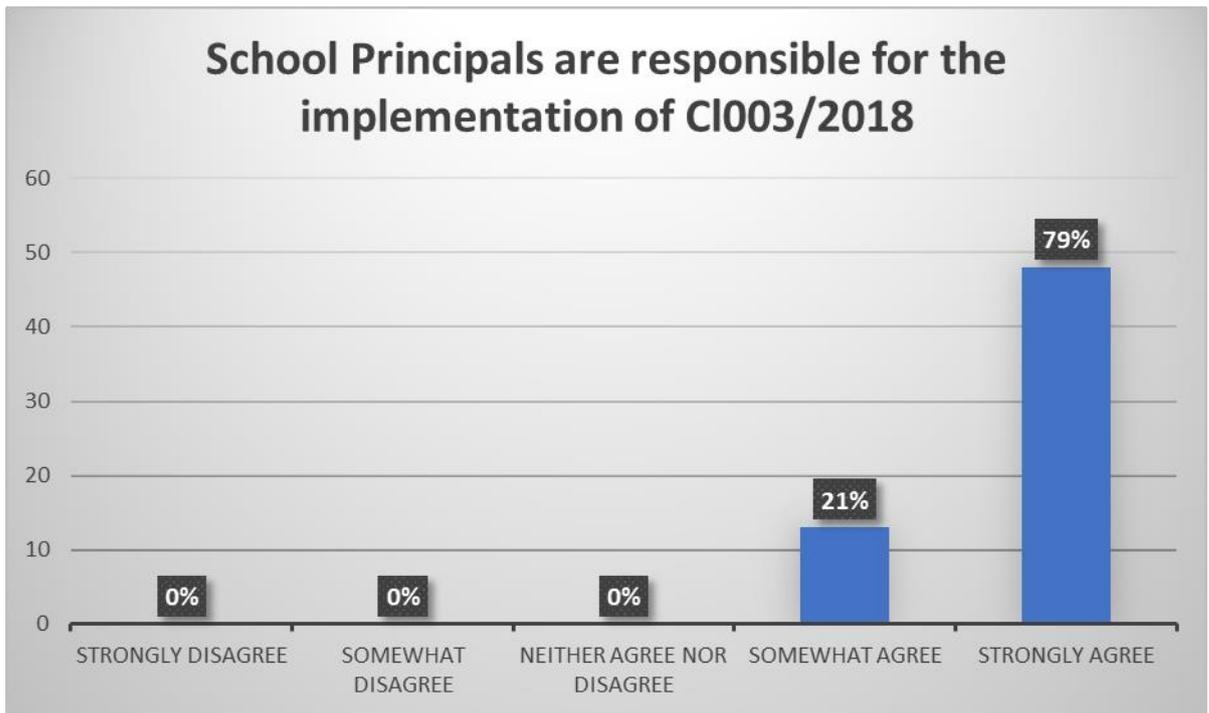
Figure 8. Response to Survey Question 3

Question 4 asked what the size of the school is? In response to this question, thirty (49%) principals in a school with less than 500 students, twenty-six principals are between 500 and 900 students, and five (8%) are principals in a school with more than 900 students. In a small cohort of principals, five respondents indicated they had over 900 students, these five respondents appear within the between 500 and 900 cohort group for analysis, and the group relabelled "Over 500 students".

School size is an essential criterion because schools with over five hundred students have a full-time non-teaching deputy principal as part of the staffing allocation from the Department of Education (DE). Schools over 500 students also receive two additional assistant principal 1 (AP1) leadership posts and two additional assistant principal (AP2) leadership posts. Some schools remain over their quota in their assistant principal posts allocation, only reducing upon retirements or resignations.
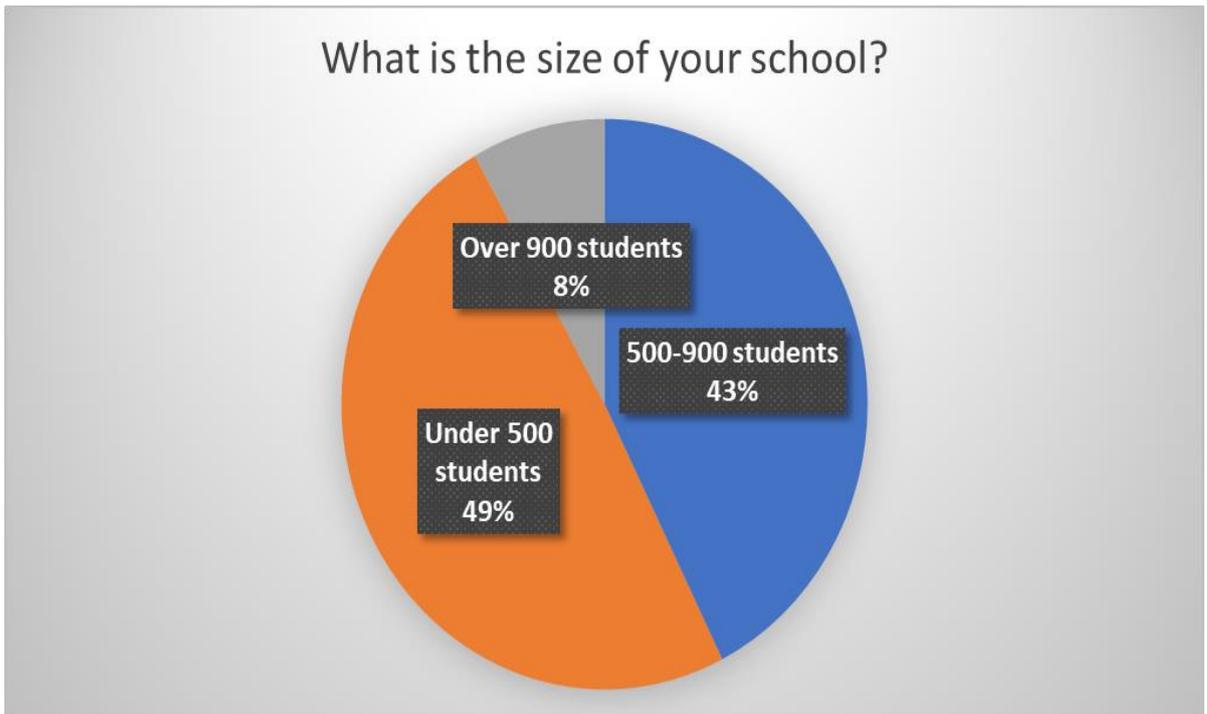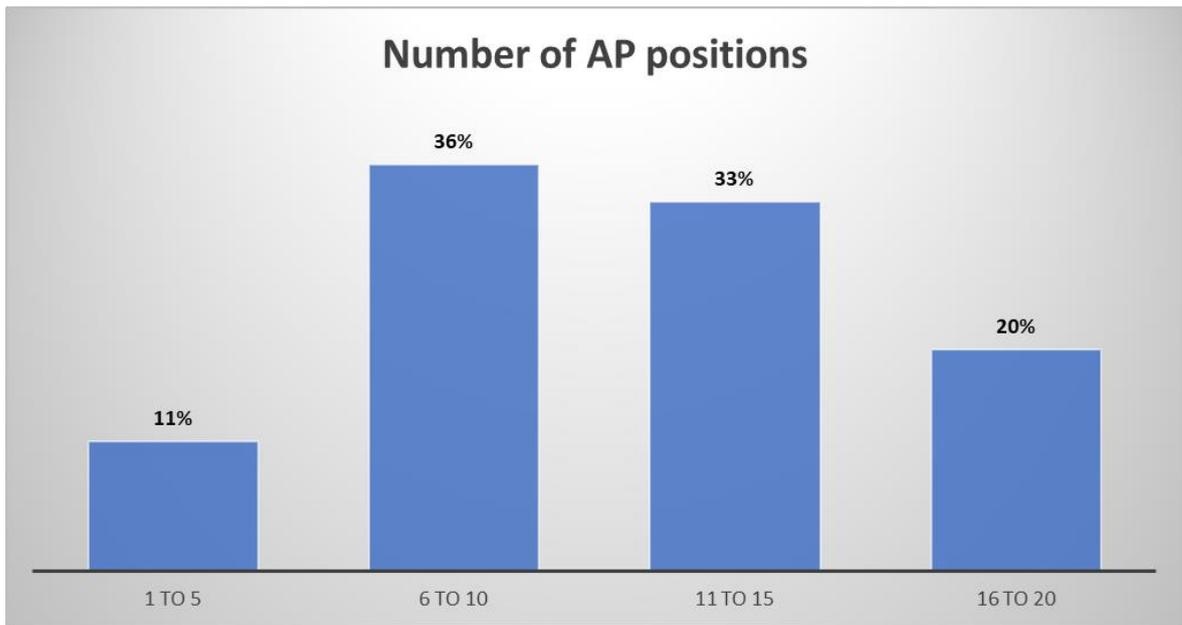

Figure 9. Response to Survey question 4

Question 5 asked participants to state their level of agreement with the statement that principals are responsible for implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. On the question of the role of the principal in implementing CL003/2018, respondents unanimously agree that school principals are responsible for implementing CL003/2018. Of this cohort, 21% somewhat agree, and 79% strongly agree that school principals are responsible for implementing CL003/2018. No respondents disagree with this statement.

Figure 10. Response to Survey Question 5

Question 6 asked each participant to indicate how many Assistant Principal (AP) posts were in their school for 2021/2022. Only seven respondents (11%) had less than five assistant principal (AP) positions, twenty-two (36%) had between 6 and 10 AP positions, twenty (33%) had between 11 and 15 positions, and twelve (20%) had between 16 and 20 AP positions. The recent Department of Education (DE) circular 0023/2021 provided approximately 450 additional assistant principal posts from September 1st, 2021. The whole-time teaching equivalent (WTE), the teacher allocation school for 2021/2022, calculates the number of posts a school receives.

Figure 11. Response to Survey Question 6

Question 7 asked the participants how they motivate middle leaders to engage in a distributed leadership framework within the school? The question is open-ended, and the respondents identified several strategies that broadly fall into several themes.

Respondents Responses:

Through discussion with the assistant principals and those who aspire to leadership roles and the fact that staff prepare for interviews and value promotion. ***(R. 41)***

By involvement in decision-making. It was important in my school that middle leadership saw themselves as management rather than as the undertakers of tasks. By involving the AP1s in decision making on developments across the school, it helped establish this in their minds and in the minds of the staff. This has been extended to AP2s now. ***(R.45)***

One-to-one meetings with all staff - encouraging engagement in leadership training. Also, encouraging staff members to see subject departments and SSE committees as an opportunity to develop leadership skills. We provided training for subject coordinators and SSE committee chairpersons. Giving staff members the opportunity to lead inputs at staff meetings. Meetings with APs on an individual basis and as a group. ***(R.62)***

Emphasis on teamwork among the middle leadership team. Meeting with each post holder every two weeks to report on their work and to offer support. Accountability for work. Changed duties biannually to give each post holder the opportunity to gain experience in new roles. Going to extend out this period this year. Five years being considered. ***(R.61)***

It takes constant discussion and communication. ***(R.35)***

I have a timetabled weekly meeting with them - it is taken from their 22hrs, so it highlights that I value this meeting. I brought changes in bit by bit and, at all times, explained the rationale for them first so as to get a buy-in. I also stressed to them that the WSE report (from before I became principal), I had recommended that the middle management roles needed to be developed **(R.36)**

Lead by example and include them in decision making*. **(R.20)***

It is an ongoing challenge. APIs got an opportunity a couple of years ago to do JMB training, and that was hugely helpful. Meeting AP1s weekly has helped. AP IIs are more of a challenge to motivate. **(R.8)**

By giving Assistant Principals ownership of meaningful projects/roles within the school. **(R.12)**

My main way was by giving staff not in AP positions roles and responsibilities that would empower them and encouraged them to get involved and to apply for positions as they arose. **(R.17)**

Having well-defined roles and responsibilities, clarity of implementation and giving them the independence to operate, Meeting with them regularly to support them in their role, listening to the difficulties they encounter, having a range of teams for them lead, providing feedback Acknowledging their contribution **(R.26)**

By empowering others to take on responsibility and a lot of talking. This also involved concentrating on those who are motivated and not others. I am lucky to have a strong and experienced Chairperson who understands the school's needs. **(R.38)**

Consulted staff on the needs of the school. Prioritised needs and then created a number of areas to which staff could commit. **(R.42)**

Question 8 is an open-ended question asking the principals if the micro politics in the staffroom influences teacher engagement in distributed leadership. Most of this cohort (65%) believe that micro-politics influences teacher engagement in a Distributed Leadership model, 28% believe it might influence teacher engagement, and 7% believe it did not.
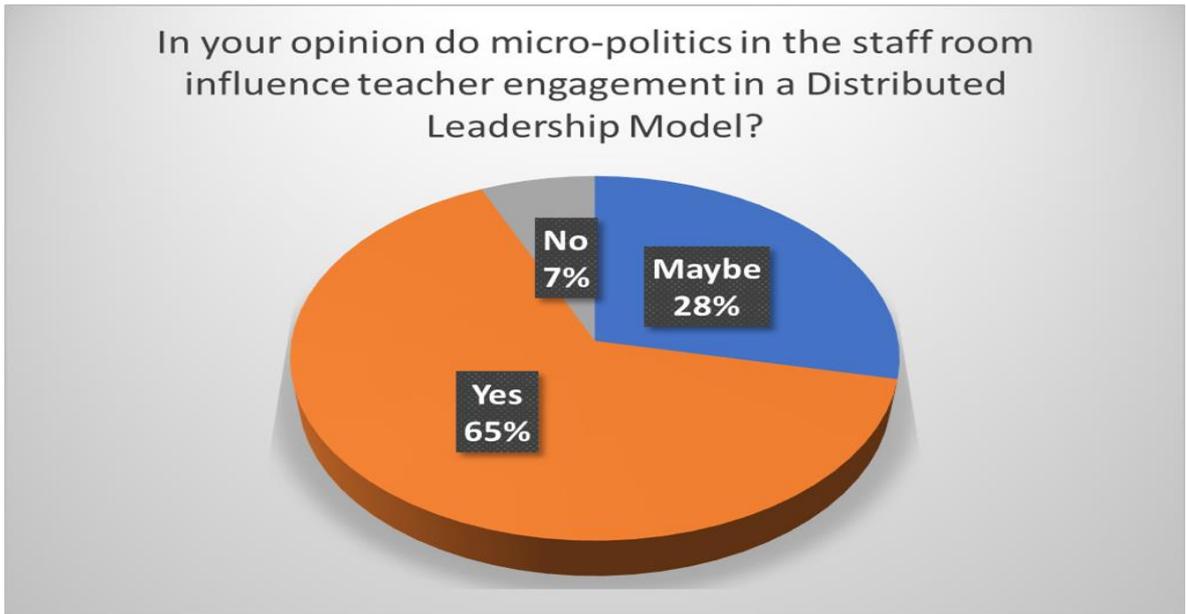
Figure 12. Response to Survey Question 8

There are no significant differences between the responses given by the cohorts with different school sizes or a different number of assistant principals (AP), but there is a difference in responses by principals with different duration as principals.
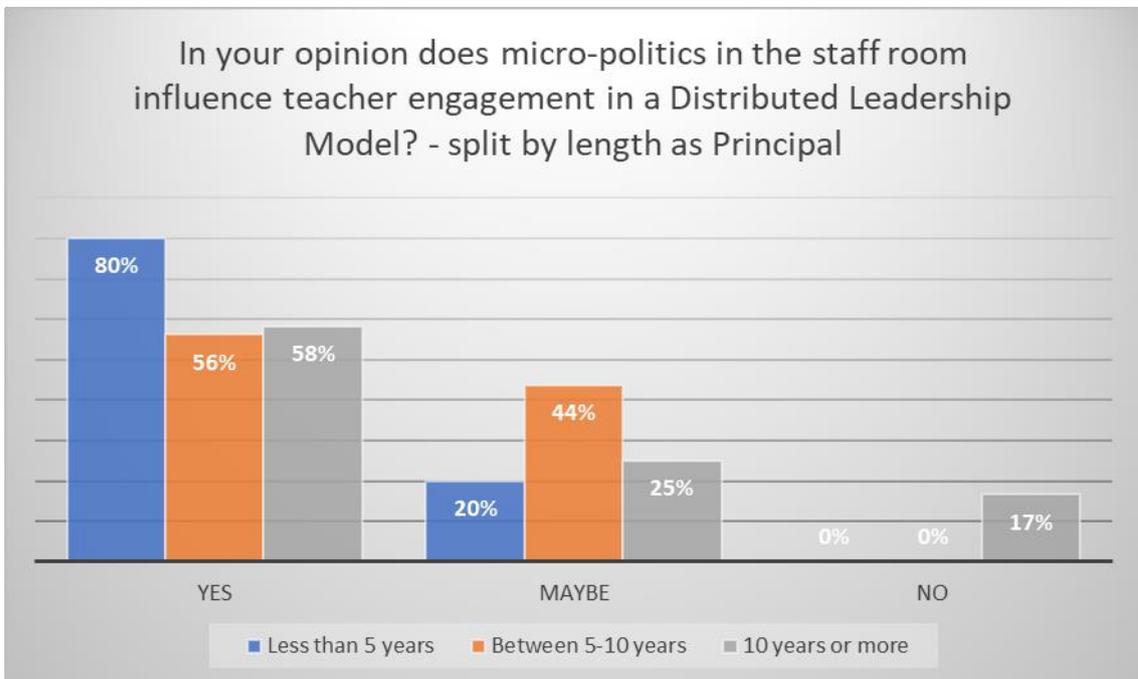
Figure 13. Response to Survey Question 8

Those with less than five years' experience were more likely to think micro-politics in the staffroom influenced teacher engagement in a Distributed Leadership model, as 80% responded yes to this question. The "Between 5-10 years" and "10 years or more" category was 56% and 58%, respectively. Interestingly, respondents who disagree that micro-politics influenced teacher engagement were in the "10 years or more" category (17% of this group).

Question 9 was open-ended and asked the respondents to describe how the micro-politics of the staffroom influenced the implementation process. Some respondents mentioned residual seniority entitlement and a reluctance to apply for positions due to judgement by peers.

Respondents Response*:*

There can be some resistance in the background to change, and some people can try and build a sense of 'safety in numbers' approach with resistance. However, I have had a lot of turnovers in staff recently, and it has had a big impact on bringing a positive approach to distributed leadership **(R.10)**

Some staff members engage in idle gossip, which can have a debilitating effect. On the other hand, the review process every two years is a wonderful affirming process for the school principal to lead **(R.52***)*

*Staff do talk about the posts as they arise - and speculate on who is applying. Some staff may be hesitant to apply if a more senior staff member is seen to be interested***. (R.31)**

*In the initial stages, some younger teachers were made to feel they did not have enough experience to apply, the assumption that the longer you were in the school, the more 'likely' or 'entitled' you may be to succeed. This no longer appears to exist***. (R.50)**

There may be some discussion on the relative workloads of one job over another, or the workload expected within a role and the extent to which that workload is fair -particularly for the AP2 model, which attracts a paltry financial reward. **(R.44)**

Culture in a school is the key factor. In our school, there is very little engagement; few go for the posts. I cannot establish is it they are too busy or do not want to upset their colleagues. It is taking a while for things to shift. **(R.56)**

This has been a difficult change for some who had bought into a profession that almost guaranteed them a long service entitlement (posts) based on seniority and years invested. This group had enough experience to influence the political mood of the staffroom in a time of rapid change. Defensive reaction masking uncertainty. This can, at times, lead to a negative attitude towards the process for Assistant Principals roles and the work 'expected" as 'not being worth it. I have also heard some staff comment that it 'wasn't their turn yet' as others in the same subject department were more senior to them. **(R.54)**

There are also the long-standing traditions in Irish secondary schools (this applies to long-established schools etc.) of 'waiting your turn'. CL 3/18 has shifted this slightly, but it will take a long time. In any working environment, there are different personalities that can direct the way things go in a staff room. Certain personalities' previous interactions with staff (or

*conflicts most likely) can make other staff slow to engage or come forward because they are aware of what has happened with/to others in the past. (**R.18**)*

*If the process is open, fair, and transparent and staff see valuable work being done, this lessens the 'politic'. Senior Management needs to manage the people involved, include them, attempt to gain their trust and, where possible, give them responsibility (**R.24**)*

Question 10 asked respondents, 'Which of the implementation stages of CL003/2018 listed presented challenges?'. The respondents could choose between the following options (1) staff consultation on priority areas & BOM approval, (2) allocation & reallocation of roles and responsibilities and (3) the biennial review process. Respondents could select more than one of these options. They could also select none. Most respondents, 42%, selected one challenge; however, 27% found no challenges in the three areas of the implementation process described in the question; additionally, 18% of respondents selected two, and 13% selected all three options.
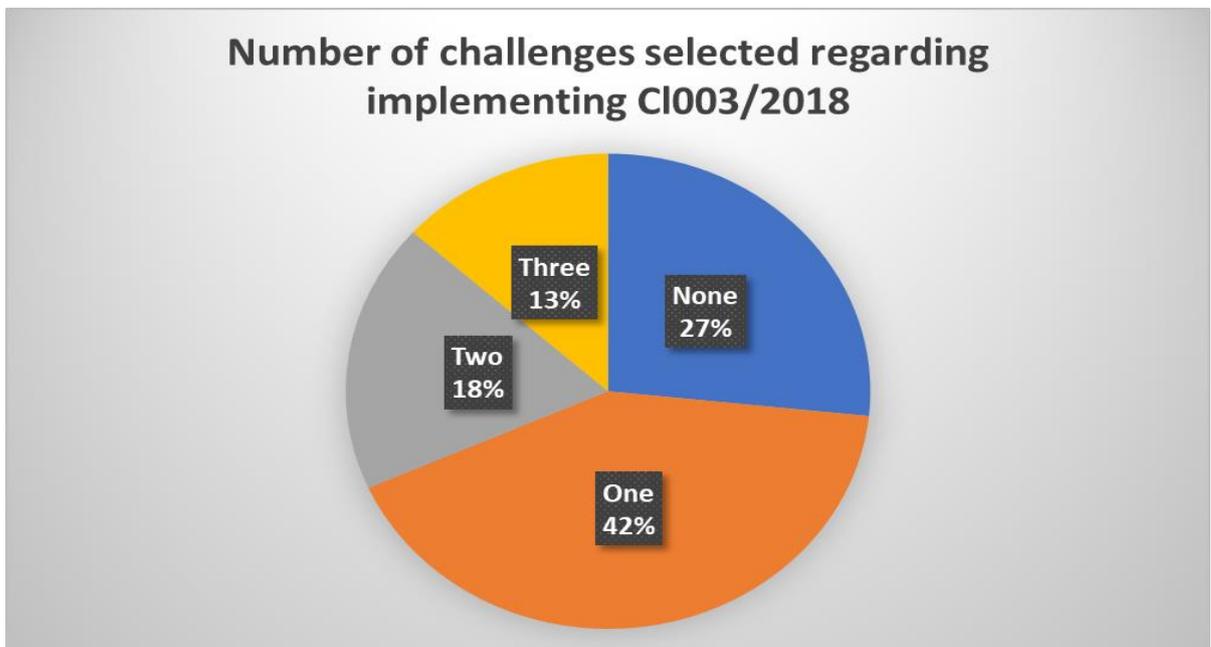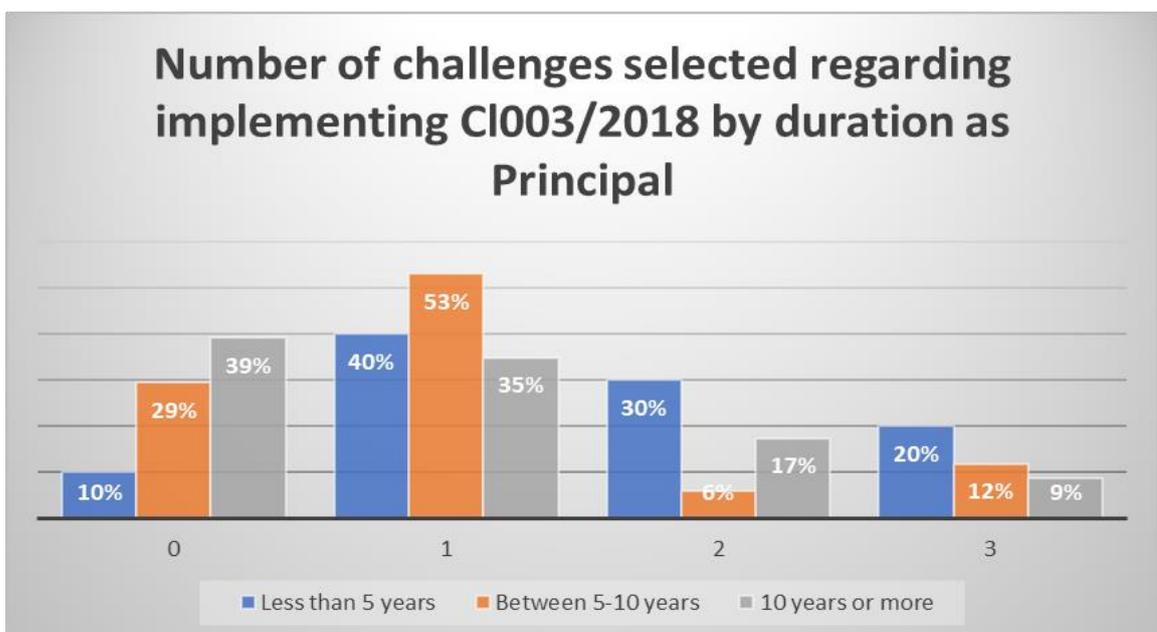

Figure 14. Response to Survey Question 10

The main challenge selected was allocation and reallocation of roles and responsibilities, with thirty-three of the sixty-one respondents selecting this option. Twenty-two of the sixty-one respondents identify the biennial review process as a challenge. Sixteen of the sixty-one respondents identify staff consultation on priority areas and BOM approval as a challenge.
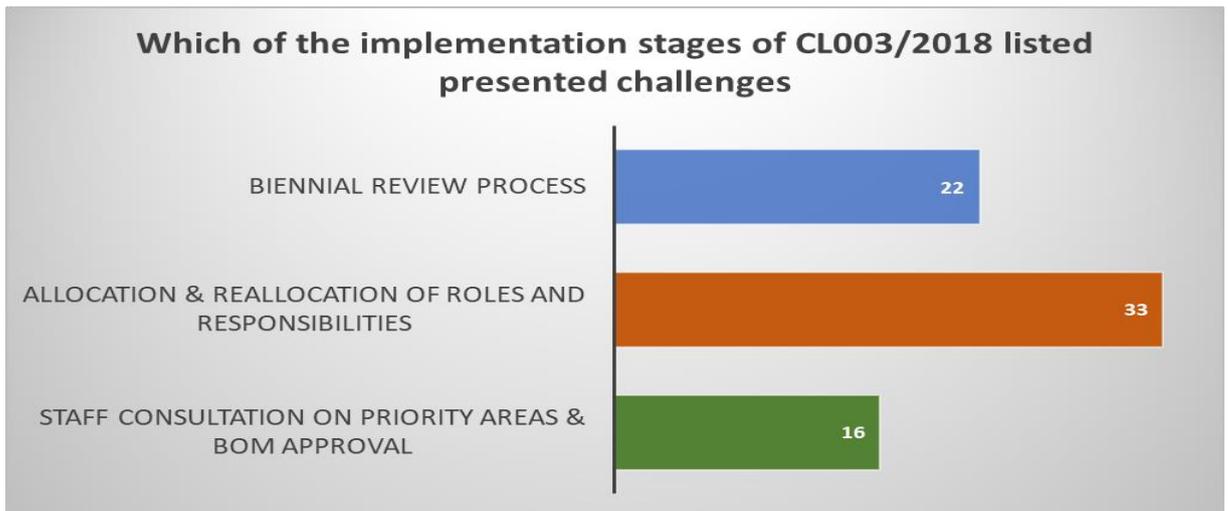
Figure 15. Response to Survey Question 10

In the analysis by cohort, there were no significant differences between the responses given by the cohorts with different school sizes or a different number of assistant principal posts (APs). However, interestingly there was a difference in responses by principals with different lengths of service as principal. The principals with less than five years' experience were more likely to report a higher number of challenges. For example, 50% of this group selected two or three challenges versus 18% and 26% by the "between 5 – 10 years" and "10 years or more group", respectively shown in the bar chart below.

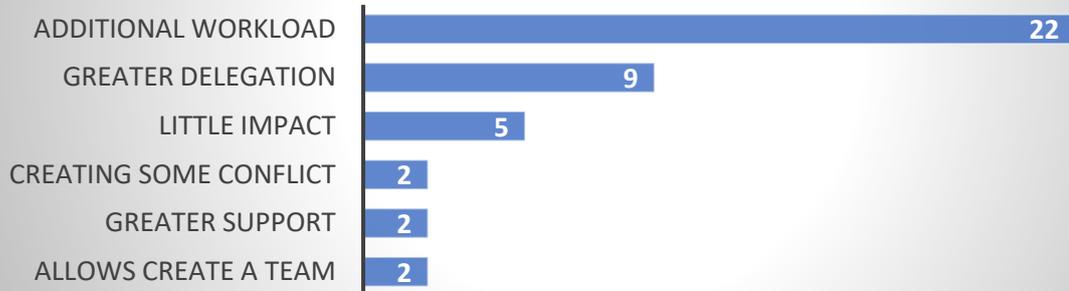**Figure 16. Response to Survey Question 10**

Question 11 asked respondents to indicate their agreement with the statement that the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 had introduced a shared leadership and management responsibility and accountability culture within the school.

Figure 17. Response to Survey Question 11

Question 12 was an open-ended question asking how the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 impacted the role of the principal within the school. 54% described negative impacts, 40% described positive impacts, and 5% neutral. Categories that came up in the responses included: additional workload, more significant delegation, has had little impact, team creation, provides more support, creating some conflict, has enabled new things, and empowering staff.

Figure 18. Response to Survey Question 12

Some respondents note:

*It has not reduced it. It has enabled new things to happen. (**R.5**)*

*It has been liberating to be able to assign some roles to staff that were previously done by the principal. For example, we had a very comprehensive and good Digital learning policy put together directly as a result of being able to assign that role to a new post-holder. (**R.7**)*

*Honestly, I do not feel much has changed; the principal's role is much the same. I really try to give autonomy to Middle Management; it is taking time to create that confidence, but it is changing now. the moratorium on posts has made this much more difficult as we do not have enough posts in the College. (**R.16**)*

*It has allowed delegation to happen in a way it couldn't pre this circular. From 2012 to 2016, I was in DP role, and the Posts were very much task-based, and the approach by post holders was 'tell me what to do, and I will do it, and for the most part, post holders worked efficiently in that arena. However, the circular has changed the language around middle leadership to a certain degree, and as senior leaders, we need to very much work on this ourselves - refer to the middle leaders as such (as opposed to post holders), get them visible in working with the staff at staff sessions etc.) The focus of the circular has been on the recruitment process, scheduling the review process of N and P in the school context, annual reports, and the general admin of the circ. (**R.18**)*

*If leadership roles are effectively distributed and explained, together with an effective review process built-in and constructive and meaningful accountability in existence, the role of the principal is enhanced and supported. (**R.24**)*

*Demands a lot more time due to engagement with design of roles and responsibilities, appointments process, working with BOM, Biennial Reviews, annual reviews, and annual report to BOM. Much more time consuming (**R.25**)*

Increased the workload - there is a lot of preparation pre- and post-appointment. Arranging an Interview panel and preparing them is Time-consuming - an appointment w/o an appeal can take up to 1 x month to process **(R.31)**

More discretion in assigning Roles and Responsibilities - Annual Review is a valuable opportunity to affirm good practise but also to address (gently!!!) deficits/shortcomings - clarity of expectation of APs operating as L and M Team - clearly defined R and Rs - overall supportive of the principal's work **(R.41**)

It's too early to say what the impact has been. Many new middle leaders were appointed in 2018 and 2019, and they needed time to learn their roles and understand what is expected of them. I think there is still a culture of seeing school leadership as just the responsibility of the Principal and Deputy. This will take time; however, the inspectorate, through the WSE-MLL process, are part of getting this message across to teachers. **(R.45)**

It has created a lot more work for the principal and sometimes staffs discontent re those appointed to the positions. This creates a very bad atmosphere in the staff room which can have a huge impact on the entire school and, as a result, can make the principal's role a lot more difficult. **(R.48)**

It has allowed for more effective distributed leadership, but without an allocation of hours, particularly at AP1 level, the complete realisation of leadership being distributed is unattainable. **(R.50)**

It has fostered a culture or rather is starting that culture of staff members leading and managing. Greater emphasis on accountability which is fantastic. It has garnered a culture negatively of expectation with some younger staff members that they deserve and should get a promotion. One negative, unfortunately, is the culture of 'volunteering' is slowly being reduced in Irish education 4. It allows me as principal to distribute roles and pull back from 'doing most things **(R.52)**

More support more emphasis on distributed leadership **(R.59)**
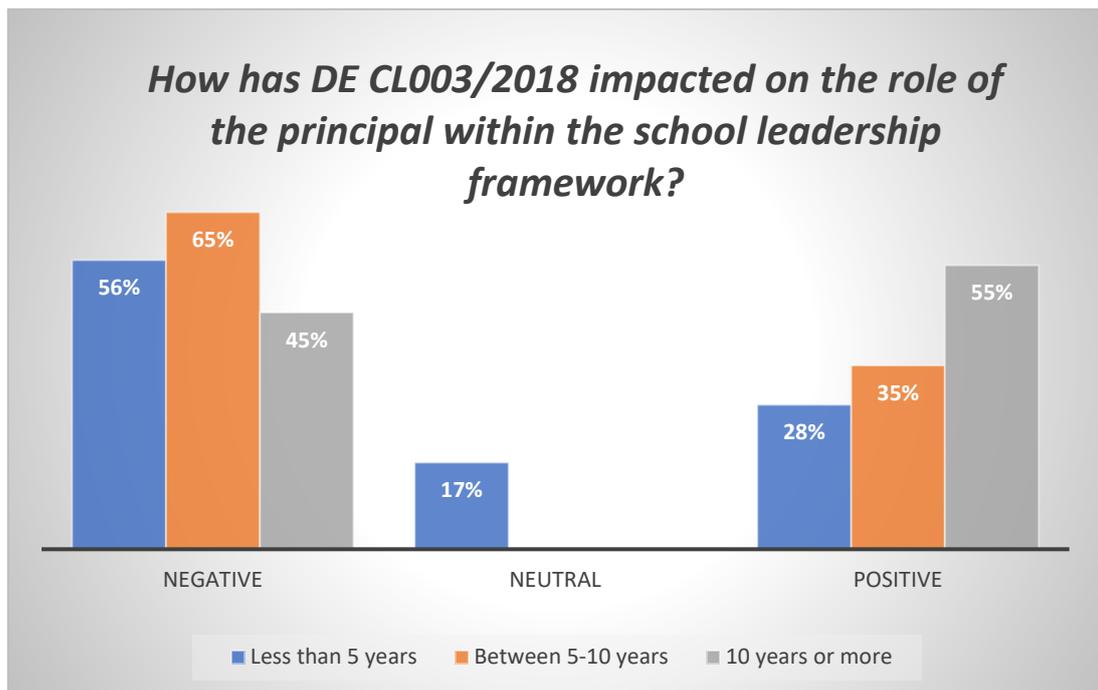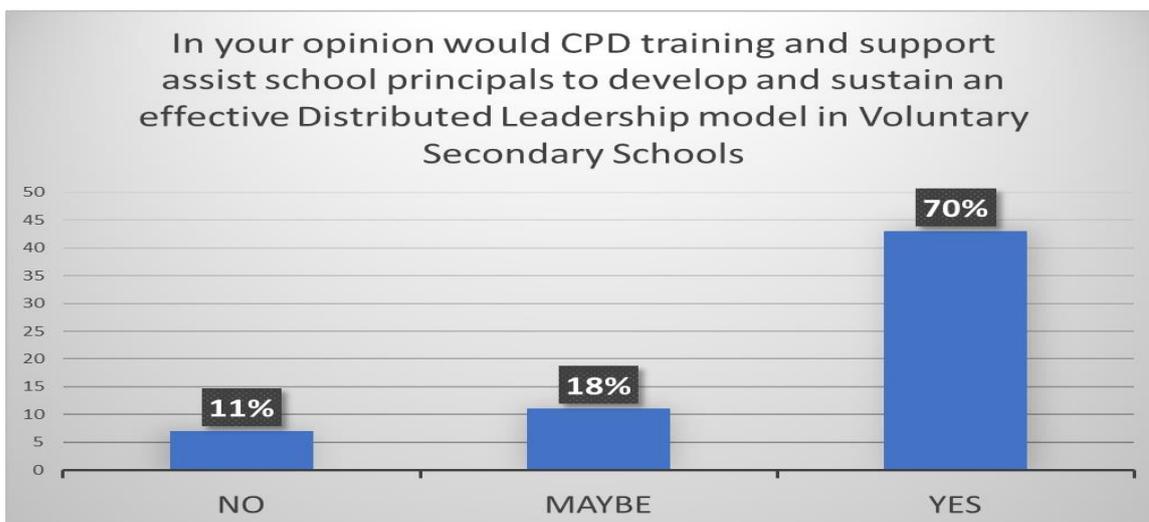
Figure 19. Response to Survey Question 12

Interestingly there were no significant differences between analysis of these open-ended responses by school size or number of APs; there was a significant difference between the duration of time served as a principal with 55% of responses from those in the "10 years or more" category were favourable compared with 35% and 28% in the "Between 5-10 years" and "Less than five years" categories**.**

Question thirteen asked respondents if the implementation of the Department of Education (DE)CL 003/2018 had created an effective model of distributed leadership in their school. Most respondents agreed that implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 on leadership and management has created an effective distributed leadership model in their school, though 11% of respondents disagree to some extent.
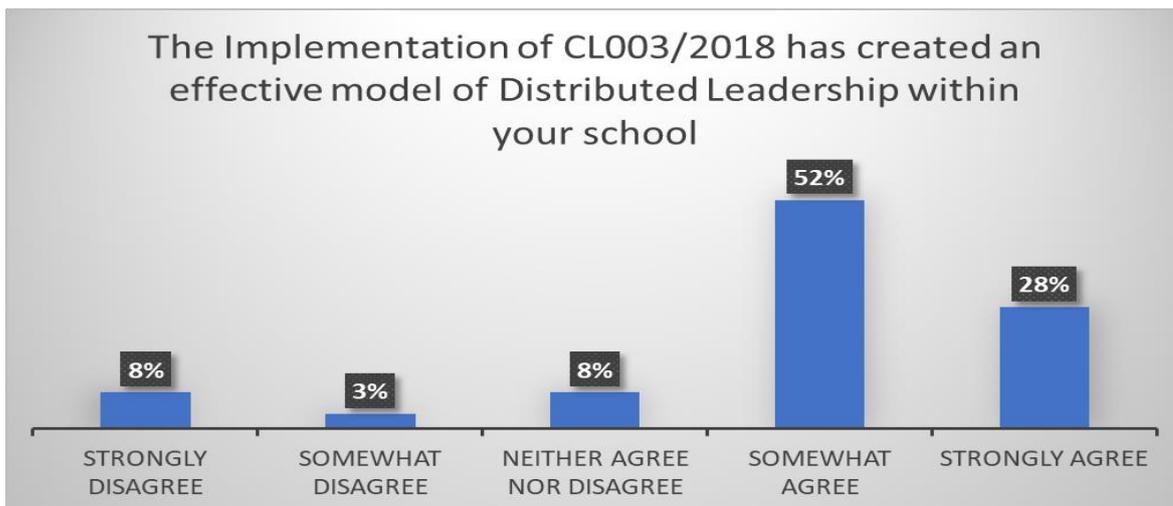
Figure 20. Response to Survey Question 13

Question 14 When asks if training would assist principals in successfully implementing a distributed leadership framework outlined in CL003/2018, there was overwhelming agreement.

Figure 21. Response to Survey Question 14

Question 15 invited respondents to provide further comments. While responses varied, a significant number of respondents mentioned training

Respondents Responses:

I hugely welcome 003/2018 and the new model of middle leadership. This has the great potential to develop leaders in the school community and effect authentic distributive leadership. However, some of the mechanics of the application of the circular are hugely onerous. A 5-year review of posts would suffice, not a 2-year review. This would be more in

line with school development planning (the 5-year School Plan). I welcome the momentum towards professionalism in our school management structures. (R.54)

In my view, post holders are willing to take on management roles, but they fall far short of taking on leadership positions. Perhaps expectations of their role need to be made more explicit and reinforced on a regular basis. I definitely think more CPD would help, but also some workshops with senior and middle management run by an outside facilitator where expectations and roles could be discussed and defined would be helpful. (R.51)

Post-holders need time to effectively carry out their roles. Particularly those of a pastoral nature need to be completed by and large within school time. This cannot work effectively when allocated hours are not forthcoming. (R.50)

The main issue with Distributed Leadership is the time needed for those to whom leadership is distributed to undertake their tasks. Whether AP1 or AP2, the middle leader can only engage with the model effectively if they have the time to do so. if the DES is to give any further consideration to the model, it should be the provision of protected time for middle management to manage. (R.44)

The Middle Management Team Members need to attend CPD on what it is to be part of a Management Team. One day per year would be a help. (R.57)
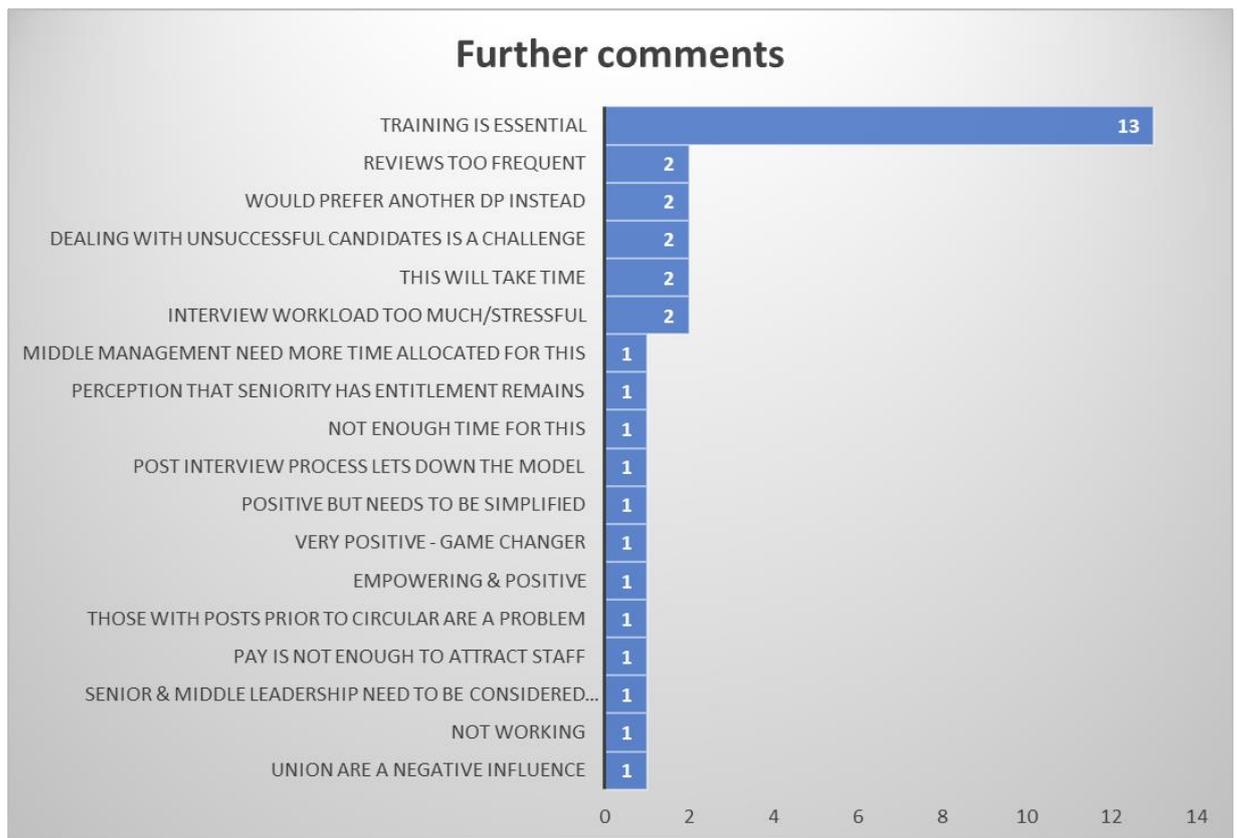
It is very important to appreciate that staff relations are always a big challenge for Principals and that the biennial process is too frequent. It adds an extra layer of stress for Principals at an unfortunate time of the year - last term! (R.35)

The culture of a POR holder being responsible for their brief is yet to be fully embraced in the Voluntary Secondary Sector. In this respect, my experience in other sectors tells me that a major change in culture is still to happen in the Voluntary Secondary Sector. (R.34)

This is a wonderful area of study. I believe this circular has been the game-changer of the past few years. As a principal is, it very supportive of my work, and I am very glad to have it. (R.29)

Training for middle leaders and a great allocation to allow middle leaders to have time off to fulfil their duties in a meaningful manner. (R.23)

I think training should be provided for staff to help in sustaining an effective model. I think it should be at the discretion of the school as to the time frame for review - three years may have a more beneficial effect. Post holders are only becoming familiar with their role in the 2nd year before they switch. (R.14)

Further comments

Category	Value
TRAINING IS ESSENTIAL	13
REVIEWS TOO FREQUENT	2
WOULD PREFER ANOTHER DP INSTEAD	2
DEALING WITH UNSUCCESSFUL CANDIDATES IS A CHALLENGE	2
THIS WILL TAKE TIME	2
INTERVIEW WORKLOAD TOO MUCH/STRESSFUL	2
MIDDLE MANAGEMENT NEED MORE TIME ALLOCATED FOR THIS	1
PERCEPTION THAT SENIORITY HAS ENTITLEMENT REMAINS	1
NOT ENOUGH TIME FOR THIS	1
POST INTERVIEW PROCESS LETS DOWN THE MODEL	1
POSITIVE BUT NEEDS TO BE SIMPLIFIED	1
VERY POSITIVE - GAME CHANGER	1
EMPOWERING & POSITIVE	1
THOSE WITH POSTS PRIOR TO CIRCULAR ARE A PROBLEM	1
PAY IS NOT ENOUGH TO ATTRACT STAFF	1
SENIOR & MIDDLE LEADERSHIP NEED TO BE CONSIDERED...	1
NOT WORKING	1
UNION ARE A NEGATIVE INFLUENCE	1

Figure 22. Response to Survey Question 15

5.3 Stage 2 Qualitative Findings

Patton (2002) suggests that interview data consists of verbatim quotations and acceptable content and context to be interpretable. Researchers may use a structured or unstructured interview approach. Unstructured or semi-structured interviews may begin with some defined questions; however, the interviewer has considerable latitude to adapt questions to the specific direction of responses to allow for more intuitive and natural conversations between researchers and participants. The researcher continues to interview additional participants until the field of interest is saturated. i.e., until the researcher is not hearing anything new. The number of participants is therefore dependent on the richness of the data, though Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that more than fifteen cases can make analysis complicated and unmanageable.

Ten school principals from the voluntary secondary school sector participated in individual semi-structured interviews for this research via Zoom, and the interviews were audio-recorded. Archibald et al. (2019) related the interview experiences of interviewers participating in research via Zoom as "highly satisfactory and generally rated Zoom above alternative interviewing mediums such as face-to-face, telephone and other videoconferencing services" (p.1). The sampling of interview subjects

was purposive and based on a balance of gender, school type and size and length of service as a principal. The principals were from single-sex and mixed schools, with five schools having more than five hundred pupils and five schools having less than five hundred pupils. Six principals had more than five years' experience as a principal, four had between three and five years, and one principal had two years' experience. There were five male principals and five female principals interviewed.

The researcher emailed the interview questions to the interview participants in advance of the interview (Appendix D). As it was a semi-structured interview, the questions guided the interview process to help rather than hinder the conversational flow. The order of questions was adhered to though not rigidly, as sometimes the interviewee inadvertently provided information related to a different question.

The opening questions focused on the type of school and the duration of the principal's service in the school. The interview progressed to the implementation of the change process.

Interview Question: During the consultation phase, or the biennial review stage, were you aware of different views and opinions amongst staff groupings on distributed leadership? How does the micro-politics of the staffroom influence the process?

Most of the interview participants expressed a view that the political dynamic of the staffroom influences the implementation process, sometimes negatively but mainly in a positive manner leading to progressive change. Principals noted that the initial introduction phase, when schools were digesting and beginning the implementation of the circular, saw the most micro-political activity amongst staff. There was an initial sense of resistance to the change process in the early implementation phase that manifested politically amongst staff. Principals viewed the change as progressive; there was a lack of understanding about the process, which caused political difficulty when staff were trying to identify needs and priorities. Principals identified an issue with current postholders who did not want their roles changed.

> *"Yeah, people who have posts and were trying to protect their posts, yeah, definitely are more vocal. And within, you'll always have somebody on staff who's a bit more vocal, you'll always have, within a staffroom, there's always, I say, a circle of influence. Now, that doesn't always mean in a positive way. And it can be in a positive way, but it can also be in a negative way".* **(P.10)**

> *"I think in general, people saw the benefits to it, and they could see the whole school now. Well, first of all, the fact that it was being opened up and that it was a competition, a proper competition for a post where before it wasn't."* **(P.5)**

The interview participants generally agreed that the issue that appeared to cause the most political tension among teachers was the seniority issue. Some principals noted the tension between more senior staff who expected an appointment to a post and less senior staff who saw imminent opportunities for leadership.

> "*We would have had difficulty attracting people to posts. One of the reasons was because people felt they didn't want to have that attention drawn to them, that they did not know their place. Now I mean, it's not; that sounds worse than it is, but you know it's that very low-level stuff.*" **(P.4)**

However, there was a board consensus that the staffroom's political dynamic around the loss of seniority as part of the criteria had diminished since the early implementation phase. Principals felt that staff were now cognisant that the competency and skills-based element of the selection process had overtaken the element of seniority.

> "*People that were more senior and perceived themselves as next in line didn't get the posts. So, what was really interesting for me. I'm just after filing-well the appeals stage is still open -an AP1, but a lot of the people that would have been very aggrieved would have felt they were next in line didn't actually go for it this time around, which I thought was fascinating, you know.*" **(P.2)**

> "*There was a competition that preceded me that I think probably was the… there was probably the legitimate one or the one that broke ground or broke the mould where I suppose people that were senior and perceived themselves as the next in line didn't get posts.*" *This translated into a selection system with legitimacy*." **(P.3)**

At the time of this research, three years into the implementation and for most schools past the first biennial review, the interview participants agreed that micropolitics had evolved from initial wariness to an understanding and acceptance of the new leadership model outlined in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The involvement of all staff in identifying the school's needs and priorities helped create shared ownership and an accompanying sense of collegiality. Principals were confident that the competency-based recruitment and selection model had created a different political climate in the staffroom. Overall, respondents saw the changed political landscape of the staff room as a progressive change.

> "*There was a little bit of disgruntlement on the early days, but it moved on really fast, I think people could see the benefit of this circular and the processes around it very quickly, I certainly could, and I didn't really see anything much negative except a bit of talk really.*" **(P.5)**

> "*So that's been a very significant change because as I said when I came first, everybody looked after lates and the whole school was constantly late, so it was like… So, it's a very different dynamic now*". **(P.8)**

Overall, principals acknowledged the influence of staffroom politics on the implementation process and the power imbalance created. The next question asked about the perception of power within the process.
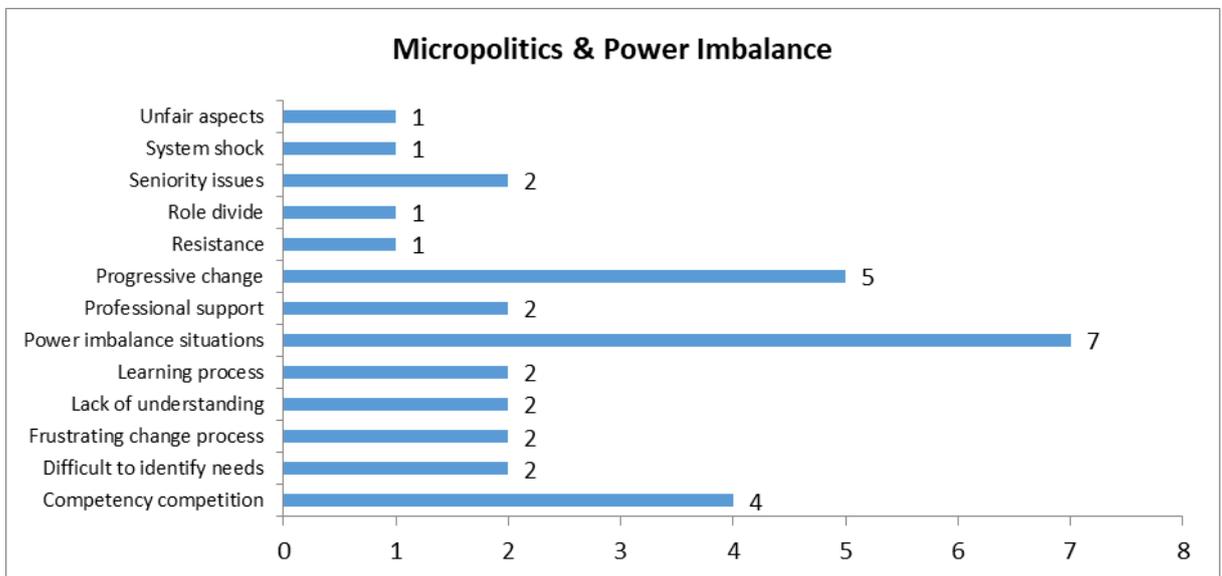
Figure 23. Micropolitics

Interview Question: As principal, is there a power imbalance within the distributed leadership model between the principal, deputy principal, assistant principal 1 & 2, non-post leaders or wider staff?

In one school, the power associated with leadership was interestingly reinforced physically by holding the school keys by assistant principal 1 (AP1) post-holders,

> " *We started back in 2018; the first day back, I think we had six Ap1s, and I got out six sets of keys for everyone.*" *Yeah, but it was kind of like for me, it was kind of like, your set of keys is nearly like you know the keys to the kingdom, so it was almost like little subconscious things like that for people to say look, it doesn't always have to be me who has to be there or the deputy.*" **(P.5)**

Most respondents noted a perceived power imbalance within the school, with the assistant principal 1 (AP 1) more involved in the school's leadership structure. The interview participants indicated that most assistant principal 1 (AP1) positions undertake the role of Year Head in the school, effectively managing the students' pastoral, behavioural, and academic needs within their assigned year group.

> "*I feel it's worked very well, but it does bring a power imbalance just in that regard because year leaders or, as we call them, year heads are regarded as higher up the food chain. So, if you're a year head, you kind of have a better profile in the school.*" **(P.8)**

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The power imbalance appears most noticeably between the assistant principal 1 (AP1) and assistant principal 11 (AP2) positions.

> "*I would have said yes, there was an imbalance, and that the AP2 were probably reluctant to step up and maybe take a more leadership role because they feel that the APIs should be doing that and that is their role*". **(P.9)**

The application and interview process are the same for both positions; however, there is a substantial salary difference between the two positions. Principals also acknowledged that the assistant principal 1 (AP1) status was higher than assistant principal 11 (AP 2). The model outlined in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 effectively creates a two-tier leadership hierarchy within a distributed leadership framework.

> "T*here is a definitely kind of dichotomy between the attitude of AP1s and the attitude of the AP2s.....I think there are two main reasons for that as I see it, well obviously by default they (AP1) are the most senior people, but several years ago there was a training course for middle management, I think though the JMB, yeah and that was excellent and that really did give them much more of a sense of their role, whereas the AP2s have never had anything like that*." **(P.4)**

The interviewee is referring to training that occurred in the 2015/2016 school year and pre-dated the Department of Education (DE) CL003/208.

> "*The AP1s get it. They get a sense that they are there as part of management, as part of leadership and that they, you know, are, and even I suppose when we were closed, they were hugely important in keeping everything going. The others don't see their role quite so much as being, you know, as whole school leaders*." **(P.4)**

The principals acknowledged that weekly meetings were usually with the principal and deputy principal and the assistant principal 1(AP1) post holders. Some principals had begun to include the assistant principal 11(AP2) postholders in meetings, but this was sporadic, either meeting them as a separate group or as individuals. Principals felt that timetabling constraints prohibited this approach though one principal had organised all post holders to meet once a week,

> "*We facilitate the 13 APs to meet every Friday for an hour. That's a huge commitment from our point of view, a huge time commitment, but it has paid dividends, absolute dividends.*". **(P.8)**

> "*I'd love to have an AP1 and AP2 meeting every week. But I can't do the in school because I can't free everyone up at the one time. And then the union directives and managerial bodies advise me against; you'll struggle to get those meetings outside of school time in the context of where we're at. Other schools I know have a biweekly AP1 meeting, and it's set in stone, and there's no issue with that. I'm scratching at that surface, and maybe in a year, maybe in a month, I'll get th*ere." **(P.3)**

> *"The AP2s, I suppose I've only… in my five years, I've only had one meeting with them as a collective, as a group on their own, I've never had a meeting with the AP1s and AP2s together."* **(P.10)**

The principals managed the political impact of the change process caused by introducing a new leadership structure by engaging staff in the change process through different levels of motivation.

Interview Question: What strategies have you used to harness individual teachers' motivation into whole-school leadership development?

There were mixed views on the level of motivation involved during the implementation phase of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 for the interviewees. Some principals identified the need to motivate staff during the implementation process suggesting in the initial implementation stage, motivation was vital to ensure staff engaged productively and understood the rationale.

> *"A lot of the staff members didn't seem to have that from their union or didn't seem to have a full understanding of it anyway, and that lack of understanding led to a little bit of concern and issues of what exactly was going to take place and what this review was going to be and how their terms and conditions might change. In my case, I think a lot of people turned to me to give them guidance on what was going to happen." It fell to the school principal to explain what distributed leadership was about and how the implementation process would work in the school"* **(P.9)**

> *"I think when you're identifying the needs and priorities, staff really struggled not to identify the role. Do you know what I mean? They were finding they needed a coordinator, or we need a year head, or we need something. They weren't actually identifying the need or the priority that that person would be responsible for."* **(P.3)**

> **"I think simplifying the information as much as possible, I mean no matter what the change process is, for me and you know maybe oversimplifying things sometimes because I've got into the habit of it, I mean nobody reads all the circulars and the information, nobody does, I hardly – we can hardly do it ourselves with the time, so it's about trying to do it, we would have started off doing a good presentation just with the key points and plotting it out exactly what was involved in and explaining the rationale for everybody, you'd be surprised by the gaps that people have in the understanding of why something has to happen, or something is happening."* **(P.5)**

Participants also recognised managing the disappointment of unsuccessful interview candidates to encourage disappointed applicants for leadership posts to continue their involvement in non-renumerated leadership as a factor that emerged as a subtheme of motivation.

> *"I thought a really important part of my job is to manage disappointment and harness it. And I've actually taken that on really seriously, and it is it's all conversation, but here is the level of disappointment when they don't get a post; I know it's the same everywhere, but they're so hungry and so ambitious."* **(P.3)**

The principals implemented various strategies to motivate school staff to engage in the process of consultation and the identification of school needs and priorities. Principals also identified a need to motivate existing post-holders to change their roles.

> *I suppose it was one-to-one conversations mostly. If we deal with the AP1s, one girl asked to be a Year Head, and then one girl that was a Year Head asked for something else, so I kind of talked to her about developing a proper school planning DEIS coordinator sort of a role. So, she was enthused about that.* **(P.2)**

> *But I spent a lot of time and effort on the feedback after interviews, of getting somebody on the panel to give really good quality feedback. And proving that it is actually about the interview as well as the; you know, it's not just a box-ticking, that the interview wasn't box-ticking. And people did buy into that and actually worked with me, and they're now all in positions and thriving.* **(P.3)**

> *"But I do see that there are more people now in the building willing to take on a leadership role. I am certainly encouraging that and talking about it a lot more and looking for them to leave whatever activity it is for them to take something, run with it, check in on me, seek whatever permission for it to start, but basically, if they are going to do something, it is their gig and go and do it right and fix up everything at the end, and I should only get called in if there is a problem or to congratulate them at the end effectively".* **(P.9)**

> *Myself and the senior management team will actually approach people and say, look, and people with particular talents, particular leadership skills that have already been shown in their subjects but also maybe extra or co-curricular activities and invite them to take on a piece of leadership. For the most part, they love it, they love the vote of confidence, and they love being asked. We link them up; we try keep things fresh, so anytime someone is volunteering or different aspects like that, we try swapping them around every two years or three years. So, at the second or third year, we'll link in someone new with them to see how they're doing it but also let them take on the role of responsibility in a fresh way themselves."* **(P.7)**

Figure 24. Motivating staff

The interview participants gave the different strategies they use to motivate teachers into whole-school leadership development as; good communication, social capital, empowerment, encouraging leadership roles, simplified swapping roles, information, one on one conversations, regular meetings, broad framework, managing disappointments, feedback, reviews and empowerment.

Question: Leadership post holders under DES CL003/2018 receive remuneration. Do you think this affects leadership development amongst non-post holders?

The issue of remuneration emerged as a motivating factor when considering aspiring leadership positions within the distributed leadership framework.

> "*So, the remuneration, to the point where I had somebody who was acting something last year, who wants to continue doing the job because they are enjoying it so much until they can even be reappointed. You know, it's mad. There's a lot of volunteerism here, but it is volunteerism for a purpose.*" **(P.3)**

> "*So, also when the review happened, and people are more aware then that an AP1 is worth whatever amount of money or a significant amount of money, but then there should be a result from it. So, it's a motivating factor*". **(P.1)**

A common approach taken by the principals interviewed was to encourage non-post holders to become more involved in a voluntary capacity in the school to undertake unpaid leadership roles because, in the interview process, candidates relate their achievements within the leadership sphere in their school.

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"*You can't talk about the historical things you've done; you have to talk about the current things you're doing in terms of leadership. And the only way you get leadership experience is by taking on roles. And sometimes, you might have to do that in a voluntary capacity. And I always say, voluntary is on top of your 22 hours. And that's the best way you can succeed.*" **(P.10)**

Motivational challenges emerged among non-post holders due to lack of remuneration,

"*There are some who feel that they work hard enough doing their jobs and that they don't want any more responsibility ... so, it's difficult to motivate them, they like their free time. And yet, they do feel out of things a little bit, and they do feel that decisions are being made that they're not always involved with. So, it is challenging.*" **(P.6)**

The importance of maintaining non-renumerated leadership in the school and how it was important for the school leadership team to volunteer for school activities outside of their leadership areas to show that voluntary leadership remained part of the whole-school community ethos and values emerged from the interview participants,

"W*e've actually talked about that quite a good bit in our AP meetings with regard to the kind of roles and responsibilities because a lot of our APs would do other things, and some have asked that those other things be included in the roles and responsibilities, but others have said no, no, no, don't do that because then what are we? We're not leaders; we're not shown the others that, yeah, we have our job but also, we volunteer, and we need to actively be shown that we do volunteer to do things**. (P.8)*

Interview Question: In your view, are middle leaders accountable for their leadership and management roles, or does the principal remain responsible? What was your experience of feedback and review provided for under the annual review process in DE CL 003/2018?

The researcher asked the interview participants for their views concerning middle leaders' accountability to their leadership and management roles. The central theme that emerged from the interview participants' discussions was the post holder's enhanced or increased accountability and responsibility. Most interview participants agreed that the middle leader is more accountable for their leadership and management roles under the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018.

"*Yes, I do. I definitely do*". Principal one also stated that; "*I do think that the circular ensures that there's a responsibility for the post holder because if it's an exercise in cooperation between the post holder and the principal and the post holder is doing a job that they feel supported and able to do, then they take the responsibility*" **(P.1)**

Yeah, and they will also take responsibility. They will take additional responsibilities. Each one of them will just say, 'Look, that needs to be done, I'm going to do it even though it's not necessarily directly related to my job, or you know? So, they certainly see much of a doing something for the group a school role more so than the AP2s, but again a distinction that needs to be made there is they are paid two and a half times more." **(P.4)**

However, another felt that there remains a reliance on the principal "*It varies. I think some people, thinking of my five-year heads, and three of them certainly would see themselves as accountable, and I suppose are probably nearly embarrassed or... no. That's too strong a word, are reluctant to come for advice. They kind of know I'm a middle manager, I should be able to do this myself, and 99% of the time, they can take care of everything, and everything's fine, different personalities, different people. They're kind of consistently looking for instruction. And I don't know, maybe I'm looking at it the wrong way, but I think when you're kind of looking for instruction all the time, I think you're actually avoiding accountability. You're avoiding thinking for yourself, and you're avoiding the chance of you getting it wrong because you only did what somebody else told you to do, you know? So, it varies from personality to personality.*" **(P.2)**

On the accountability provided for in the review and feedback element of the Department of Education (DE), CL003/2018 principals had mixed views on the accountability element of this review.

"*I know you meet people, and then you have the end of year review, but different posts have different time requirements and different times of the year, so it is very hard overall to get a sense that somebody is working as hard as someone else. The hard workers will work hard, and the work dodgers will dodge as best they can. It is very hard as a manager to get a handle on that sometimes as to get a handle on what somebody is doing or not doing.*" **(P.9)**

"*I think a lot of the accountability and responsibility comes back to me or whoever is the principal in whatever school because ultimately you have to report back to the board. So, the oversight does come back to here.*" **(P.9)**

While the principals interviewed agreed that the post-holder had a lot more accountability with the introduction of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018; some principals were sceptical about the end of the year review meeting,

"*I've gained far less from the annual review meetings than I thought I would. I found them box ticking, largely. This is what I do. The same people who exceed expectations are doing it, and the same people who don't are doing it, and they'll frame it to make it look like they're doing more. I could go and cause a lot of issues by completely renegotiating roles, but there's no point in doing that. Being honest, the biggest accountability is to each other rather than to me. Because they're so competitively fought for here that the room is watching, and the room is waiting." (P.3)*

Interview Question: Do you think distributed leadership has improved the leadership structure in the school? Have you noticed changes within your role?

The principals interviewed saw the introduction of distributed leadership under the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 as having a positive impact overall on the role of the principal. Most principals felt their role had improved as they had support in a leadership capacity by forming a leadership team that had a whole school remit.

"*And you have to trust them, and you have to, I suppose, press upon them enough to allow them to make decisions themselves without having to consult me. So, I do feel the trust is there – that was never there; we changed the culture a little bit.*" **(P.10)**

"Absolutely, it has changed my role for the better. Now, initially, I came into the school, just to give you; I was deputy principal of a different school, an all-boys school when the directive was in. And there were no year heads. And myself and the principal were the de facto year heads. So, we dealt with every disciplinary issue that came up. I suppose now when I started where I am, not everyone is a year head, there were only two-year heads – and we've changed that now over time" **(P.10)**

It has, I suppose, fostered a line of support for me. With people taking on leadership roles, taking on the responsibility you know formally and informally, it means that there's a shared or a different perspective on things. There's an extra body or set of opinions in the room, and that the person takes it on, you know, it's their responsibility. Obviously, they're supported with it, but for me professionally, it means that someone has taken on a role to have responsibility for it. **(P.7)**

"Yeah, mostly positively. And I think it has the potential to be more positive … if there were other bits put in place" **(P.4)**

Interview Question: What changes, additions, or amendments would you recommend for future leadership development policy in the post-primary sector**?**

Most principals raised the issue of time to hold meetings with postholders as a team and time for the postholders to discharge their leadership functions outside of their teaching timetable. There was a distinct view that while post holders received remuneration, they had very little time to discharge their role, particularly assistant principal 1 (AP1) post holders. Both assistant principal 1(AP1) and assistant principal 11(AP2) post holders also teach a full timetable, and there is no time allowance provided in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. In the voluntary secondary school sector, the time reduction given to postholders is dependent on the resources available within the school's yearly allocation.

> *"My understanding is that if you're in senior or middle management in England, you might only have half a teaching timetable, and the rest of your time is supporting management. I've to take people out of class to get them to do that; that's not good."* **(P.3)**

> *"Time allowance. I think it's the people that have time off that are the biggest help to you. Your Guidance Counsellor, your Home School Coordinator, your Programme Coordinator, your Deputy. If we could move to a place maybe where AP1s, there's a time allowance, considerable time allowance".* **(P.2)**

> *I'd say that you'd have to give us time. I know in the VEC they don't get extra time, but most of the post holders, especially AP1s, get extra time, and I think that's certainly something that we could look into a little bit more because no matter what energy we all have if you're teaching full 21 hours or whatever it is, it's hard to keep the energy going to bring more richness to it. I would build into it that we should have a built-in meeting time." I'd say that you'd have to give us time.* **(P.8)**

> *There needs to be time. Time given. Now I'm lucky in a DEIS school that I can give time to my year heads".* **(P.3)**

While the time to undertake the role was significant, another concern was finding time to hold leadership meetings. The time for meetings was deemed crucial to the success of implementing a distributed leadership model in the school, as the principal is responsible for implementing a successful model of leadership distribution within the school. The principal and the post holders must have time to meet to communicate and make decisions. Principals were using their existing allocation to try and make time for the post holders to reduce their teaching contact time to meet; however, there is no official allowance.

> "*I know we interview people, and it's always about can they see the big vision, and it's hard to see the big vision when you're teaching 22 hours and involved very closely with the classroom as is your primary role. So how do you facilitate that bigger vision thinking unless we give a little bit of time to it*". **(P.8)**

> "*We have our post holders' meeting, our AP1 post holders' weekly like for a good few years and then we've got the AP2s and AP1s through to Croke Park, you know, every six weeks or so, which we're only doing that this year but it means that we can talk about the issues in a very structured way more if you like systems and processes rather than just you know putting out the fires, who did what, it's set up properly so no I think it's been – well we've made a real conscious effort to do that, I've made a huge conscious effort.*" **(P.5)**

> *Proper resourcing of people and giving them a say. Like it was funny, for me, what do I need? Time. I need time, and I don't have it. I have the goodwill piece, which I'm very grateful for. On the technical aspects, I think more clarity around what is required of each level, AP1 and AP2 timewise, outside school, inside the school, that sort of stuff. I think the detail that is lacking it's left a bit woolly, but to some extent, It has to get its own context; what I might see as an AP1 role or what we might see here as an AP1 role might be totally different to somewhere of a similar size and they might have a totally different perspective on what would be required or what is appropriate for them to do. I think a little bit more guidance on that, even template suggestions, and then you can work around that in your own context. (**P.9**)*

Interview Question: What supports, and training do you feel would assist you as a principal in leading and developing distributed leadership in your school?

The principals strongly saw the need for continuous professional development. They recognised the need for training for the assistant principal in leadership skills.

> "*Certainly, I think that… done a little bit of training around middle management, but it's all being done over Zoom and so forth. I certainly think that there's no ownership within the department via the PDST.*" **(P.10)**

> "*You know you've APs that don't know, and I'm not in any way derogatory; I'm just saying they don't have experience of taking minutes of a meeting, of managing people, of the nuts and bolts of what you have to do when you take on such a role, and that can be very undermining for the person because they're delighted with themselves to have the post, and then they go and find themselves not quite skilled enough in the basics … I've had one or two instances where say for example in one instance an AP was delighted with themselves for having a post and went to meet everybody with regard to it and made total hames of it and put everybody's*

back up and everybody was going what's your man at! It took him a year to kind of bring him back again and mop it up. So, an initial training programme would be amazing, alright." **(P.8)**

"Training for, you know, any job. If we get a Deputy Principal/Principal, any job you get, you start off by getting training with the JMB, but you get an AP1 or an AP2, which are supposed to be management roles, you get nothing, only whatever the school can provide for you. And I did try; you know, last year, I suppose we were trying to get involved in all of that, but then that's individual schools trying to sort something out, where you know a more general thing where you get the sense of the philosophy; yeah, I suppose the philosophy of it, the whole concept to the circular." **(P.4)**

" Last year we had the opportunity, with ... then at the beginning of September 2020 for us all to participate in coaching online - I think there was a couple of people who couldn't do it, but most people participated in that, so that kind of – you'd love everybody in a post to have the proper training, but anyway the thing was – sorry the last thing I wanted to say about that was, one of the things we realised as a team towards the end of the coaching, it's that skills deficit." **(P.5)**

"We need more access to CPD; it's very hard to source that; I mean we're lucky we're working with ...recently through this programme, but I mean teachers, in my view, have never been given the skills to properly operate as teams and even young people coming in who you know they're not being trained in that way in that mindset, so it's a skills deficit, and then you know when people start getting those skills you know, there's a bit of CPD needed .. when people get those skills, they can thrive but a lot of this circular and a lot of what the department has asked people to do through the junior cycle et cetera, they don't actually have the skills for and then you're setting them up for maybe not failure but not as much quality." **(P.5)**

There was also an awareness of the need for ongoing support and training for principals in implementing and developing distributed leadership. The principals acknowledge the provision of seminars and information sessions by the voluntary secondary school sector management body, the JMB; however, the session focused on implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 and the recruitment and selection process.

"Look at the breakdown of the circular; I think there might be a page, a page and maybe two pages on the principles behind it. You know, obviously, Looking at Our School (LAOS) and different things like that, but there's so much training on not getting it wrong in terms of avoiding an appeal, making sure you know the advertisements on a notice board or every notice board or digitally. I think the focus on, you know, these trivial really aspects, as opposed to the principles of leadership, is a key deficit in all of this. Too much of our time is spent on the nitty-gritty side of that. We need to remove ourselves to the broader leadership principles and specially to distributed leadership." **(P.7)**

"I suppose the training and - schools are very insular places, and tradition and practice can become alive and well in a school setting. So, the more our leaders are brought beyond the school pale and shown what leadership really means in the bigger picture, the better because otherwise, it can become just not as affected at all. I think so training would be a big one, and I suppose more opportunities as well for those leaders to present on what they do because that's quite a powerful tool if they have forums where they can go and say, this is the way I do it." **(P.8)**

Further Comments from Participants

The principals were optimistic about the future of distributed leadership by creating a genuine leadership model and offering opportunities.

> "*I think the leadership, invitations to leadership and you know what we really do with staff before we start looking at the circular and entering the circular, I think that's key. Inviting people to leadership, we've done a reverse mentoring with them in the school as well in terms of where you have newer members of staff mentoring more senior members of staff or senior management team, having that access and that exposure to leadership is really, really key. And once that real distributed leadership model is alive in the culture of the school, then putting the structure around the circular becomes an awful lot easier. And I think a circular going forward needs to promote that, needs to kind of address those issues.*" **(P.7)**

> "*The only thing I can think of right now is more opportunities for teachers to take on leadership roles because there's been some movement with DEIS schools getting more vacancies or whatever is available to them. But I think more opportunities for teachers to take on roles would be better for everyone.* **(P.1)**

> **"***The whole thing might need to be reviewed a little bit. We're in a different place now, and I imagine than when the circular was initially drafted. So, what's the next step? What's the vision? I think everybody is looking for the flexibility we've identified there and moving away from the clearly defined roles. We've taken strides in that direction, but I think there is more work to be done on it***." (P.3)**

Figure 25. Principals' perspective

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings from the analyses undertaken regarding this Mixed Methods research Study (MMR) study, which sought to investigate the principal's perspective on implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 on Leadership and Management. Stage 1 of the study gathered data from a census survey of voluntary secondary school post-primary school principals. Stage 2 involved semi-structured interviews with ten voluntary secondary school principals. The next chapter considers the research study findings.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The research question asks: What is the experience of school principals in the implementation of distributed leadership in the voluntary secondary school as mandated in the Department of Education CL003/2018? The sub-questions are:

1. Does the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 change the principal's role within the school's leadership framework?
2. Does the micropolitics of a school impact the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?
3. What are the strategies employed by principals to motivate staff when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018?
4. Is there a distribution of accountability and responsibility within the distributed leadership framework per Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018?

The research findings provide answers to the research questions, and the quantitative and qualitative data analysis shows a broadly positive response from the principal's perspective to the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018. The data gathered in this research study identifies that the process of establishing a distributed leadership model is underway in schools, and future policy development on school leadership can build on this progress. The procedures for recruitment and selection to leadership posts have established a competency-based approach broadly welcomed by the principals who participated in this research study. However, concerns are also evident within the broader context of the emerging distributed leadership structure in the voluntary secondary school

6.2 The Micro-Politics of Change

The research findings support the literature concerning the impact of micro-politics within the school environment on implementing a distributed leadership framework. The qualitative and quantitative data findings correlate with the literature on the influence of power within the concept of distributed leadership. Spillane & Anderson (2019) identify the distribution of leadership as the distribution of power. For the successful implementation of distributed leadership, the principal must relinquish power (Lumby, 2013). The principals participating in this research study indicate their willingness

to share leadership responsibility with a school leadership team. The principals use their power as formal leaders to lead the process (Kelly, 2008) and encourage collaboration (Bush & Glover, 2012).

In the survey data and the interview data, principals are cognisant of the micro-politics of the staffroom during the change process, with most viewing the influence of staffroom micro-politics on the process as primarily positive. However, some negative experiences emerge in the survey data. Staffrooms are full of people and people who gather for a specific purpose, each bringing a personal agenda of personality, values, and interests to the collective agenda of the organisation. Furthermore, the principals in this research study recognise that teachers have agency due to the collaborative nature of the policy consultation phase. Giudici (2020) describes how schools "deal with new policy texts always depends on the contextual and institutional constraints that are specific to the enactment phase (p.5)," and each principal negotiates the cultural and historical context of their school and classroom when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018.

The initial introductory stage of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 caused tension within the staffroom, in particular the change in the seniority criterion, which facilitated a competency-based approach to school leadership development, resulting in some teachers feeling stepped over for promotion by junior colleagues. For Spillane et al. (2004), their "perspective on distributed leadership centres on practice" (p.7), and the literature supports the view that building and maintaining professional relationships is key to establishing the correct balance between support, delegation, and distribution within the school leadership structure. Lumby (2013) states that the existing social norms within the school culture impact the process of distributing leadership. The initial reaction from school staff towards the phased removal of the seniority criterion was understandably mixed. Principals in this research study understood that staff under the previous system believed they were next in line. However, now they compete with younger staff and less experienced staff, often with additional qualifications and possibly more involvement in school-based initiatives. The principals were required to skilfully negotiate the political climate of the staffroom to maintain a delicate balance between staff to ensure no one or no cohort felt alienated or discouraged from engaging in the new leadership framework.

Preedy (2016) highlights the necessity for a shift in power to successfully implement distributed leadership. Principals state that the initial resistance waned as the cause of concern was the change to the competency-based recruitment and selection model within the new revised leadership model rather than the change in the leadership framework or style of leadership. The research notes that principals experienced a shift in the dynamic of staff engagement with the process once the initial loss of the seniority criterion dissipated. The influence of the micro-political atmosphere of the staffroom on the implementation of distributed leadership changed by the time the principal was

leading the biennial review; a crucial finding as it opens the door to leadership development on a whole school collective basis (Harris 2014).

It is interesting to note that the longer-serving principals tended to attribute less importance to the influence of the micropolitics of the staffroom, which could be accounted for because the longer-serving principals are most likely more familiar with the staffroom dynamic. Redmond (2016) suggests that school leaders balance micro-political tensions resulting from macropolitical, cultural and structural changes daily. In that regard, it is most likely that the more experienced principal approached the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) Cl003/2018 with an established knowledge of the political dynamic within the school, nonetheless as the findings of the study established the aspect of micropolitics was present. The principals with less than five years' service in their school identify the more negative aspects of the political dynamic in the change process, particularly with the change in the seniority criterion. Giudici (2020) notes that "individual teachers on the ground consciously or unconsciously motivated have political significance", and it is this that "provides them with the power to resist policy change, alter it or forge new policy on the ground" (p.5). Previous experience in implementing a policy change is likely to have equipped the longer serving principals with a set of experiential skills, and principals with more than five years in the role within the school have become more familiar with the organisational norms of the workplace than their principal colleagues with fewer years of service.

6.3 Motivating Staff Engagement

As the research acknowledges the role of micro-politics in implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018, how the principals managed the process and moved it along becomes relevant (Bush & Glover 2014). The literature emphasises the relational aspect of a distributed leadership model. The interview participants provide examples of how teamwork and collaboration is essential components for a successful implementation process, which "presents a challenge to principals to align different perspectives, broker and open new possibilities for meaning and participation in the school as a community of practice" (Moynihan A., & O Donovan. M, 2021, p.5). The research findings support the literature and show how principals motivate staff to engage in a change of leadership practice to introduce distributed leadership. Principals interviewed emphasis their role in assisting teachers in understanding the rationale for developing distributed leadership. The principals identify the importance of communication and the need to achieve buy-in from staff at the consultation and establishment phase of the process (Macbeath, 2005). The reliance on social capital to motivate and encourage engagement in distributed leadership amongst teachers was considered a vital resource (Spillane 2002,2012; Spillane et al. 2009). As discussed in the literature

review, Dansereau et al. (2013) self-expansion theory provides a critical motivating influence on aspiring leaders. A key role for principals when navigating the change in leadership structure required under the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2108 was to act as a resource for teachers as they identified organisational needs and priorities, roles, and responsibilities within the leadership framework. A critical motivating factor for teachers to engage with the process was the alignment of individual needs and priorities with the collective needs and priorities of the school (Dansereau, 2013). The development of trust emerges as an essential component in the literature (Gronn ,2014; Robinson, 2008). The principals explain how they hold conversations with staff often on a one-to-one basis to support, empower and encourage them.

The principals were involved in individual and collective motivation strategies during the implementation process. Changing a cultural mindset requires the principal to use motivation strategies to solve problems and work towards agreed goals. The principals reveal they deploy intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies to successfully implement the necessary change in the school leadership framework mandated under the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Motivating employees remains an integral part of successful leadership utilising Theory X & Theory Y (Mc Gregor 1960); principals identify the intrinsic motivation strategies as the school ethos, shared values and participation in decision making (Torres, 2018) to obtain staff engagement in the process.

The extrinsic motivating factor related to the individual rather than the collective was remuneration and career progression for aspiring school leaders. Principals express concern for the disappointed post of responsibility candidates interviewed when vacancies arose within the formal school leadership team and the importance of support and encouragement to maintain their interest in leadership activities. Motivation to harness and encourage leadership without remuneration emerged as a concern. The identification in this study of the emerging trend of volunteerism for the purpose as a pre-requisite for a successful interview is an emergent issue of concern for principals around maintaining whole school motivation and the delicate balance of retaining the spirit of volunteerism to maintain both formal and informal leadership roles in the school.

It is an important finding as in the absence of required leadership qualification and the absence of any recognition in the marking scheme for leadership qualifications or continuous professional development courses undertaken by interview candidates; the candidate must give examples of leading initiatives within the school. Harris (2008) maintains that "distributed leadership does not imply that the formal leadership structures within organisations are removed or redundant. Instead, there is a strong relationship between vertical and lateral leadership processes. It also means that those in formal leadership roles are the gatekeepers to distributed leadership practice in their schools"

(p.174). The principal maintains the delicate balance between formal and informal leadership activities within a distributed leadership framework.

The division between assistant principal 1(AP1) and assistant principal 11(AP2) emerges in the research with a considerable difference in remuneration and role status within the school. In a distributed leadership model of creating teams and collaboration, emphasising moving away from a task-based and specific duty's managerial role, the categorisation and inequality present a dichotomy (Harris, 2014: Bolden 2004). Principals acknowledge staff perceptions of assistant principal 1(AP1) and assistant principal 11(AP2) positions and the subsequent challenges within the school leadership culture to validate the significance and contribution of assistant principal 11posts (AP2) to the leadership team. Murphy (2009) describes how principals manage any power imbalance, whether real or perceived, is critical for implementing distributed leadership. The research study highlights the difference in the remuneration allowance for assistant principal 1 (AP1) and assistant principal 11 (AP2). Leadership practice is the central component of distributed leadership (Spillane 2005). Principals reveal that it is difficult to motivate staff to apply for an assistant principal 11 (AP2) post of responsibility, and they consider the remuneration for the work required as a factor. In the absence of guidelines for differentiating between assistant principal 1 (AP1) and assistant principal 11 (AP2) duties, the decision falls to the principal to assign the responsibilities from the agreed school schedule to the post-holder.

Interestingly principals also mention the profile of the role within the school with a stronger motivation amongst staff to apply for assistant principal 1(AP1) as it is considered a more critical leadership position amongst the wider staff. Duignan (2006) argues that distributed leadership is not possible within a hierarchical structure. The existence of two distinct leadership positions within the middle management framework inadvertently creates a hierarchical structure that impedes the participatory and consultive nature of distributed leadership.

6.4 Accountability & Responsibility

"Thus, accountability is becoming more apparent in Irish education and Irish schools and represents the greater need for accountability called for by those outside of Ireland's schools" (Mc Namara et al., 2022). In an age of accountability, principals express concern about whether there is a functional mechanism for accountability and whether the annual review process adequately serves that purpose.

Gunter (2001) identifies distributed leadership as an emergent response to the school improvement movement with an increased element of accountability. Hallinger & Heck (2010) consider the contextual implications for school improvement in a distributed leadership model. The Department

of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 on distributed leadership aligns with the Looking at Our School (LAOS) Department of Education (DE) (2016) document for school improvement "It is a fundamental principle of the framework that, for schools to be led effectively, they must be managed effectively. Therefore, both leadership and management skillsets are considered at all times as serving the school's core work: learning and teaching" (p.7). Principals observe there appears to remain a perception of the principal as having the ultimate responsibility, and the extent of the post holder responsibility within their leadership role is vague. In certain situations, it remains unclear, for example, in a whole school inspection (Ehren et al., 2013), if there is an issue raised about an aspect of leadership under the remit of a post holder, for example, school self-evaluation coordinator is it the post holder or the principal who is accountable during an external inspection (King & Stevenson 2017). Principals mention their accountability to the Board of Management when making their annual report on the school's leadership and management posts of responsibility under the provision in Department of Education (DE) Cl003/2018. Moynihan & O Donovan (2021) believe that "the proliferation of compliance mandates and accountability regimes, emanating from the Department of Education and the Inspectorate, is constructed as a barrier to school autonomy in negotiating models of collaborative practice" (p.22).

Similarly, several participants comment on the absence of performance review skills training for principals with an ad hoc approach left to the school's discretion rather than a consistent systemic approach. Elmore (2005) notes that an accountability policy does not work when it does not consider the knowledge and skill requirements for its success. These requirements vary considerably from one setting to another. The research shows that principals do not view the end of year review meeting as an effective accountability measure; there appears to be a lack of consistency of approach in schools to this part of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Principals understand that a performance review meeting requires skills and a clear understanding of the process, yet principals are less confident about the accountability element of the circular. Under the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018, a distributed leadership model moves assistant principals away from delegated specific tasks to roles and responsibilities, including the responsibility to participate in whole school leadership; however, the accountability or measurement of this engagement appears unclear.

An emergent concern from the research is the lack of understanding about the purpose and function of the review meeting by the assistant principal 1(AP1) and assistant principal 11 (AP2) post holders due to the delicate nature of accountability and awareness of the importance of maintaining and building relationships; most principals utilise the end-of-year review meeting to provide feedback and discussion rather than a performance review for accountability. As a motivational tool for school leaders to deploy with staff, constructive feedback is an effective strategy. Lorrington & Hall (1998)

state, "within any organisation, there are formal and informal channels of communication" (p.113). Interestingly the research uncovers that some schools deploy a coaching professional development model to provide feedback and a direction for improvement. Fogarty & Pete (2007) explain that coaching in school "provides the mirror to the adult learner and reflects professionally on the various elements of performance "(p.135). Some principals had engaged in coaching for themselves, and the leadership team and those principals found this method of continuous professional development also served as an effective review mechanism on a one-to-one basis.

6.5 The Role of the Principal

The research sought to discover if the principal's role had changed within the school following the implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. From the principal's perspective, the primary role of the school is to facilitate the implementation of distributed leadership in line with the national policy under the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 within the context of their school environment. The literature on distributed leadership supports the view that the principal is central to the successful implementation of distributed leadership (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). Therefore, by its very nature, the introduction of distributed leadership changes the role of the principal within the school. Distributed leadership involves the formation of a leadership team within the school. The introduction of distributed leadership in schools emerges from the realisation among policy makers that one solo leader cannot lead and implement the ever-increasing volume of initiatives and reforms emanating from central governments.

All principals agree that the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 has changed the principal's role to varying degrees. The research on distributed leadership identifies distributed leadership as an essential component in the sustainability of principalship. The formation of leadership teams and the distribution of leadership responsibilities require a change in leadership style, a letting go, and a deepening of trust and collaboration (Duignan, 2006; Spillane, 2006). Creating a framework for distributed leadership dilutes the idea of a sole leader and strengthens collaborative leadership. The principals acknowledge the collaborative and consultative nature of the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018 with the creation of a leadership team within the school whereby the role of the principal as the figurehead who has a solution to all problems diminishes and a leader who facilitates and seeks collective consensus emerges. The research findings confirm that the role of the principal has evolved with distributed leadership, and principals welcome the concept of distributed leadership with the support of a leadership team to implement curriculum and policy initiatives to improve the learning experience for students.

The absence of an additional time allocation in the voluntary school sector emerges as an impediment to the development of distributed leadership within schools. The demands of timetabling the teaching requirements for individual post holders and the necessity to timetable leadership post holder meetings are causing tensions for principals. The issue of the time allocation features strongly as an impediment to the successful implementation of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The time issue translates into an access issue of facilitating meetings of postholders within the timetable schedule to ensure effective communication and discussion between the principal and the leadership team members within the school. Spillane (2006) describes the interactional element of distributed leadership and the investment in social capital," from a distributed perspective; it is the collective interactions among leaders, followers and their situation that is paramount" (P.4.) it transpires that if the leadership team are not meeting and communicating regularly than the vision and the effectiveness of distributed leadership is reduces considerably within the school.

The second issue of concern for principals around time is the absence of a time allowance within the school's teaching allocation for post holders in the voluntary school sector to discharge their leadership roles. Even though there is an acknowledgement that assistant principals receive an allowance, they do not have a reduced teaching timetable, unlike their counterparts in the Education and Training Board sector (ETB). In the absence of official time, principals are obliged to find time within the school allocation, which proves very difficult in some cases, and the amount of time varies from school to school. Principals indicate they are finding it increasingly difficult to facilitate time for post holders with the many demands of school initiatives. The contextual variables of practice in school influence the theory or policy text of distributed leadership (Tian et al., 2016; Liu,2020). The allocation of time varies between the school sector and between schools.

The training question features strongly among participants who identify a need to have access to leadership skills-based training for assistant principals in the school (Kavanagh, 2020; Kavanagh et al., 2021). Caldwell & Spinks (2008) emphasise the importance of "ensuring that all who are so employed are at-and remain at the forefront of knowledge and skill" (p.49). Principals assign the role and responsibility to the post holder from the school schedule; then the postholder commences the roles; principals in some schools were fortunate to be involved with some coaching and team training projects. Lipscombe et al. (2020) acknowledge that there is an "increased awareness for professional development at the school level where teachers work together to develop their knowledge and understanding within the school site "(p.373). All principals identify a need for a more accessible and structured induction training model for assistant principals either through onsite or off-site delivery.

Hamilton et al. (2018) note that "within each level, there are aspirant, newly appointed, and highly experienced leaders" (p.75), and the increasing skill, understanding and confidence requires the necessity of developing more subtle and strategic approaches to leading. The need for principals to receive ongoing support and training of a skills-based nature also emerges as an essential component for the successful implementation of distributed leadership. Hopkins and Jackson (2002), cited in Bush (2011), argue that" formal leaders need to orchestrate and nurture the space for distributed leadership to occur" (p.89). Principals mention that the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 introduces a considerable change in school leadership culture. The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) (2018) acknowledges the need for ongoing and enhanced leadership training within the school leadership framework. It suggests that a "well-constructed continuum also provides a framework for both aspiring and serving school leaders at different levels to plan their learning partway "(p.14). However, principals highlight that there is no accompanying training on distributed leadership, or the different models of theory and practice offered to school principals to assist with implementing and developing the model as a sustainable leadership practice in voluntary secondary schools. Principals who attended the seminars provided by the management advisory body for the voluntary sector (JMB) found the training helpful from a technical and procedural aspect rather than a theoretical or skills-based perspective.

Principals are satisfied with the move to a competency-based model of selection and recruitment for the leadership positions of assistant principal 1 (AP1) and assistant principal 11(AP2). However, the impact on the principal's workload when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018, such as the required procedural elements around the recruitment and appeals process and the annual review and reporting process, is identified by principals as cumbersome, bureaucratic and time consuming leading them away from other school business. Many principals mention the procedural elements of the appeals process in its current format as particularly challenging and time-consuming. A more positive disposition to the changes in the principal's workload under Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 increased with a principal's length of service, indicating perhaps that a principal with more than five years had grown more accustomed to the additional workload experienced with system change.

6.6 Conclusion

The interview respondents agree that the Department of Education (DE) CL/003/208 has moved schools closer to having a leadership structure that facilitates leadership distribution and provides the principal with more support in day-to-day leadership tasks, thereby creating an environment conducive to sustainable leadership (Brown et al. 2017). As described by Hargreaves (2003) cited in

Davies (2009), sustainable leadership is about the "impact and importance of leadership as a process and a system, not as a set of personal, trainable and generic competencies and capacities that individuals possess" (p.183).

The research findings confirm the importance of the micropolitical climate of the school when introducing change emanating at a macro-political systemic level. The content of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 is a mandatory document for all schools. Yet, the implementation is contextual to each school sector and within each sector contextual to the culture and political dynamic of the school community. The research study findings corroborate the literature presented in the literature review chapter. Understanding the process's contextual and relational aspects, knowing and understanding people, the school culture, and managing the change process is a crucial role of the principal and is central to the successful implementation of distributed leadership. The research study uncovers the importance of the motivational strategies deployed by the principals when implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. It corroborates the literature presented in the literature review chapter. The principals seek to empower and encourage staff involvement through intrinsic and extrinsic motivational approaches on an individual and collective level. The extent of distributed responsibility and accountability within the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 is evolving.

Chapter Seven will summarise the findings of this research study and the contribution of this EdD research study to the voluntary school sector. Its limitations will also be considered, including any potential flaws in the methods, the data gathering, and the analysis techniques used. The research questions explored in this study will be considered, and questions posed for further consideration. Stemming from the findings, recommendations for future research will be made relating to policy and practice.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion & Recommendations

7.1 Conclusion

"Over the past ten years, distributed leadership research conducted in post-primary schools has rarely framed the study in a given context and has not fully considered the influence of powerful factors such as school culture and national policy" (Hickey et al., 2022, p.16). In this doctoral thesis, the researcher explores the current understanding of distributed leadership outlined in national policy and its impact within the voluntary secondary school sector to gain insight into the perceptions and practices of the principals implementing distributed leadership within their school culture. In the absence of any research on the principal's experience implementing Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 in the voluntary secondary school, the research question asks; What is the experience of school principals in the implementation of distributed leadership in the voluntary secondary school as mandated in the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018? The researcher investigates the emerging themes from the literature review, questionnaires and interviews through a sequential explanatory mixed methods design using an online survey as the research instrument to collect quantitative data and semi-structured interviews as the data collection method for qualitative data gathering. The research study presents the results and analyses the findings that recognise the benefits and challenges experienced by principals in voluntary secondary schools during the implementation process of the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. The full potential of a distributed leadership model in action is currently not fully realised, and schools are at different stages of development operating within their context and resources. This study examines the experiences of secondary school principals in the voluntary secondary school sector. The findings create a significant commonality of perspectives within the contextual environments and experiences of the school principals.

- This study sheds light on the principals' perceptions concerning the recent changes to the leadership and management structure in the Irish post-primary school system. While opportunities for greater collaboration and an enhanced leadership structure within schools are acknowledged, other challenges hinder the development and sustainability of a genuine distributed leadership model.
- The research study shows that the underlying concepts of power, motivation, and accountability fundamentally impact the principal's perspective on implementing distributed leadership.

- The research findings show that the concept of micro-politics within the staffroom on distributive leadership does exist and influences the implementation process mainly in the early stage.

- The research findings show that motivation is crucial for principals during the implementation process and essential to sustaining a distributed leadership culture within the school.

- The findings confirm that accountability exists within the implementation phase for assistant principals; however, creating a structure to clarify and measure the level of accountability within a distributed leadership model is not embedded.

- Changes in education policy and practices also require attitudinal change; it is evident in this research that since the introduction of the Department of Education (DE) CL 003/2018, principals have fostered and developed a positive attitude among school staff towards a distributive leadership model.

- However, this doctoral study identifies challenges to effectively developing a sustainable distributed leadership structure in the voluntary secondary school.

7.2 Recommendations

The findings of this research correlate with the literature on distributed leadership which highlights the significant role played by the school principal in the successful embedding of distributed leadership in the school. Redmond (2016) explains, "it is now beyond argument that collaborative approaches to organisational development are, and will remain, integral to the implementation of contemporary educational policy for schools in Ireland as elsewhere" (p.28). The principal facilitates interaction and collaboration to assist each assistant principal in developing their leadership role. As interaction and collaboration enable the assistant principals to communicate more effectively, they can reflect on their leadership goals and actions (Bagwell, 2019; Gronn, 2009). This researcher recommends that school principals in the voluntary secondary school sector receive the support and assistance required to successfully implement, maintain, and develop a distributed leadership model. The recommendations listed below will aid this process:

- **Continuous Professional Development for Principals**

Nawab & Asad (2020) maintain that policymakers as educational reformers should incorporate the concept of distributed leadership in the professional development programmes designed for school leaders and teachers. The research findings identify the principal's view of a training deficit around implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018. Furthermore, King & Nihill (2017) explain that "teachers engage voluntarily in professional learning, but it is not a requirement for

career advancement, and the absence of any mandatory qualification for appointment to senior school leadership is an example of this lack of prioritisation of ongoing learning in the profession" (p.7).

A model of continuous professional development based on communities of practice could benefit school principals in developing a distributed leadership practice in their schools. The Centre for School Leadership (CSL) oversaw an initiative on collaborative leadership and management to facilitate collaboration between schools (CSL,2018b:1). Though not primarily for the development of distributed leadership, a similar model whereby principals could attend with colleagues from their region or locality as a cluster meeting in a local Education Centre, establishing a network of principals who meet once a term could develop distributed and collaborative practice. As Sugrue (2009) concluded, "for principals' sense of professionalism to thrive, there needs to be a density of provision in terms of variety, formality, and informality. More than anything else, there needs to be a policy framework that reflects this panoply of provisions that maximises the expertise of all potential providers rather than privileging some over others. Such a policy would need to be particularly attentive to prevent more 'scripted' learning from colonising the informal conversations of professionals where often 'real' learning takes place" (P384-385).

The training could consist of an outside facilitator or expert in distributed leadership theory complimented by a sharing of practice from the principals to discuss what works well and where the challenges lie. Principals could also alternate as facilitators for the sessions bringing a particular scenario for discussion or an example of distributed leadership practice in their school. Such examples might include a typical meeting agenda for a postholder meeting or an example of a review meeting. Another option would be to have an assistant principal from a local school discuss how they discharge their role, what works well in their context, and where the challenges lie. This type of continuous professional development emphasises the ongoing nature of the support and its relevance to context and practice.

Another training style that could benefit principals is the stand-alone one-day national in-service training model. The focus could be skills-based, with a question-and-answer session, delivering a specific set of skills to the principals to implement distributed leadership. An example would be workshops focused on communication within a distributed leadership model, motivating and encouraging leadership development, distributing, and not delegating, or providing a skillset to conduct a productive performance review meeting.

An alternative or complementary training model is onsite leadership team training consisting of the principal, deputy principal, and assistant principals. An external facilitator works with the school team for several sessions over a period. This training is context-specific, focusing on the school

vision and ethos and fostering an authentic, collaborative culture conducive to distributed leadership implementation and a shared understanding of school leadership in action. This type of training is also self-reflective and helps identify the team's strengths and challenges to create a sense of cohesion of purpose rather than a series of individual leaders within the school.

"Research has shown that middle leadership is more difficult without professional development" (De Nobile 2017, p.10). Induction training for newly appointed assistant principals could occur at the start of each academic year regionally for all newly appointed post holders to provide them with a baseline skillset such as time management, conflict management and communication skills. Sometimes assistant principal postholders lead other teams within the school, such as class tutors or a school self-evaluation (SSE) committee. Leading and developing a team requires team-building skills to navigate complex group dynamics. Currently, only newly appointed principals and deputy principals in the voluntary school sector receive induction training from the JMB. An online module could be available for post holders appointed during the academic year. An in-school coaching or mentoring programme to support and develop leadership skills for newly appointed assistant principals could involve another assistant principal trained in coaching. Macbeath (2005) suggests that teachers should be supported and developed to undertake a leadership position, suggesting that skills enhancement and capacity building are essential.

- **Time Allocation**

The principals in this research agree that the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 has far-reaching benefits for the school in leadership culture and school development. Despite the additional workload for principals identified in the research, the principals welcome the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 to lead and manage the school through a distributive leadership model. However, the issue of time emerges as an essential consideration. A principal cannot distribute leadership responsibilities appropriately and proportionally in a distributive manner to an assistant principal if there is insufficient time for the post holder to perform the role reasonably. The findings show that a principal, though willing, cannot devolve a leadership role to an assistant principal in its entirety because the principal or deputy principal often must undertake elements of a post holder's role due to the whole teaching timetable of the post holder.

The findings also show that principals are aware of holding regular leadership team meetings on strategic whole school issues to create a collaborative leadership culture and effective communication. Yet, the lack of time creates many challenges for principals in the voluntary school sector. It is recommended from this research study that schools in the voluntary school sector receive a time allowance for assistant principals in the allocation received from the Department of Education

(DE). Notwithstanding any additional time, allowance, and meetings with the entire team of post holders should occur at least once a term; where this has occurred, the principal reported a very positive effect**.**

- **Generic Post Title**

Another welcome development is the publication of the Department of Education (DE)CL0023/2021, which increased the number of assistant principal positions in post-primary schools relative to student enrolment numbers. However, an interesting finding in this research study was the dichotomy in most schools between the post of assistant principal 1 (AP1) and assistant principal 11(AP2) positions. Policy writers could consider removing the numbers 1 & 11 in the policy document to address the perceived power imbalance with an alternative such as assistant principal and deputy assistant principal. Alternatively, future policy initiatives on leadership could remove this distinction by creating assistant leadership posts without the associated numbers and discontinuing the leadership posts division into assistant principal 11 posts (AP2). However, the school could still retain the number of posts equal to its entitlement; for example, a school currently with six AP 1s and six AP 2s could have nine assistant principals (AP) posts with an equal salary allowance and time allocation, which would further enhance a sense of equality among the school leadership team.

7.3 Relevance of the Research

The area of distributed leadership as a national approach to school leadership is a recent development. The Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018 seeks to formalise a distributed leadership model within Irish post-primary schools; however, the Department of Education circular document CL003/2018 omits school principals' support to ensure a successful implementation of distributed leadership. This research fills a gap in the professional field on the perspective of principals in the voluntary school sector on their experience implementing the Department of Education (DE) CL003/2018.

7.4 Limitations of the Research

The research study relied solely on the principal voice as its primary source of information. The study provides a snapshot of school principals in a voluntary school setting during a set period in 2021, and all the 365 voluntary school principals received the online questionnaire. A response rate of 16.5% informed the findings, which ten voluntary secondary school principals subsequently validated through a semi-structured interview. This researcher proposes that the findings of this

mixed methods research approach are generalisable to all principals in this country's voluntary secondary school sector. In the Education and Training Board (ETB), schools and the Community Comprehensive Schools (AMCSS), the school principal receives a timetabling allocation which translates into a time allowance for assistant principal 1 (AP1) post holders; the sectors also receive different levels of capitation funding and operate under different governance procedures. In that regard, the findings of this research study cannot be considered generalisable to those sectors. In Ireland, assistant principal roles vary in nature, and role responsibility to those of the department head or subject leader role found in other jurisdictions. The role of the voluntary secondary school principals also differs in structure and responsibility to school principals in other countries. Therefore, the finding of this research study is not generalisable to other countries.

The human tone is absent from the interview transcripts, and therefore the interpretation of the reader may be different to that intended by the interviewee; however, this is an unavoidable limitation of the written word. Finally, the researcher is conscious of her biases as a researcher and a voluntary secondary school principal; it is, therefore, a matter of acknowledgement that the researcher's professional experience could potentially influence the interpretations of the data.

7.5 Recommendations for Further Research

This researcher recommends the following areas of research that may assist in gaining an improved understanding of the implementation of distributed leadership in Irish post-primary schools in the voluntary secondary school sector.

1. A follow-up study in three years to assess the principal's perspective on the level of implementation of the Department of Education (DE)CL003/2018 requirements in the voluntary school sector. Redmond (2016) suggests, "specifically our understanding of the alignment between the leader as a person and leadership as a process could be enriched by deeper explorations of mean-making and motivation through a wider range of lenses" (p.134).

2. A pilot study could investigate the experience of school principals in the voluntary school sector who have completed any continuous professional development in distributed leadership to assess the impact of training on their ability to embed a distributed leadership framework within their school culture.

3. The challenge of time reported in this study raises a question regarding the ability of school principals to communicate and engage with assistant principals in a meaningful and productive manner within the current timetable allocation. The lack of time also impacts how much leadership responsibility a principal can distribute to a post holder without additional

time for the post holder to discharge their leadership role within the school. Therefore, a pilot study into how effective additional time would be and how to best utilise the time allowance in the voluntary school sector could establish best practice guidelines for the sector.

7.6 Using this Research

This thesis explores the implementation of a Department of Education (DE) policy document CL003/2018 by school principals in the voluntary secondary school sector.

The research findings highlight the importance of the principal in the implementation process and the significant role played by the school principal in embedding a distributive leadership practice in the school culture. The research report could serve as a basis for discussion among school leaders focusing on their role in implementing the Department of Education (DE) policy CL003/2018. The voluntary secondary school management body, the JMB, the school Trustees and the CSL under the remit of the Department of Education could use the findings to inform their work with school leaders around distributed leadership.

From a policy perspective in the future for the Department of Education (DE) and the stakeholders, this research could consider the findings to develop the infrastructures and supports required to achieve an effective and sustainable model of distributed leadership within the voluntary school sector. To conclude, the philosophy of Popper cited by Magee (1984), "nothing that is not a proposal can ever be put into practice. So, what matters in politics or in science, is not the analysis of concepts but the critical discussion of theories, and their subjection to the tests of experience" (p.107).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Plain Language Statement

THE STUDY

"Follow the Leader": Implementing a Distributed Leadership Model. The Principals Perspective in Irish Voluntary Secondary Schools". This study is being undertaken by Ms Maree O'Rourke to fulfil the Doctor of Education programme (Ed. D) requirements in Dublin City University (DCU) Institute of Education. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Shivaun O' Brien of the DCU Institute of Education. The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to explore the experience of school principals in the voluntary post-primary school sector implementing a distributed leadership model as mandated in the Department of Education and Skills CL 003/2018. The research has been granted approval by the Ethics & Research committee in Dublin University (DCU).

WHAT IS REQUIRED FROM PARTICIPANTS?

This is the first of a two-phase, mixed-methods study. Should you choose to participate in this phase, you will be asked a series of open and closed questions in the following survey. This should take no longer than 20 minutes to complete.

All responses are anonymous; If you are willing to engage in a follow-up interview you will be required to provide your contact details to the researcher who may contact you later. This will be the second phase of the study. If you choose to participate in the follow-up interview, this will take around 45 minutes.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of respondents is protected within the limitations of the law. Your responses will be treated confidentially if you choose to participate, and no individual will be identifiable in reporting findings. If you choose to participate in the follow-up interviews, all identifying details (name, work location, etc.) will be removed prior to publication. While personal data remains confidential, there is some risk that the programme itself (the Doctor of Education) and the institution (Dublin City University) may be identifiable to a reader. This is because the researcher will be submitting the thesis for consideration for the same award at the same institution.

HOW WILL DATA BE USED?

Your data and the data from other participants will be used to publish the findings in a thesis to be submitted for the award of Doctor of Education. On successful completion of the award, the thesis will be published online via DCU's Open Access Repository (DORAS. www.doras.dcu.ie). The findings of the study may also be published in academic articles or presented at conferences. In all instances, no identifying personal information will be used in these publications/presentations.

HANDING OF PERSONAL DATA – GDPR COMPLIANCE

The data controller for the study is the researcher, Ms Maree O' Rourke. If you have any queries regarding your personal data, or any other aspect of the study, I can be contacted at: maree.orourke3@mail.dcu.ie.

If you have any concerns regarding your personal data, you can contact the DCU Data Protection Officer, Mr. Martin Ward, at data.protection@dcu.ie.

The data controller will retain any data collected and stored electronically on an encrypted laptop, in a password-protected computer file. Data may be shared with the supervisors for the purposes of validating the findings; however, all identifiers will be removed before sharing the data. The data will be retained for a maximum of five years.

The Data Protection Acts, 1988 and 2003, the Data Protection Bill of 2018, and the 2016 GDPR provide a right to access by an individual data subject to personal information held. If a participant wishes to access their data, they should contact the Dublin City University (DCU) Data Protection Unit

A data subject may lodge a complaint with the Irish Data Protection Commission info@dataprotection.ie

Giving Informed Consent

This is a voluntary study, and you may choose to withdraw from the research study at any point. However, due to the anonymous nature of the survey, it may not be possible to withdraw your data once the survey has been completed and submitted. If you wish to participate, you must give informed consent by completing the informed consent section at the start of the online survey. Should you choose to participate in the follow-up interview, you will be required to give informed consent again before the interview commencing.

RESEARCHER DISCLOSURE

The researcher, Ms Maree O' Rourke is a student on the Doctor of Education programme at DCU and the principal of a post-primary school. I am undertaking this research as a student to satisfy the requirements of the award sought. If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary

DCU Research Ethics Committee

c/o Research and Innovation Support

Dublin City University, Dublin 9

rec@dcu.ie

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Research Study Title

Follow the Leader": Implementing a Distributed Leadership Model. The Principals Perspective in Irish Voluntary Secondary Schools". This study is being undertaken by Ms Maree O'Rourke to fulfil the Doctor of Education programme requirements in Dublin City University (DCU) Institute of Education.

Clarification of the purpose of the research

The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr Shivaun O' Brien of the DCU Institute of Education. The purpose of this mixed-methods study is to explore the experience of school principals in the voluntary post-primary school sector implementing a distributed leadership model as mandated in the Department of Education and Skills CL 003/2018. The research has been granted approval by the Ethics & Research committee in Dublin University (DCU) of requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

Participation in a semi-structured interview with audio taping.

Participant – please complete the following (Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me)   Yes/No

I understand the information provided   Yes/No

I understand the information provided in relation to data protection   Yes/No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study   Yes/No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions   Yes/No

I am aware that my interview will be audiotaped   Yes/No

I confirm that my involvement in the Research Study is voluntary   Yes/No

I understand that I may withdraw from the Research Study at any point.   Yes/No

I understand the arrangements to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations   Yes/No

I have received information regarding the retention / disposal of data   Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

     Participants Signature:

     Name in Block Capitals:

     Date:

Appendix C: Survey Questionnaire

Principals' Survey Questionnaire

The research is part of a thesis for a Doctoral programme (Ed. D). The data controller for the study is the researcher Ms. Maree O' Rourke. Your data and the data of other participants will be used to publish the findings in a thesis submitted to Dublin City University (DCU) for the award of Doctor of Education. This research has received ethics approval from the Ethics & Research Committee in Dublin City University (DCU).

I am interested in understanding the principal's perspective on implementing DES CL003/2018. You will be asked to answer some questions about it. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential.

The study should take you around fifteen minutes to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, as outlined in the Plain Language statement. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail me at maree.orourke3@mail.dcu.ie

By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that (1) your participation in the study is voluntary, (2) you are 18 years of age, (3) you have read the Plain Language Statement and (4) understand the information provided in relation to Data Protection.

Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

o   I consent, begin the study

o   I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Q2 How many years have you held the role of principal?

o   Less than 5 years

o   Between 5-10 years

o   10 years or more

Q3 To what extent do you think DE Cl003/2018 has improved the middle management structure in Voluntary Secondary Schools?

o   No Change

o   Moderate Change

o   Extensive Change

Q4 What is the size of your school?

o   Under 500 students

o   500-900 students

o   Over 900 students

Q5 Please state your level of agreement

School Principals are responsible for the implementation of CL003/2018

Strongly Agree (1) Somewhat agree (2) Neither agree nor disagree (3)
Somewhat disagree (4) Strongly disagree (5)

Q6 How many Assistant Principal positions (AP1 & AP2) are in your school for 2021/2022?

_____

Q7 In your experience as a principal how did you motivate middle leaders to engage in a distributed leadership framework within the school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q8 In your opinion does micro-politics in the staff room influence teacher engagement in a Distributed Leadership Model?

o   Yes

o   Maybe

o   No

Q9 How does this micro-political influence in the staff room impact the process?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q10 Which of the implementation stages of CL003/2018 listed presented challenges

☐   Staff Consultation on Priority Areas & BOM Approval

☐   Allocation & Reallocation of Roles and Responsibilities

☐   Biennial Review Process

☐   None of the above

Q11 DESCL003/2018 introduced shared responsibility and accountability for leadership and management in post-primary schools?

o   Strongly disagree

o   Somewhat disagree

o   Neither agree nor disagree

o   Somewhat agree

o   Strongly agree

Q12 How has DE CL003/2018 impacted on the role of the principal within the school leadership framework?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Q13 The Implementation of CL003/2018 has created an effective model of Distributed Leadership within your school

o   Strongly agree

o   Somewhat agree

o   Neither agree nor disagree

o   Somewhat disagree

o   Strongly disagree

Q14 In your opinion would CPD training and support assist school principals to develop and sustain an effective Distributed Leadership model in Voluntary Secondary Schools

o   Yes

o   Maybe

o   No

Q15 Any Further Comment

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix D: Interview Questions

The Principals Perspective

The semi-structured interview approach allows for a conversation-style interview on the topics, and the questions are a guide to structure the conversation.

Opening Question

Confirm consent and context- (Size of school- single-sex or mixed- number of years a principal)

Describe your experience as a principal leading the post of responsibility change process?

Power & Politics

During the consultation phase, or the biennial review stage, were you aware of different views and opinions amongst staff groupings on distributed leadership? How does the micro-politics of the staffroom influence the process?

As principal, do you feel a power imbalance within the distributed leadership model between the principal, deputy principal, assistant principal 1 & 2, non-post leaders or wider staff?

Motivation

What strategies have you used to harness individual teachers' motivation into whole-school leadership development?

Leadership post holders under DES CL003/2018 receive remuneration. Do you think this affects leadership development amongst non-post holders?

Accountability and Responsibility

In your opinion, does the revised leadership structure facilitate distributed leadership, or is it delegation of roles and responsibilities?

In your view, are middle leaders accountable for their leadership and management roles, or does the principal remain responsible? What was your experience of feedback and review provided for under the annual review process in DES CL 003/2018?

Perspective

Do you think distributed leadership has improved the leadership structure in the school? Have you noticed changes within your role?

What changes, additions, or amendments would you recommend for future leadership development policy in the post-primary sector?

What supports and training do you feel would assist you as a principal in leading and developing distributed leadership in your school?

Any further comment?

Appendix E: Sample Interview Transcript

Interviewer questions are in bold, and the respondent is non-bold

Interview Principal Nine (P.9)

Good afternoon and thank you so much for agreeing to participate in the interview about the principal's perspective on Distributed Leadership. Before we begin, could you confirm that you received by email the Plain Language Statement and the Informed Consent Form and that you are aware that I am audio recording the interview?

I can confirm that. That is no problem.

Great, thank you very much. So, we might just begin if you could tell me the size of your school, how long you have been principal here, and the number of post holders you have.

So, the school has 230 students. I have been principal here for ten years. This is my tenth year, and I was deputy for two years before that. We have twenty-nine staff in total. Twenty-two teachers, seven SNAs and I have three AP1 positions, four AP2s, and a programme coordinator.

Brilliant, thanks a million. As you are principal leading the process of Distributed Leadership under circular 003/2018, either during the consultation phase or during the bi-annual review phase when you were working with staff, were you aware of any different opinions and views about the process of changing the structure and how did that dynamic and the politics of the staffroom work out around the whole process?

There was definitely a change, but I think a lot of it was around that there was a lack of understanding among staff members about the change.

Okay.

While we received some support and preparation from the JMB, a lot of the staff members didn't seem to have that from their union or did not seem to have a full understanding of it anyway; and that lack of understanding led to a little bit of concern and issues of what exactly was going to take place and what this review was going to be and how their terms and conditions might change. In my case, I think a lot of people turned to me to give them guidance on what was going to happen, so I had to be careful about what I was going to say on one hand because I didn't want to commit to something or set out what might happen or that our route might take a slightly different road. But just to give people an overview, I remember at a staff meeting taking some time to go through the process with everybody, post holders and non-post holders and tried to explain what was happening and why it would happen. One of the issues was there is a two-year review. A lot of people were concerned about it and thought they were going to be changing jobs every two years or what was set for the role would change drastically every two years. That was one of the

big concerns. This has come from a position where several staff had the same post for a number of long years.

Which would be common?

So, that was the kind of key factor. We were going through a change process and staff change as well. So, we were coming to a cycle where many retirements were happening around that time or in the run-up to that time. So, posts were becoming available, and some changes were coming with that anyway, so it was using those changes to make modifications already. So, it was not that everything was set in stone beforehand; we had some changes but not as a kind of a whole staff review. That hasn't happened yet.

Thank you. In relation to when the list was drawn up of the roles and responsibilities, and you assigned the roles to the post holders who would have been current at the time, did you find any issues around that, or how did you manage that process?

To be honest, I suppose it was a little bit of the negotiating skills. It was trying to work out who we had, what we had and what we needed and then trying to work it all out. One of the areas in particular that we had to work out around was having a year head system, somebody for every year. It just wasn't viable as a school, and it wasn't viable with the number of posts that we had. We had eight, including the programme coordinators, so it is not viable to have six of them taken up as year heads. I know some schools have done, say, year head plus or something else, but what I wanted to get to was senior year head and a junior year head. That is where I wanted to go. My first go was we got a year head for first second, a year head for third, fourth, fifth and sixth. So, there was a bit of negotiating and horse trading to get to where I wanted it to go. Now, in the second round around it, I got to where I wanted to get to. There was definitely more negotiating and discussion around it, and not having gone through the first-time years ago; this is kind of a new experience for me.

Coming onto that experience, you mentioned that the JMB had provided some training for principals, and my understanding of that would have been that it was quite a lot around the structure of the circular and how you advertise, how you interview, how you review. There wasn't anything on that piece you have just spoken about how you changed the mindset or convinced people to move from what they are currently doing into something else. That whole sort of motivation and negotiation skills. Firstly, do you think that something like that would have been or would be useful for principals and secondly, how did you find it to motivate people who hadn't been interested in leadership before to kind of step up now and to look at these posts?

The circular is very functional and technical, and this is what you do when and how you go about it, but the dealing with the people part isn't in it. You are really relying on your social capital built up with people that you have looked after somewhere along the way, and you are looking for them to give you a little bit back, and you are saying, "I can give you this if you give me that." I would have come at it from where I wanted to get to and then try and go in a little higher and then work back to where we can go, but you are relying on the capital you have built up with people. You are also relying on the newer teachers, the younger teachers looking at this. They are looking at stuff out of time and practices that just don't make sense to them when they come in from college. They are in a

place two or three years and they are looking at this going this is nonsense. How is this system still in place?

The people who are in AP1s and AP2s are paid to carry out these roles of responsibility in the school. Do you find that a positive or a negative when you are trying to engage non-post holders to take up leadership initiatives or to work outside of their teaching remit?

To be honest, it probably depends on the person. Some people say they are not being paid, and they are not doing it. Now, I would have one or two like that, not many. I think the majority would look at this and think, okay, "look, I do something. I get some experience. I put it on my application form the next time it comes up." That is how I would have framed it in Looking at the Looking at Our Schools application is based on competence skills. You need to have something to say, and you need to be able to talk about it at the interview. Not as bluntly as that, but that is the basis of what I would have said to them. You know, "don't come with your arms swinging. You have to come having done something, and it is not about what I will do, you are talking about what was done." That was a kind of game-changer in that it is not if I get the post for looking after lockers, I will do Z, Y, Z. You are coming having done something and try to get a sense that you are coming from a whole school perspective. What are you doing that benefits the school? Maybe not every student in the school but just a little thing they are doing for themselves and a couple of students you are interested in. What are they doing that benefits the school?

The circular looks at moving people from a task focussed position into a whole school mindset around leadership. Within the AP1s and the AP2s, do you think there is a power imbalance there, or do they all see themselves as part of the leadership and management team?

I would have said yes, there was an imbalance and that the AP2s were probably reluctant to step up and maybe take a more leadership role because they feel that the AP1s should be doing that, and that is their role. We were part of a ----programme last year with ---- and --- -------- and a leadership programme for DEIS Schools so for middle leaders in DEIS schools. I think the idea is that they are going to roll it out to other schools, but it was a kind of a pilot project with us. It was brilliant. It was a slow burner, and I was trying to get people to see that it was half four to half five on a xxxxx, and nobody wanted to stay around it. It was on Zoom, so it gave some people some flexibility. After a couple of sessions with it, they started getting a sense of a team and a sense of ownership and being given the freedom to take leadership in the school and that it was okay for them to take on something, do something. Now, I would always have encouraged people to do it, but I think we organised to meet as a group which we could never do before timetable-wise. Everyone agreed to stay back. We have a half-day on a xxxxx so once every four or every five weeks we stay back for an hour that day from 1 to 2 pm to meet as a group because timetable wise, I can't manage it, and that was a big step. So, that really worked as getting us in a room and trying to start developing as a team, which we hadn't done before. I would have met very regularly with the AP1s, and we would have met together, I was never really meeting with the AP2s. It was never feasible to get everybody together.

That comes on, I suppose to the time perspectives, how do you find managing the time and you have alluded it there about the meetings, but even within the post holders themselves from the time perspective of doing it, how does that work, or do you feel that is an issue?

It is an issue, and even there is a lack of clarity of what time is actually required. I know people have kind of worked it out. It is roughly six hours a week for the AP1s and maybe two or three hours. Some say eight and four, but there is a lack of clarity on the commitment exactly. What exactly are people required to do, and then you end up with people who do loads, much more than they would be expected to do, and others do less, which is very hard to gauge. I know you meet people, and then you have the end-of-year review, but different posts have different time requirements and different times of the year, so it is very hard overall to get a sense that somebody is working as hard as someone else. The hard workers will work hard, and the work dodgers will dodge as best they can. It is very hard for a manager to get a handle on that sometimes as to get a handle on what somebody is doing or not doing.

That leads me on to the other area around the whole sort of accountability and responsibility, so if we look at Distributed Leadership, as you will know, in its pure sense, they say it is not delegation, that is it somebody taking ownership and responsibility for an area, and that means taking complete responsibility for that. In your experience as a principal, have you seen that work? How much accountability and responsibility do people take, or how much comes back to you as the principal to look at, or do you just oversee it or manage it?

I think a lot of the accountability and responsibility comes back to me or whoever is the principal in whatever school because you have to report back to the board. So, the oversight does come back here. Again, it depends; a lot of this is relationship-based. You know how good your relationship is with each individual person. If it is a good relationship and you can have a good frank open discussion, and people are generally on your side and willing to work at what we are trying to achieve, then it works really well. If somebody is pulling against you or at best, complacency and not too bothered, then it is a bit of work and a bit of an effort on my part to try and pull it out and try and pull them along. There is not a lot of accountability on their part, really. There is the end-of-year review to the board. Look, they put in wonderful stuff that they did, X, Y and Z all year, and that is great. I might say to the board that so and so did great. So and so, not that much, but unless it is that bad that you are going to take a disciplinary process against them, but no one wants to go down that road, the board aren't really going to do anything. It would want to be horrific to get to that point, and generally, it is not. So, for the underperforming and even the slightly below average, there is not a lot of accountability. Say, the really poor; you might have something where you can start or threaten a process on somebody for doing nothing. That is difficult. It is long, and nobody really wants to get on that road, but for the ones who are a bit below average, there is not an awful lot of power over them other than trying to coax and cajole them and give them a nudge in the right direction.

Do you find that staff will go to post holders with that area of responsibility for issues around that, or would they still come to you?

I think it is getting better that they will go to that person, but I think that some of that depends on the clarity of the role in the roles of responsibilities and what exactly are they responsible for. I think staff members like that kind of clarity. I know some of it what we put in is a little woolly around leadership, So some people are not quite sure who is responsible for something, but if they know who is responsible, they are generally quite happy to go to that person first. We have done a bit of work on that recently with staff going through each post, the role, and the responsibility and what exactly it entails to make sure everybody does know, but that takes a bit of time and effort as well to make sure the staff are aware of it.

Concerning your own role as a principal, have you noticed a change in your role since the circular came in? How has it impacted, or has it impacted, how you do your job?

Time-wise, probably not. I don't see it time-wise, but I do see that there are more people now in the building willing to take on a leadership role. I am certainly encouraging that and talking about it a lot more and looking for them to leave whatever activity it is for them to take something, run with it, check in on me, and seek whatever permission for it to start, but basically, if they are going to do something, it is their gig and go and do it right and fix up everything at the end, and I should only get called in if there is a problem or to congratulate them at the end effectively. That is what I am trying to get sorted.

So, do you feel you have support for this?

The younger teachers who are new to the post are very much running with that. Some of the older ones who are used to that kind of task-based would be asking along the way, is this okay, is that okay, am I doing this right? I think the newer ones, once they have been given the freedom to go and do something, they are quite willing to take it on and run with it so it might be a generalisation shift there.

Do you feel you have more support within the school structure, and leadership structure than you would have had previously?

Yes, but I don't know if that is all down to the new post structure. I think in my particular context with a change of staff in the last number of years. I have employed nineteen of them in the last number of years. I think that will work with me.

So, it is more to do with the relationships within the building rather than the actual circular?

I would feel that yes. It may be giving me the language to talk about leadership more, but on a practical level, a year head is still a year head, and they still have to look after the year group. I think it has changed the language of leadership. It has allowed us to develop a kind of a leadership team approach, but I have also got a number of new people in positions in the last two or three years with a lot of energy as well, which I think has made a difference.

Do you think ongoing training for people in the areas you mentioned, like when you came together training people and skills around leadership and changing what whole-school leadership means, will be helpful?

Yes, absolutely. I think we are giving people an application form about competencies. We are asking them to fill it in. We are interviewing them, but really, there is no structure to put that on really. I know we talk about looking at our schools at staff meetings and JCT and all sorts of stuff, but really, it is not leadership training. I think that is a gap we need to address for AP1s and AP2s. It isn't really there, and it is kind of relying on the school culture, the principals, and the deputy principals to put some shape on it and a bit of guidance for people. In every school, you are going to have the principal or deputy or whoever might be helping, an AP1 or AP2; they are going to have varying interests. They might be more interested in one aspect than another and more interested in sitting down with someone and helping leadership somewhere else, so you don't get consistency across the board then as to what leadership in a school is.

You have answered this question, but if you were involved in writing the next circular, I suppose, on leadership, what would you be looking for as a principal? What would you want to see so that you could build capacity and develop leadership within your school?

On the technical aspects, I think more clarity around what is required of each level, AP1 and AP2 timewise, outside school, inside the school, that sort of stuff. I think the detail that is lacking it, s left a bit woolly, but to some extent, it has to get its own context; what I might see as an AP1 role or what we might see here as an AP1 role might be totally different to somewhere of a similar size and they might have a totally different perspective on what would be required or what is appropriate for them to do. I think a little bit more guidance on that, even template suggestions, and then you can work around that in your own context. I think it is left a little vague. I might have an idea, and my staff might have a very different idea, and the school down the road might have very different ideas. What you don't want is that there is a fight over something that there doesn't need to be a fight over. I think a little more structure on appropriate work on appropriate levels would be good.

Perfect. As you say, samples or templates or maybe even sharing ideas between schools as to what different schools would do. We have come to an end, so unless you have any further comments in general around your experience of distributing leadership within your school.

No.

Thank you so much. I am just going to stop the recording now.