SYSTEM LEADERSHIP IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA.

by

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Doctor of Philosophy.

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The University of Melbourne
Abstract

System leadership has emerged as a concept in work on educational leadership in recent years but is a concept with little empirical foundation. This research examines system leadership in the context of the jurisdiction of Victoria, Australia. The research finds that system leadership does exist in Victoria, but, significantly, that it does not manifest in ways anticipated in current literature and that school principals do not exhibit system leadership as a result of systemic structures and operations. Three research questions are posed:

1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian education system and, if present, how is it manifested?
2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?
3. To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

The research draws on interviews with three classes of leader (seven senior managers, thirteen Regional Network Leaders and eighteen principals). Using qualitative methods the research finds that system leadership is a feature of the Victorian education system and that operational relationships between leaders in Victoria support the achievement of DEECD policy priorities. The research finds little evidence of, although great potential for, school improvement resulting from system leadership.

The research exposes a new and interconnective leadership role in Victoria operating between the DEECD and schools, the Regional Network Leader, and considers how these roles relate to promoting system leadership, particularly in the context of creating adaptive public policy and environments conducive to successful governance in post-industrial economies. A definition of system leadership is established and tested alongside a review of literature pertinent to the area of study.
Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

- The thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD
- Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
- The thesis is fewer than 100 000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

..............................

Sean Butler
Acknowledgements

Many people have assisted me along the way as colleagues and friends. Dr Lawrie Drysdale and Dr David Gurr took on the task of supervising a student who sought a light touch and I thank them for keeping an eye on this project from its inception to conclusion and for their understanding and flexibility. Others including Dr David Hopkins, Tom Bentley and Judy Petch gave me time to discuss my ideas as I developed the concept for this research and this assistance was invaluable. Colleagues Bronwyn Hinz and Paul Gilby were co-presenters at the AARE conference and I am grateful for their work.

This work would not have been possible without the contribution of many school principals and other leaders within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria. I am grateful for the time people gave, their forthrightness and their passion for education.

For proofreading and other assistance I am grateful to Tian Bisak and my parents, Nick Butler and Robyn Hunter without whom there would be many more typing errors and other flaws.

And, finally my partner Katie and our children Beth and Nicola who have always been a welcome distraction and great support for me, thank-you.
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List of Abbreviations

ACARA  Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
CEO     Catholic Education Office
CGT     Classical Grounded Theory
DEECD   Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
DET     Department of Education and Training
FCAL    Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership
GT      Grounded Theory
NAPLAN  National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy
NMR     Northern Metropolitan Region
OECD    Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OCPC    Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination
OGSE    Office for Government School Education
PISA    Programme for International Student Assessment
RNL     Regional Network Leader
SGT     Strausian Grounded Theory
VCAA    Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
VCAL    Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE     Victorian Certificate of Education
VET     Vocational Education and Training

Referencing style

This work uses APA (American Psychological Association) 6th edition referencing.
Chapter 1: Introduction and Context

Statement of the Problem
System leadership is an emergent concept: a concept in search of a definition. In the process of emergence it is to be expected that the meaning of the concept will be unclear and contested. To date, little high quality empirical research has been undertaken into the concept and much of the writing on the topic stems from small-scale investigations of high-performing principals conducted through organisations such as the U.K.'s National College of School Leadership (Ballantyne, Jackson, Temperley, Jopling and Lieberman, 2006).

System leadership has great potential, on a conceptual level, to bring together leadership theories and system theories. However, it is not clear in existing literature and research that system leadership exists as a category of leadership. If and when system leadership is identified how it is framed is of significance.

Purpose of This Study
To investigate the concept of system leadership in a high performing system to determine:

• What system leadership is and to what extent it exists in the system studied.
• What system leadership looks like in the context of operational relationships that are intended to carry out government policy.
• If and how system leadership works in practice.

Research Questions and Methodology
Three questions were constructed to frame the research project that would occur within the Victorian jurisdiction.

1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?
2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?
3. To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?
The research undertaken is qualitative in nature and is primarily based on interviews with personnel employed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Victoria in leadership roles. Those interviewed included the Secretary (the most senior non-political office in the system) and six other senior managers, thirteen Regional Network Leaders and eighteen principals. Within the qualitative approach, grounded theory was used to undertake research and analyze data. This is discussed more fully in the methodology chapter.

**Significance of this study:**
In highly developed, media exposed capitalist nations much is made of the ‘new’ economy and its attendant effects on society and social interaction. One suggestion is that “system leadership” might enable education systems to change and adapt to the new economy. However, it may be that system leadership is a refinement of linear industrial models of management rather than a new and dynamic post-industrial model (Erkman and Ramaswamy, 2006, p28-43; Green and Randles, 2006, p11).

One of the many problems that emerge in examining system leadership is how leaders control, negate or negotiate conflicting interests in a system. Indeed, the very notion of a system leadership model in which actors behave in accordance with a collective interest can itself be problematical (House, Javidan, Hinges and Dorfman, 2002). Can we assume that self interest and collective interest will align? In the fall out of the 2008-9 Global Financial Crisis we have seen some bewilderment as to the failings of ‘counter-party surveillance’\(^1\) when it was assumed that collective interest and self-interest would align to protect the interests of investors. Alan Greenspan, former chairman of the US Federal Reserve was quoted in *The Guardian* newspaper (Clark and Treanor, 2008, no page), indicating that “those of us who

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\(^1\) In a financial transaction the buyer and seller are counter-parties. The concept of counter-party surveillance is that the buyer and seller evaluate the risk of the transaction and the probity of their counter-party. Counter-party surveillance would suppose, for example, that in a transaction of debt sold between two financial institutions that the surveillance of either party should identify any risks to investors in the institution. Counter-party surveillance would, thereby, provide a mechanism to protect investors and the broader economy from harmful trading interactions.
have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholder’s equity ... are in a state of shocked disbelief.” Greenspan was later quoted by a Reuters journalist (Goldstein, 2008, no page) saying, “I made a mistake in presuming that the self interest of organisations, specifically banks, were such that they were best capable of protecting their own shareholders and their equity...” The idea Greenspan alerts us to assumes that organizational self-interest achieves collective-interest. Noel Pearson (2009, p10) described this belief in an organizational self-interest as an “anthropomorphic fallacy.” Pearson (2009, p10) argued, “the self-interest of organisations is merely the expression of the range of human interests contained within the organization.” These discussions have implications for the idea of system leadership, which is partly premised, particularly in literature around schooling (Caldwell, 2011; Collarbone and West-Burnham, 2008; Hargreaves, 2007; Hopkins, 2007, 2008; Hopkins, Higham and Matthews 2009), on a notion of a responsibility toward the system.

The unity or disunity of system and individual interests is of critical concern when examining the potential for ‘system leadership’ when it is certain that individual schools can, and will, experience success and failure in widely different patterns throughout a school system. As Fullan observed in 1998, “we have many more examples around the world of individual schools becoming successful (for a time at least), but only a few examples of entire school districts becoming successful” (p6). He went on to say that “achieving larger scale reform is the new agenda” (1998, p6). Fullan’s point brings to the forefront the much-debated question of the utility of competition and cooperation that is explored in this research.

This research provides insight into whether system leadership exists as a type of leadership or whether it is the application of known leadership styles and behaviors in a system context. As such it provides direction for future researchers seeking to understand the relationship between leadership and system functions.

This research focuses on the ‘real-world’ investigation of leadership in systems. Encouragingly, O’Leary (2005, p6) contends that; “There is good reason why so many people are interested in conducting research into real-world problems. And
that’s because the findings, results and conclusions can lead to recommendations, genuine change, great opportunities and real problem solving.” While we focus on the field of education in this research, the term ‘school professional’ could easily be translated into ‘health professionals’, ‘front-line managers’ or positional terminology from other industries and thus this research might be transposable to alternate systems.

**The Jurisdiction of Victoria, Australia.**
The focus for this research will be the jurisdiction of Victoria, Australia. More specifically, we will focus on the government school system operating within this jurisdiction. Victoria is one of the largest education jurisdictions in the OECD behind the United Kingdom, districts in New York, Los Angeles and Chicago and the neighboring Australian state of New South Wales. Australia has two tiers of government that are responsible to some extent for education; first, the Federal or Commonwealth Government and second, the State and Territory Governments. The Australian constitution (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1900) enacted at federation in 1901 makes no mention of education and in constitutional terms legislative power for education resides with the States. Unlike many federations or federal systems of government, the Australian federation is largely artificial in political science terms in that the lines of demarcation between states are to some extent arbitrary and a result of the invasion and colonization by British Europeans in distinct geographic areas. Each of these early British colonies had a singular dominant ethnicity (Anglo-Celtic-European) and singular dominant religious ideology (Christianity). These invasions occupied land held by indigenous Australians and, as a result of the great distance between the colonies, evolved to some extent autonomously between the first colony established in 1788 and federation of the colonies into the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901. In contradistinction to many federations, Australia’s States are not and never were demarcated on religious or ethnic lines and the boundaries between states do not reflect in any way the national or linguistic boundaries of the many pre-existing indigenous nations.
The Australian constitution (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 1900) grants the Federal government authority to legislate trade, the military, finance and the legal system amongst other things while education remains the purview of the states and each state evolved its own distinct education system. Despite this constitutional history, the financial power of the federal government and its ability to tie funding from federal taxation to the attainment of particular objectives has, particularly in more recent times, enabled the federal government, through its Ministry of Education, to establish national educational goals such as the planned National Curriculum. The Federal government funds non-Government schools (including Catholic and Private schools) to a greater extent than they do state schools (Productivity Commission, 2011, Sec4:p5). Each State in Australia remains its own educational jurisdiction with different curricula, funding, regulations, organizational structures, leaving certificates, teacher accreditations and employment arrangements for teachers. Across Australia in 2009, the most recent period for which figures are available at the time of writing, 71.4% of all schools are State schools (Productivity Commission, 2011, Sec4:P8) and 65.8% of all equivalent full time enrolments in primary and secondary schools attend state schools nationally (Productivity Commission, 2011, Sec4:P9).

The Victorian education system can be divided into three sections: First, state school education provided and funded by the State government and administered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD); second, Catholic school education operating across Victorian Diocese and the Archdiocese of Melbourne, administered by the Catholic Education Office (CEO) and funded by the Church, Catholic religious orders, federal and state government (Catholic Education Office Melbourne, 2009, p12-16) and through compulsory fees ranging from a basic annual tuition fee for a Year 12 student at Xavier College in Kew of $19,448 (Xavier College, 2011) to an annual tuition fee of $1,140 at St Thomas’ Catholic Primary School in the township of Sale (St Thomas’ Catholic Primary School, 2011); third, private school education administered locally (and including denominationally aligned non-Catholic schools) that are often heavily funded through compulsory fees - ranging widely and peaking at nearly $30,000 per annum (Marshall, Butt and Priess, 2013) - but also attract Federal government funding. While these three types
of schools can be said to exist within an education system, the CEO and DEECD can also be said to operate unique systems within the broader education system. In Victoria, in 2009, there were 1,575 State Schools and 704 ‘non-Government schools’, being a mixture of Catholic and Private schools, and 63.7% of Victorian young people attended a State school (Productivity Commission, 2011, Sec4: P8-9). These figures altered slightly in 2010 where the DEECD figures from the February census of schools put the figures at 1,555 State Schools and 707 ‘non-government’ schools (DEECD, 2010, p10).

**System Boundary Specification**

It is important to clarify at this point the nature of the boundaries being established between systems. These boundaries might best be described as operational boundaries rather than socially defined boundaries since they do not account for the myriad social or interpersonal connections that might link these sets of schools. This clarification is necessary as seemingly “natural boundaries may at times prove artificial, insofar as individuals within the boundaries may be linked through others outside of them” (Alba, 1982, p43). It is necessary to recognize the complexity of social networks within and beyond systems but establishing boundaries is a necessary precondition of studying systems. In this case the operational boundaries described here are appropriate to the area of study.

For the purpose of clarity we will refer to the “education system” as the system of relationships and operations that center around the provision of education to young people in any type of school. Thus, the ‘Australian education system’ will refer to the provision of education to young people anywhere in Australia in any school, while, ‘Victorian education system’ will refer to the provision of education to young people anywhere in Victoria in any school. The term ‘education system’ refers to the existence of certain legislative and funding arrangements that are common to all schools within the geographic area defined. The term “education system” in this study includes primary and secondary education but does not include education at tertiary level (Universities, TAFE or post-secondary private providers).
The phrase “government education system” will refer in this study to Victorian schools operationally aligned to the DEECD and primarily funded by the State Government. In all cases in this study “government education system” will refer to the State of Victoria, while other State systems will be named. In all cases in this work where a system is referred to without specific associated naming this refers to the Victorian government education system.

**Victorian Government Schools**

The Victorian Government School system is organized through the State Government of Victoria and its Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). The DEECD directly manages the Government School System and also regulates the educational environment from birth to adult-hood across education systems in Victoria. The 2009-2010 DEECD Annual Report – the most relevant report for the period of study - indicates that the Department “provides services to children and young people directly through government schools and indirectly through regulation and funding of early childhood services and non-government schools” (DEECD, 2010, p10).

Victorian government schools operate across a number of age groups with the principal divisions being ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ although there are schools operating from Prep - year 9 and Prep – year 12 that encompass both divisions. Primary schooling includes seven years from 'Prep' to grade 6 and secondary schooling includes year 7 to year 12. Limited compulsory pre-schooling exists in Victoria and is operated by both local government run 'public' pre-school centers and 'private' pre-school centers.

Schooling in Victoria is divided into three output units, two of which (Early Years – ‘Prep’ to Grade 4, and Middle Years – Grade 5 to Year 9) are compulsory and one (Later Years – Year 10 to Year 12) within which an educational pathway, although not necessarily in a school, is compulsory and must be reported by schools for young people to age seventeen.
Beyond these divisions, the DEECD describes its intended outcomes for three age-based divisions as follows:

**Children: 0–8 years**

- children have the best start in life to achieve optimal health, development and wellbeing
- children acquire the basic skills for life and learning
- all children have access to affordable, high-quality early childhood education in the years before schooling
- high-quality early childhood education and care supports the workforce participation choices of parents with children in the years before formal schooling.

**Children: 8–17 years**

- all children are engaged in and benefiting from schooling
- children are meeting expected literacy and numeracy standards, and overall levels of literacy and numeracy are improving
- Victorian students excel by national and international standards.

**Young people: 17+ years**

- young people make a successful transition from school to further education and/or work that provides further training opportunities.

(DEECD, 2011b.)

Students in the Early and Middle Years undertake curriculum aligned with but not prescribed by the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS, latterly known as AusVELS) (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2013). Schools determine the curriculum content at a local level. The emergence of the National Curriculum that is occurring presently will see the alignment of VELS with the National Curriculum. National minimum standards for student achievement were established by the Federal Government in 2008 based on the students’ performance on the national standardized test NAPLAN.

**DEECD Structure**

The DEECD (during the period of this research) fell within three ministerial portfolios, the Minister for Education; Minister for Children and Early Childhood
Development; and the Minister for Higher Education and Skills and Responsible for the Teaching Profession. At this time the DEECD was divided into five “Central Offices” and nine “Regional Offices” (see Appendix 4). The Central Offices are function based while the Regional Offices are geographically defined with smaller regions covering the more densely populated metropolitan areas (DEECD, 2011). A Deputy Secretary who reports to the Secretary of the DEECD leads each central office. A Regional Director who reports to the Secretary of the Office for Government School Education (OGSE) and the Secretary of the Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination (OCPC) leads each Region. (DEECD, 2011)

**Victorian Government Schools’ Governance and Leadership Arrangements**

Victorian Government Schools are governed at the local level by a school council and led by a principal. The school council and principal work together on parts of school governance although the principal maintains authority to lead most areas of school management. The role of school councils is established in the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006* (Parliament of Victoria, 2006). The role of school council is to set the long-term objectives for the school and to maintain oversight (rather than management) of school operations. The following table sets out the governance activities of both the school council and the principal as required by the Act.

<p>| Functions          | School council activities                                                                 | Principal activities                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strategic Planning | Participates in the development of the school strategic plan.                             | Leads the development of the strategic plan, consulting with the staff and the school community. Signs the strategic plan, acknowledging responsibility for its implementation. Implements and monitors the school strategic plan. |
|                    | Approves the strategic plan which is then signed by the president.                       |                                                                                                                                                  |
|                    | Monitors the progress of school strategic plan against the goals.                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
| Finances and Budget| Approves the annual budget.                                                              | Leads the development of the annual budget. Manages the day to day financial running of the school. Ensures, with the convener of the finance committee, appropriate financial reports are presented to council. |
|                    | Ensures appropriate internal controls are in place.                                      |                                                                                                                                                  |
|                    | Monitors school expenditure.                                                             |                                                                                                                                                  |
|                    | Approves requests to parents for voluntary school contributions.                         |                                                                                                                                                  |
|                    | Approves and monitors investments.                                                       |                                                                                                                                                  |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Develops the broad direction and vision for the school using guidelines provided by DEECD.</th>
<th>Leads curriculum development and implementation. Determines teacher, subject and time allocations, timetable, class sizes and structures.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policies</td>
<td>Develops, monitors, reviews and updates policies.</td>
<td>Implements policies endorsed by school council.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Develops Student Engagement Policy and Student Dress Code. Consults with the school community before adopting changes to these policies.</td>
<td>Implements these policies. Considers and, where appropriate, grants exemptions to dress code. Manages all matters of student wellbeing, discipline, academic progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Approves employment of some staff e.g. casual replacement teachers, canteen staff. Recommends to the Secretary the appointment of a principal.</td>
<td>Responsible (as delegate of the Secretary) for the employment of persons in the Teaching Service (including non-teaching staff).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>employment</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>The council president, upon request from the Regional Director, provides input into contract renewal discussions. The president advises school council of that input at the next scheduled meeting.</td>
<td>No role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contract</td>
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<tr>
<td>renewal</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>No role.</td>
<td>Responsible for all aspects of staff management such as: allocation of work, leave approval, performance management, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>management</td>
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<td>(Day to Day</td>
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<td>basis)</td>
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<tr>
<td>and grounds</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-community</td>
<td>Promotes the school to the wider community. Works with school community to stimulate interest in the school.</td>
<td>Represents DEECD to the wider community. Engages the school community and develops links with broader community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relationships</td>
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</table>

(DEECD, 2011c)

While the relationship between school council and principal is one of partnership in many areas, it is also the case that due to the highly devolved environment in Victoria (Barber, 2010, p265), Principals in Victorian State schools have high degrees of autonomy and wider spans of authority than exist in many other jurisdictions.
Depending on size, a school’s leadership team generally constitutes a principal, assistant principal(s) and leading teacher(s). Each of these positions is open only to teachers registered with the Victorian Institute of Teaching and can only be accessed by promotion following a merit based selection process (DEECD, 2013). Recent reorganizations of some school districts in Victoria have seen the creation of a limited number of executive principal roles, where the principal is responsible for a number of schools in the district (DEECD, 2013).

Principals are appointed by the Secretary of the DEECD on the recommendation of School Council following a merit-based process organized and managed by the Regional Director or their nominee (DEECD, 2013).

**School Improvement Agenda: Blueprint and Flagship Strategies for Victorian Government Schools 2003 and 2008**

The reforms set in place in Victoria by the Blueprint for Government Schools in 2003 has positioned Victoria to become an international educational leader. A report into ‘the top school systems’ around the globe (Barber, Clarke and Whelan, 2010, p4), identified Victoria as amongst the few systems, including only Alberta (Canada), England, Ontario (Canada), New York (United States), New Zealand, The Netherlands, Singapore, and Victoria (Australia) [that were performing] strongly on international tests … and [that] demonstrate good practices in school leadership.

Similarly, the earlier report by the OECD (Matthews, Moorman and Nesche, 2007, p 28) refers to the establishment in Victoria of a high quality improvement agenda and relates this to the emergence of a set of specific strategies for reform: “The quality of the systemic approach to school improvement in Victoria has been excellent since the Blueprint was published by the Government in 2003.” The essence of the Blueprint for Government Schools: Future Directions in the Victorian Government school system (DEECD, 2003) is the seven Flagship Strategies it established and that guided development in the subsequent five-year period.
The Flagship Strategies were an example of what Hopkins (2009, p4) would refer to as top-down prescription, although, as he rightly points out, that is not to say that top-down prescription is necessarily negative. Its effect is, rather, context dependent. Significantly, if we accept that the Flagship strategies resulted in significant and positive growth in Victoria as suggested by the OECD (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008, p28), and if we accept that they represent prescription and top-down or centre-out control, then we must also accept that they require people ‘at the top’ or ‘in the center’ to be leading the system.

Of particular interest to this study of system leadership in Victoria is whether, and if so how, these strategies framed the conditions for system leadership to emerge. Of particular note is Flagship Strategy 3: Building Leadership Capacity (See Appendix 7). This strategy formulated the basis of the leadership development strategies that in 2007 caught the attention of the OECD and its study into the global emergence of system leadership. The OECD team noted (Hopkins and Pont, in Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p262) that:

Through participation in programmes and the creation of strong networks of common practices, school leaders are contributing to the improvement of Victorian schools as a whole … This results in strategic alignment, and the common language and culture of school improvement permeating all levels of school leadership. The approach engages the workforce, provides clear expectations and emphasises peer learning.

While the authors note that the Victorian example did not fit their specification of system leadership we can see that it certainly indicates the presence of the conditions for system leadership as it is framed by our ‘starting point’ definition (see chapter 2).

The importance of high-quality leaders undertaking the principalship is clearly evident in the strategy’s stipulations around the selection, mentoring and evaluation of principals, although, as will be contended later, the linking of principal
performance assessment to overall school performance measures might adversely affect the conditions for cooperation and interconnections between schools. Barber, Clarke and Whelan (2010, p19) note that:

[some systems] have responded by delivering leadership development primarily in the context of system goals. For instance, in Victoria, leadership development is increasingly seen as “a by-product of system improvement focused on a specific goal” rather than as a separate activity. Superintendents, coaches, and learning networks support principals to achieve a goal in their schools, building their leadership capacity in the process, rather than building their leadership capacity first to enable them to achieve goals in the future. In the words of a leader in Victoria, “our whole purpose is delivering improvement – we’re not interested in leadership development for its own sake.

Also of significance to system leadership in Victoria is Flagship Strategy 6 (see Appendix 7) that established a system for the performance evaluation of schools. The implication of establishing this performance evaluation “to better target support and assistance” (DEECD, 2003, no page) is two fold: firstly that a centrally located function and/or role(s) is created to oversee the quality of schools and to intervene differentially; Second, differentially targeting support and resources necessitates school leaders and school councils accepting that their budget per student may be lower than a neighbouring school. This is cooperation on a system scale that is prescriptive and top-down, and as Hopkins illustrated, this prescription is necessary as a system builds capacity toward professionalism and autonomy (Hopkins, 2009, p3-4).

Significant also, are Flagship Strategy 1 (Student Learning) and Flagship Strategy 7 (Leading Schools’ Fund) for the ways in which, through top-down mandate, a concept of system responsibility and leadership was embedded within policy (see Appendix 7). In Flagship Strategy 1 we again we see evidence of a top-down and prescriptive effort to generate improvement across the education system. Interestingly this occurs alongside a promise to create a “knowledge bank” that
documents best practice at the grassroots level and shares this for the purpose of system improvement. This knowledge bank suggests the potential for school-based leaders to generate change and improvement in other schools by modeling and sharing their own practice.

Flagship Strategy 7 takes this concept one step further in explicitly indicating the intent to specially fund a number of schools who will assist other schools and strengthen the government school system:

The 2003 Blueprint (Department of Education, 2003) was, to say the least, a sweeping system reform and improvement agenda with implications for the development of system leadership in Victoria.

In 2008 the Victorian government released “Blueprint 2” which explicitly spoke to system level improvement as can be seen in the Blueprint strategies and actions diagram in Appendix 3. Blueprint 2 (DEECD, 2008) also established both Regional Networks and Regional Network Leader roles under the banner of system improvement and action item number eight ‘government school improvement’. In its 2010 report on progress with the 2008 Blueprint the DEECD (2010b, p17) provided the following case study notes that illuminate the system leading role that was intended for Regional Network Leaders (RNLs):

The introduction of RNLs provides increased support for the achievement of large-scale school improvement. Each RNL has a clear focus on individual and collective improvement in the performance of all network schools.

Working closely with each of their network schools, RNLs have provided a sharper focus on government and Department priorities – improvement in literacy and numeracy, Year 12 retention and completion, and system-wide enhancement.

Each RNL has led the development of strategic and annual implementation plans for their network of schools, giving networks the lead role in school
improvement. To support higher levels of teaching expertise, RNLs are working to ensure that each network teacher has opportunities to engage in effective, ongoing professional learning through regional and network programs. A major professional learning focus is classroom coaching.

The establishment of these Regional Network Leader roles is highly significant in this study as they were clearly intended to connect the ‘top’ and ‘bottom’ of the system – to “provide a sharper focus on government and Department priorities” while also working with or in support of “each network teacher” (DEECD, 2010b, p17). The Regional Networks were, if this DEECD report is an accurate reflection of reality, intended to “give networks [of schools] the lead role in school improvement” (DEECD, 2010b, p17) with a possible implication of this being that the ‘centre’ or ‘top’ would no longer have this leading role.

System Leadership in the Victorian Government education system

(Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and, Office for Government School Education)

Victoria has been recognized by the OECD as one of the highest performing educational jurisdictions in the OECD on a range of measures. Significantly an OECD case-study report on school leadership in Victoria (Matthews, Moorman and Nesche, 2007, p 28) found that in relation to the government education system:

The quality of the systemic approach to school improvement in Victoria has been excellent since the Blueprint was published by the Government in 2003. The creation of a clear and persuasive, research-based school improvement, professional learning and leadership development culture, articulated through a common language, reflects clarity of focus. The programmes which have been instituted to implement the propositions which form the Departmental basis for action are well-designed and comprehensive. Momentum has been sustained through highly effective communications and diligent consultation with all the major stakeholders. Most compelling is the way in which evidence-based theory and school-based provision of
leadership development opportunities are aligned, reflecting a high degree of coherence in the Victorian school improvement strategy. The ‘theory of action’ which underpins these developments is clear and rational, and can be commended to other education administrations.

The OECD's praise for the leadership of the Victorian government education system is echoed by Elmore (2007, p1) who indicates that:

... Victoria, because of the thoughtful design of its improvement strategy, is on the leading edge of policy and practice in the world. There are few improvement strategies close to or as well developed, and probably none that are focused with such depth and complexity on the basic human capital problems associated with school improvement at scale. Unfortunately, this ... [means] that there are relatively few places Victoria can look to find the answers to the kinds of problems that will surface...

System leadership in Victoria can be identified as a theme within the government education system’s school improvement agenda. As the OECD’s and Elmore’s reports (above) indicate, leadership and school improvement have been priorities for DEECD in the last decade. The *Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders* (DEECD, 2007) outlined DEECD's view of the roles of school leaders. Significantly this model embedded the notion that at the highest level of leadership attainment sits system leadership. The *Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders* is based around Sergiovanni’s (1984; 2005) transformational ‘five forces’ approach to leadership, those forces being; technical leadership, human leadership, educational leadership, symbolic leadership and cultural leadership.
Within each domain the Developmental Learning Framework provides a descriptive “profile” that outline the capabilities of leaders within that domain. Each of these profiles is categorised into levels from level one to level five, with five being the highest level of capability. System leadership is explicitly referred to in level five for each domain and is tied to working and influencing ‘across the system’.

**Table 1.2 Developmental Learning Framework Level 5 Capabilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Extract from Level 5* capabilities</th>
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<tr>
<td>Technical Leadership</td>
<td>“Leaders use an understanding of broader educational and political influences to inform strategic thinking and planning and initiate processes that enhance educational outcomes across the system.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Leadership</td>
<td>“… publicly support other schools to build trust and cooperation across the system.”</td>
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* Symbolic Leadership, unlike the other four domains, contains only the levels 1-4 with level 4 indicating the highest capability.
Educational Leadership
“...design initiatives that build the capacity of people across the system.”

Symbolic Leadership*
“... work with other schools and across the system to generate and share knowledge and maximise the access of all students to a quality education.”

Cultural Leadership
“... assist other education systems and organisations to transfer and adapt innovative practices from their school.”

The presence in official Government education system communications of explicit reference to system leadership, and the apparent success of the government education system in the area of leadership indicated by the OECD and Richard Elmore (above), means that the Victorian government education system offers a unique opportunity to study the theory and practice of system leadership.

But what does system leadership look like in the Victorian government education system? The research undertaken in this thesis will answer this question and go beyond to examine how system leadership operates, how it is perceived, how it is developing over time and how it is impacting on the government education system itself.

The research undertaken for this study has been qualitative and primarily based on interviews with personnel working for DEECD in Victoria including the Secretary of Education (the senior bureaucrat of the department), senior managers, Regional Directors, Regional Network Leaders and school principals.

While the Senior Ministerial role of Minister of Education in the Victorian Government provides Ministerial leadership for all schools operating in the Victorian education system, our focus is on the DEECD operated government school system. Within the DEECD the OGSE (Office for Government School Education) has a singular focus on Government School Education.
The core function of the Office for Government School Education is to manage, coordinate and implement high-quality government school education across Victoria.

This Office aims to improve the education outcomes of all students in government schools by addressing variations in school performance across the state, developing highly skilled teachers and school leaders, and facilitating parent and community engagement.

(DEECD, 2011d.)

Most significantly for this study into system leadership in the government education system, the OGSE lists the following four items as its main plans and challenges.

Each of these directly relates to areas of this study:

• Continuing to develop a system-wide approach to determine high-priority school improvement projects to build the collective capacity of schools, networks and regions. To address the effects of disadvantage, targeted interventions will continue to be supported
• Continuing to deliver the e5 Instructional Model to support teachers reduce the variability in classroom practice within and across schools ...
• Continuing to focus on leadership ...
• Delivering the Ultranet, [for] connecting students, teachers and parents, and enabling efficient sharing and transfer of knowledge.

(DEECD, 2011d)

Within the remit of the OGSE are Victoria’s nine regional offices based on geographical areas. Each region is led by a Regional Director who is considered a senior executive of the DEECD and reports to the head of the OGSE. Each region is further divided geographically into regional networks of approximately 20-25 primary and secondary schools catering for children from Prep (age 5) to Year 12 (age 18). The early childhood (birth – 5) education functions of the region occur outside these networks.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction to Literature

Positioning research in extant knowledge is fundamental. The review of literature herein focuses on those works and studies relevant to this piece of research. The field of educational research is both broad and deep so it is necessary to determine criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of works from the literature review. The following criteria have been used for this task:

The work may be included if it meets any of the following criteria and is not otherwise excluded:

1. The work relates to an educational initiative, reform or project operating across an education system.
2. The work contains theoretical discussion pertinent to this study in the areas of economics, reform, governance, policy and leadership but is drawn from outside the field of education.
3. The work is written in English or is available in English translation.

Criteria for exclusion

1. The work relates to an initiative or project operating across a network or a group of fewer than ten schools unless the initiative or project is related to broader system agendas.
2. The work is from the field of education, but does not relate to theory or practice of education reform / improvement, education policy or education leadership.
3. The work relates exclusively to systems, initiatives and projects in developing nations.

Justification of criteria:

It is necessary to justify for the reader the choices made in determining what literature is of significance to this study. With this information the reader can infer areas of interstice and identify areas for further or related thinking and research.
Where this work is definitive in its area of focus it will also be of interest to those in other research areas. Criteria for inclusion must be read alongside the criteria for exclusion. A work that meets a criterion for inclusion will be excluded if it also meets a criterion for exclusion.

Studies and writing related to projects or initiatives operating across an education system are included to provide the researcher with insight into the concepts of system reform, system improvement and system leadership within the frame of these large-scale system initiatives.

Literature that is drawn from outside the field of education but contains theoretical discussion pertinent to the study in the areas of economics, reform, governance, policy and leadership is included to ensure that within these defined fields the researcher has access to ideas from outside ‘education’ literature. These fields (economics, reform, governance, policy and leadership) were chosen for their relevance to the concepts of systemic change within a government and policy environment. While they necessarily narrow the fields of non-education discourse they provide rich evidence that directly relates to the research discussed herein.

Works available in English, including those in translation, have been privileged in this study due to costs associated with the translation of non-English texts.

Literature from the field of education that does not relate to the theory or practice of educational reform / improvement, education policy or education leadership is necessarily excluded from this study in order to narrow the focus of literature onto those areas pertinent to the study. For example, without this exclusion literature on a study of pedagogical practice across a network or fifteen schools would meet the criteria for inclusion. Thus, unless the study of pedagogy also related to reform, policy or leadership it would be excluded.

Literature related exclusively to systems, initiatives and projects in developing nations has been excluded in recognition of the divergences between systemic organisation and operation in polities at different stages of economic development.
The strengths of developing nations and the challenges that their systems of social organisation encounter are qualitatively different from those of developed nations. Accounting for these divergences is beyond the scope of this project.

**POSITIONING THE TOPIC OF SYSTEM LEADERSHIP IN BROADER SCHOLARLY DISCOURSE AND LITERATURE.**

In researching the concept ‘system leadership’ within the field of writing on education, three discernable topic or thematic groupings of literature can be said to deal most commonly with the concept. Those thematic groupings are literature that deals with: education reform and improvement; education policy; and, education leadership. However, it is necessary that in researching this specific area we also seek to explore ideas within wider scholarly discourse that impact upon the ideas and actions of those in the field of education. Thus, stepping back and taking a wide-angle lens to the literature that frames the scholarly work within the field of education it is possible to discern three distinct and occasionally overlapping meta-narratives running throughout most of the scholarly work:

1: Economics and related social change  
2: Cooperation and competition  
3: Governance and effective policy-making

These discernable meta-narratives relate and refer to scholarly work and philosophy from within and beyond the field of education. Debates within these meta-narratives have a profound influence on the way in which writers in the field of education have handled and interpreted questions of reform / improvements, education policy (including governance) and educational leadership. Examining the meta-narratives then, is critical in positioning and understanding the purpose, function and ideology of the scholarly texts around system leadership.

The diagram below demonstrates the connections between Meta-narratives and Themes identified. Each meta-narrative to some extent informs the production of the body of work around each theme area indicated.
It is through these three meta-narratives that we first attempt here to position the topic of system leadership in broader scholarly discourse and literature. Meta-narrative 1 addresses the impact of economic theory and debate on the development of thought relating to system leadership. Meta-narrative 2 may be seen as a sub-set of economics were we not also to deal with the moral, philosophical and motivational aspects of scholarly debate around what are, essentially, two economic concepts. Meta-narrative 3 deals with scholarly debate over the form and nature of governance and policy making, which, for us means the policy making and governance arrangements around system leadership.

Exploring these three meta-narratives, as themes of discourse within this literature review, facilitates the positioning of specific works in the broader context and milieu of ideology and culture that infuses scholarly discourse in this area.

If, however, we are to approach the meta-narratives from a standpoint of identifying ideologies – as each of these three meta-narratives are profoundly ideological – then it is necessary first to explain why we look to ideology as a relevant concept in analyzing literature. The term ‘ideology’ is not used here derisively, but as an essential factor in determining, in an epistemological sense, the cause, nature and
origin of ideas expressed in literature. Understanding the ideological position as well as the social and cultural context within which ideas are produced is of profound importance when examining literature on any topic. We seek in examining literature here to find not only the ideas, but also the cause and nature of the ideas.

Ideology is a notoriously contested and difficult concept. McLellan (1986, p1) described ideology as “the most elusive concept in the whole of social science.” However, understanding ideology is essential to the positioning of literature in this review in the context of the meta-narratives identified above. To begin an explanation of ideology we turn here to the ‘Frankfurt School’ and particularly to Adorno and Horkheimer’s writing on the topic of the ‘culture industry’. Writing in the USA in the mid 1940s as refugees from Nazi Germany, Adorno and Horkheimer (1944/1972, p34) wrote that “the might of industrial society is lodged in men’s minds.” While they focused on the ‘culture industry,’ the point Adorno and Horkheimer made is relevant to the production of ideas and provides an entrée to the concept of ideology in that each information product produced today, as in the 1940s, is “a model of the huge economic machinery” (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1944/1972, p34) within which it is created. Placed within an historic context (for later thinkers have developed these ideas), Adorno and Horkheimer can be seen to outline the fundamental premise of a theory of ideology; that ideas occur only within a social and cultural framework that contributes to their existence and form.

Following Adorno and Horkheimer, Parsons (1951, p24) wrote “ideologies are the shared ... mental models that groups of individuals possess that provide both an interpretation of the environment and a prescription as to how that environment should be structured.” More recent writers, including Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Dutton, Kleiner, Lucas and Smith (2000), have utilized the ‘mental models’ concept to understand unconscious aspects of work and thought in education. “Because mental models are usually tacit, existing below the level of awareness, they are often untested and unexamined. They are generally invisible to us – until we look for them” (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Dutton, Kleiner, Lucas, and Smith, 2000, p66).

In the 1960s and, with the growing prominence of psychoanalysis, we find Jacques
Lacan and Lois Althusser contributing further to the conceptualization of ideology. Lacan’s (1968) contribution was to link ideology to the idea of the unconscious much as Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Dutton, Kleiner, Lucas and Smith (2000, p66) did more recently. Through this link, ideology can be seen primarily as the construction of the imaginary. Ideology, then, is not ‘real’ in an ontological sense but is the social construction of ideas within an unconscious system of thought. Using this reasoning Althusser (1969, p6) contended that ‘dominant ideology’, that which serves the interests of the ruling class, is “political, partial and open to change [but through its domination of the unconscious turns thought] into something seemingly natural, universal and eternal.”

There was, following Althusser’s contribution to defining ideology, a schism in the ranks of Marxist intellectuals along ‘structuralist’ and ‘cultural’ lines. Structuralists were accused of constructing Marxism as a ‘theology’ above critique and counterpoised to ‘ideological state apparatuses’ (Thompson, 1976, p69). For Cultural Marxists, particularly the ‘Birmingham School’ (Jameson, 1971; R. Williams, 1980), Althusserians and all structuralists failed to deal with ideological forces outside those controlled by the State, and thus were restricting a “dialogue with evidence and open rational criticism” (Thompson, 1976, p70). However, these theoreticians, notably Raymond Williams, agreed with the structuralists on the idea that understanding the base (economy and relationships of production) is essential “to understand the realities of cultural process” (Williams, 1980, p33).

In essence, to understand the production of any of the texts included in this literature review it is necessary to be able to locate them in relation to the social and cultural dimensions of their production. This recognizes the existence of ‘resistant readings’ and the variety of ideologies that are held by sub-groups within discourse on education. Indeed, more recent contributions to the concept of ideology (Freeden, 2001; Knight, 2006) have surmised that while ideologies are evident in the communication of widely shared beliefs and values, they are also evident in the communication of the beliefs and values of smaller sub-groups, and further, that for these groups’ ideologies provide a framework through which the world is interpretable and understandable.
In terms of analyzing literature, the ability to position an author ideologically is necessary to interpreting their motives and cognitive processes as Federico, Jost and Napier (2009) contended:

To the extent that different ideologies represent socially shared but competing philosophies of life and how it should be lived (and how society should be governed), it stands to reason that different ideologies should both elicit and express at least somewhat different social, cognitive, and motivational styles or tendencies on the part of their adherents.

To identify, at least in part, the ideological position of the authors examined herein we will first examine the three meta-narratives we have identified in order that we might be cognizant of these when considering the literature and ideas dealt with throughout this paper. It is therefore necessary to sketch the landscape of ideas within the broader scholarly discourse of each meta-narrative.

Our purpose though, in examining these three key meta-narratives, is more than simply facilitating an explanation of the author’s ideological position. Examining the three meta-narratives will enable us to locate the author’s contribution to literature from within and from outside the field of education. Theories of education, of teaching, of educational reform or leadership do not exist in an academic vacuum isolated from the scholarly thought and philosophy of other fields of study. The purpose of the following interrogation of the three meta-narratives is to illuminate the contribution that ideas about economics, social change, governance and policy have made to thinking within our thematic focus areas.

Meta-narrative #1. Economics and the knowledge economy.

The meta-narrative of economics and the knowledge economy is evident in much of the literature on system leadership. Indeed, as will become apparent, much of the ideology of education is premised on economic philosophy. Sometimes the link
between the literature and its economic antecedents is made explicit while more often it is implicit - and perhaps unconsciously embedded - within the assumptions underlying a writer’s contentions, ideas and frameworks. Our purpose in this section of the paper, is to identify and describe this meta-narrative of ‘economics and the knowledge economy’.

Christensen, Johnson and Horn (2008), writing about education in the United States, begin by outlining four aspirations for schools, two of which – aspiration one and three - are clearly economic in their foundation if we appreciate that ‘human potential’ (point 1) can be quantified in economic terms:

1. Maximise human potential.
2. Facilitate a vibrant, participative democracy in which we have an informed electorate that is capable of not being “spun” by self-interested leaders.
3. Hone the skills, capabilities, and attitudes that will help our economy remain prosperous and economically competitive.
4. Nurture the understanding that people can see things differently – and that those differences merit respect rather than persecution.

(Christensen, Johnson and Horn, 2008, p1)

In Australia the same concerns with the relationship between the economy and education can be seen in Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s first speech to the Australian parliament (1998, no page): “[A] fundamental challenge facing government lies in our nation’s education system. Education is both a tool of social justice as well as a fundamental driver of economic development.” And, in a speech delivered by former federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard (2008, no page):

... in a global economy hungry for knowledge and skills, the nations that succeed will be those with the highest concentrations of education, skills, innovation and workforce participation. In other words, the future will belong to the nations with the best human capital and the most inclusive societies.
There is in fact a long-standing academic tradition of literature relating education to economics dating back to canonical authors such as Durkheim (1858-1917) and Dewey (1859-1952). In this sense the term economics must be seen in its broadest sense as the study of the production, consumption and distribution of goods, including social goods such as health and education, and the study of how economic actors (producers, distributors and consumers) interact. That is to say, our lens here on economics, views it as a socially defined concept. It is within this frame that Durkheim in a 1922 posthumous publication (cited In Filloux, 1993, p306) described the purpose of education in terms of its utility for society:

... education is the action exercised by the adult generations over those that are not yet ready for social life. Its purpose is to arouse and develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him both by the political society as a whole and by the specific environment for which he is particularly destined ... It emerges from the foregoing definition that education consists of a methodical socialization of the young generation.

Presently, in the Western economies, most discussion within the meta-narrative of ‘economy and the knowledge economy’ is occurring around two fundamental and interrelated changes to national economies: communication technology and global trade. In relation to the former, Loader (2007, p8) contends that: “Today we live in a networked community ... a larger and more interactive global community brought to us by electrons, networks and computers. [Yet] we still need learning to be mediated by people ...” While in relation to the latter Halsey, Lauder, Brown and Wells (1999, p1) contend that global trade with its associated shift in the ‘West’ away from industry, particularly in manufacturing, means that “commonly held assumptions about the role of education are now in question due to the economic, cultural and social transformation of post-industrial societies.” A common thread is a perception that education is failing to meet the needs of the economy. “In the United States, this perception dates back at least to 1983, when the U.S. government report A Nation at Risk, came out, arguing that the U.S. population was too poorly educated to compete in the global marketplace” (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Dutton, Kleiner, Lucas and
Smith, 2000, p9). While *A Nation at Risk* was roundly criticized and its assumptions were questioned by Berliner and Biddle (1995) the prevalence of critiques of education premised on economic concerns is notable. More recent criticism of education systems’ ability to meet the needs of the economy includes the following from Microsoft founder Bill Gates (2005, no page) in his address to the National Education Summit:

> By obsolete, I mean that our high schools – even when they are working exactly as designed – cannot teach our kids what they need to know today. Training the workforce of tomorrow with the high schools of today is like trying to teach kids about today’s computers on a 50-year-old mainframe. It’s the wrong tool for the wrong times.

**The Knowledge Economy**

In a public sense the linkages between education and economics are most clear in relation to recent imperatives delivered about the relationship between education and social change, as the following attest:

> A lot of our kids will be working in companies that haven’t been invented yet in industries we haven’t thought of. So, innovation isn’t some soft-edged liberal idea, it’s an essential economic imperative. ... And corporations have a big responsibility here because they need to stand up and start to say politically [that] we need people who can think differently” (Robinson, 2009, no page).

> “The task of leading and managing a school has become inherently more complex over the past two decades ... the nature of broader society and economy have all impacted on school leadership” (Davies, 2005, p163).

> “Learning is the key to prosperity ... investment in human capital will be the foundation of success in the knowledge based global economy of the twenty-first century” (Department for Education and Employment, 1998, p7).
These statements provide snapshots of a widely held assumption of the existence of a correlation between educational success and the sustainability of a healthy and modern economy, a generally unquestioned idea that can be seen here extending from education theorists, to politicians, to business leaders. Indeed, there is some empirical data that would tend to support such ideas. Doppelhofer, Miller and Sala-i-Martin (2004), for example, found that completion of primary schooling was the strongest influence factor in GDP growth per capital between 1960 and 1996. Mankiw, Romer and Weil (1992), Barro (1991), and Levine and Renelt (1992) had earlier used data on school enrolment ratios and found similar patterns of economic growth. Where these empirical models become problematic is in the poor correlation to actual student knowledge growth where the experience of education might be qualitatively different and produce divergent outcomes. Hanushek and Kimko (2000) developed a more robust empirical measure and demonstrated a significant correlation between children’s cognitive development and economic growth. They found that on PISA tests, “one country-level standard deviation higher test performance would yield around one percentage point higher annual growth rates” for the nation’s economy. When, according to the OECD (2010), the average national growth rate is 1.5% the economic implication of a further 1% growth is considerable. However, such empirical research which links technological change and productivity growth to human-stock capital is problematical as the measures are based on assumptions, which may be correct or not, of a causal linkage between cognitive skill development - brought about by education - and later occurring innovation. While logical this can not account for growth in national economies which is due to financial, political and economic factors that are unrelated to the cognitive achievement of a nation’s children, for example, mining booms and global financial crises. Indeed, endogenous growth models are only one of many opposing mechanisms for measuring economic growth.

In the quotes from public figures listed earlier, we can trace a belief that the nature of education is changing or must change in response to the altered needs of the economy. Guile (2006, p355) also identified this trend in contemporary thought but questioned its underlying assumptions about the utility of education in providing access to knowledge:
The conventional wisdom is that knowledge now constitutes the most important factor in production in the economies of advanced industrial societies; and as a corollary, that the populations of these countries require greater access to knowledge...

Guile (2006, p365) questioned the implications that knowledge and culture are separable and that theoretical knowledge and tacit knowledge are discrete. These implications, he believes, resulted in policy makers lurching toward an over-emphasis on examination and standardized testing in an effort of codify and routinize the production of theoretical knowledge. Guile (2006, p366) concludes that the ‘knowledge economy’ and emphasis on knowledge as the main unit of production, while being distinctive features of the existing economy, have not constituted “a different kind of capitalism in terms of its focus on profits and markets.” This represents a profound schism in approaches to understanding the effects of education (synonymous here with knowledge production) on the nature of capitalism. For many theorists in the 1990s – the decade in which the concept of the knowledge economy blossomed – the transition to knowledge based economic activity in the West signaled a profound shift in the reality and potential of social relations. Drucker (1993) built on the work of Bell (1973) who predicted that a shift away from manufacturing toward knowledge based work would necessarily lead to greater freedom for workers, to contend that we have entered a new stage of post-capitalism. Guile’s assertion that such theories are inaccurate is echoed in Brown and Lauder (2006, p25) who identified and problematised what they defined as the ‘dominant view’ of the relationship between education and economic development:

The dominant view today is that we have entered a global knowledge economy, driven by the application of new technologies and collapsing barriers to international trade and investment. This has accelerated the evolutionary path from low to a high skills economy.

They continue, “the research evidence does not support the idea of a rapid increase in demand for highly skilled workers although there has been a rapid expansion of
tertiary education” (Brown and Lauder, 2006, p45). It may be the case that more refined ‘off-shoring’ practices such as ‘captive outsourcing’ (Hameri and Tunkelo, 2009) mean that increasingly, highly skilled and knowledge intensive labour is able to be ‘off-shored’ to the locus of global production. This possibility presents a profound political problem for leaders of ‘post-industrial’ nations. If we take the Netherlands clothing industry as an unlikely example, we see that between 1958 - the first year of the European Union and its associated trade liberalization – and 2004 ninety percent of the clothing industry workforce was lost (Duineveld and Scheffer, 2004). Recent decades of trade liberalization has seen this example replicated across industries and across developed nations. If both tacit and theoretical knowledge can be offshored in manufacturing then developed nations face a clear dilemma.

The political shock of trade liberalization and its impact on manufacturing industries in developed nations was undoubtedly a major contributor to pressures for educational change in post-industrial societies. Promises of knowledge economies were concomitant with demands for restructuring education. Indeed, Kelly (2009, p51) writes that the “growing international pressure of globalization affects practitioners in unpredictable and different ways [where] the development of national [education] policy is tied to the process of translating global trends into local contexts.” Hinchliffe (2006), for example, explores the way the concept of ‘lifelong learning’ has arisen in response to the pressure globalization and the knowledge economy have placed on education. A decade before Hinchliffe made that connection, communication theorist Kress (1996, p188) had noted that:

The new age of the movement of production sites and the consequent globalisation of labour is taking place in an environment characterised by non-Fordist forms of production ... even if Fordist modes of production continue in very many places. The necessary 'internal remaking' of the labour force and the question of requisite, appropriate, necessary subjectivities pose entirely new questions for education systems and for their curricula.

The political ramifications of failing to produce a knowledge economy in the post-
industrial world are clear for all citizens. Two options are possible here; the first, restructuring of the cultural practice of education in the post industrial west, the second, to limit the growth of knowledge capital outside of the west. Appendix 2 provides further discussion of this point as while changes in the economic imperatives are foundational to the social construction of education systems and are important, the discussion is general rather than specific to the research purpose.

**Summarising Meta-narrative #1**

In the field of education the terms system reform, system improvement and system leadership each imply that the ‘system’ requires change. There is evidence that for many theorists, educators and politicians this change is understood as a requirement of economic and social change presently occurring. Many assume that the creation of a knowledge economy will enable western nations to adapt to economic and social changes and that its creation will require changes to the education system.

Where ideological divergence emerges in the literature produced in the anglophone west in regard to this first meta-narrative is on the question of how education systems and educators should respond to economic changes. Principally, we find this divergence around the questions of the utility of competition and cooperation within a system. This brings us shortly to the second meta-narrative identifiable in literature relating to developments in educational systems.

**Major ideological perspectives from meta-narrative #1 relevant for defining and exploring a ‘system’ and system leadership**

To understand the production of any of the texts included in this research it is necessary to be able to locate them in relation to the social and cultural dimensions of their production. There are two major ideological perspectives within this meta-narrative evident within the literature examined:

a) that changes in the economy exist as a result of globalisation and that in the
‘west’ globalization necessitates a shift in social organization (such as schooling)

b) that knowledge can be a form of capital to be constrained and controlled through education (see Appendix 2 for extended discussion)

There are of course possible resistant readings against these ideological drivers.

Meta-narrative #2. Economics: Cooperation and competition.

This economic narrative underpins and provides theoretical and ideological groundings for literature on education systems and system leadership literature. The investigation of the meta-narrative here will look first at the OECD’s summary of cooperative arrangements in OECD education systems. This will be followed by discussion of market-based reform and choice narratives including the presentation of critical voices. Proposals for cooperation as an economic model are then considered including an overview of powerful work by Benkler on legal ‘commons’ as models for cooperation and also his work on the requirements of social organization in the post-industrial economy.

While the first meta-narrative demonstrated a highly unified narrative with its own underlying assumptions and ideologies that were tested and critiqued by only few writers, this second meta-narrative is much more openly contested as some writers push for competitive models of school relationships, others for cooperative models and yet others attempt to blend the two.

Cooperative arrangements identified by the OECD in education systems:

Not only is cooperation within the field of education an extant phenomenon, it is also a phenomenon that is attracting formal interest from governments. The OECD recently released findings showing that many OECD governments were implementing cooperative arrangements within their educations systems as the following table illustrates:
### Table 2.1 Cooperative Arrangements in OECD Education Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>School communities have been created as voluntary collaborative partnerships between schools. They aim to have common staffing, ICT and welfare resources management.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Co-operation in post-compulsory education has been promoted by the creation of administrative groups set up locally or regionally to optimise the joint resources of several self-governing institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2003 legislative reform has enhanced school co-operation aiming to ensure integrity of students’ study paths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>“School basins” have been implemented to ensure collaborative partnerships between schools to work together in student orientation, educational coherence between different types of schools, common management of shared material and human resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>“Micro-regional partnerships” based on economic and professional rationalisation have resulted in the spreading of common school maintenance in almost all Hungarian micro regions. This network-type co-operation enables professional and organisational learning leading to new forms of education governance and efficient innovation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>Small schools cooperate to overcome problems of size in teacher exchange, curriculum organising, joint development activities, and integrated use of facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>In primary education, “upper management” takes management function responsibility for several schools. About 80% of primary school boards have an upper school management bureau for central management, policy staff and support staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>School clusters are based around geographical communities and communities of interest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>Tendency is to merge several schools to form an administrative unit governed by a school principal. Three-level municipalities require networks between schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>Schools are commonly grouped together with a collective management structure; executive, pedagogical and administrative councils are responsible for their areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Important political promotion of collaboration. “Heads together” is a nationwide online community for sharing leadership experience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>Municipal directors of education steer principals. Most of them are members of director of education steering group where strategy, development and results are discussed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK (England)</td>
<td>There are different approaches to co-operation stimulated by the government – federations of schools, national leaders of education, school improvement partners...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p260).
Within the nations listed in Table 2.1 three similar approaches to promoting cooperative arrangements in schools are identified or alluded to: partnerships (Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Korea, Scotland and the UK), locality based cooperation (Belgium, France, Hungary, Korea and New Zealand) and, governance centered cooperation (Denmark, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and the UK).

**Market-based and choice reforms and their critics:**

Of the work around economic notions of cooperation and competition in regard to education systems, the bulk of work in recent decades in the Anglophone west (primarily the USA, Britain and Australia) has focused on marketization. That is, the creation of demand-side (parent and student driven) reforms that aim to enable parents to choose schools in order to create quasi-markets and thereby competition between schools.

In examining literature related to competition in education markets it is easy, though not necessarily correct, to conflate choice with competition. Choice, in this context, is the ability of consumers (the demand side of the market) to choose which school to attend. Depending on the jurisdiction, choice is limited by a range of factors (Brown Centre on Education Policy, 2013). At one end of the spectrum policies and laws may restrict consumer choice while at the other end of the spectrum consumers are free to choose any school and are limited then by factors such as cost, personal preferences and geography. The availability of choice within a government education system is within the remit of policy makers or governments (Brown Centre on Education Policy, 2013). Competition, on the other hand, is cultural (Apple, 1996).

From a purely economic standpoint, choice and competition are not synonymous because competition can be measured through demand while choice refers to available options (Bayer and McMillan, 2005, p2). While levels of choice impact on levels of competition they are not the same. Whether viewed from a cultural or an economic perspective it would be possible to have high levels of competition in a low-choice environment and vice-versa. However, a scan of the literature finds no
evidence that meets our selection criteria of culturally nuanced competitive relationships within school systems where choice is restricted.

The creation of choice focused reforms in school level education emerged relatively similarly and at similar times across major English speaking nations (Campbell, Proctor and Sherington, 2009, p1). In the context of the United Kingdom the introduction of a choice-based or demand-side driven reform is aptly described by Bradley, Johnes and Millington (1999, p4):

> The thrust of education policy over the last 15 years or more has been to create a so-called quasi-market [with] reforms, culminating in 1988 with the implementation of ... the Education Reform Act (ERA), [meaning] that schools are now in direct competition for pupils ... Good schools are expected to grow in size and flourish, whereas poor schools would either wither and close, or react by introducing strategies to raise performance. The logic underpinning the quasi-market is therefore that the increase in competition between schools will lead to an overall improvement in the quality of education provision.

At the same time as Bradley Johnes and Millington were discussing this idea in the United Kingdom, Brian Caldwell was writing from Australia as a proponent of choice for consumers. In 1999 Caldwell argued that the Victorian government education system would be improved through higher levels of demand-driven competition. He did however, recognize that greater choice would need to be associated with greater resources for government schools: “The common ground with the critics is the case for higher levels of resources for schools, but denial of choice ... is a prescription for the continued and inexorable decline of the government school” (Caldwell, 1999, p258). Citing research in the United Kingdom Caldwell stated that: “The greater the degree of competition between schools, the more efficient the schools tend to become. Moreover, differentials in efficiency between the most and the least efficient schools appear to narrow in response to competition” (1999, p258).

Caldwell (1999) indirectly notes the scarcity of research evidence existing at the
time that would show the effectiveness of school choice in raising student achievement. Caldwell notes that in the UK, Doe (1998) and Hardman and Levacic (1999) found that results in schools with more flexible enrolment due to freedom of choice for parents “increased faster in the early 1990s because their more flexible admissions policies meant they were better placed to covertly select pupils by ability” (Caldwell, 1999, p259). Similarly he notes findings from a longitudinal study in New Zealand that found working class schools disproportionally entered a ‘downward spiral’ in response to the flight of middle class families when school choice was introduced (Lauder and Hughes, 1999). However, Caldwell demonstrates that these studies were “based on a small sample of schools” (Caldwell, 1999, p259) and that researchers had not canvassed the possibility of solutions based on differential resourcing.

Aside from raising the performance of government schools Caldwell (1999, p259) argued that increased choice was necessary in line with social changes and expectations from the community.

... choice is an outcome of interest in the exercise of choice by an increasingly articulate community, aware that schools were not the same and that students had different needs. Until the mid-1980s, students in the public sector were required to attend the nearest government school. Except in cases of special educational need, they are now guaranteed a place at the nearest government school, but may choose to enrol elsewhere if there is a place available.

A similar acknowledgement of changed social expectations is seen in Campbell, Proctor and Sherington’s (2009, p3) articulation of the parents’ dilemma:

Where thirty years ago parents might have been concerned about whether a child might leave school before completing year 11 or 12, now: ‘Which school is the best choice for my child?’ is an increasingly significant question.

In 1999 the empirical data to back Caldwell’s arguments that choice, and through
choice competition, would lead to improvements in school performance was weak. However, his idea is born out by more rigorous empirical data gathered by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) in the USA in 2005. Bayer and McMillan (2005, p2-3), authors of the NBER report, acknowledge that prior to their own work existing literature provided “only indirect guidance as to the responsiveness of schools to competition.” Retrospectively though, the NBER finding that “a one standard deviation increase in the competitiveness of a school’s local market [in the study area] is associated with a 0.15 standard deviation increase in school performance” (Bayer and McMillan, 2005, p34) lends credence to Caldwell and others. The NBER research used a measure of “residual elasticity” from the demand side of the market and found that their measure had “no effect in predicting neighborhood wealth” (Bayer and McMillan, 2005, p35) suggesting that the measure of school improvement is not picking up changes in household characteristics rather than changes in the school. While this empirically valid data lends credibility to Caldwell’s assertions, the NBER authors indicate (Bayer and McMillan, 2005, p7) the considerable complexity and challenges at the school level:

... by raising quality (through higher effort), [a school] would increase enrolment, and if funding were on a per-pupil basis, this would lead to an increase in revenues. At the same time, higher quality would require higher effort, which is costly. How the school would resolve this trade-off in making its optimal effort choice would depend on the response of [enrolment numbers].

The NBER report also raises the thorny point that employees’ level of discretionary effort can be related to loss in enrolment just as it can be related to a gain. The NBER report, significantly for opponents of school choice, does not account for differential financial or other resources existing between schools. While the measure used in the NBER report eliminates neighborhood wealth it does not necessarily distinguish between schools with greater or lesser resources to fund additional effort from employees.

The belief in competition, or its proxy choice, as a tonic for education underpins many works in the area of education policy and discussion of competition’s benefits
extends even to the discussion of whether failing schools should be closed as the following example (Bradley, Johnes, and Millington, 1999, p18) shows:

Policymakers should take care when deciding whether to close a particular school, since the gains from reduced public expenditure may be outweighed by the loss of efficiency in neighbouring schools because of the reduction in competition between schools.

However, some more recent works are, while broadly supporting competition, questioning the educational benefits for consumers. This is particularly evident in recent work on Charter Schools in the United States. Lubienski (2003) for example acknowledges that Charter Schools elevate choice but finds that the quality of classroom strategies and practices tend toward traditional modes rather than fostering innovation and improvement. Similarly Apple (2001) acknowledges the intent of market-oriented policies in education but questioned their applicability to schools operating in the real world. Most recently the promotion of competition in school education in the Australian context has been questioned by Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009, p5) who have argued that the markets created in education to support competition are not “natural markets [but] quasi-markets made possible only by government support through major tax-raised subsidies” and that the necessity to create a social safety net “to catch and provide some relief to citizens who for some reason of incapacity do not operate effectively within a market” means that competition and to some extent choice are in fact restricted even in a seemingly high choice environment.

In stark opposition to the proponents of greater choice and the creation of competition between schools, some recent authors have reacted to perceived failures of the demand driven reforms to improve outcomes for the community by rejecting choice as a method to generate improvement. Bonner and Caro (2007, p169) in The Stupid Country rail against competition and look to concrete examples of cooperation between schools working and where competition has not (p190-192) as well as referring to emerging trends toward cooperation in England (p170). Writing from a UK perspective, Seddon (2008, p14) is scathing of what he sees as the failures of the public sector as a whole, including education, to improve services:
“... instead of competition we should be concerned with cooperation; instead of choice people want services that work.” Seddon goes on later in his book (2008, p197) to create a case for cooperative service delivery in the public sector (including education) and to contend that this cooperative system organization will result in the improvements he argues were not delivered under the policies that pushed greater competition: “... in delivering services to consumers and citizens, cooperation will serve our purposes better than competition. People’s behavior is a product of their system. It is only by changing the regime that can we expect a change in behavior.”

While Seddon’s effusive demonstration of the failings of competition and advantages of cooperation might be seen, in comparison to the work of Caldwell and others, to be on the fringe of the debate, when viewed in the context of recent work in the field of system leadership by individuals and by groups such as the OECD it is evident that Seddon’s theories have some significant backing.

In 2008 the OECD released a large international study using highly successful school systems as the basis for investigations. One significant finding of the study was that cooperative arrangements existed in all of these systems, but that these did not necessarily impede competition or freedom of choice.

Using Flanders as an example the OECD researchers found that cooperative arrangements between schools could build effective internal markets and regulate competition in order to improve opportunities without eliminating the positive cultural advantages of competition:

... at present, communities of schools cover more than 95% of secondary schools in Flanders, with an average of 6 to 12 schools belonging to a community. The immediate effects of the innovation were to establish internal markets which regulated competition for students between schools and increased opportunities for collective action on allocation of staffing and other resources, and for student guidance systems and curriculum. Yet, while these are important features, it must be acknowledged that the scope for
collective decision-making was at the margins and did not affect the principals’ autonomy (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p262).

Beyond Flanders the OECD researchers made similar findings across the systems investigated:

Working together has developed greater interdependence among leadership teams in Belgium, Finland and England. This also happened in Austria and Victoria, through participation in training. A principal in Belgium, comparing how schools used to compete against each other while now they are collaborating, described it as a small revolution. Over the long run collaboration generates better processes and outcomes. In Finland, this greater degree of co-operation was enhancing a shared culture of trust, co-operation and responsibility in the pursuit of increased effectiveness (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p264).

However, the OECD researchers did warn that from their qualitative data gathering they found cause for caution in managing the creation of cooperative arrangements:

... co-operation for its own sake, which has been described as contrived “collegiality”, may not produce the desired results; some may even see it as simply a burden. The Flemish example shows that some communities of schools have not evolved, and pushing co-operation on to agents who are not willing to take on this task may not work. In England, we were told that the federations or networks that worked were based on successful matching up of the partners. This may be crucial, and that matching should include shared values and aims, and clear perception of the benefits to all parties (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p264-5).

The OECD authors note the dilemma of democracy where in cases such as Flanders the education system is committed to competition but at the same time communities of schools are attempting to work in cooperative arrangements. This is the tension surrounding the emergence of the system leadership models that the OECD set out
to investigate.

In England ... system leaders are appearing in contrast to the competitive ethic of headship so prevalent in the nineties. This is at the heart of system leadership, as system leaders are the ones willing to work for the success of other schools as well as their own. This role is also emerging in other education systems across OECD. However, although system leadership in England is now a recognisable movement, it is not yet a mainstream practice. Although it is strongly advocated by the national government it is still not widely accepted by local politicians, local education officers or governors of schools – who worry that collaboration may lead to a dilution of excellent practice in their leading schools (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p267).

The shift in the ideas of some educators suggested by the OECD research on system leadership brings us to consider an existing model for social organization that melds a cooperative approach with an economic underpinning relevant to the post-industrial West. That is, we come to the work of Yochai Benkler from the Harvard University Law School. If, as the OECD suggests, governmental institutions will struggle to shift from commitments to hardline market competition ideologies then it is necessary to find compelling alternative models not just for system leadership but for social organization.

Benkler’s work springs from his analysis of information and networked organisations and draws our attention to the possibility for heterarchical sharing and cooperation to support economic growth. Benkler’s work in this area has generated new understandings of the concept of peer production, a term he coined (Hetcher, 2009, p963-68). Benkler’s ideas have been fervently adopted by some academics, for example, Tapscott and Williams (2008) contend that peer production was/is fundamentally changing economics and culture. Benkler himself (2005, p2) was more cautious noting that a cultural phenomenon like the novel was unlikely to appear through peer production. On the flip side, Benkler attracted derision. Goldman (2006) contended that Benkler was overly optimistic and argued that
Wikipedia, as an example, would cease to exist by 2010 due to participants inability to work collaboratively and effectively. Benkler’s advantage, from a critical perspective, is that his work relates to proofs that will only unfold over time. Hetcher (2009, p973-975) elaborates on a number of alternative approaches to the economic issues Benkler grapples with including rational choice theory and the tragedy of commons (that rational actors will free-ride on the work of others and that therefore all rational actors will cease to provide or contribute to public goods). However, to date there is little evidence to dispute Benkler’s work.

Benkler’s interest in our area of research stems from his work around property law and the rise of “commons” within legal frameworks that regulate or deregulate access to information and the sharing of ideas, knowledge and creativity. Benkler (2003, p9) recognized the Public Library of Science and the Budapest Open Access Initiative as two early frameworks through which scientists “can manage their own publication systems without relying on the [proprietorially interested] large commercial publishers.” In essence these commons enabled scientists to work and share knowledge cooperatively and freely. The relationship between the legal basis of commons and the political, social and economic debates around competition and cooperation are clear.

But could the concept of commons be applied to public systems like that of education? For Benkler (2003, p6) the issue is one not of setting or environment but of the legal arrangements of the relationships between actors:

Commons are a particular type of institutional arrangement for governing the use and disposition of resources. Their salient characteristic, which defines them in contradistinction to property, is that no single person has exclusive control over the use and disposition of any particular resource. Instead, resources governed by commons may be used or disposed of by anyone [using pre-determined rules].

In the Victorian government education system there is some evidence of systemic resources being arranged and used on a commons-like basis (although without the
formal recognition of this through creative or other commons licenses). On a formal level this would include the disposition of information products for use across the system while on an informal level it might include the free sharing of resources between teachers and practitioners primarily through the Victorian *Ultranet* and *Fuse* – two web-based sharing tools for schools.

More particularly though, and of most interest to school system settings, is the distinction made between open access commons and limited access commons (Ostrom, 1990). Limited access commons grant access to resources to members of a group such as those observed by the OECD in the partnerships and networks presented earlier. Ostrom (1990, p.xi), using the disposition of water resources in Switzerland, Japan, Spain and the Phillipines, creates a strong case for her argument that “stable institutions of self-government can be created if certain problems of supply, creditability and monitoring are solved.” For Ostrom the reflexive belief within free market ideology that collectives require privatization in order to be economically rational is erroneous and that “instead of basing policy on the presumption that individuals involved are helpless [it is necessary to acknowledge] the capacity of individuals to extricate themselves from various types of dilemma2 situations” (Ostrom, 1990, p14).

In the context of this study a limited access common might exist within a school community or within a network of schools or indeed within a whole school system. As the scale of the system examined gets larger the openness of the commons grows apace. Benkler (2003, p6) defines commons only as either ‘open’ or ‘limited access’. In the very broadest sense, education itself is an open common space accessible to all people of the world. Systems within the field of education though contain access limitations. Within those systems common spaces that facilitate economic, social or cultural cooperation might exist with varying degrees of limitation and openness.

The importance of understanding commons as a legal and political economy theory

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2 A dilemma of this sort arises between the possibility for attainment of an individual good which necessarily restricts the attainment of collective good which is, still, a different form of individual good.
in terms of our study is that it allows us to consider the ways in which cooperation might be given an economically rational basis in education. To determine this basis it is helpful to examine Benkler’s (2003, p6) distinction between ‘commons’ and ‘free markets’. He writes of ‘commons’:

Commons are institutional spaces, in which we [individuals or collective bodies such as a school] can practice a particular type of freedom – freedom from the constraints we normally accept as necessary preconditions to functional markets. ... [Commons mean] that individuals and groups can use resources governed under different types of constraints than those imposed by property law.

In contrast Benkler (2003, p6) describes the space of free markets thus:

Though we often think of ‘free markets’ as spaces that enable free choice, in fact these are structured relationships intended to elicit a particular datum – the comparative willingness and ability of agents to pay money for resource.

Clearly this thinking resonates with both our earlier discussion of demand side reforms that promote ‘choice’ and also with the question of how schools might work together cooperatively for mutual assistance and benefit.

Most importantly for our discussion of this meta-narrative around cooperation and competition, Benkler moved in 2006 and later in 2008 to describe the emergence of the networked information economy and contended that the “rise of greater scope for individual and cooperative nonmarket production of information and culture ... threatens the incumbents of the industrial information economy (Benkler, 2006, p2). In The Wealth of Networks (2006, p470) Benkler creates a case that technological and social changes have fundamentally changed the way post-industrial Western economies can and are functioning and that the competitive and proprietary “business models [of the industrial age] are running head-on into emerging social practices.” He adds to this (Benkler, 2008, p1-2) by suggesting:
The overarching finding [of studies in the economics of human behavior are clear]: In no human society studied under controlled experimental conditions have people on average behaved as predicted by the standard economic model. Given that the assumptions of *homo economicus* are so inconsistent with intuition, experience, and the pervasive cultural practices of inculcating sharing and pro-social behavior in children, the fact that they now have also been seen to be systematically poor predictors of observable human behavior under controlled conditions requires significant attention.

The tension for education systems between competitive organization on industrial-age business models and the place of education in the public sphere is replicated in other fields as can be understood by considering the following examples used by Benkler (2006, p35):

There are no noncommercial automobile manufacturers. There are no volunteer steel foundries. You would never choose to have your primary source of bread depend on voluntary contributions from others. Nevertheless, scientists working at noncommercial research institutes funded by nonprofit educational institutions and government grants produce most of our basic science. Widespread cooperative networks of volunteers write the software and standards that run most of the Internet and enable what we do with it. Many people turn to National Public Radio or the BBC as a reliable source of news.

These examples pose the question of what the difference is between the two classes of productive output described above. As Benkler (2006, p35) asks, “why do we rely almost exclusively on markets and commercial firms to produce cars, steel, and wheat, but much less so for the most critical information our advanced societies depend on?”

One answer would be that education is a public good rather than a private good. However, economists speak of this in terms of a good being *rival* or *nonrival*. News radio is nonrival because consumption by one person does not stop it being
consumed by another. Food is rival using the same logic. Education is nonrival. Credentials gained through education are rival. Government funding on a per-student basis might be nonrival. But in a system with choice focused demand side reform, student enrolments in schools are rival. There is more than the existence of a ‘public good’ that is at work here. There are fundamental economic reasons for the existence of non-market production processes such as those described above.

Economists (Bowles and Gintis, 2002; Dohmen, 2008) and anthropologists (Boyd and Richerson, 2005 and 2009; Andre and Baumard, 2011) have taken steps to unravel the question of what causes cooperation to emerge using evolutionary theory to explain the stability and prevalence of cooperative behaviors. Benkler (2008, p7) similarly looks to these and psychological explanations. He contends (2008, p27) that: “Design for cooperation begins with a different model of human beings than the selfish rational actor model.”

The fundamental advancement that Benkler provides in our economic understanding of this meta narrative on competition and cooperation - and in our understanding of the position of school systems in this economy - is in relation to the evidence presented for cooperation creating financial and other economic advantages for firms or organisations that are engaged in generating and using knowledge. Benkler (2006, p46) describes how “Learning Networks” allow firms to cooperate in order that they can be ‘at the state of the art’ and in a position to capitalize with ‘first-mover advantage’ when a new business opportunity arises by sharing knowledge with other firms in the field. In a parallel case he exposes how IBM has increased revenue through the use of non-exclusivity in its productions and the sharing of products, research and innovation. From 1993 to 2004 IBM gained 29,000 patents, however, at the same time IBM was “one of the firms most aggressively engaged in adapting its business model to the emergence of free software” through Linux systems (Benkler, 2006, p46). Within the four years from 2000 to 2003 IBM’s revenue from intellectual (patented) property declined slightly while revenue from Linux related services (grown through the free public sharing of IBM produced innovation and knowledge) grew from $0 to $2,000 million US dollars or $600 million more than revenue from intellectual property (Benkler, 2006).
Harris (2008, p220) added her voice to the view that “sharing information socially within a community or network is a critical factor in the creation and use of new knowledge.” Writing on the possibility for schools to be the creators of knowledge and for the power of professional learning communities and networks of practice to bring about “co-construction of knowledge within a community context” (2008, p221), Harris focused on teacher level interactions that can generate knowledge. Likewise Stoll and Seashore-Louis (2007, p222), in writing on teacher professional learning, contend that “learning can no longer be left to individuals. To be successful in a changing and increasingly complex world ... school communities need to [develop and learn together in] networks of practice.” Neither Harris nor Stoll and Seashore-Louis extend this idea to between school learning or between school governance, operations, and sharing.

Clearly there is evidence that cooperative sharing can have a rational economic justification and that networked or shared learning, shared skills and shared knowledge capital can result in improvements and growth across financial and non-financial indicators.

**Summarising Meta-narrative #2**

While Bayer and McMillan found strong and valid evidence to support the claim that competition (stemming from policies promoting choice) resulted in school improvements in their analysis of the Bay area schools in the US, there has been a clear trend in recent years toward questioning the market as the most effective driver of school improvement. While it is clear that a market focused ideology redolent of the industrial age is dominant in most polities studied, the undercurrents for change away from the industrial market model are clear. This is evident most significantly in the OECD's report on school systems and their findings around how successful school systems are attempting to develop or consolidate collaborative, system focused or cooperative relationships between schools. Benkler’s work provides an economic justification for the move toward networking
or other forms of collaboration and positions this in the context of social and economic changes associated with the rise of the networked information rich society that has developed rapidly in recent years.

**Major ideological perspectives from meta-narrative #2 relevant for defining and exploring a ‘system’ and system leadership**

To understand the production of any of the texts included in this literature review it is necessary to be able to locate them in relation to the social and cultural dimensions of their production. There are two major ideological perspectives within this meta-narrative within the literature examined:

a) the competitive model of social organization  
b) the cooperative model of social organisation

There are of course resistant readings possible within and against these major ideological drivers.

**Meta-narrative #3. Effective policy-making.**

Our third meta-narrative centers on the means through which systems are organized and governed under the mandate of public policy. Public policy making (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007) directly impacts on the creation and sustainability of system leadership models, programs and initiatives. That is, while recognizing that system leadership can exist in education outside of a policy framework that promotes systemness or cooperation, it is more sustainable and transferable across a system where, firstly, the existence of a system is acknowledged and, secondly, where public resources are spent on infrastructure and human resources that enable the system to *consciously* function on a large scale and for system leadership to operate within this (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008). The recent OECD research into system leadership (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p262-5) has aptly demonstrated in the case of Flanders and the Flemish education system that the existence or non-existence of a public-policy framework to support
system leadership makes a notable difference. And, they note, that in the UK and Victoria the emergence of system leadership has been the result of shifts and developments in public policy designed explicitly to promote this system leadership.

This exploration of the relationship between public policy and system leadership in education is divided into three parts. First, we define public policy (as distinct from private policy) and describe two approaches to public policy making, a) public policy as authoritative choice, and b) policy by network. The difference between these two approaches is briefly described and we then discuss the relative absence in the literature of concrete research into policy by network in the field of education public policy. In the second part we then discuss how a policy by network approach might be a superior frame of reference for our research area because of its pertinence to heterarchical and network organizational models and the relevance of this to the economic and social changes described in metanarratives one and two above. However, we also point to critical theories that suggest policy by network is less democratic or heterarchical than it may seem. Lastly, we discuss how policy making relates to social and economic change discussed in meta-narratives one and two. Critically, we expose the fact that while there is deep literature on policy making and education there is simultaneously a dire lack of authoritative work on the either public policy resulting in system leadership or, perhaps more surprisingly, work that applies policy by network approaches to educational leadership and public policy.

It is necessary first to clarify what is meant here by public policy. Gunn and Hogwood (1990, p15-19) distinguish between private policy making in organisations and public policy by noting that private organisations cannot call on public resources or legal coercion in the same way that governments can. Public policy then, working forward from this definition, is the action of government in the public realm. According to Althaus, Bridgman and Davis (2007, p5):

public policy is how politicians make a difference. … Policy is the instrument of governance, the decisions that direct public resources in one direction but not another. It is the outcome of the competition between ideas, interest and
ideologies that impels our political system.

While this is a serviceable definition, and certainly clarifies the term public policy, Ball (2012), Besussi (2006), Peterson (2003), Rhodes (1997), Shamir (2008) and others, consider this type of definition as inadequate because it places the locus of decision making with the politician and elides possibilities for other forms of public policy making. While on a theoretical level these authors make strong arguments for the potential of community and networked public policy making in the public sector, to be considered as public policy – a policy that comes from the public rather than private realm - a policy must have at least the assent of government even if this assent is given in the delegation of decision making to relatively autonomous agents.

There are numerous approaches to policy making in the literature of public policy (Bardach, 2000; Considine, 2005; Fisher, 2003; Kay, 2006) but for our purposes here two perspectives on public policy-making are particularly relevant. The first perspective views policy making as an “authoritative choice” where policy-making is “deciding at any time and place what objectives and substantive measures should be chosen in order to deal with a particular problem or issue” (Colebatch, 1993, p33). The significance of the authoritative choice model for understanding policy-making is that viewing “policy as an authoritative choice, based on plausible hypotheses ... compels us to consider the environment within which the policy making occurs” (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p10). Our previous discussions around economic and social factors and changes in the economic and education policy environments make this perspective clearly pertinent. That is, as Althaus, Bridgman and Davis contend, “Society continues to grapple with how to allocate scarce resources and provide basic services such as health, education, community order and transport” (2007, p10).

The authoritative choice model for public policy has been described as a mechanism for government or top-down “command-and-control” (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p91). The model is considered by some to have “established a ‘them and us’ approach where public officials were kept at a strictly discreet and anonymous distance from those they served” (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p91). To
some extent this is born out in examining the literature on educational systems and leadership as there is a notable absence of policy analysis work examining the relationships across this hierarchy between policy makers (and the ideological state apparatus they serve within) and the realization of education policy in schools. Codd, Gordon and Harker (1997, p264) remarked upon this absence assigning it to the “liberal ideology within which such analysis is generally undertaken [that] embodies a political theory of possessive individualism.” However, rather than the absence being the result of policy analysts’ ideological blindness, instead this absence may reflect that there was in fact little evidence of interaction between the policy makers and the policy enactors at the grass roots. Certainly Althaus, Bridgman and Davis (2007) contend that this was the case under the traditional hierarchical model.

The second frame pertinent to this study through which we view policy-making is that of “policy through network” (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p91). Where a traditional view of policy-making requires a “hierarchical government bureaucracy interacting with society to repetitively and uniformly carry out government objectives” (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p91) a policy through network perspective subverts this traditional command-and-control model. Sørensen and Torfing (2006, p9) defined network governance thus:

… a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors who interact through negotiations which take place within a regulative, normative, cognitive and imaginative framework that is self-regulating within limits set by external agencies; and which contributes to the production of public purpose.

In contrast to traditional hierarchical policy-making, policy through network approaches allow “conglomerates of interested parties joined around an ad-hoc issue” (Rhodes, 1997, p62), a point expanded on by Williams (2002), to prioritize functionality that works “vertically and horizontally within government and intergovernmental settings” (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p91). The policy through network approaches originated as a result of the concerns with traditional
policy making illustrated by Agranoff (2003b), Benkler (2008), Bonner and Caro (2007), and Seddon (2008). In a policy by network approach, policy is “enacted through the input and energy of a range of parties carrying out different duties” (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p91) and governments become policy facilitators rather than taking on the actual work of policy creation or alternatively of enacting the policy at grass roots level (Eggers and Goldsmith, 2004).

These two approaches to framing public policy making are relevant to this research as we will later explore how actors within the Victorian education system view the policy making process and their interactions with it, whether as makers of policy, co-creators of policy, or recipients of policy.

With this in mind, the second frame (policy by network) is perhaps most relevant to this research as this model retains the possibility of keeping the prerequisite assent of government mentioned above while also resonating with the heterarchical models of social organization advanced by Ostrom (1990) and Benkler (2003 and 2006) that are, to some extent, evident in this research.

A question that is unresolved in the literature and that is relevant to our study is the question of motivation behind the shift toward limited policy through network approaches in some governmental areas, such as that seen in recent years in Victoria. It may be that governments are reacting to what Althaus, Bridgman and Davis (2007, p11) describe as “disenchantment and institutional breakdown that [is] propelling shifts toward greater participation and trust building activities [as governments move] to engage in networked governance and more fluid interactions [in the policy process].” A more critical, if not cynical perspective, is that moving away from hierarchical command and control methods of policy delivery enables elites to gain greater control and influence through the creation of pervasive networks within a system that carry the message of - and carry out the function of - system elites. Hatcher (2008, p30), for example, argues that networked policy making is a reconfiguration rather than a rebuttal of government power that creates a cadre of technocratic managers who implement state directed policy at local levels. Similarly, Morrison (2009, p42) contends that networked forms of
governance are designed to “reduce local influence.”

Throughout the literature on system leadership in education and on school improvement more generally the meta-narrative of effective policy making provides the link between economic and social change ideas discussed in the previous two meta-narratives and the enacting of change or reform in education systems. Where economic ideas become action this occurs through policy-making. Policy-making creates an environment. In school systems it does this through the allocation of resources, the regulation of schools and teachers, by influencing the curriculum and pedagogy and by influencing how consumers interact with the resources they consume and the spaces they attend for the purpose of education. But, policy making also responds to the environment. This occurs particularly in policy makers responding to the choices consumers make, reacting to the media and through ensuring elected officials provide or appear to provide the outcomes demanded by their constituencies. Most significantly for this research, and as we have discussed above, public policy responds to the economic and social change that occurs in the policy making environment.

In meta-narrative 2 we explored demand-side reforms around choice and we have explored the challenges to the competitive ‘demand-side’ focused public policies that have been caused by both the limited evidence for success of the reforms and the shift in attitude to market-driven philosophies. Nobel Laureate Robert Lucas, in his presidential address to the American Economic Association, concluded that the focus on demand-side reform had run its course and that new public policy was necessary to take the economy forward:

Taking performance in the United States over the past 50 years as a benchmark, the potential for welfare gains from better long-run, supply-side policies exceeds by far the potential from further improvements in short-run demand management (Lucas, 2003, p1).

This concern around economic gain is, as we have see previously, closely coupled with debates around the structure and manifestations of education systems. The
urgency that so often surrounds these discussions is due not only to the impact of schooling on society's children but also because of the size of the impact it can have. The OECD's 2010 analysis of PISA scores, for example, was titled *The High Cost of Low Performance* (OECD, 2010, p27). The ‘Policy Conclusions’ chapter of this analysis report suggests that there are “enormous economic gains to be had by OECD countries that can improve the cognitive skills of their populations. Moreover, the gains, put in terms of current GDP, far outstrip the value of short-run business-cycle management.” The implications for the OECD countries as a whole are dramatic.

A modest goal of having all OECD countries boost their average PISA scores by 25 points over the next 20 years – which is less than the most rapidly improving education system in the OECD, Poland, achieved between 2000 and 2006 alone – implies an aggregate gain of OECD GDP of USD 115 trillion over the lifetime of the generation born in 2010 (OECD, 2010, p27).

For an area of such importance there is, unsurprisingly, a large body of literature on public policy making in education. The nature of this literature depends largely on the issues that are prevalent in the nation, polity or time period studied. There is, for example, a significant body of research from the United States that looks at the divergences and changes in the location of policy making, ie, the degree to which governmental intervention adds or removes local control over education. Grissom (2012, p475), stated in summarizing the work of other authors in the field that: “No other phrase sums up American education governance like *local control.*” Drawing on the work of Cooper and Fusarelli (2009), Manna (2011) and Viteritti (2009) each of whom explore the collision between local, State and Federal controls over education, Grissom (2012) explores the ways that state and federal policy making has operated while all the time keeping “local priorities and needs [as] the linchpins of decision making” (p475).

However, while there is a great depth in literature linking public policy and education, what is startling is the absence of work relating either to:

- system leadership (in particular, and educational leadership in general) and
... there is an enormous gap in the research field of education policy. Despite all of the talk of globalization this and globalization that, and a few nods and gestures to new forms of governance, most education policy analysis is still locked into a nation-state, policy-as-government paradigm.

Ball (2012) and Beck (2006, p73) call for the emergence of new approaches to public policy that might deal with the “cosmopolitanisation” (Beck, 2006, p72) of education public policy where the global and the local are seen as interconnected. They seek approaches that can look at policy emerging in networks or beyond the traditional government transmission model. Ball (2012) however suggests that, as of 2012, theorists do not have the tools to undertake this type of analysis of public policy.

In relation to the case examined for this research, that of the Victorian education system and the system leadership and network focused reforms of recent years, there is very little in the way of formal policy documentation and no scholarly academic research. In the extent to which public policy shifts that occurred in Victoria can be seen to have occurred through organizational restructure and realignment, in this sense, the public policy evident in Victoria is similar to what Ball (2012, p5) describes as policy by networks where the policy making occurs through community and “based upon shared conceptions of social problems and their solutions.” In Victoria, agents within the system certainly shared beliefs and a narrative around educational and systemic change. This is evident in the research as will be seen later. For Ball (2012, p5), this type of policy making allows ‘new voices’ to be “given space within the policy talk” and at the least this type of policy making enables what Agranoff (2003a, p28) describes as collaborative solutions.

While little has been written in a scholarly context that relates our central topic to
public policy making, the relationship between system leadership and public policy in education is necessary to uncover.

As the economies of post-industrial nations change so too might their systems of governance and policy making. How government and education systems respond to these changes in terms of policy making will vary and there is clearly a potential for a shift from the authoritative choice model to the policy by network model. In terms of the potential for disjuncture between policy and practice in such a shift it could be argued that this disjuncture is unproblematic and that adaptive practice at the local level is desirable. Indeed this is the potential suggested by a policy by network approach. However, there are challenges implied within such an approach since as Althaus, Bridgman and Davis (2007, p8) indicate “public policy is about achieving objectives. It is a means to an end. Policy is a course of action by government to attain certain results.” Understanding and balancing interests in ensuring policy outcomes are met and in ensuring policy is appropriate to the conditions in which it is implemented is central to this research into how system leadership operates in system-wide reforms in education.

**Summary of Meta-Narrative #3**

Within the literature on public policy there are many divergences as to how public policy is or should be created and enacted. Two of these are relevant to the discussions of system leadership and to the emergence of public policy that might impact on the potential and possibility for system leadership, these are:

- The authoritative choice model
- The policy by network model.

In a system where the authoritative choice model has contributed to the emergence of a system leadership initiative or idea, then we would expect to find evidence of there being a top-down, command and control culture evident in the actions of public policy makers and in the experiences of leaders operating in the system
below the public policy making level. In contrast, where a policy by network model has contributed to the emergence of system leadership we would expect to find actors at the front-line and intermediary levels of the system contributing to the formation of policy either within their own area of operation or, perhaps more significantly, outside of their operational areas.

Both the authoritative choice and policy by network models have implications for the manifestation of power within the system and for the ability of the system to adapt to prevalent economic and social factors that impact upon system operation.

**Major ideological perspectives from meta-narrative #3 relevant for defining and exploring a ‘system’ and system leadership**

To understand the production of any of the texts included in this literature review it is necessary to be able to locate them in relation to the social and cultural dimensions of their production. There are two major ideological perspectives within this meta-narrative within the literature examined:

a) the view that policy making logically and necessarily flows from the authoritative choices of politicians (the authoritative choice model)

b) the view that effective policy making would engage networked groups or individuals with responsibilities in policy areas in the policy making process (the policy by network model).

There are of course resistant readings possible within and against these major ideological drivers.

**DEFINING “SYSTEM” THROUGH THE LITERATURE**

Czech politician and author Vaclav Havel observed that “the system is not... a social order imposed by one group upon another, [but rather an ideological process in which] everyone... is both a victim and a supporter of the system” (1991, p 144). He
was, of course speaking about human political systems, most specifically drawing from his experience in Eastern Europe, but the concept and implication is that same for any system in which humans are engaged and in which humans are the motive force.

It is necessary first, though, to establish what a “system” is. There are many precise definitions that pertain to a particular area of study with the term used in a variety of disciplines from the sciences to the humanities; so an eco-system and a production-system and a school system can be held as discipline specific forms of a common concept. One very broad definition (Boulding, 1985, p9) defines a system as “anything that is not chaos”, which while poetic is not particularly helpful. It is also not the earliest manifestation of a system definition. Interest in the discrete and formalized study of systems in published work can be traced back to biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy and his 1951 publication of General System Theory: A New Approach to Unity of Science. This interest in systems is now evident across disciplines including engineering (Kossiakoff, Sweet and Seymour, 2011; Pistikopoulos, Galindo and Dua, 2010), Mathematics (Hinrichsen and Pritchard, 2010), information technology and the internet (Cordoba-Pachon, 2010; Maani, 2002; Yao, 2010), Public Service and Public Policy (Fullan, 2010a; Lundvall, 2010; Seddon, 2008), Health (Hunter, Marks and Smith, 2010; Smith-Acuna, 2010; World Health Organisation, 2010) and the list goes on.

These approaches to systems are often brought under the umbrella of ‘systems thinking’ which is “a way of thinking about all manner of things – from social to biological to mechanical systems – that became more prominent after World War II” (Birkland, 2011, p26). Illustrative of the common threads of thought around systems thinking is that, in this study of leadership in education, we can turn to work conducted for the French Petroleum Industry around oil reservoir management (Consentino, 2001) and find definitions that are pertinent to our study. Consentino (2001, p3) explains that system thinking aims to:

- Understand the process of change, instead of focusing on the individual constituent parts of the process itself.
• Understand the interrelationships among all the constituent parts, rather than the linear cause-effect concatenations.
• Concentrate on the dynamic complexity of the process, rather than the static complexity of its details.

More recently Toma (2010, p25), contends that system thinking is a prerequisite for strategic management: “Any strategic-management model draws on systems thinking, which focuses on the interrelated nature of the components of a complex organization.” Toma (2010, p26) contrasts the more linear analytical approaches of research that centre on, and impacts upon, details of single variables, with a systems approach that “considers groups of variables simultaneously in order to study their effects, focusing on the nonlinear interactions between and among them.”

There are also competing definitions of systems thinking. They are what Meadows (2008, p.ix) calls the “many fractious schools of systems thought.” Kleiner, in an aside contained in Senge's *Fifth Discipline Handbook* (Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Dutton, Kleiner, Lucas and Smith, 2000, p79), identifies seven different approaches to understanding the nature of systems including ‘Process Systems Thinking’ which sees an “organisation as a set of information flows”; ‘Open Systems Thinking’ which “seeks to understand a system in terms of its inputs, outputs, throughputs and boundaries”; and, ‘Human Systems Thinking’ that examines the “ways people’s roles and relationships can interact.”

In this study we will be principally concerned with systems of human interaction and thus, by Kleiner’s divisions, this study will be most closely aligned to the Process Systems Thinking and the Human Systems Thinking schools of thought. In saying this though, the understanding of system structures and processes aligned to open systems thinking is essential since as ‘open systems’ thinker Oshry (2007, p.xiv) puts it: “We humans are systems creatures. Our consciousness – how we experience ourselves, others, our systems, and other systems – is shaped by the structure and processes of the systems we are in.” Oshry (2007, p.xiv) also expands on the notion of system blindness which is the state of being where humans do not perceive the system they are part of; “we prefer seeing ourselves as captains of our own ships;
we prefer the notion that we believe what we believe and think what we think because of who we are, not where we are.” This concept is an important factor to contend with in the research conducted here. Oshry (2007) contends that the ‘costly illusion’ individuals have of their relationship to systems results in diminished system effectiveness. In this instance Oshry parallels the ideas of Gharajedaghi (2006, p10) who explained that the unconscious assumptions and memories within an organization overpower any plans for change that do not deal with the systemness of the system:

Accepted on faith, these assumptions are transformed into unquestioned practices that may obstruct the future. Unless the content and implications of these implicit cultural codes are made explicit and dismantled, the nature of the beast will outlive the temporary effects of interventions, no matter how well intended.

However, Process Systems Thinking and Human Systems Thinking do not of themselves provide an explanation of systems which are after all categorically different from organisations (Meadows, 2008) and it does not sufficiently explain the view of systemness that is taken in this study. Rather, it is an accurate explanation of part of a system, that being interactions, processes and the flow of information. Despite contested interpretations of systems there are certain critical commonalities to approaches previously taken to system analysis. Across all academic disciplines, considering the ‘system’ is about analyzing the behavior that is latent or inherent in a particular structure, whether that is the structure of the limbic system in the brain or the structure of a public transport system. That is to say, in any system there are certain structures that cause it to behave a certain way (Meadows, 2008, p1-2). A general, and most useful definition of a system is provided by Meadows (2008, p11):

A system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something. If you look at that definition closely for a minute, you can see that a system must consist of three things: elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose.
Meadows goes on to illustrate that according to this definition the digestive system is indeed a system including elements (teeth, enzymes, intestines) that are interrelated (by the flow of food and chemicals) to achieve a function (separation of nutrient from waste and the transfer of both). Similarly a football team is, according to Meadows (2008, p11), a system including elements (players, coach), interconnections (rules, strategies, communications) and a purpose (to win a game, get fit).

Meadows’ explanation of systemness is more useful than the more humanist and open systems theories because of its general applicability. To illustrate this point we might look to Gharajedaghi, a business and organizational systems specialist who wrote *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity* (2009), in which he states that “the system ... consists of all the interactive sets of variables that could be controlled by participating actors” (p30). This articulation (in the connective sense) of actors with actor-controlled variables as definitive of a system excludes the presence in a system of any element that is not actor controlled. He relegates these to the ‘environment’ external to the system while also making the valid point that “systems can only be understood in the context of their environments” (2009, p30). If, however, those variables or elements in the environment outside the system impact upon the system are they not part of it? In many cases obviously not: a hot day will affect various body systems and cause perspiration but the heat is not part of the body system. However, and more importantly, there are elements that are not controlled by actors, which are part of the system. These actors, for example, do not necessarily control memory and culture. Gharajedaghi’s definition does not account for these factors. Similarly we can find problems in definitions of systems within the business administration field. Macdonald, Burke, and Stewart (2006, p108) provided what they called a ‘definition of system’: “… a system is ‘a specific methodology for organizing activities in order to achieve a purpose’. This involves directing flows of work, information, money, people, materials and equipment. The system provides the framework within which these flows take place.” While this is a neat encapsulation there is a semantic problem in labeling a system as a methodology and simultaneously as a framework. Meadows’ simple statement
stands as the clearest definition yet.

To extend Meadow’s analysis further, what then is not a system? There is the obvious answer, which is that things that are unrelated cannot form a system. A light bulb and an ant, for example do not make a system: even if the two elements were in close and connective proximity the relationship between the two elements would not of itself serve a function or purpose inherent within those two elements. Even when elements form part of a whole they are not necessarily a system. Meadows (2008, p12) illustrates this with the idea of a creature who dies and in dying loses its “system-ness” as the “multiple interrelations that held it together no longer function.”

Meadows’ singles out three things that all systems must have, elements, interconnections, function/purpose. In this process she elides the importance of “coherent organisation” within her definition. There may be a natural reluctance to argue for coherence and organisation as a pre-determiner of a system’s existence, particularly with, say, an astronomical system, because questions of coherence and organisation become muddled with physics, metaphysics and religion. In this example the nature or origin of the coherence and organisation is contested. None-the-less, in all systems this fourth factor, coherence or organisation, must exist. To go back to Meadow’s example of the digestive system, in that system coherence exists in the physiological actions of cells, and the governing organisation of the brain that together provide “an elegant set of regulating chemical signals” (Meadows, 2008, p11) that are both organising and coherence giving. Without these regulating chemical and neurological signals – coherence - the system would not fulfill its purpose. In the astronomical example, coherence is provided by the laws of physics with their basis in mathematical possibility. In the football team, coherence is provided by rules that are understood and followed by the players. In each case, the giver of coherence is associated with an interconnection within the system and this has profound implications in this study for the role of leaders who as elements within a system may or may not contribute to coherence and the achievement of the function or purpose of the system depending on the inter-connectivity of their role. Significantly, the removal of a single human element from a social system may not
affect its coherence where established interconnections and the function or purpose are both clear. Changing single human elements in a system may have little effect on it. Indeed, Meadows (2008, p16) argues, “Changing elements usually has the least effect on the system.” If, however, the inter-connective aspects of the system were bound up with a specific individual or group of individuals, then their presence or absence might fundamentally affect the system. The role and effect of leaders within systems is something we will examine further.

Education systems then, can be described and said to exist where they contain four components; elements, interconnections, function or purpose, and coherence. These components are described in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elements</td>
<td>Entities (things with distinct and independent existence) and things within the system that are discrete units but are interrelated.</td>
<td>Students. Parents. Teachers. Administrators. Buildings. Money. Teacher training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Function or Purpose</td>
<td>A reason for the existence of the system.</td>
<td>Education. Economic growth. Enculturation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coherence</td>
<td>Shared meaning including mechanisms for making and/or sharing meaning.</td>
<td>Stated, consistent and understood priorities, policies, rules, practices or expectations that are transmitted or present in the interconnections. Continuity over time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the table above displays each component separately, each component operates and exists together with the others. As has been stated previously, studying systems is inherently complex as “systems happen all at once” (Meadows, 2008, p5).
However, with that in mind, it “is easier to learn about a systems' elements than its interconnections” (Meadows, 2008, p14). Some interconnections are physical and are comparatively easy to observe, some are information or communication based and are harder to observe. It is harder still to ascertain a system's function or purpose as this is not necessarily spoken or written down and in cases where a mission statement is articulated it does not ipso facto mean that the system’s purpose and the statement align. For Meadows (2008, p14), “the best way to deduce the system’s purpose is to watch for a while to see how the system behaves. ... Purposes are deduced from behavior, not from rhetoric or stated goals.”

What is certain is that systems of human interaction, or social systems, are complex and changing one part of a system can have profound, unforeseen and potentially unexplainable effects. Meadows (2008, p5) describes the problem of cause and effect neatly in explaining how in her study of organisations everyone “can act dutifully and rationally, yet all these well-meaning actions too often add up to a perfectly terrible result, [and how] a system might suddenly, and without warning, jump into a kind of behavior you've never seen before.” In education systems around the world the elements and function or purpose of the system are common and easily understood. The elements listed above are, to a large extent, common to all education systems. Similarly, and without being reductive, while education systems certainly perform many varied social, economic and personal purposes including economic growth, social cohesion and individual fulfillment, all of these are sub-functions or sub-purposes of the function/purpose, “education.”

A further complication in the study of systems is the way in which the researcher determines the system boundaries. This ‘boundary specification problem’ (Laumann, Marsden and Prensky, 1983) presents specific concerns for the study of systems as when a boundary is not properly specified “some relevant actors [are] excluded” (de Lima, 2010, p246) as are the interconnections of those actors with others (Butts, 2008, p22). Gharajedaghi (2009) provides a simplistic framework that is nonetheless a helpful starting point, around which we can think about the boundaries of a system where since everything depends on everything else the complexity is massive. Gharajedaghi (2009, p30) started with the notion that
‘everything’ can be “grouped into two categories: those elements that somehow can be controlled and those that cannot” and the system boundary is an arbitrary line between the two. We have discussed above the problems of Gharajedaghi’s ‘actor’ and ‘control’ model, and here we see that the arbitrariness of Gharajedaghi’s boundaries is indeed problematic. An education system across a country such as Australia will also contain systems within the larger system, each with their own controlling and organizing mechanisms – governments, policies, bureaucracies, leaders. Each school in fact serves as its own system, as might each classroom. As Meadows (2008, p16) explains, “systems can be nested within systems. Therefore, there can be purposes within purposes.” This concept of ‘nesting’ leads to consideration of the influence one system can have on another and the bleed between boundaries of systems.

Despite the commonality of elements present within them, education systems vary widely in the use and application of those system elements. Different education systems have different allocations of time, money, teachers, teacher training, and so on. These differences however, do not lead to an inability – from a system analysis perspective – to draw from one unique system, conclusions that can be applied to others. When examining common structures that produce characteristic and recognizable behaviors, that deal with common problems such as the distribution of resources, economic downturns, etc, system thinkers refer to those common structures as archetypes. For Meadows (2008, p6), these archetypes, “which are responsible for some of the most intransigent and potentially dangerous problems, also can be transformed, with a little systems understanding, to produce much more desirable behaviors.” So it is with education. The presence of these archetypes within the systems enables us to transfer and apply knowledge from one system to another. In this case study, the Victorian State education system is a broad entity with nested systems of Regional Networks and within those there are nested systems that are individual schools. The existence of these archetypes within education means that conclusions that are drawn about a system and system leadership that are likely to be applicable in many other systems.

To summarize: The defining characteristic of a system is “that it cannot be
understood as a function of its isolated components ... the system doesn't depend on what each part is doing but on how each part is interacting with the rest” (Kofman and Senge, 1995, p27). As Meadows (2008, p11) explains, “a system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something.” Within this description the concept of ‘coherence’ is significant and separate to the three concepts of ‘elements’, ‘interconnections’ and ‘function/purpose’ that Meadows focus her attention on. Systems can be complex and dynamic and they have boundaries, including the potential for systems to nest within the boundaries of larger systems.

ESTABLISHING A “STARTING POINT DEFINITION” OF SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

Having established what a system is, we can now turn attention to establishing a ‘starting point’ definition of system leadership from relevant literature. The phrase ‘starting point’ is used here to indicate that the literature does not in-fact provide an adequate and agreed definition. Concept development invariably has a confused and contested phase. Arriving at a research based definition for system leadership relevant to the Victorian context is one of the outcomes of the research undertaken for this project.

We are looking here at literature outside of the field of education in order to develop our ‘starting point’ definition since to do otherwise would necessarily inhibit broader understanding. For example, Hopkins, Higham and Matthews (2009, p23-25) present a ‘taxonomy of roles’ for system leaders, but quite apart from the fact their role definitions are questionable they are so specific to education in England as to render them unsuitable for determining a definition of system leadership.

System leadership is a concept that might be investigated in two principal ways:

1. As a unique form of leadership with particular skills and behaviors that define it, or,

2. As a term for the application of already known leadership skills, styles and behaviors imported into the context of leading a system.
This is a necessary distinction to make. If system leadership is a unique form of leadership then there is a curriculum through which system leadership can be learned and developed by any actor with leadership capacity. If system leadership is not a unique form of leadership then it is positionally defined, that is, system leadership would be the application of known leadership skills, styles and behaviours in a position that has influence over a system. These questions and the implications they have are of present concern and have not yet been clearly answered in empirical literature and for which existing empirical evidence is scant.

It is necessary then, to examine the definitional ideas that already exist in literature. In the United Kingdom the government’s Innovations Unit notes that:

Much attention is currently being paid to the concept of ‘system leadership’. At the same time, interpretations vary and definition is elusive, but this is hardly surprising. System leadership is an emergent concept – it will, in the end, be defined by practice as the education system evolves and reshapes itself to meet broader twenty-first century challenges and aspirations (2006, p2).

Part of the problem faced by governments and organizations investigating system leadership is that, according to the OECD in 2008 (Hopkins and Pont, 2008, p254), “There has been little attempt to date to document how system leadership is being enacted.” Morrison (2009, p42), notes that “even leading protagonists [of System Leadership] seem to disagree ... [on what the term means] when applied to Education Leadership and Management.”

Ultimately this research project will address some of those problems by attempting to identify and then examine the role of system leaders in Victoria, thus providing evidence of the practice of system leadership if it can indeed be effectively described. The research will arrive at a definition based on the research evidence. Our immediate challenge, then, in establishing a ‘starting point’ definition for system leadership from literature, is the paucity of pre-existing research into the practiced
skills, attributes and behaviors of system leaders. What we will examine then, in the remainder of this section, are alternative theories of and approaches to understanding system leadership. This will then bring us back to establishing a starting point definition of system leadership for the purpose of the research undertaken in this project.

Before we look at some of the literature surveyed here, it is worth considering Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom’s injunction (2004, p4) that: “… we need to be skeptical about the ‘leadership by adjective’ literature. Sometimes these adjectives have real meaning, but sometimes they mask the more important themes common to successful leadership, regardless of the style being advocated.” Some of the literature below is backed by empirical research, other texts however, rely on sociological and critical theory. Both empirical and theoretical approaches are valid means to study and hypothesise, but for the sake of clarity the approach taken will be noted.

**SYSTEM LEADERSHIP AS HUMAN LEADERSHIP**

Our first port of call in the literature investigates the relationship between a leader’s ability to affect a system and their social position, personal attributes and human leadership skills. Macdonald, Burke and Stewart (2006, p11), in their book *Systems Leadership: Creating Positive Organisations* – a monograph based on empirical research in business contexts - argued that:

> Systems leadership is essentially about how to create, improve and sustain successful organizations [and that] this is a social process. While we do not underestimate the critical issues in creating commercially and technically viable organizations, even these are built on the social process of human relationships.

They go on to outline nine ‘core principles’ that they believe are the foundations on which systems leadership is built.
• People are not machines
• People need to be able to predict their environments
• People’s behaviour is value based
• People form cultures based on mythologies
• Change is a result of dissonance
• It is as important to understand social processes in detail as it is to understand the detail of technical process
• Understand the difference between prediction of a population’s behaviour and the prediction of an individual’s behaviour
• It is better to build relationships on the basis of authority rather than power
• Clarity of boundaries is the basis of freedom.

(2006, p11-35)

In addition to these nine ‘core principles’ Burke, Macdonald and Stewart identify six ‘core values’ (honesty, trustworthiness, courage, respect, fairness, love) which, they contend, it is necessary for individuals to demonstrate if they are to sustain membership of a system and that are fundamental to successful system leadership.

The centrality of values illustrated here is reminiscent of Fullinwider (1996, p169), who postulated that agents of society, such as schools and school leaders, must operate across four ‘virtues’: moral, intellectual, communal and political. Including within those virtues the values of honesty, truthfulness, decency, courage, charity, thoughtfulness, commitment to the common good and the like. Having tested their proposition in a range of business contexts and in different countries, Macdonald, Burke and Stewart (2006, p19) created the following diagram to indicate the behavior of a human system member “must be at the positive [left-hand] end of the scale [in each of their six ‘core values’] in order for him or her to be accepted and relied upon by others.”
The diagram above focuses on the values leaders are perceived to hold or represent. This social relationships focused analysis of system leadership suggests, with obvious implications for leadership, that “positive values are the defining properties of a cohesive social group. If members behave in a way that is perceived to demonstrate those positive values then the group will remain cohesive” (Burke, Macdonald and Stewart, 2006, p21). These authors place a premium on what Sergiovanni (1984, 2005) described as the human leadership domain and cohesion creation in leadership roles and behaviours. In so doing, these authors reflect work on ‘emotional leadership’. Beatty and Leithwood (2008, p2) note that emotions “are a potent and largely untapped resource, which educational leaders need to understand better if they are to be directly and intentionally helpful to their teaching colleagues in the shared task of improving student learning.” Indeed some writers contend that the ability to transform organizations is emotionally based (Dubinsky and Yammarino, 1994) and that positive perceptions of leadership are based on emotional bonds between leaders and followers (Cherulnik, Donley, Wiewel and Miller, 2001). George, in *Emotions and Leadership* (2000), suggests that emotional leadership is the ability to understand followers’ emotions, which Meindl and Schyns (2006, p45) suggest generates the “risk of manipulating followers.” The ‘core values’ and ‘core principles’ outlined by Macdonald, Burke and Stewart are highly contestable but provide a basis on which we can begin to consider other factors that might be equally or more important in describing system leadership.
SYSTEM LEADERS AS POWER PLAYERS AND INFLUENCE EXERTERS

In pointed contrast to Macdonald, Burke and Stewart and others working from the emotional and human leadership perspective, a number of writers focus on the political and power dimensions of roles that might be defined as system leadership. Gharajedaghi (2009, p249), for instance, writes from theoretical standpoint “Leadership ... is defined as the ability to influence those over whom one does not have authority” and “the ability to influence those whom we do not control” (2009, p32). Heifetz (1994, p101), also explored the duality of power and influence: “Authority can be divided into two forms: formal and informal. With formal authority come the various powers of office, and with informal authority comes the power to influence attitude and behavior beyond compliance.” Barry Oshry, in Leading Systems (1999, p7), illustrates the nexus between system leadership and power.

Power is not a dirty word. Power – though often treated as an outmoded relic of ancient times, irrelevant to our more enlightened era – is an essential element of system leadership. System power is the ability to act in ways that fundamentally transform whole systems, elevating them to new possibilities of experience and accomplishment for their members and for the systems as wholes. System leadership is quite a different order of business from system management. ... System leadership has to do with breaking the system out of its current patterns, radically transforming the system’s mission, direction, tradition, culture, elevating the system to previously unattained levels of performance. The ... challenge of leadership is to create what else the system can be.

For Oshry, the term ‘power’ indicates a system leader’s ability to be transformative. Although, it is interesting to note here that between 1999 and 2007 Oshry’s perspective has modified to place less premium on the individual heroic leader “breaking the system out of its current patterns” (1999, p7) to a more moderate view that for all system actors including leaders, “our consciousness ... is shaped by the structure and processes of the systems we are in” and the power exerted
operates only within these structures (2007, p.xiv). What has not shifted in Oshry’s work is a view on the relationship between power and leadership which is in stark contrast to that of Macdonald, Burke and Stewart (2006) who use the term ‘power’ in the context of human interactions and suggest that power is in fact a ‘dirty’ word. Indeed, the eighth principle outlined by these authors for system leaders is: “It is better to build relationships on the basis of authority rather than power” (p34). Macdonald, Burke and Stewart (2006, p34) acknowledge that there are many definitions of power and authority but illustrate that:

They are both concerned with influencing behaviour. A person can exercise authority or power in order to direct another person’s behaviour toward a particular purpose. If a person uses authority then he or she will be acting with limits known and agreed by the other person. The use of power will breach one or more of these limits.

Where Oshry describes power as a capacity of transformational system leaders to bring about change within a system, Macdonald, Burke and Stewart contend that exerting power actually limits the capacity of leaders to effect change. They indicate that in terms of the human elements of a social system, changing the system is about changing behaviours of the actors. Thus, in a social system the exertion of power over others would be counter to an ability to achieve transformation. The implications of this debate are significant for concepts of system leadership.

What we see in the debate between these two ideas is a fundamental challenge for system leadership. If, as Macdonald, Burke and Stewart (2006, p34) would have us believe, system leaders can be effective, only if they use influence “with limits known and agreed by the other person” then ipso facto a system leader cannot effectively exert influence or bring about change in parts of a system where ‘agreement’ about the relationship between the actors has not been reached. In the best case scenario then, under the Macdonald, Burke and Stewart approach, a system leader has effective influence only over those parts of the system where they have direct contact and have made agreements, or, to stretch the bow, where there might be said to be a tacit agreement based on assumed lines of authority
determined by employment status and organizational culture. This view would necessarily mean that only those with positional authority to act over or with system actors could exhibit system leadership and those without positional authority and / or those who are unknown across the system, cannot exhibit system leadership as there is no opportunity for an ‘agreement’ to be reached. The act of system leadership in this conceptualization is personal, relational and occurs in close proximity between the leader and the led. It also affirms the seemingly natural conflation of position and power. Heifitz (1994, p101) writes, “to lead from a position of authority requires knowing how to deploy the power that comes with the position.” But, the joining of the ideas of ‘position’ and ‘power’, apart from negating the potential for anyone other than those with position to exert power, negates Heifetz’s own notion (1994, p101) that informal authority exists where an individual has the “power to influence attitude and behaviour beyond compliance.”

In contrast Oshry’s standpoint enables any actor who can marshal power to be an agent of change, even if that change occurs within the ideological and unconscious parameters of the system structures and even if that actor is unknown to the wider system or is not positionally empowered.

Like Oshry, other writers see the potential for power to be liberating when it is not defined by positionality but by action and self-belief. In The Wounded Leader Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2002, p32) argue that in schools, the “balanced use of power is critical to school life, creating common goals and giving meaning to work.” They go on (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p32) to expand upon the misconception they would identify in the work of Macdonald, Burke and Stewart:

Pervasive and predominant conceptions of power in our culture and schools define it in terms of the ability to control and impose ones will on others. Yet power is essential to a leader’s success in leading change and realizing goals. Consequently, power has traditionally gone hand in hand with leadership and played a major role … for good or bad.

This recognition that power can be constructive and that it can be used for empowerment rather than repression and to support rather than to undermine,
represents a fundamental challenge to the conception of power as a necessarily repressive force that would run counter to successful leadership. “The paradox of power leaves leaders aware of their vulnerability and their dependency on others” (Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p32). Power is, from this perspective, about mobilizing to bring about change, and this can rarely be done alone. This is not to say that power cannot be used repressively, but it is to say that power is a relevant factor in determining the existence of system leadership.

If power is a relevant factor, and if any actor who can marshal power can bring about change regardless of their position, then system leadership can be viewed as a more open field where any organizational actors can become system leaders if they are able to effect change to the system. Position undoubtedly helps many leaders exert power, but it is clear that while there may be a strong correlation between position and power they are not the same thing when it comes to understanding system leadership. Indeed, understanding that power can be mobilized for change without the formal or tacit agreement of other actors and outside of the “limits known and agreed by the other person” (Macdonald, Burke and Stewart 2006, p34) empowers those who are positionally marginalized or unknown in a broad and complex system. In short, understanding that any actor has the potential to mobilize power undermines both the view that power is repressive and that position is central to system leadership. Instead, system leadership requires the ability to mobilize power constructively in the service of change.

SYSTEM LEADERS AS NETWORKERS
If it can be contended that system leadership can occur within positionally marginalized roles and in roles that do not have visibility and authority across the system, then how, in reality, are system leaders able to operate and mobilize this power? The notion of ‘position’ within the system is one that a number of texts (Blankstain, Cole and Houston, 2009; Butts, 2008; Cordoba-Patchon, 2010; Oshry, 2007) have identified as having importance for system leadership. Much of this work refers to ideas of networks and relationships structured by the system. Basing their definition on a survey of literature, including some empirical but primarily
theoretical works, the UK government’s Innovation Unit contends that:

System leadership sees, and acts on, the *system as a whole*. It recognizes the interdependence between schools, and between schools, other public institutions and communities. It recognizes, too, that the relationships between them can have profound effects on the outcomes for young people. ... If we accept that this is the basic territory for what system leadership will do, then it is clearly a different set of skills and behaviours that are required by those exercising locality leadership (2006, p3).

Drawing from their work in the UK and on their extensive personal expertise in the area, Stoll and Jackson (2009) theorize that in order to be effective, leadership has to be supported by and create systems that connect rather than divide. Similarly, Chapman and Hadfield (2009, p125) drawing on their own research indicate that networks and relationships both coordinate and generate the operations of the system: “There are coordination processes, which are concerned with leadership and management, and generative processes that create new capacities within the network.” In this, we see the construction of the idea that system leadership can only exist where connections exist across the system. In the field of network analysis these connections are often said to occur through nodes, people or organizations that serve a connective function. Connectivity we have established is a necessary precondition for a system to be said to exist.

Burt (2000) contends that disconnected parts of a system can be connected, or ‘bridged’, by ‘brokers’ who act between parts of a system and are a separate entity to either part of the system being ‘bridged’. In contrast, Wenger (1998) describes these actors as ‘translators’ who work in both parts of the otherwise unconnected system simultaneously. In either concept, the notion of interconnectivity within a network enables a view that ‘position’ is less important for exerting power within a network than it is in more traditional conceptualizations of organizational relationships. While ‘brokers’ or ‘translators’ hold a ‘network position’ that is influential and from which great power is exerted (McCormick, Fox, Carmichael and Proctor, 2011, p97), the interconnectivity they establish enables otherwise
marginalized actors to influence larger and larger areas of the system. Here then, again, we see an argument that system leadership need not be necessarily positionally defined, but instead that system leaders are necessarily required to exert influence through the interconnections within the system.

The ability of system leaders to operate through these interconnections, and the implication that this ability has fundamentally altered the reality of what was previously understood as hierarchical or centralized positional power, is a result of changes in the economy and functioning of society in the twenty-first century. This concept is explored by Benkler (2006, p212) from the Harvard Law School:

The fundamental elements of the difference between the networked information economy and the [traditional] mass media are network architecture and the cost of becoming a speaker. The first element is the shift from a hub-and-spoke architecture with unidirectional links to the end points in the mass media, to distributed architecture with multidirectional connections among all nodes in the networked information environment. The second is the practical elimination of communications costs as a barrier to speaking across associational boundaries. Together, these characteristics have fundamentally altered the capacity of individuals, acting alone or with others, to be active participants in the public sphere as opposed to its passive readers, listeners, or viewers.

Benkler’s point is well made and the shift he describes in the move from unidirectional to multidirectional connections in media systems are equally relevant in many other large systems including bureaucracies that now operate in a highly interconnected human environment. Manuel Castells (2000) describes this new environment as one of looser and more flexible arrangements of human affairs. Networks, and particularly technological developments that link people, and that in theory enable marginal voices space, do alter and open the landscape for system leadership where actors are able to mobilize through visible and virtual networks.
SYSTEM LEADERS AS AGENTS OF EITHER DECENTRALISATION OR CENTRAL CONTROL

Discussion of position, networks and relationships within a system brings us to a debate as to whether system leaders are agents of decentralization and empowerment or of greater central control. Leading systems thinking author, Michael Fullan (2010a), has argued that systems thinking can serve both purposes, both in empowering the organization or state and in empowering leaders who operate within the organization or state, and through them connecting otherwise isolated actors and agencies at all levels. Bogdanor (2005) had similarly argued for this point using the term ‘joining up’ in relation to government service provision.

Fullan’s deep knowledge and expertise in the area of system thinking theory (2001; 2004; 2010a), much of which is based on empirical evidence, is sometimes also a synthesis of ideas rather than an exposition of new research. This later tendency is clear in the imperative Fullan (2004, p9) presented, which predicted rather than reflected on evidence to contend that system leadership requires the capacity for decentralization and that this in itself will strengthen both the leader on the periphery and the leader in the organization:

A new kind of leadership is necessary for breaking through the status quo. Systemic forces, sometimes called inertia, have the upper hand in preventing system shifts. Therefore, it will take powerful proactive forces to change the existing system (to change context). ... To change organizations and systems will require leaders to get experience linking to other parts of the system. These leaders in turn must help develop other leaders with similar characteristics.

The type of leadership model Fullan describes strengthens the organization or state through empowering leaders outside of centralized structures. Caldwell (2011, p3) describes this idea as the “contemporary meaning of system leadership” and contends that this contemporary perspective “extends the traditional view of those who work in central, regional and district offices to include leaders in schools” (2011, p3). Stoll and Jackson (2009) go further to emphasize that in order to be
effective, leadership has to be shared between levels of an organization, that it is no longer effective for leadership to be top-down only. Castells (2000) in his work on Networked Societies notes that there has been a shift away from hierarchies and this, Benkler (2006) indicates, results in seemingly less controlled, more heterarchical social organization through which, inexorably, system leadership must operate.

Further still can be found viewpoints that system leadership of the type Fullan, Stoll and Jackson describe is truly liberating. This is evident in the Framework for System Leadership in Catholic Education in Australia (FCAL, 2007, p1) which describes the purpose of system leadership in terms of “service to communities, both to Catholic school communities and beyond to the wider school community through serving truth, serving freedom, serving justice and serving love.” If then, system leadership were viewed as either a result of or precondition for decentralization, the rise of heterarchies and the strengthening of networks, then it would seem to be an empowering framework for all system actors. However, the relationship between system leadership and decentralization need not automatically result in a withering away of State or central organizational control. It may in fact heighten central power, or at least be a means through which State or central organizational actors maintain control in a changing economy and society.

Working from a critical theory standpoint, Morrison (2009) and Hatcher (2008), criticise what they view as the seemingly ‘dominant contention’ that system leadership is about dismantling arcane industrial era bureaucracies and reducing centralized command and control. In critiquing the system leadership concept, Morrison (2009, p42) argues that:

The key point is that government intentions appear to be towards super leaders with the capacity to manage dissensus. Moreover, some of those in the leadership field who exercise influence on policy, increasingly seem to be advocating new forms of networks that are intended to reduce local political influence...
Thus, Morrison contends, system leadership may in fact strengthen centralised command and control within the system. In a similar vein Hatcher (2008, p30) writes: “networks and system leadership can best be understood as a reconfiguring of state power, attempting to create new vehicles for the implementation of policy under the control of a reliable new technocratic management cadre.”

While Morrison and Hatcher both critique the function and agenda of system leadership, their critique serves to highlight the accuracy of Fullan’s earlier points around the challenge to the status quo that is presented by system leadership.

The distinction between Fullan on one hand, and Morrison and Hatcher on the other, is not their understanding of the purpose of system leadership, but their belief in the morality and correctness of this purpose. What distinguishes the two views most is the choice of adjectives rather than a deep variance in understanding. The moral divide here comes down to a contest over the rights and responsibilities of the State in engaging with the masses, and this in turn has profound implications for how system leadership is understood as either a top-down or bottom-up mechanism for change. The issue is neatly encapsulated in a statement in the concluding chapters of the 2008 OECD report on system leadership (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p270) which notes that: “The argument is that [leadership] needs to come more from principals themselves … It is clear that the more bureaucratic the response the less likely it will work.” The obvious conclusion from this is that if system leadership does indeed result in the reduction in influence of traditional bureaucracies, it does this, according to the OECD, in the aid of more effectively achieving State initiatives. Thus, the more effectively system leadership operates the more effectively the State will achieve its aims. For the authors of the OECD report, and for Fullan, the moral imperative of effectively operating State agencies is paramount. In contrast, Hatcher and Morrison view the suggested capacity of system leadership to more effectively control outcomes at grass roots levels with suspicion.
SYSTEM LEADERS AS ‘ADAPTIVE’ LEADERS

In the literature, the influence of ideas concerning transformational leadership and more recently, adaptive leadership on system leadership ideas is clear. There are many correlations: Questions of power, position and politics suffuse both sets of literature and both draw on a common understanding that, both socially and economically, the environment in which business and organizations operate is different now for first-world nations than it was for most of the last century.

The literature on ‘adaptive’ leadership rarely (except in passing comment on the emergence of the idea) directly refers to system leadership as a separate category of leadership. In contrast, Hopkins, Higham and Matthews (2009, p25), use the concept of adaptive leadership to describe major parts of the skill set of system leaders:

An important perspective on this is offered by Heifetz through the concept of ‘adaptive leadership’. His argument is that leaders increasingly require skills that move beyond traditional management solutions for technical problems to provide adaptive responses to challenges ‘without easy answers’.

In terms of our present search for a ‘starting point’ definition of system leadership, these authors do not go on to present a case that identifies the skills or actions of system leadership, instead contending that the term is “integrative rather than exclusive” (2009, p27). This could be seen as a defense against Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom’s injunction against ‘Leadership by Adjective’. Such a defense lacks substance; integrative of what, we may ask.

Adaptive leadership is effectively described by contrasting it with the concept of technical leadership, as did Chrispeels and Daly (2008, p32): “Technical leadership, or first-order change, is generally defined as those changes that are in line with current belief and value structures. Technical changes are concerned with applying ‘fixes’ to problems that exist within a system, with the solutions bounded by existing paradigms” of that system. Adaptive leadership, on the other hand, describes the ability to take an organization or group of people from a position embedded in the assumptions, practices and ideologies of the existing system into a new
organizational reality by exposing challenges and leveraging available capital to effect a change to the system. Or, as Chrispeels and Daly wrote (2008, p33), “Adaptive Leadership, or second-order change, is most often associated with creating the conditions for individuals to confront existing values and norms.” Similarly, Heifetz (1994, p75) writes that adaptive leadership can be distinguished in the scenarios in which it is required, situations where “definition is not clear-cut, and technical fixes not available.” But to this he adds another ‘type’ of situation, one that requires learning and where the “situation calls for leadership that induces learning when even the [expert] does not have a solution in mind. Learning is required both to define the problems and implement the solutions” (Heifitz, 1994, p75). In terms of relating ‘adaptive’ work to working in systems, this is most clearly articulated by Chrispeels and Daly (2008, p56) who write: “In an ever-changing system, the most powerful kind of social capital is often not the ability to work under formal authority in established structures, but the capacity to create new interactions.” Thus, we find a thread that ties the body of work on the concept of adaptive leadership back to our primary concern, system leadership.

AGREEMENTS, DISAGREEMENTS AND ABSENCES WITHIN THE GENERAL SYSTEM LEADERSHIP LITERATURE

Literature on system leadership as a general concept is, in comparison to the body of research into other leadership forms, pallid, under-researched and frequently contradictory. We will see in the following section on The System Leadership Concept in Education Literature that there has been further thought and more specific discussions about the manifestations of system leadership in that field. However, here we will deal with some general insights into the agreements, disagreements and absences within the general literature.

The agreements noted here are problematic. Above for example, we question the general agreement that system leadership requires an actor to hold a position whereby they are positionally empowered. While Oshry (2007, pxiv) and Macdonald, Burke and Stewart (2006, p34) debate the function and use of power, both presuppose that the system leader is positionally influential and has the quality
of being known within the system. This agreement, as has been demonstrated, is not
one that should be taken as a *fait accompli* for system leadership. Nor should the
other agreements noted below.

**Agreements (each potentially problematic) found within the literature:**

1. System leadership exists as a categorical definition of a discrete form or
   manifestation of leadership, albeit an integrative one, and results in changes
   across a system or across significant parts of a system (Caldwell, 2011;
   Hargreaves, 2007; Hatcher, 2008; Hopkins, Higham and Matthews, 2009;

2. The emergence of the system leadership concept responds to changes in
   social and economic order and in the operational environment for
   organizations (Castells, 2000; Hatcher, 2008; Morrison, 2009; Pont, Nusche
   and Moorman, 2008).

3. System leadership requires an actor to be positionally able to effect change
   (Blankstain, Cole and Houston 2009; Caldwell, 2011; Cordoba-Patchon, 2010;
   Hopkins, 2009; Macdonald, Burke and Stewart, 2006).

4. System leadership entails connecting and interconnecting parts of a system
   (Burt, 2000; Caldwell, 2011; Gharajedaghi, 2009; Hopkins, 2009; Meadows,
   2008).

**Notable Disagreements:**

1. The definition and role of power as either a positive or negative factor in an
   actor's ability to lead (Burke, Macdonald and Stewart 2006; Oshry, 2007).

2. Whether system leadership is liberating for actors in systems or a
   manifestation of new forms of technocratic control over systems and system
   actors. More specifically, whether system leadership enables decentralization
   of power and authority (Castells, 2000; Stoll and Jackson, 2009), reaffirms
   central control (Hatcher, 2008; Morrison, 2009) or a happy combination of
   both these ideas (Fullan, 2004, 2009; Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008).

3. The “skill set” or “personality” of the system leader, particularly in their
   relationships with other actors in the system. (Fullan, 2004, 2009, 2010b;
   Burke, Macdonald and Stewart, 2006; Oshry, 2007).
Notable Absences:

1. Evidence of system leadership being a discrete form of leadership.
2. Evidence from research into the specific actions that system leaders perform or undertake.
3. A description of the skills of system leadership or a notion of a curriculum through which one would learn system leadership.
4. Evidence of system leadership improving student outcomes or school results.

**A “STARTING POINT” FOR DEFINING SYSTEM LEADERSHIP**

The research upon which this paper is based, is designed to discover and explore manifestations of system leadership in the jurisdiction of Victoria, in the field of Education. From the research we will arrive at evidence of what system leadership is or is not, whether it exists or does not, so on and so forth. It is necessary though to have a starting-point definition of system leadership. We may confirm this definition through the research or discover that it is flawed or inaccurate, but, on existing evidence and theory, the following is a suitable ‘starting point definition’ of system leadership: *System leadership is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system*. This definition assumes preexisting understanding that leadership is motive (forward moving) in contrast to system management that would be about maintaining a system in its current form. It assumes the definition of ‘system’ previously established but sets to one side the seemingly general agreement that system leadership is positionally determined until the research undertaken here sheds more light on the matter.

**THE SYSTEM LEADERSHIP CONCEPT IN EDUCATION LITERATURE**

System leadership as a concept has gained traction in educational literature and in education systems in recent years. However, in relation to education systems the
concept requires far greater explication than it has currently received. A number of authors have written on the topic but, as we will see, significant research remains to be undertaken. Indeed, in England the concept ‘system leadership’ is closely associated with ‘next practice’ (Hannon, 2007) suggesting that the concept of system leadership is either marginal in practice or marginal in research around practice. Recent work by Barber and Mourshed (2009, p7) suggests that, internationally, consolidating thinking around building system efficacy, and acting on this, is the challenge for ‘good’ systems this decade, much as acting on thinking around building effective schools was the challenge for the 1990s. Seeming to bear this out, in 2008 the largest single study into the manifestations of system leadership in education was conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). This research was compiled as a complementary volume to a broader study titled *Improving School Leadership* (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008). Volume 2, *Improving School Leadership: Case Studies on System Leadership* (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p254), notes that there “has been little attempt to date to document how system leadership is being enacted” and describes the research as “a first international comparison and assessment of the state of the art of systemic leadership.” The 2008 OECD report (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008) was based on empirical case studies into system leadership in education across five jurisdictions. In describing the purpose of the study the authors note that:

> Across the globe, the 21st century is seeing rapid economic and social change. Social and population mobility allied with technological advances and an increased focus on schools to perform mean that students today face very different challenges from their predecessors (p3-4).

And that:

> Greater decentralisation in many countries is being coupled with more school autonomy, more accountability for school and student results, and a better use of the knowledge base of education and pedagogical processes. It is also being coupled with broader responsibility for contributing to and supporting the schools’ local communities, other schools and other public
services. As a result, there is a need to redefine and broaden school leaders’ roles and responsibilities (p9).

The OECD team identified five education systems (Austria, England, Finland, Flanders (Belgium) and Victoria) that they felt highlighted “examples of innovative practices that focus on system-wide school improvement by encouraging and developing school leaders to work beyond the school borders for the benefit of the school system as a whole” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p3-4). These choices demonstrate selection bias toward a particular pre-established view of system leadership where these systems were chosen because of their ability to demonstrate ‘innovative practice’ within that pre-established conceptualization of system leadership. The two types of system-wide improvement and system leadership that the research team sought in choosing sites for research are shown in the table below:

Table 2.3 2008 OECD Research Project Research Focus.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A: Models of school organization and management that distribute leadership roles in innovative ways. The activities identified for case studies should:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Demonstrate models of school organization and management where leadership roles and responsibilities are distributed in new ways;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Take a systemic orientation: the leaders’ behaviours should influence student outcomes in the whole of the school or larger system, or explore the interactions of the school with larger elements of the educational or community systems.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>B: Promising programmes and practices for the preparation and development of school leaders. The activities selected for case studies should:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Prepare and develop school leaders using innovative approaches reflecting the broader roles and responsibilities of leaders, the purposes of schooling, and the operation of core school technologies to achieve intended outcomes;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Be designed to produce leaders who work to build student-centred schools with capacity for high performance and continuous improvement towards that end;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Take a system-wide perspective: the innovative programmes should align with the larger goals and processes of the system concerning school improvement, student performance, and enhanced efficiency and effectiveness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p18)
Naturally enough then, the research finds evidence of this particular form of system leadership. The selection criteria used by the researchers and notes from the authors demonstrate the research bias toward an understanding of system leadership as primarily the work of principals / head-teachers. Nonetheless, this does not bar the writing team from discussing the work of a limited number of non-principal actors such as ministers and senior bureaucrats. Overwhelmingly, though, the OECD research focuses on the role of senior school-level leaders. The bias toward this particular conceptualization of system leadership is evident in the authors’ explanation of their premise in regard to who system leaders are:

System leaders, as they are being called, ... are willing to shoulder system leadership roles because they believe that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p9).

To support this conceptualization the authors of the report’s summary chapter, Pont, Nusche and Hopkins (2008, p254), directly quote Fullan (2004, p9) who wrote that:

A new kind of leadership is necessary for breaking through the status quo. Systemic forces, sometimes called inertia, have the upper hand in preventing system shifts. Therefore, it will take powerful proactive forces to change the existing system (to change context). This can be done directly and indirectly through systems thinking in action. These new theoreticians are leaders who work intensely in their own schools, or national agencies, and at the same time connect with and participate in the bigger picture. To change organizations and systems will require leaders to get experience linking to other parts of the system. These leaders in turn must help develop other leaders with similar characteristics.

Pont, Nusche and Hopkins (2008, p254) contend that this “quotation from a leading educational commentator whose work has a global reach [is a demonstration of how
the] concept of system leadership has recently caught the educational imagination.” However, Pont, Nusche and Hopkins (2008, p254) argue that Fullan’s statement:

Contains three implicit assumptions. The first is that if we are ever to achieve sustainable education change it must be led by those close to the school; the second is that this change must have a systemic focus; and the third is that ‘system leadership’ is an emerging practice.

In the identification of the second and third ‘implicit assumption’ there is little to challenge. The identification of the first ‘implicit assumption’ however, clearly, and significantly, side steps the words “new theoreticians” and “national agencies.” To ignore these words certainly would mean that Fullan had indeed implied that “sustainable educational change ... must be led by those close to the school” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p254) but to reinsert them into Fullan’s statement makes it clear that he does not make that implication. Indeed, in 2010 Fullan (2010b, p67-68) explicitly identifies the operation of system leadership in education as existing in the role of the Premier of Ontario and Minister of Education, both of whom are elected politicians, and in the roles of senior bureaucrats.

The explanation of system leadership presented in the OECD report positionally describes the system leader as someone who is, firstly, operating in a leadership role that does not oversee an entire system (note the emphasis above on “... to change the larger system” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p9)) and, secondly, someone who is able to “engage with it [the ‘larger system’] in a meaningful way” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p9) where this, indicates an interconnective role for the position holder. This conceptualization of system leadership precludes the research undertaken for the OECD from investigating in depth the potential for other possible manifestations of system leadership. This includes, but is not limited to, restricting conceptualizations whereby a person positionally responsible for the entire system might demonstrate system leadership, or on the other extreme, where positionally marginalized actors who do not necessarily serve an interconnective role might also demonstrate system leadership. This is not to suggest that the OECD’s research is flawed or inaccurate, but to emphasise its specification.
The description in the OECD report of the system leadership being undertaken within the chosen systems, does provide an evidence base from which we can draw general conclusions about the state of system leadership when it is understood as primarily a head-teacher’s role.

The identified systems were, according to the report, selected on the basis of evidence of innovative practice:

- “Finland was selected by the OECD as an example of a systemic approach to school leadership, because of its particular approach to distributing leadership systematically” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p71). Finland was also of interest to the researchers because it operated as a decentralized system where reforms have been geared “to improve schooling for local children ... by ensuring that principals are responsible not only for their own schools but also for their districts” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p71).

- “England (UK) was selected by the OECD ... because it has been promoting [a vision wherein] schools work beyond their school borders for the benefit of the school system as a whole [and] has been promoting this vision through a number of policies and practices at national, regional and school level...” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p111).

- Victoria. The “OECD chose the Victorian model as an example of a state-wide approach to leadership preparation and development” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p180) linked to “the state’s remarkable drive to improve school effectiveness in which leadership development plays a central part” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p179).

And so on.

What the report (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p258) found across the study
sites was the existence of “leadership beyond the school borders”:

These wider engagements focus leadership beyond the people in the school leaders’ own buildings to the welfare of all young people in the area and to the improvement of the profession and its work as a whole, but in ways that also access learning and support from others to provide reciprocal benefits for leaders’ own communities.

The report findings also indicate that “Schools and their leaders are strengthening collaboration, forming networks, sharing resources and working together” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p258). This is backed by evidence of many school based and collaborative leadership approaches used across OECD countries and demonstrated in Volume 1 of the OECD report (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008).

Throughout OECD countries, there is a great deal of school leadership co-operation and collaboration going on. Practitioners do not work alone, and many benefit from a variety of networks. Approaches to co-operation range from informal networking to new management structures, such as the Portuguese or the Dutch approaches, in which structures are created above the school level to share management ... In fact, in all countries participating in the OECD Improving School Leadership activity, there are some arrangements for co-operation between schools. School leaders are the key to these and are also strongly influenced by them (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008, p259).

The OECD report notes that:

... different countries and different political, social and economic contexts may respond differently to similar challenges and pressures; alternatively, the system approach may be a response arising from different sets of needs. Each individual case has its specificities, as we describe in the following paragraphs, but there are also common patterns and features (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p259).
Summaries of the findings of the research into the five key research sites visited by the OECD team are presented below. Significantly, the researchers found clear examples of the types of system leadership behaviour that were specified by their selection criteria in only three of the five systems (England, Finland and Flemish Belgium). For the remaining systems (Austria and Victoria), researchers resorted to using approaches to leadership development operating in those two systems as an indicator for the existence of a system leadership agenda if not system leadership itself. In the three aforementioned systems the researchers found that:

• The English practices of system leadership are some of the most developed in this field, and have been publicly developed and supported in recent years. There are a wide range of possibilities: schools can collaborate with each other formally with the possibility to ‘federate’ since 2002. ... There are also special training courses to develop the capacity of leaders to become skilled in system leadership (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p260).

• In Finland, the OECD team was able to find two approaches which seemed to be systemic. On the one hand ... responsibilities are distributed and shared across the system, one could say that there is system leadership of an organic nature. ... In addition, there is a new scenario in Finland due to declining school enrolments, declining resources in education, and an increasing workload for principals (who have been calling for strategies to deal with these issues). Municipalities are developing ways to transform school leadership to benefit the broader community (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p261).

• In Flemish Belgium, the development of communities of schools has tested the benefits and effectiveness of collaboration (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p261).

In Austria and Victoria the OECD found that innovations concentrated on leadership development, but also suggests that this leadership development had a systemic dimension:
• In Austria, “Leadership Academy participants ... form partnerships, coaching teams, regional and virtual networks. ... The Academy has already begun to achieve a degree of culture and systems change, with a high degree of voluntary participation, engagement and enthusiasm and appears to have positive effects on individual development and improved practice over the long run. It is introducing system change by acting on the agents who are to introduce this change (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p263).

• In Victoria ... There is multi-layered system-wide leadership, which provides a common vision of leadership ... Through participation in programmes and the creation of strong networks of common practices, school leaders are contributing to the improvement of Victorian schools as a whole ... This results in strategic alignment, and the common language and culture of school improvement are permeating all levels of school leadership. The approach engages the workforce, provides clear expectations and emphasises peer learning (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p262).

These last two case studies, when the detail is examined, do provide evidence of system leadership as we would describe it from our starting point definition. However, the evidential link made by the OECD researchers between leadership training programs and the existence of system leadership stretches credibility, as they themselves acknowledge in highlighting that the “Austrian and Australian innovations concentrate on leadership development, but both also have a systemic dimension to them that merit their inclusion with the rest of the approaches analysed in this report” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p262). This “systemic dimension” clearly does not satisfy the evidential requirements for demonstrating the existence of system leadership and may highlight limitations in the research methods used to gather information in addition to the limitations imposed in selection noted above. In terms of the research methods the report notes: “The case studies result from research and visits by OECD staff and education experts to each country. The visits included meetings and discussions with national and local government representatives, and site visits to exemplary schools” (Pont, Nusche and

One thing the report was unable to achieve was a compelling case for the existence of something called system leadership; that is, it does not clarify what system leadership is. The literature scan provided in the summation of the report (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p254) purports to “summarise what the research and the specialists are saying about system leadership” but in fact presents work from Senge, Leithwood, Heifetz, Elmore and Fullan that deals with systems thinking and system reform rather than system leadership. This can be forgiven to some extent because as an emerging idea, and as we have found in this research, literature on system leadership itself is scant. However, rather than isolating a definition for system leadership the report’s authors opt for generalization in a way that would present it as a mish-mash of recent ideas. They contend that:

... the concept of system leadership is embracing rather than esoteric, for three reasons. First the concept of system leadership flows from the general literature on systems theory and thinking. Second, system leadership is a theory of action that embraces a range of disciplines in order to exert its power. And third, system leadership will only exert any influence to the extent that it focuses on teaching and learning (ie is instructional), shares its authority with others (ie is distributed) and so on (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008, p255-256)

The first reason suggested is without dispute. The second reason implies that to be a system leader is to adopt practices from a range of other leadership approaches to action and thus that system leadership is the ability to interweave these different practices rather than a discrete practice in itself. This would be to contend that system leaders do not have a unique skill set or body of knowledge that is discrete or identifiable. The third point, then, might be considered a defence against the injunction of Leithwood, Loius, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004, p4) against “… the ‘leadership by adjective’ literature [where] sometimes these adjectives have real meaning, but sometimes they mask the more important themes common to successful leadership, regardless of the style being advocated.” If system leadership
is indeed to “embrace a range of disciplines” then we might question the veracity of using the term system leadership to describe the implementation of these existing disciplines and practices. No evidence from the case studies of the five education systems is provided in this summative chapter to support these final two assertions.

Beyond the OECD report a number of other authors and educators have begun to write about system leadership in education, particularly in relation to the education system of England. Brian Caldwell (2004, p188), for example, writes that “The notion of ‘system leadership’ is emerging in England”. He goes further to suggest “system leadership calls for leadership to be distributed across schools as well as within” (2004, p188). He also makes a cautious claim for the significance of system leadership: “System leadership is important, although its limitations are acknowledged in networks of schools that are in competition” (2004, p194). Importantly, Caldwell’s work here is not drawn from an empirical base.

Caldwell’s focus on England is certainly justified when we consider that the English education system has invested considerable resources into investigating ‘system leadership’. What is most striking about the English experience is the primacy of ‘Headship’ and inter-school-level integrations or co-operations in the conceptualization of system leadership that emerges. This can be seen in work of the Blair Government (Barber, 2008) and particularly in it’s Innovation Unit (Innovation Unit, 2006):

Across the country today, the landscape of school leadership is being transformed. One of the most striking and important trends is leadership beyond a single institution. ... Headteachers today are taking on responsibility of leading more than one school; they are co-leading in partnerships and federations; they are leading schools in close collaboration with other agencies ...

This narrowed conceptualization of system leadership may be the result of the foundational principles for the Innovation Unit, which was created by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) “to take forward the agenda of
practitioner-led change” (Hannon, 2007, p1). For Stoll and Jackson (2009, p79), the “Innovation Unit advocates for, stimulates, incubates and makes visible the practices of innovative leaders”. In 2005-6 the Innovation Unit initiated a round of field-trial research into system leadership in schools. That project built on earlier work the Innovation Unit had conducted through the ‘Networked Learning Communities’ program (Jackson and Temperley, 2006). The program was initiated in 2005 under the title “Leading Beyond a Single Institution” and in December a call was made in the *Times Education Supplement* for school leaders and Local Authorities:

... who were extending the boundaries of current leadership practice by working beyond a single institution [with a particular focus on]

- Holistic approaches to multi-service delivery
- Enabling personalized and extended opportunities for 14-19 education
- ‘Chains’, ‘Franchises’, developed federations or formal school networks
- Learning taking place outside formal institutions such as supported home-based learning or part-time schooling which involves new technology

(Department for Education and Skills and National College of School Leadership, 2005)

The Innovation Unit, in this instance, was pursuing what it termed *next practice* in the leadership of the education system, and thus distinguishing their target from ‘good’ or ‘best’ practice. Next practice presents a conceptual difficulty because “like tomorrow, it is never here” (Hannon, 2007, p2). For Prahalad (2004), a professor in business administration in the USA, *next practice* is a form of disciplined imagination, a practice that is enacted from thoughtfully wrestling with not just problems but potentials. Recognizing the methodological issues around studying next practice the innovation unit adopted the notion of a ‘disciplined approach to innovation’ or ‘disciplined innovation’ as a means of facilitating a space for practitioners to be creative (Hannon, 2007). In response to the idea that next practices “are much more likely to come from the thoughtful, experienced, self-
confident practitioners trying to find new and more efficient solutions to intractable problems” (Leadbeater, 2006) the Innovation Unit focused on interventions related to system leadership, as they defined it, that “could release professional imagination, whilst encouraging work that is disciplined and system relevant” (Hannon, 2007, p8). The ‘Next Practice Innovation Model’ shown in Figure 2.5 below and developed by the Innovation Unit outlines the process through which the next practice research occurs.
Figure 2.3 Innovation Unit (U.K.) Next Practice Innovation Model

(Innovation Unit, 2007, In Hannon, 2007, p12)
In response to their call for expressions of interest the Innovations Unit received over one hundred expressions of interest from which they chose sixteen sites for ‘Field Trials’ including groups calling themselves ‘partnerships’ (5), ‘federations’ (3), ‘alliance’ (2), ‘coalition’, ‘haven’, ‘village’ and ‘family’ (1 each) in addition to a ‘Local Authority’ and a site called ‘Remaking Learning’ in Barnsley (Innovation Unit, 2007). From each of the field trials the Innovation Unit claims to have developed “a number of different ‘system’ models of leadership which have helped to:

- Spread high quality leadership across schools
- Strengthen support to schools causing concern
- Deliver provision beyond the capacity of a single school
- Provide better services in a locality
- Resolve Headteachers’ succession issues
- Engage the community
- Strengthen local accountability
- Raise aspirations of parents and pupils [and]
- Link to a broader regeneration agenda”

(Innovation Unit, 2007)

A number of the field trial sites can indeed be said to have developed models of system leadership within the conceptual framework that has emerged around the head-teacher role. These can be found in the online publication of “Models of Leadership Case Studies” (NCSL, 2011) produced by the National College for School Leadership, which is an ever expanding collection of case studies on educational leadership models. Each of the Innovation Unit field trial sites is reported on this NCSL site. To choose just three of the case studies (NCSL, 2011) as examples:

- the 3Es (a coalition of six secondary schools in the Midlands and Surrey), is reported by the NCSL to have established a Chief Executive role that “provides the impetus for internal leadership of the coalition and brokers contact with the wider community on its behalf.”

- the Harris federation, the NCSL reports, “uses system leadership to raise
attainment in its south London academies [through] shared approaches and interdependence [and] collaborative leadership” across the six academies.

- the Central Leeds Learning Federation, NCSL reports, saw the “governors choose to establish a hard federation from [two schools to] create a large organization that could be led by an executive head-teacher.”

Summing up this research, Stoll and Jackson (2009, p79) write that there are some “conventional learnings – insights from the edge of next practice [including]:

- Governance rather than leadership is the key to sustainability
- The developmental journey requires transition from one model of system leadership to another
- [There is a requirement for] brokerage and facilitation at the system level ...
- New forms of system governance have to define themselves as they explore and develop their new roles
- There is always enough leadership potential ... but it must be liberated ...
- The appropriate balance of policy incentives and accountabilities can be crucial to success or failure.”

What Stoll and Jackson’s revision of the ‘Next Practice System Leadership’ program of the Innovation Unit illustrates, is an equation of system leadership with governance, which while pertinent in the English context of the first decade of this century during a time of radical reevaluation of governance (Crawford, 2009, p2), certainly risks conflating leadership and governance. The preoccupation with the role of the head-teacher as system leader, which we will examine shortly, certainly stems from this discourse.

What is clear thus far is that ‘system leadership’ in existing education literature is a concept in search of a definition. The reality is that system leadership is still...
evolving as both a theory and a practice as broader economic, social and political changes work to shape it against the equally important lived and practiced applications of system leadership by leaders operating within education systems.

The contestation and emergence of a definition for system leadership can be seen in the evolution of Hopkins’ explanation of it and the dialectical developments made through contributions by others such as Hargreaves (2007). In *Every School a Great School*, Hopkins (2007) outlined the following “five striking characteristics of system leaders” (p154). Hopkins stated that system leaders:

- Measure success when working with other schools in terms of improving student learning and increasing achievement, in terms of both raising the bar and narrowing the gap(s).

- Are fundamentally committed to the improvement of teaching and learning. They engage deeply with the organisation of teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment in order to ensure that learning is increasingly personalised for students.

- Develop schools as personal and professional learning communities, with relationships built across and beyond each school to provide a range of learning experiences and professional development opportunities.

- Strive for equity and inclusion through acting on context and culture. This is not just about eradicating poverty, as important as that is. It is also about giving communities a sense of worth and empowerment.

- Realise in a deep way that the classroom, school and system levels all impact on each other. Crucially they understand that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way.

Hopkins’ construction of system leadership viewed it as primarily a function of the principal or headteacher role. Hopkins’ approach to system leadership at this time
aligned with what Fullan 2010b, p63) later described as “school leaders as formal
system leaders.” This is further indicated in an article written by Hopkins with
Higham (2007, p147) which states, “System leaders are those headteachers who are
willing to shoulder system-wide roles in order to support the improvement of other
schools as well as their own.” As well, “System leadership … implies a significantly
more substantive engagement with other schools in order to bring about system
transformation” (Higham and Hopkins, 2007, p148). This focus on the role of the
headteacher emerged from what was then an ongoing discussion of the structure of
Academies and executive headship in the United Kingdom. The National College of
School Leadership, for example, described system leadership in much the same way
as Hopkins, as “Leaders working within and beyond their individual organizations
...to bring about improvement in their own and other organizations” (National
College, cited in Fullan, 2010b, p63).

Shortly after Hopkins and Higham’s publication David Hargreaves responded with
the following counter-position presented to an NCSL annual conference:

System leadership is not leading just one or more schools, not even many
schools, but leading the education system as a whole and doing so with an
explicit moral purpose in mind, with the implications for action. … So the true
meaning of system leadership? System leadership arises when political
leaders and school leaders openly debate and agree on the moral purpose of
education (Hargreaves, 2007).

The effect of Hargreaves’ challenge, was to open the door to wider and more
revolutionary approaches to conceptualising system leadership. Significantly
Hargreaves does not restrict his conceptualization to headteachers. Rather than
system leaders being the passive recipients of public will directed through
government, instead they can be seen from Hargreaves perspective as active co-
constructors of the policy agenda and political framework within which they exist.

This shift was evident in 2009 when David Hopkins released The Emergence of
System Leadership in which he wrote, “It is clear that the more bureaucratic the
response the less likely it will be to work. A more lateral approach may be to create the conditions within the system to promote system leadership and collaborative activity” (Hopkins, 2009, p7). This was not entirely a new idea. Fullan (2004, p7) had written:

[System thinkers are]... leaders who work intensely in their own schools, or national agencies, and at the same time connect with and participate in the bigger picture. To change organizations and systems will require leaders to get experience in linking other parts of the system. These leaders in turn must help develop other leaders with similar characteristics.

It was however a confirmation of the development of “system leadership” as a valid, reasoned and compelling model for educational leadership across all spheres of work in education.

Hopkins and Higham’s (2007, p160) visual representation of a system leader (below) appropriately maintains a close and explicit link to school based leaders as is indicated by the “Improve a school in challenging circumstances” and “Partner a low achieving school” components. However, it is consciously constructing space for these leaders to take action in the wider reform agenda as well as in their own professional relationships with other schools. This development can be seen manifested in the OECD report (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008) that Hopkins co-authored.
Higham and Hopkins’ model self consciously, but appropriately, maintains its applicability to school based leaders but also enables the envisaging of leaders operating outside the school level as system leaders. The model itself allows for wider readings as to who might fill the system leader roll. Hopkins (2009, p3) goes on to state, “The key question though is ‘how do we get there?’ Because we cannot simply move from one era to the other without self consciously building professional capacity throughout the system.”

Hopkins visually represents the problem using the following diagram that posits a move from the prescription of practice in schools from outside the school to a
professional culture where schools are increasingly able to self-manage through a process of capacity building over time. The diagram (Hopkins, 2009, p3) suggests that system leadership is a motive force for this change and/or that it emerges within the change process.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 2.5 Hopkins: From Prescription to Professionalism**

In this diagram Hopkins (2009, p3) suggests that capacity building occurs through moving away from centrally mandated national prescription toward local adaptive practice around schools leading reforms, where the leadership of this necessarily comes from multiple directions. That is, there is a dual requirement implicit in the model: Firstly, for leaders based outside schools to create the conditions for adaptability, professionalization and lower levels of prescription for those schools who do not need it. Alongside this is a second and simultaneous requirement for school leaders to build the capacity, professionalism and ‘greatness’ of their school in a way that warrants lower levels of prescription from outside. What Hopkins (2009, p4) does indicate is that his is “not an argument against ‘top down’ change.” He notes, “Neither ‘top down’ nor ‘bottom up’ change work just by themselves, they have to be in balance – in creative tension. The balance between the two at any one time will of course depend on context” (Hopkins, 2009, p4). Hopkins suggests that
professionalism can be achieved through system leaders attending to the following “four key drivers for system reform” (Hopkins, 2009, p4).

Figure 2.6 Hopkins’ Four Key Drivers for System Reform

Hopkins’ conceptualization is demonstrably transformed to enable a wider description of system leadership, but this occurred within the adoption of notions of adaptive leadership. In contrast, Kimmelan (2010, p122), writing about school leadership in the United States, contends that system leadership is not about dislocating from prescription but is bound up with federally mandated compliance. In this case Kimmelan describes the work of Superintendents as system leaders using data driven accountability to manage the engagement of the district of schools for which they are responsible. In such an instance the work of the system leader becomes managing within central control. What we see here is a tension in the roles identified for system leaders in the management of either local or extra-local environments.

Fullan, like Kimmelan and Hargreaves, specifically directs our attention to the existence of system leaders operating ‘above’ or ‘outside’ direct school leadership. Fullan (2010b, p66) notes:
The moral imperative in action at the whole-system level is becoming increasingly crucial and, thankfully, receiving much more attention by system leaders. Here we are talking about entire states, provinces and countries. A large part of their job, of course, is to foster leadership at other levels of the system ...

Fullan focuses our attention on Dalton McGuinty as a system leader in education, a man who is not an educator but a politician in the role of premier of Ontario. Fullan (2010b, p67) describes McGuinty’s system leadership in education as a commitment “to making whole-system improvements [alongside a concern] about how to get there”. Fullan (2010b, p68) goes on to describe the core system leadership team in Ontario as “the premier, the minister of education, the deputy minister of education (highest ranking bureaucrat ...), their policy staff, and me [Michael Fullan] as special advisor.”

Within the field of education there is evidence of productive debate around the nature and scope of system leadership as a concept. Allan goes so far as to say that “notions of system leadership ... are now common terms in discourses characterizing the broader commitment to leadership beyond the school” (Allan, 2010, p281) However, despite the evidence of growing understanding of system leadership, the questions and debates around definition and role position or the importance of positionality persist.

What is clear is that the system leadership concept in educational literature is in a state of emergence. The OECD reports (2008) present system leadership as extant but ill-defined and containing a mish-mash of concepts while Hopkins (2007, 2009) and work from the U.K. Innovations Unit (2007) present system leadership within aspirational but narrowly defined frames with little empirical backing.

**Research Questions**

To progress discussion of system leadership, the following three questions were
constructed to frame the research project that would occur within the Victorian jurisdiction.

1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?
2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?
3. To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

These three questions will be explored in the Results chapter of this thesis.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Questions

The research questions are re-stated below.

1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?
2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?
3. To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

Study Context

The research was undertaken in the jurisdiction of Victoria, Australia, at a time when education policies were focussing attention on the system-level creation of networks as well as leadership in general and specifically the idea of system leadership. Extensive details of the study context have been provided in Chapter 1.

The research undertaken is qualitative in nature and is primarily based on interviews with personnel employed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) in Victoria in leadership roles. Those interviewed included seven senior managers, thirteen Regional Network Leaders and eighteen principals. Within the qualitative approach, grounded theory was used to undertake research and analyze data.

Research Design: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory (GT) is a pathway to the construction (or emergence) of theoretical ideas on the basis of empirical data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Tavory and Timmermans, 2012, p167). GT is a provocative methodology, both because of its refutation of other methodologies that set out to
prove a presupposition or that rely on existing concepts to investigate new ones and also because of splits between the proponents of various forms of GT.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first proposed GT as a radical opposition to established methodological approaches. It was their belief that prevailing sociological methodology was fundamentally flawed in that it sought to verify the truth of theory without having first determined a theory from data. This, they argued (1967, p1-2), overemphasized “verification of theory and [deemphasized] the prior step of discovering what concepts and hypotheses are relevant for the area that one wishes to study.” Glaser and Strauss argued for grounding theory in data and challenged ungrounded theory as being both limited by preconceptions and open to the unconscious manipulation of data to fit ideologies. More recently, Glaser (2002, p17-18) has critiqued ungrounded work as turning researchers into intellectual idols and contending that GT liberates research:

... we have the enduring grab which carries with it the great respect of the concept generator ... that turn[s] them into idols and theoretical capitalists, virtual owners of their concepts. GT allows many to claim this power modestly and with the integrity that comes from grounding. ... GT puts morality into this power as it brings it into reach of many researchers, and takes it out of the hands of a few.

This more recent claim aside, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p3) held the position that “generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited to its supposed uses.” They further argued that “the adequacy of a theory ... cannot be divorced from the process by which it is generated” (1967, p5) and that “generating a theory involves a process of research” (1967, p6) rather than research setting out to prove or disprove an existing theory.

According to Patton (1990) GT is a methodology for inductively, rather than deductively, generating theory. The grounding concept gained great traction in the field of qualitative research beyond the many joint and separate works of Glaser and Strauss (Bowker, Timmermans and Star, 1995; Dey, 1999; Eisenhardt, 1989;
Lonkila, 1995; Martin and Turner, 1986; Melia, 1997; Orlikowski, 1993; Pettigrew, 1985; Prein, 1995;) a point that was articulated clearly in Birks and Mills (2011, p3) who commented on the “second generation of grounded theorists” (p.33) who have interpreted and worked from Glaser and Strauss’ initial concepts. Corbin and Strauss (1997, p7vii) noted that GT was “among the most influential and widely used modes of carrying out qualitative research when generating theory is the researchers’ principal aim.”

The process of GT sees researchers engaging with and coding data in order to arrive at a theory about the area of study. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p237) contended that a theory could be evaluated by the degree to which it fits the area of study, whether it is understandable and generalizable, and the degree of control that a future user of the theory has to adapt it to changing times. How data coding is conducted differs in the two main streams of GT, but in the classical approach it begins with substantive coding where the researcher works with the data directly (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Holton, 2007) and then proceeding to the creation of “theoretical codes [that] are the abstract models that emerge” (Glaser, 2013 p3) through the researcher’s engagement with the substantive codes to create “hypotheses of a substantive theory” (Glaser, 2013 p3).

Grounded theory was an appropriate methodological fit for this area of study because of its pertinence to the study of systems. Simmons (2006, p488) described this pertinence with respect to systems thus:

[GT’s] suitability for studying and understanding systems is that, rather than being focused on verifying relationships between limited numbers of preconceived variables, it is designed to discover all relevant variables including those that may be discovered later or in other settings. Not only does this provide the ability to study whole systems, not just parts of systems, it enables the theory to be modified as new data emerge or as new data are collected from other settings.
Grounded theory is further appropriate in that, as the literature review demonstrates, so little is actually known about system leadership. When handling a topic around which there is little clear understanding and where even definitions are sketchy it is a simpler task for the researcher to suspend preconceptions (Dickson, Kwok and McCallin, 2012; Evans, 2013) and to stay “open to what can emerge” (Glaser, 2013. p3) than might be the case in other areas. That is not to make a naive claim for partiality since as Goulding (1999) notes; no researcher is a blank sheet. Indeed, Glaser (2011) points out that overemphasizing the dangers of preconceptions misunderstands the inductive process in which he argues preconceptions simply have to be held until the data has provided direction to research.

For researchers using grounded theory the particular approach taken must be clarified. This necessity results from the fracturing of GT and the potential for different approaches to GT to undertake and understand research differently. The primary split in approaches to GT was between Glaser and the partnership of Corbin and Strauss. Their divergence became evident at the publication of Corbin and Strauss’ (1990) text *Basics of Qualitative Research*. The two schools of thought can be identified as the Glaserian classical grounded theory (CGT) and the Straussian Grounded Theory (SGT) that uses adjusted approaches to qualitative data analysis (Strauss, 1987; Corbin and Strauss, 1990 and 1994). A separate approach to GT is Constructivist GT (Charmaz 2000 and 2006) in addition to which political overlays can occur such as Feminist GT (Wuest, 1995).

CGT and SGT differ on their approaches to procedures for the analysis of data and, perhaps more importantly, the degree to which the researcher prioritizes the exclusive use of data to arrive at theory. Where SGT allows researchers to develop their concepts with greater degrees of hypothesis, deduction and verification informing the theory generation (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Evans, 2013), CGT eschews approaches that allow researchers to prejudice the data speaking for itself and directing the researcher (Evans, 2013, p44; Glaser, 2011).
CGT has a relatively open analytical structure that seeks not to place limitations on
the data shaping emerging theory. Dickson, Kwok and McCallin characterize this as
moving from ‘forcing’ to ‘emergence’ (2012). This openness is prefaced on Glaser’s
dictum that “all is data” and his contention that “all data can yield substantive and
theoretical” information (Glaser, 2013, p4). Glaser further argues that the “full
power of GT comes with staying open to the emergence of codes that fit with
relevance when generating a GT” (2013, p3).

CGT adheres to the strict injunctions to allow the data to speak for itself in that, for
example, the use of literature by researchers is delayed until the “emergent theory is
sufficiently developed” (Cowley and Heath, 2004, p143) in order to prevent
literature leading to the closing off of potential theories that might be directed by
the data (Hickey, 1997). Christiansen (2011) argued that it is better for a researcher
to choose a different methodology than to engage with literature too early. Allowing
the data to speak for itself in CGT involves the researcher using substantive coding
followed by theoretical coding. However, CGT proponents have also identified
coding types (open coding and selective coding) within these two main coding
with Holton (2007, p265) writing that:

... in the substantive coding [phase] the researcher works with the data
directly, fracturing and analyzing it, initially through open coding for the
emergence of a core category and related concepts and then subsequently
though theoretical sampling and selective coding.

In the CGT approach according to Holton (2007, p255) the theoretical coding phase
occurs last “to conceptualise how the substantive codes may relate to each other” in
ways that can be formulated into a theory. For Glaser (2005) the purpose of
theoretical codes are to integrate the substantive into theory, however, in 2013 (p7)
he notes that theoretical codes “occur in mixes” with substantive codes during
research recording. The challenge then is for the researcher to disentangle codes
that are theoretical. Glaser further notes that unlike substantive coding “the
underlying groundedness [of theoretical codes] is less clear since they are abstract models” (2013, p7).

In using GT researchers seek to find a ‘saturation’ point at which new theory will not emerge regardless of the amount of additional data gathered. This saturation is achieved or recognized “by the constant comparison of incidents in the data to elicit the properties and dimensions of each category or code” (Evans, 2013, p41). Glaser and Strauss (1967, p102) described constant comparison as an approach to analysis and explained that “constant comparison causes the accumulated knowledge pertaining to a property of the category to readily start to become integrated; that is, related in many different ways, resulting in a unified whole” (1967, p109). In this sense, constant comparison of data and codes generates theoretical ideas, which allows the researcher to engage and reengage with their data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p108).

SGT differs from CGT in the approach to coding and the degree to which the researcher attempts to remain free from the influence of existing theory and concepts. Corbin and Strauss (1990) describe a three stage coding methodology of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. These were defined by Corbin and Strauss (1990) as follows:

- Open coding: “The analytic process through which concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (p101). During open coding the researcher “is concerned with generating categories ... and seeks to determine how categories vary” (p143).
- Axial coding: This is where disaggregated codes or categories are related to each other through inductive or deductive means. Corbin and Strauss (1990, p143) state that “categories are systematically developed” and that “axial coding does require the analyst to have some categories” in place through open coding (p124).
- Selective coding: This is “the process of integrating and refining the theory” (p143) that aims “to integrate the categories [identified in open and axial
coding] along the dimensional level to form a theory, validate the statements of relationships among concepts, and fill in any categories in need of further refinement” (p211).

Beyond the difference in approach to coding, a departure of SGT from CGT is around theoretical sampling (Evans, 2013, p43-44). Corbin and Strauss (1990) contend that theoretical sampling, the choice of who to interview for example, rather than being predetermined before beginning the research, evolves during the process (p202) and that it “is important when exploring new or uncharted areas because it enables the researcher to choose those avenues of sampling that can bring in the greatest theoretical return” (p202). This is in contrast to CGT that would content this “creates a preconceived bias” (Evans, 2012, p43). However, Corbin and Strauss demonstrate that theoretical sampling emerges from the problems or questions that emerge within the data (1990, p204) to circumvent this concern.

The second departure of SGT from CGT is in the development of hypotheses about relationships between themes that are developed and verified during the research. Corbin and Strauss (1990, p135) describe how during data analysis researchers “begin to link categories with their sub-categories. [They] call these initial hunches about how concepts relate ‘hypotheses’ because they link two or more concepts, explaining the what, why, where, and how of a phenomenon.” Corbin and Strauss (1990, p68) argue that “provisional hypotheses ... are likely to arise during line-by-line analysis” (p68) and that these “hypotheses and propositions derived from data must be continuously ‘checked out’ against incoming data” (1990, p22). CGT adherents critique this as deductive rather than inductive (Rennie, 1998; Evans, 2013) where in CGT theory emerges inductively only.

The third departure of SGT from CGT is in relation to acknowledging broader structural conditions and literature in the early stages of research rather than using literature exclusively in a comparative framework as CGT advocates. Corbin and Strauss (1990, p53) acknowledge that research questions may come from many sources outside the data and that in many cases researchers come to a topic with existing knowledge from literature (p49). They note that a question “may be derived
from the literature” (1990, p53) and that “literature can be used as an analytic tool if we are careful to think about it in theoretical terms” (1990, p47) and that used in this way it can provide a rich source of stimulus.

A third approach to GT is Constructivist GT, an approach that is compatible with CGT (Andrews and Hernandez, 2012) as it regards people's social interaction as the ground for study and that it accepts that there is an objective reality that can be understood through language and representation (Hammersley, 1992). Constructivist GT focuses on how people make meaning (Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Schwandt, 2003) and Charmaz (2000; 2006) extends this using the terms ‘constructionism’ and ‘social constructionism’ to differentiate meaning constructed by individuals and by society. According to Evans (2013) both CGT and Constructivist GT, where it accepts an objective and subjective reality, are compatible (Evans, 2013, p45-46) and that in its acceptance of this Constructivist GT is opposed to relativist post-modern approaches. While compatible with each other, Constructivist GT elaborates on CGT in that it recognizes that concepts are created rather than discovered as Glasser (2002) had put it.

In addition to the three schools identified above, the perspectives of various post-positivist political and philosophical approaches can be laid over GT. Feminist perspectives, for example, have been advanced by Wuest (1995) using GT as an approach that, for her, accords with Feminism.

A more recent development in grounded methodology relates to abductive analysis. Birks and Mills (2011), for instance, included constant comparative analysis that uses abductive logic as a method within the field of grounded theory methods. Where GT methods are referred to as inductive because they build theory up from the data through successive comparative analyses, abductive reasoning relies on the researcher undertaking an intellectual act of investigating a pathway that has not previously been considered and that has emerged for the researcher through a cerebral process rather than by explicit reference in data. Reichertz (2007, p 220) explained that abduction occurs when the researcher:
... has decided ... no longer to adhere to the conventional view of things ...
Abduction is therefore a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another: A cognitive logic of discovery.

For Reichertz abductive reasoning occurs through and it permitted by SGT. Abductive reasoning occurs particularly in constant comparative analysis of constructed themes to constructed themes (Reichertz, 2007; Richardson and Adams St Pierre, 2005).

Tavory and Timmermans (2012) critique the traditional approaches to GT in favour of including abductive reasoning. They include in their work (2012, p175) a critique of the time-consuming and, they suggest, limiting heuristics of GT:

Through the grounded theory heuristics of field note taking, theoretical sampling, coding along various dimensions, memo writing, constant comparing, and sorting and diagramming memos ... qualitative researchers are urged to subject their work to a series of tedious and time-consuming methodological sequences. ... In this sense, these steps do what many methodological guidelines do: They increase the resistance of the phenomenon to our interpretations.

That is not to suggest that an abductive approach does not include rigorous heuristics itself. What it does mean is that the heuristics should not interfere in the process of the researcher using the empirical data to make evidentially prompted intellectual leaps beyond the data. Tavory and Timmermans (2012, p179) describe the abductive research cycle thus:

Abductive analysis involves a recursive process of double-fitting data and theories. An abductive inference involves making a preliminary guess based on the interplay between existing theories and data when anomalies or unexpected findings occur. If the existing theories fully account for the empirical phenomena, the researcher has simply verified an existing theory.
... Anomalies, which are inevitably both empirical and theoretical, then require the development of tentative new theories built on inductive conceptualization of this data through intensive coding and other methodological steps.

These writers use abduction to describe the opportunity for researchers to go beyond some of the more restrictive CGT practices while maintaining the rigorous analysis of empirical data as the means to construct ideas. What they acknowledge is the potential for the researcher to move beyond the data by creating connections that utilize the other assets that the researcher can call on. For Tavory and Timmermans (2012, p181), purely “inductive grounded theory as theory-engine is philosophically untenable.” They continue:

After half a century of trying, grounded theory has very little theoretical novelty to showcase. Without exception, the best qualitative research is steeped in various literatures and aims to contribute to these literatures. ... Not taking current scholarship into consideration risks not only ignorance but also the rediscovery of a well-developed domain (p181).

For these two authors, the challenge lies in the work of designing and conducting the research rather than in the theories, so long as they are empirically grounded, that might be present at the start of research (2012, p181). This is clearly at odds with a CGT approach but may be compatible with SGT approaches. Tavory and Timmermans (2012, p181) contend that “the theories we approach the field with will influence the details of ... research design. At the same time, the research design requires an opening for the surprises and empirical challenges that stimulate abductive reasoning.” Or, as Reichertz had earlier stated, within research design the researcher needs to be in “a state of preparedness for being taken unprepared” (2007, p221).
Approach to grounded theory

The approach to grounded theory taken in this research is an amalgam of parts of the CGT and SGT approaches and inclusive of abductive approaches identified above. As Bryant suggested (2009, p32), researchers need to move beyond the CGT / SGT divide: “The epistemological issues that separate different strands, or branches of the [grounded theory methodology] family, can ... be set to one side” provided that the outcome is good research. In part, methodological choices were impacted upon by the nature of the project and the requirements of it. But these choices also reflect the researcher’s belief that a researcher comes to a topic with existing knowledge and that literature may be a way to identify questions and problems (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p49 and 53) as well as to avoid researching redundant areas as Tavory and Timmermans argued (2012, p181).

The nature of PhD research places limitations on researchers that hinder the use of a CGT approach in that the potential for the data to direct the researcher (Glasser, 2011) is constrained. That is, research approval requirements mean the researcher must arrive at research questions, present literature and research design elements prior to beginning to collect data in the field. Further, the research problem is, to an extent, known (Dickson, Kwok and McCallin, 2012). In this sense, the researcher must come to the field in possession of existing theories and questions rather than these emerging purely through engagement with the data. As such, it is fortunate that the SGT approach enables the suspension of preconceptions during engagement with data (Dickson, Kwok and McCallin, 2012) and for “theory to be modified as new data emerge” (Simmons, 2006, p488).

The central category, to use the term of Corbin and Strauss (1990, p147) in this analysis is system leadership. The researcher’s theory about it was developed through engagement with data and the coding of data. This coding occurred along CGT lines in beginning with open coding, proceeding then to theoretical coding (Glaser, 2013) via a process of creating themes that reflect elements of Corbin and Strauss’ (1990) axial coding approach. Open coding occurred through the data gathering and was the “act of naming phenomena [that we could] fix continuing attention on” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p102). Data was broken down to identify
discreet concepts that, where conceptually similar, were grouped into themes that were linked and reassembled (see Appendix 8) “along lines of their properties and dimensions” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p124) and around the research questions. From this, data was integrated and refined into theory as advocated by Corbin and Strauss (1990, p161) and Glaser (2013) that is expressed in the conclusions chapter.

During data gathering the researcher stayed open and rejected forcing data as advocated by a range of writers (Dickson, Kwok and McCallin, 2012; Gatin, 2013; Glaser, 2013) and was open to making abductive connections and testing these against the data in order to enrich data interrogation. In this sense the researcher recognizes that the research is active and that, to borrow from phenomenological philosopher Marion (2002, p112), there is an “overflowing” of the phenomenon during research and in reliving the events of it we “position our perception in new relations … reevaluate and rethink” (Tavory and Timmermans, 2012, p176). The researcher aimed to achieve saturation, that is, “the point in the research where collecting additional data seems counterproductive; that is, the ‘new’ that is uncovered does not add much more to the explanation” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p136). This was attained within and across the classes of respondents described below.

**Selection of the site and participants**

Victoria was chosen as the site of the research because it is a relevant location for the study according to the OCED (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008) which found Victoria to be engaged in promoting system leadership. Specific geographical areas were chosen on the basis of the exploratory interviews and interviews with the first round of respondents as discussed below.

**Provision of trustworthiness**

There are a number of ways to provide trustworthiness. Most obvious is the replicability of findings. However, in actor oriented qualitative research this is certainly challenging and in some cases impossible as the actors change. LeCompte and Preissle (1993, p32) suggest that in qualitative research trustworthiness can be regarded as a fit between what a researcher records and what actually occurs in the
natural setting, and that as such replication is less important than in quantitative research. However, ascertaining this then becomes the issue.

In working with human actors, free agency has the potential to distort truth and researchers need mechanisms to account for or recognise this (Guba and Lincoln, 1985; Sandelowski, 1986). Truth in this context is actor oriented, that is, the researcher seeks the truth as it is for the actors and in finding this achieves what Guba and Lincoln (1985) called ‘credibility’. For Merriam (1998, p201) ‘credibility’ relates to how “congruent are the findings with reality”. Where there are actors with divergent perceptions of reality the researcher seeks to represent these while also seeking a truth beyond these that can be evaluated. Krefting (1990, p214) notes that different strategies are required to ascertain the trustworthiness of different types of qualitative research. Shenton (2004) provides an extensive account of varying ways qualitative researchers can provide trustworthiness and the relevant items from this are expressed below. Shenton frames his work around Guba’s (1981) claims that trustworthiness relates to credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The items expressed below and related to credibility are: triangulation, tactics to help ensure honesty in informants, peer scrutiny, inclusion of real episodes, member checks and verification. Statements follow these on transferability, dependability and confirmability.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation can occur through the use of data outside the interviews to confirm, dispute or provide context for the interview responses (Shenton, 2004, p65-66). This occurred in this study through the use of documentary evidence alongside the data and theory attained through interview data analysis. A second, and in this study more powerful form of triangulation is the triangulation of “a wide range of informants” (Shenton, 2004, p66). In this research a wide range of informants across three different classes of respondents were able to provide triangulation and corroboration between individuals and classes (Shenton, 2004; Van Maanen, 1983). A third form of triangulation (Shenton, 2004, p66) exists through “site triangulation” which in this study is provided through the identification of three
Regions and a Central Office as the sites within the DEECD organization to undertake the research.

Triangulation between documents and interviews, between individual respondents, between classes of respondents, and between respondents in different sites contributes to the trustworthiness of the findings in this study.

**Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants**
In this study informants were able to choose to participate and were aware that the researcher was acting in a capacity independent from their employer. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any time. These tactics, Shenton (2004) suggests, help ensure honesty as does establishing a rapport early.

**Peer scrutiny**
This research in its early days was presented at the AARE conference in Melbourne in order that the fresh perspectives and challenges to assumptions possibly under this scrutiny could be made (Shenton, 2004, p67).

**Inclusion of real episodes**
Shenton (2004, p69), in discussing “thick descriptions of the phenomenon under scrutiny”, suggests that “if a researcher employs a reporting system [that] defines a series of types” of response then these should be illustrated “using real qualitative episodes [that] enable the reader to assess how far the defined types truly embrace the actual situation.” This is provided in the findings chapter of this work.

**Member checks and verification**
Two types of member checks are relevant to this research. The first is the member check described by Guba and Lincoln (1985) where the researcher initially makes on the spot checks of understanding and statements made and then repeats this as the end of data collection through the provision checks with the participants that their intended meaning has been captured. The second relevant type of member
check is to test the “investigator’s emerging theories and inferences” (Shenton, 2004, p68) by probing these within the interviews. Clearly this is only possible within a non-CGT framework (SGT and abductive approaches) and it has been advocated by Miles and Huberman (1994) and Brewster and Hunter (1989). For Van Maanen (1982) this type of member check provides verification in the field that could never be attended to later.

**Transferability**
The transferability of findings in this research is supported by the provision in Chapter One of contextual information about the fieldwork site that enables future researchers to place the findings in a context that can be compared and contrasted to future research contexts (Bassey, 1981; Firestone, 1993). To support future researchers further, the limitations of the study have been clearly outlined and a “detailed description of the phenomenon in question” (Shenton, 2004, p73) has been provided to allow comparisons to be made.

**Dependability**
Shenton (2004, p71) argues that “the process within the study should be reported in detail, thereby [enabling what Guba describes as dependability by] enabling a future researcher to repeat the work.” This is provided in this study.

**Confirmability**
Miles and Huberman (1994) and Shenton (2004) argue that researchers can enhance trustworthiness by acknowledging predispositions and beliefs underpinning research. In this study the researcher’s approach to methodology has been outlined and the assumptions implicit in the research design are made clear and tested in the next section of this paper.

**Testing assumptions implicit in the research**
As has been discussed above, this project required the researcher – contrary to the typical CGT approach – to have engaged in literature and determined research problems before engaging in the field to generate data. The approaches that the researcher has taken to this within GT methodology are outlined above.
Significantly, in line with Miles and Huberman’s (1994) argument that acknowledging a researcher's assumptions and background aids in the provision of trustworthiness, the following is provided to unpack and test assumptions the researcher was required to make in establishing this project.

Having already conducted the four aforementioned exploratory interviews the researcher felt it was necessary to test two assumptions that underpinned the research questions with leaders operating within the system. These assumptions were:

- That system leadership exists and is somehow manifested in Victoria
- That there was an intent from the DEECD to plan and structure the growth and development of capacity of leaders within the system to undertake system leadership

These two assumptions were tested in the first group of interviews that were conducted with Senior Managers within the DEECD.

To test the assumption that the concept of system leadership exists and is somehow manifested in Victoria, the researcher used the opening question to the Senior Managers - “Conceptually, what is your understanding of system leadership?” Responses to this question indicated a consistent narrative around the idea of system leadership. One interviewee saw system leadership from two perspectives and elaborated:

One is probably the more current and popular ... perception, that if you get to a level of maturity and sophistication in your practice in your own school context you have the ability and the willingness to contribute to the wider system. So, working within your network of schools [or] working across the system you are using your expertise to advantage other schools.

The second is probably a more personal [perception. It] is a belief that if you are part of the system ... then there is a reciprocal responsibility - one that
the system should support my learning and development and growth, but [also] if I am a leader of a system, while I can be critical, I endeavor to be an advocate for that system (Respondent S03).

A second respondent added.

System leadership could be referred to within any organisation ... where it is any group of people with senior leadership roles that have responsibility for leading and managing systems of work. Within education it has come to be ... leaders somewhere in the middle ... brokering between policy and practice and [who] have significant responsibilities for groups of schools and groups of principals (Respondent S04).

These and other responses validated the research premise that a concept of system leadership exists in the Victorian education system. This type of response sits alongside other responses that identify system leadership as an actually occurring practice.

In Victoria we've ... had one of the most evolved school systems were there's a lot of authority residing in the school principal and that ... certainly means that the role of the school leaders themselves is critical in terms of system leadership. [The work of] school principals is a very major part of system leadership ... because of the amount of authority we give them (Respondent S02).

These results reassure us that the assumptions implied in the research questions can be validated and that the research is purposeful and likely to yield coherent results.

For the second assumptions implicit in the research questions, the interview question “If leadership can be learned, what is a curriculum for system leadership?” was posed to a smaller sample of Senior Managers, specifically to those responsible for the leadership and learning architecture of DEECD. This tested the assumption
that there was intent from DEECD to plan and structure the growth and development of capacity for system leadership among its leaders. One respondent stated:

... there are domains of practice that we know help build the knowledge and skill and disposition over time for people to undertake complex work. That it needs to be mediated or strongly supported in the context within which they work. So, is there a curriculum for system leadership? I think that you can help people understand that there is a difference in they way in which they exercise leadership in that environment.

Are there domains of practice that they need to know? I think, yes. We know that people who have high levels of emotional intelligence are more likely to thrive in any environment ... People that are able to engage, influence and motivate their staff. ... [There] are domains of practice that we would want to build and help them develop [such as] educational leadership.

For system leadership to be exercised one of the things that does shift ... is the nature of the political environment, an awareness of how to exercise and broker across boundaries, form stakeholder relationships, how to mediate your influence through others ... they are all things about the nature of how you exercise that leadership that would be part of that curriculum (Respondent S04).

A second respondent took a more pragmatic position and described the development of a suite of professional learning programs which were offered to leaders. The interviewee stated:

When I think back to 2004 we started off with four programs and they were pretty darn strategic ... Then we went back to government with a case for more, and we were doing very well with a suite of nineteen programs. ... [We] asked the question, if we were to start early enough with teachers in their first five years, we could map a learning pathway by defining a
curriculum [and] that was how we ended up with the four themes and the sixteen modules and essentially that, for me, encapsulates the knowledge and skills required of a leader in any government school (Respondent S03).

These responses validated the research premise that the DEECD has taken specific actions in the field of study that might be observable or might have had effects that are observable in the research.

Data Collection

While broadly identified by class before the research, the choice of interview respondents, “rather than being predetermined before beginning the research, evolved during the process” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p202). This began with exploratory interviews that were not included in the data sets.

Exploratory Interviews.
The researcher, in preparation for the research, conducted four exploratory interviews intended “as an experiment” (Dexter, 2006, p26) to see whether there was a need to research the topic and, whether Victoria was a suitable site for the area of study. These interviews also provided preliminary fieldwork to help structure later fieldwork since, as Corbin and Strauss note (1990, p205), interview questions and approaches are preferred where they have “evolved from ‘real’ data.” While the interview questions will continue to evolve in relation to the data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p66) and the opportunity of each interview moment, they are less likely to be discarded where the initial approach and questions draw from real data. Each of these four interviews confirmed that there was a need to research the reality of system leadership and that Victoria was well positioned as a site for study. While none of these interviews feature in the data they generated contacts for future interviews.

Leader Sub-groups (Classes) interviewed
Three categories of senior personnel were interviewed: Senior managers, Regional Network Leaders and school principals. Further information on the structure of the
DEECD in relation to these roles can be found in the section of this work in Chapter one titled “The Jurisdiction of Victoria, Australia.”

In this thesis extracts from interviews are labeled with a code number the first letter of which indicates the sub-group of the respondent. ‘S’ numbers indicate that the respondent is a Senior Manager while ‘R’ and ‘P’ numbers indicate that the respondent is a Regional Network Leader or principal respectively.

**Senior Managers (DEECD)**

Senior manager, in this context, refers to DEECD employees working at the classification of Assistant Regional Director, Regional Director, and General Manager or above. General Managers are the key leaders in the DEECD’s central offices who report to the Deputy Secretaries for each office. Regional Directors are the senior managers of each DEECD Region and report directly to the Deputy Secretary of the Office for Government School Education.

Seven interviews with senior managers were conducted, one of whom was the Secretary of the DEECD, the most senior, non-political office in the Department, reporting directly to the relevant elected Ministers. As the research data emerged it became apparent that the topic was most directly relevant to only one Central Office, the Office for Government School Education, and the Regional Offices.

**Regional Network Leaders (RNLs)**

The role and history of Regional Network Leaders (RNLs) is expanded on in other parts of this work. The number of Regional Network Leaders (RNL) remained relatively stable during the period of study at around seventy across the State. The RNLs report to their Regional Director and Assistant Regional Directors and are responsible for the principals and schools in their network where the network is geographically defined.

As it emerged that system alignment and leaders’ relationships were important in this study, it was necessary to narrow the research boundaries to three regions from
which principals would also then be interviewed in order to identify consistencies and inconsistencies in messages relayed from one level of the system to another. This meant both trimming the data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p159) and also demonstrates how the research adapted to the concepts emerging from the data. Thirteen Regional Network Leaders were interviewed from across three regions.

**Principals**  
Principals are the senior leaders of an individual school. In the Victorian jurisdiction each school has a principal regardless of school size, however, principals are paid at variable ranges depending in part on school size. The eighteen principals interviewed in this study come from across a range of school types, primary, secondary and P-12.

**Order of investigation**

The order of investigation was set on methodological grounds and was:

1. Senior Managers (DEECD)  
2. Regional Network Leaders  
3. Principals

This ordering allowed the researcher to test assumptions implicit in the research questions against the responses of the senior managers responsible for the leadership and learning architecture of the DEECD before widening the research to a greater number of respondents and different classes of respondents.

Additionally this ordering of interviews allowed the researcher to identify language and themes present in the responses of Senior Manager class respondents in order to ensure questions posed to the RNL class respondents and principal class respondents were able to demonstrate the existence or lack of a common narrative or language around the idea of system leadership.
Selection of Respondents

For the first round of interviews, with DEECD senior manager respondents, participants were selected using a snowballing technique. The researcher conducted a small number of preliminary interviews (pre data-gathering) and these initial contacts suggested appropriate contacts within DEECD senior management. In turn, these initial contacts suggested other contacts at the senior manager level. The exception to this was the interview with the most senior office holder in DEECD, the Secretary of DEECD, which was sought via a direct contact. Snowball sampling can be highly problematic in that it is not necessarily generalizable or transferable (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002) and that the initial contact has a significant impact on next recruits (Horrocks and King, 2010, p35). However, snowballing is appropriate for this sub-group because the “population to be sampled from is [hard] to access and quite tightly defined” (Horrocks and King, 2010, p35) as well as being highly numerically limited.

Interviews with DEECD senior managers suggested a need to narrow the next round of interviews to geographically defined areas called regions. This narrowing became necessary as analysis of data from the first round of interviews suggested that the Regional Network initiative was critical to the concept of system leadership in Victoria and that there was variability in implementation between regions.

Three regions were selected on the basis of three factors – ensuring rich data. First, that they were perceived by senior managers to be active and likely to participate and engage with the idea of system leadership. Second, they enabled the researcher to observe variation between urban and rural settings. Finally, the regions were selected based on data analysis suggesting that the three regions included both high-level and low-level performance in undertaking the Regional Network initiative.
In the second round of interviews - conducted with Regional Network Leaders - participants were selected on the basis of their region and their availability. That is, if they were available and willing to participate they were interviewed.

For the third round of interviews – conducted with principals – and in order to note any variation between regions, principal class participants were approached on the basis of their school site being within the regions identified for second round interviews. It was necessary for this class of respondents, given that the number of potential respondents increased dramatically, to introduce some other criteria for selecting the principal class respondents.

In selecting principals, accounting for differences in school type was deemed to be important as it could potentially impact on the interpretation and experience of system leadership. The eighteen principal respondents include seven from Primary Schools, two from Prep-Year12 Colleges and the remainder from Secondary Schools. In Victoria in 2012 there were 1,137 government primary schools, two-hundred and forty-five secondary schools, seventy-five combined primary / secondary schools and eighty other settings catering for special needs (DEECD, 2012a). As of February 2012 there were 315,030 primary school students and 219,755 secondary school students in Victorian government schools (DEECD, 2012a). While government primary schools employed more teachers in 2012 they are on average smaller organisations than their secondary counterparts. While data on the number of students attending the seventy-five combined primary/secondary schools is not available in the DEECD’s statistics, it is reasonable on these numbers to suggest that the mean average student population of a government secondary school in Victoria is approximately three times that of a government primary school. In government primary schools, assuming that each school has only one principal and excluding deputy/assistant principals, 1,137 or one in every 16.6 equivalent full-time employees is a principal (DEECD, 2012a). In government secondary schools that figure, again assuming that each school has only one principal and excluding deputy/assistant principals, is two-hundred and forty-five or one in every 64.7 equivalent full-time employees (DEECD, 2012a). These statistics indicate the significant differences in size of primary and secondary schools and these size
factors were accounted for in that the spread of principals interviewed more closely resembles the number of students in each cohort rather than the number of schools.

The Regional Directory of Schools, available on the DEECD website, was used to cold call principals from the relevant regions.

**Interview Technique**

The interview technique used in this research draws its antecedents from Dexter’s “elite interviewing” approach, first published in 1970. The term ‘elite’ refers to non-standardised treatment of the respondent. Dexter (2006, p18) describes the elite interview as:

> ... an interview with *any* interviewee [who] is given special, nonstandardised treatment. By special, nonstandard treatment I mean
  1. stressing the interviewee’s definition of the situation,
  2. encouraging the interviewee to structure the account of the situation,
  3. letting the interviewee introduce to a considerable extent ... notions of what he [sic] regards as relevant, instead of relying upon the investigator’s notion of relevance.

By this definition a standard or non-elite interview is closed with the investigator defining the problems and looking for answers within rigid boundaries whereas an elite interview is more open and flexible. This is not to say that the elite interview is free-ranging. It does occur within the topic area, but the questions are open and promote the exposition of ideas that are new to the researcher. “In elite interviewing, as here defined, ... the investigator is willing, and often eager to let the interviewee teach him [sic] what the problem, the question, the situation, is ...” (Dexter, 2006, p19). Such interviews are not simply a more structured form of individual ‘depth interviews’ that Webb (1995, p121) defined as: “... an unstructured personal interview which uses extensive probing to get a single respondent to talk freely and to express detailed beliefs and feelings on a topic.” Instead, elite
interviews provide a structure around which an elite respondent can provide expert insight on their own terms.

In this research the use of elite interview techniques is particularly relevant because the respondents are expert and practicing leaders of education and are, to a significant extent, better positioned that the researcher to identify and explain the realities of the area of study. The researcher’s aim is to draw together the data from these interviews to establish the realities around the concept of system leadership in Victoria, a task that cannot be achieved if the interview is structured around the preconceptions and understandings of system leadership held by the researcher.

The choice to pursue individual interviews over group interviews was taken to protect the respondents’ anonymity and to create an environment where individual concerns and beliefs could be aired freely. There are undoubtedly advantages conferred through group interviewing. As early as 1949 Abrams (p502) noted three items that would have been advantageous in this study:

1. The group interview (by discussion) enables the investigator to get at the thoughts not merely the responses, of the group members.
2. The group climate can be used by informants to express views and feelings which if voiced in a person-to-person interview might sound selfish or intolerant, and would therefore be repressed
3. The time available and the physical setting ... enables [creative] procedures.

However, group interviews pose the unique problem for researchers in the social sciences around the effect of peer interactions. As Bergin and Stokes (2006, p27) pointed out, “Although focus groups have extrinsic advantages such as speed and cost, there is evidence that individual ... interviews have intrinsic advantages relating to the quality of the research outcome.” Bergin and Stokes’ work comparing the effectiveness of group and individual interviews found that “group processes appear to have had considerable influence on the consensus view expressed in focus groups, which may not be representative of respondents’ individual views” (2006, p27). This concern echoed the earlier work of Jenny Kitzinger (1995, p300) who
said, "the downside of such group dynamics is that the articulation of group norms may silence individual voices of dissent. The presence of other research participants also compromises the confidentiality of the research session."

In pursuing individual interviews the researcher sought, as far as possible, to “gain an insider perspective of the phenomenon being studied, whilst acknowledging that [in such cases] the researcher is the primary analytical instrument” (Flowers, Larkin and Smith, 1999, p223).

Interviews in this study have been cumulative and generative in nature. Many researchers (Brenner, 1985, p152: Rubin and Rubin, 1995, p42-44: McCracken, 1988, p45) have worked from the premise that “over time interviews will naturally become less exploratory or inductive and more deductive” (Box-Steppensmeier, Brady and Collier, 2008, p699). Certainly it is the case that in this study interviews with one class of respondents built understandings for the researcher that informed interviews with successive classes of respondents, and in this way successive interviews built on each other (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p66 and p205). This approach is consistent with SGT. This was also true in that within interviews the researcher could act flexibly to test or expose ideas that had emerged in earlier interviews. Box-Steppensmeier, Brady and Collier (2008, p699) contended that the “researcher should constantly be looking ... for sources of agreement and disagreement, new themes and causal factors previously un-theorized.” The researcher in this study undertook such revision in line with the GT approach outlined earlier.

**Interview Questions**

Only open questions were used in this fieldwork, as closed question would act to restrict responses both in time and scope (generally tending toward shorter and narrow answers rather than allowing the introduction of new or tangential ideas). This accords with the GT approach. Open questions provide the researcher with data that may otherwise be inaccessible.
A strength of open question interviews as a data gathering technique is the ability of the interviewer to elicit further information in reaction to responses that were superficial or that exposed an idea without elaborating it. This can be demonstrated in the interview with respondent R13, in response to the question “What factors assist or hinder schools working together to improve educational outcomes?” the respondent answered:

I think there’s some view that if my school is going okay and there’s another school that’s not going okay, [pause] I don’t think that people see there’s a collectiveness, that collective efficacy of: ‘I have an obligation to help you and you have an obligation to be receptive and open because I might have some things that you might benefit from and you might have some things that I might benefit from’. … I know in our network we’ve got a few high performing schools and in a secondary context they would say ‘how could I ever understand or help to understand someone who leads an alternative setting?’ … (Respondent R13).

In this response it is clear that the interviewee is working through their ideas, but not ‘nailing’ their answer. In eliciting further information the researcher asked “When you have those hindrances … where do they come from?” to which the respondent went on to say, “That comes from the leader and that comes from the leader’s view…” Such clarification from the respondent adds to the researchers’ ability to understand the meaning of the response to the initial question.

**Interview questions by sub-group (class) investigated**

As Corbin and Strauss note (1990, p205), GT methodology researchers are often required to create interview questions prior to fieldwork in order to satisfy research requirements. This was the case in this study. However, as discussed above, the researcher engaged in preliminary work to ensure the questions “evolved from real data” as Corbin and Strauss (1990, p205) suggest. Further, and as discussed in more detail above, the questions were open and applied flexibly so that the researcher could pursue, probe and elicit further information from respondents both in
response to internal uncertainty or emergent concepts in the interview and in response to uncertainty or emergent concepts generated earlier in the fieldwork.

Lists of questions developed prior to fieldwork are included in Appendix 1.

While certain questions - in those developed prior to fieldwork - remained consistent across all interviews, other questions were phrased differently depending on the role of the respondent. These question variations were each designed to elicit responses to the same research questions but were adjusted to acknowledge the position of the respondents. Hence, the question posed to the Senior Managers “To what extent can networks flexibly adapt ...” became “To what extent can you and your network flexibly adapt” when this question was posed to the RNLs.

The relationship of interview questions developed prior to research and the research questions is expressed in the tables included in Appendix 1.

**Data Analysis**

**Documentary data**

Documentary data was used to complement and triangulate interviews. As the study focuses on emerging ideas, this documentary evidence provides a ‘moment in time’ statement of intent, belief or purpose against which the interview data can expose consistencies and inconsistencies between idea and practice. Documents coming from within DEECD included policy and framework documents used to coordinate and structure activities pertinent to the area of study. Consequently, documentary evidence is restricted to ‘official’ documentation of DEECD policy and frameworks.

Two senior managers and a small number of RNLs made available documentary evidence of their activities and communications. However, these documents were not included on the basis that the sample was too small to draw conclusions across
the system. While Glaser (2011) contends ‘all is data’, it is necessary to trim that which cannot be saturated (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p156-159).

**Interview data**
The choice by the researcher to use interviewing was a methodological one. The benefits of capturing evidence of leadership practice from those engaging in it make the intensive labor worthwhile. In an environment of emergence and uncertainty around the reality and practice of system leadership, interviews also provide a means to observe phenomena that might otherwise be unobservable. Box-Steffensmeier, Brady and Collier (2008, p700) note that the “disadvantages rarely outweigh the unique advantages of interviewing: the ability to target questions directly to actual participants and push them for responses in a way that archival or other qualitative research never allows.”

The use of interview accords with a grounded approach, noting as we have above the limitations imposed around this project that are also noted by Corbin and Strauss (1990, p205). Interviews were conducted prior to and during other research, where this occurred particularly when interviews required the researcher to seek understanding and context for ideas emerging in the data. While Berry (2002, p680) contends that the interviewer should exhaust all secondary sources and publically available primary sources before beginning interviews, this does not accord with a GT approach. For Berry, pre-work on literature allows the researcher to “work out a puzzle, if one isn’t already evident; to figure out what is known and what is not known so questions can be more targeted and efficient” (Box-Steffensmeier, Brady and Collier, 2008, p695). Brenner (1985, p152) seemingly supports this idea as he writes: “Perhaps the most important lesson for any would-be interviewer is not to begin intensively interviewing without being fully prepared.” However, in the context of grounded approaches Brenner’s concept of being ‘fully prepared’ takes on a different meaning, it includes what Tavory and Timmermans (2012) and Reicherts (2007) described as being prepared for “abduction … an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one had never associated with one another (Reichertz, 2007, p 220). This abductive
reasoning occurs through and it permitted by SGT. It occurs particularly in constant comparative analysis of constructed themes (Reichertz, 2007; Richardson and Adams St Pierre, 2005). For Reichertz (2007, p221) being ‘fully prepared’ within research design means the researcher needs to be in “a state of preparedness for being taken unprepared.”

Through ‘constant comparison’ within the data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Dickson, Kwok and McCallin, 2012; Martin, 2011. p57-58) of incident to incident, code to code and theme to theme (Birks and Mills, 2011, p11; Evans, 2013, p40), where constant comparison is a unifying approach shared by CGT and SGT (Myrick and Walker, 2006, p550), researchers have a deep knowledge of the topic area. As Dexter (2006, p24) writes, “where the interviewer, the chief investigator, knows a good deal about the topic ... [they] can make appropriate discounts for interviewee statements by reference to other sorts of data.” In grounded approaches this deep knowledge is generated by interaction with the data that emerges from research and by tailoring investigations in literature and documentary evidence around the emergent themes and problems.

**Interview Data Analysis**

Data from interviews has been analysed in two ways, first, as unique transcripts, and second, by grouping the data around themes derived from coding of the transcripts. The process of arriving at and naming themes is discussed later. The themes used to group the data were: system alignment; system leadership purpose; hierarchy; system reform; ‘who are system leaders?’; policy; system leadership definitions; system leadership examples; factors hindering system leadership; factors assisting system leadership; school improvement; leadership relationships; RNL role; flexibility experienced by the leader; students learning; cooperation and competition.

The relationship between the Research Question (RQ) and the emergent themes is indicated in the table below where a ‘tick’ (√) indicates an instance where the theme was pertinent to the RQ.
Table 3.1 Relationship between research question and derived themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Derived Theme</th>
<th>System alignment</th>
<th>System Leadership purpose</th>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
<th>System Reform</th>
<th>‘Who are system leaders?’</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>System Leadership definitions</th>
<th>Factors hindering System Leadership</th>
<th>Factors assisting System Leadership</th>
<th>School improvement</th>
<th>Leadership Relationships</th>
<th>RNL role</th>
<th>Flexibility experienced by the RNL</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
<th>Cooperation and competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ1</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ2</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ3</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
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<td>√</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviewing and Transcription**

In all cases interviews were conducted in private as one:one personal communication.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Interviews were generally conducted at the workplace of the respondent with the exception of one Senior Manager. Where it was impossible to meet with a respondent in person, electronic communication and phone calls were implemented.

Interviews were transcribed soon after an individual interview or cluster of individual interviews was completed. Some interviews were clustered around the limited opportunities to meet and interview respondents. Limited field notes were used. Transcripts were generated to be precise and were checked by a third party to ensure accuracy since as Tavory and Timmermans note (2012, p175), “precise transcriptions is understood as a way to check against faulty memory” and against the tendency suggested by Allport and Postman (1947) and Schechter (1997) to retroactively change our experience so that it fits better with a preferred narrative.
Post transcription the transcripts were edited to remove references to names or information that would have identified the respondent or others.

**Transcript Coding and Creation of Themes**

Transcripts were initially produced in word-processed documents. These documents were edited to remove references to names or information that would have identified the respondent. Names were substituted with a generic position title in most instances.

These edited documents were then transferred to NVivo, a proprietary software tool used extensively in qualitative research. NVivo allows parts of a transcript to be given a unique code which can then be grouped with and then represented alongside other sections of transcript with the same code in what are called nodes. These nodes allow for the identification of themes that emerge across multiple transcripts. Within the node, coded sections of transcript retain the identifier of the originating transcript. (See Appendix 8).

Transcripts were coded and grouped according to themes that emerged during analysis. This presented specific challenges as Fade (2004, p650) notes:

> ... naming themes ... requires considerable interaction with the data. ... It is sometimes appropriate to name a theme exactly as it is found in the data but usually the researcher moves to a higher level of abstraction and names themes based on ... what is going on in the data and how [incidents] compare with other similar incidents in the data.

This abstraction was undertaken to name the themes in this instance. For example, while only one respondent used the word “hierarchy”, a theme was given this name based on the multiple descriptions of hierarchical activities or relationships described in the transcripts.

The process of identifying themes was iterative and required multiple re-readings of the transcripts as new insights emerged from engaging with the data. As themes
grew in prominence or emerged from within the data so to other themes diminished in importance. The identified themes are displayed in the table below.

**Table 3.2 Identified themes and their frequency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Unique References</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors hindering System Leadership</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNL role</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors assisting System Leadership</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation and competition</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Reform</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Who are system leaders?’</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System alignment</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility experienced by the RNL</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Leadership definitions</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Leadership purpose</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Relationships</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The identified themes and explanations of their meaning are displayed in the table below. Themes are listed in order of prevalence in the data as can be seen in the previous table.

**Table 3.3 Explanation of themes identified in interview data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors hindering System Leadership</td>
<td>Data that suggest behaviors, policies, practices, cultures and other things that respondents indicated hindered system leadership being effectively manifested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>Data gathered when respondents identified, positively or negatively or neutrally, the existence of hierarchy/ies within the DEECD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNL role</td>
<td>Data where respondents discussed the role of the Regional Network Leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors assisting System Leadership</td>
<td>Data that suggest behaviors, policies, practices, cultures and other things that respondents indicated helped system leadership to be manifested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation and competition</td>
<td>Data where respondents spoke of relationships between schools in relation to either cooperative or competitive practices and, data where respondents spoke theoretically about the concept of either cooperation or competition.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School improvement</td>
<td>Data instances where respondents spoke of evidence of school improvement, or the need for school improvement, or the importance of school improvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Reform</td>
<td>Data where respondents spoke of system leadership in terms of system reform or of network arrangements in terms of system reform. This included theoretical discussion of system reform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Who are system leaders?’</td>
<td>Data instances where respondents identified by name or by position system leaders in the jurisdiction of Victoria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System alignment</td>
<td>Data where respondents have indicated a desire for or against system alignment, a theoretical position on its importance, or a purpose within system structure and operation aimed to achieve alignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility experienced by the RNL</td>
<td>Data that indicates the degree of flexibility intended for, experienced by or perceived to exist for system leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Leadership definitions</td>
<td>Data instances where respondents provided a definition of system leadership or characteristics of system leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Leadership purpose</td>
<td>Data where respondents suggested a purpose for system leadership or an intended outcome of system leadership or its activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy</td>
<td>Data that referred to DEECD or other governmental policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Learning</td>
<td>Data that dealt with or referred to student learning or outcomes for students in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Relationships</td>
<td>Data that spoke of the relationships between leaders and between levels of leaders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once transcripts had been coded and collected into named themes, these thematic collections of transcript elements were used to emerge the perceptions of respondents in relation to the theme.

**Confirming response data and variability**
While the interview technique described above allows for planned variability and for the exposure and pursuit of new information, it is also essential in this case that data can be confirmed or identified as varying from other respondents. In this study the number of respondents, in total and in each class, allowed for cross checking of information and for the constant comparison of data as discussed earlier (Evans, 2013, p41; Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p102). Documentary evidence can also be used to confirm statements made as fact. In the findings and discussion below we use the term *variability* to articulate the observable variations in responses, concepts and ideas expressed by respondents within a class and between different classes of respondent.

**Limitations of the study**
The study is broadly generalizable within the domain of education while acknowledging that it reflects a particular operational arrangement, particularly around Regional Networks, that may be peculiar to Victoria. Other jurisdictions using superintendent and similar models of system structure will find obvious parallels between theirs and the Victorian system. More widely, the investigation of system leadership can be transferred to other systems and to domains outside education if the local situation is taken into account while doing so.

The study does not use evidence from different types of systems, that is, the case study is exclusive to manifestations of system leadership in DEECD to the exclusion of manifestations of system leadership in other education systems, business, government and other fields. As such the study may be seen as a starting point or point of comparison for researchers working in other fields.
As the study aimed for depth and explication via interview across a ‘vertical slice’ of the DEECD there has not been the scope to comprehensively investigate all members of a particular class of respondent. Such a study may yield slightly different results but the researcher is confident that the interviews conducted for this research reached a point of diminishing returns (Box-Steffensmeier, Brady and Collier, 2008, p699) at which little new evidence was emerging from any of the classes of respondents studied. Further, the study undertaken here has limited itself to three classes of respondent. Other classes of respondents may return different results. The study was also limited to three geographically defined regions. Investigation of the other regions may find evidence of local particularities and experiences in those regions that are not evident in the data presented here.

Decisions made around the selection of principal respondents also limit the ability of this research to directly assess the successes of the approaches taken by individual Regional Network Leaders. That is, taking principals from a wide range of networks was useful but future researchers may choose to instead examine all the principals within a smaller number of networks in order to determine the strategies and activities that have greater resonance or effect on the principals.

Similarly, this research does not attempt to assess the strengths of approaches taken in the three regional areas studied. Data is not available to accurately assess this as not all Regional Network Leaders within each regional area studied were available, or inclined to be interviewed. Future researchers may wish to study Regional activities and the variations within them.

**Confidentiality**

Participants were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and that their names would not be used in any form associated with the research. It was pointed out, in writing, that in some cases the identity of the respondent may be determinable from their response. Every effort has been made to de-identify participants. Material provided to participants in relation to their rights and confidentiality was approved by the HREC of the University of Melbourne.
In extracts from transcripts of interview included in this thesis, a code number identifies respondents. The following table lists the groups of respondents and the associated code numbers.

**Table 3.4 Respondent coding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent group</th>
<th>Associated code numbers used in transcript extracts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Managers</td>
<td>S01  S02  S03  S04  S05  S06  S07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Network Leaders</td>
<td>R08  R09  R10  R11  R12  R13  R14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>R15  R16  R17  R18  R19  R20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>P21  P22  P19  P20  P18  P26  P27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P28  P29  P30  P31  P32  P33  P34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>P35  P36  P37  P38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first letter of the code number indicates the sub-group of the respondent. ‘S’ indicates the respondent is a Senior Manager while ‘R’ and ‘P’ numbers indicate the respondent is a Regional Network Leader or principal respectively.
Chapter 4: Findings

The first part of this chapter identifies the quantity of data relevant to each research question. Findings are then organized by research question. For each research question consideration will first be given to documentary data available. Consideration will then be given to data derived from interviews. Data collected from interviews has been drawn together around ‘themes’ that are relevant to the research questions. Discussion, conclusions and recommendations for further study follow in Chapter 5.

Responses between classes of respondents vary greatly in relation to some topics and yet are uniform in relation to others. These variations are noted in this chapter when relevant. Senior manager respondents were more likely to demonstrate consistency in responses within their class than Regional Network Leader respondents. In turn, Regional Network Leader respondents were more likely to demonstrate consistency in their responses within their class than principal class respondents.

Data Quantity and the Research Questions

The three research questions are restated here.

1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?
2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?
3. To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

Research question 1 generated the greatest volume of data. This question sought to uncover what system leadership is, what has happened in Victoria, policies and processes of the DEECD, who the system leaders are and what can be learnt from the features of system leadership in Victoria.
Research question 2 also generated a large volume of data. This question sought to identify who system leaders are and how they operate or interact together as well as to establish how effective DEECD has been in establishing a system focus and system leadership focus in order to achieve departmental or statewide priorities.

Research Question 3 generated less data than the preceding questions but served two important functions. First this question allowed us to assess the effectiveness of the DEECD’s initiatives. Second, the question was deliberately provocative as we sought to test whether system leadership was resulting in school (and by inference, student) improvement or whether the initiatives were operating at a grand design level that did not impact directly upon student achievement.

Data relevant for one research question was also often relevant within another of the questions. In these cases the findings of research question 2 and 3 have attempted to limit any repetition of points demonstrated in earlier questions.
**Research Question 1: To what extent is ‘system leadership’ a feature of the Victorian education system and, if present, how is it manifested?**

As the table below indicates this research question was relevant within nine of the fifteen themes observable across the interview data. Each of these nine themes will be discussed in relation to this research question. Relevant documentary evidence will also be investigated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>System alignment</th>
<th>System Leadership purpose</th>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
<th>System Reform</th>
<th>‘Who are system leaders?’</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>System Leadership definitions</th>
<th>Factors hindering System Leadership</th>
<th>Factors assisting System Leadership</th>
<th>School improvement</th>
<th>Leadership Relationships</th>
<th>RNL role</th>
<th>Flexibility experienced by the RNL</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
<th>Cooperation and competition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RQ 1</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
effectiveness in which leadership development plays a central part” (Pont, Nusche and Hopkins, 2008, p179).

This statewide approach can be found in the Developmental Learning Framework for School Leaders (DEECD, 2007) that outlines DEECD’s view of the roles of school leaders. This model (see Figure 1.5, p.28) articulates a notion that the highest level of leadership is system leadership and is based around Sergiovanni’s transformational ‘five forces’ approach (Sergiovanni, 1984, 2005).

The Developmental Learning Framework (DEECD, 2007) gives a descriptive “profile” outlining the capabilities of leaders with each of these categorised into five levels, with five being the highest level of capability. System leadership is explicitly referred to in level five for each domain and is tied to working and influencing ‘across the system’ (see Table 1.2, p28).

This notion of working across the system is also manifest in later documentary evidence. In a 2009 paper on school improvement through accountability measures, the DEECD indicated to the Victorian community that cases of school failure would be handled systemically and with the idea that collective effort across the system is likely to achieve improved outcomes. This paper explains,

In the small number of cases where further support is needed, parents and carers can have confidence that we will take a stronger systemic approach, use best practice improvement strategies and target resources effectively to help schools progress on their improvement path.

With everyone working together at all levels we can achieve a high quality education for every student in every school across the Victorian government school system ...

(DEECD, 2009b.)

Symbolic Leadership, unlike the other four domains, contains only the levels 1-4 with level 4 indicating the highest capability.
More recently we find further evidence of the DEECDs’ commitment to the development of system leadership in documentation of the Office for Government School Education’s (OGSE) statement of plans and challenges for 2011. As the OGSE’s core function is to “manage, coordinate and implement high-quality government school education across Victoria” (DEECD, 2011d) the plans of this central office are highly relevant to the area of study. Documentation of the OGSEs priorities for 2011 indicate the following four areas are central to their work:

- Continuing to develop a system-wide approach to determine high-priority school improvement projects to build the collective capacity of schools, networks and regions. To address the effects of disadvantage, targeted interventions will continue to be supported
- Continuing to deliver the e5 Instructional Model to support teachers reduce the variability in classroom practice within and across schools ...
- Continuing to focus on leadership ...
- Delivering the Ultranet, [for] connecting students, teachers and parents, and enabling efficient sharing and transfer of knowledge. (DEECD, 2011d)

Since 2007 a narrative focused on system improvement can be seen emerging through discussion of system leadership and activities of leaders to engage across schools or across the system.

**Interview Data**
Data from interviews has been grouped around themes derived from examination of the transcripts where these themes were relevant to the identified research question. The themes used to group the data pertinent to this first research question were: system alignment; hierarchy; ‘who are system leaders?’; policy; factors hindering system leadership; factors assisting system leadership; cooperation and competition; RNL role; flexibility experienced by the leader. Some themes are presented together where appropriate.

**RQ1 Theme Findings: System Alignment**
System alignment in this study refers to the ability of the system to generate
coherence across or within the system.

Analysis of interview data found respondents from all classes related system alignment with the action or achievement of system leadership. Primarily this was articulated in relation to structural alignments within the DEECD that drew schools into greater alignment with the center through intermediary leaders and structures. Respondent S04 pointed out that,

... the very heart of the network strategy ... was to try and push the sense of agency and authorizing environment closer to schools [and away] from the center. ... it was really trying to create an authorizing environment that [resulted] in a locus of control closer to the school site. [This] is about building common language, about trying to create trust in the environment, trying to get people to collaborate.

Another Senior Manager spoke of the establishment of regional networks as a critical lever in developing the capacity of the system to align through interconnecting goals and plans within the organisation.

There is a line of sight from the government goals and targets through to the corporate plan through to the regional business plan and divisional plans, and regional plans, through to the network plans. So they still have to report on the same basic outcomes around student learning, engagement and wellbeing, pathways and transitions ... (Respondent S03).

Senior Manager respondents were able to articulate clearly both the limitations of a highly devolved model in achieving system objectives through system alignment and the potential for a more efficient and effective system to be established through networking. They suggest that such interconnective arrangements, where they occur within a coherence-giving framework, can generate system alignment. Two senior managers spoke of the power of system alignment to act as a lever for change at the local level. Respondent S01 said: “Alignment is [where we agree with schools]
on the same moral purpose. We agree on what the data says. We agree we’re going
to do something about it and we agree [what] the best practice is."

While Respondent S01 gives a seemingly simple definition of alignment, s/he goes
on to argue that it involves clarity, accountability, challenge and conviction.
Respondent S03 also begins with a simple explanation of alignment, when
indicating, “Alignment is simply, at a basic level, about us all working on the same
tasks”, but then goes on to elaborate,

... if central office doesn’t have a clear idea of how schools improve ... and if
those goals and aspirations aren’t shared by people in schools then we have
misalignment. Then schools are producing young people that are at odds
with what a government or a department believes is a well-educated young
person. The other thing is, ... if there isn’t some [alignment] between the
policy and improvement within that school environment then you can write
policy until the cows come home.

Only one Senior Manager referred to practical problems in relation to greater
system alignment:

... there’s always going to be tension between any two offices in terms of [the
question] ‘do they know how it is here?’ It’s a little bit like schools saying to
Regions ‘you don’t know ... what it’s like for our school, you never get out
here’. Well it’s a bit like that [between] regions and central office
(Respondent S06).

Five of the Senior Managers also spoke directly about the training and induction of
Regional Network Leaders as a key point through which system alignment was
fostered. Respondent S06 discussed some of the range of programs offered to RNLs:

Through the first part of the period of the RNLs being put in place there’s
been significant work done by the system in terms of building capacity of the
RNLs as instructional leaders. ... Some of the work was around developing
their understanding of the use of data and how they can use that effectively in schools. We were part of a graduate program through Harvard University, an online program. ... There was [also] a lot of work done around the work we did with Richard Elmore on instructional rounds.

Respondent S01 described the need to spread the same message to all RNLs and Senior Managers to ensure alignment. The respondent goes on to argue the idea of ‘message’ was also significant in these professional development activities.

It is talking the same language so the principals, when they hear Daryl, understand exactly what he’s talking about and when the principals hear me they understand I’m talking the same language as [the Deputy Secretary of the DEECD]. So they don’t hear inconsistent messages. (Respondent S01)

However, one senior manager, Respondent S07, pointed out that differences exist with the way RNLs carry out their duties.

I see quite a line management between the RNLs and the principals ... but in some places people are quite pedantic [and in] others they’re a fuzzier in their role of support [rather] than actually taking up responsibility for the principals’ performance.

Regional Network Leaders, like Senior Managers, spoke of the linkages between different parts of the education system and concurred with Senior Managers’ responses that alignment between planning and strategic documents supported system alignment. Respondent R20 drew attention to the drive for school and network level change where the impetus for change was “the national and state agenda.”

Respondent R14 also notes the use of strategic planning as a means for alignment. The respondent drew attention to the deliberate alignment of school and network and state level strategic planning documents, indicating that “schools had Annual
Implementation Plans [AIPs] and ... the network developed its own AIP and process [that was] very similar.”

While this use of planning documents brought about an apparent alignment, one of the RNLs also indicated that this on-paper alignment was artificial. Respondent R12 stated,

It’s really hard to do an AIP for twenty-four schools in a network that is relevant to them because twenty-four schools have between one hundred kids and fifteen hundred kids. To make one AIP really relevant to a network, you tell me how you do that? That’s like being a doctor and writing a generalized script for everybody waiting in the waiting room.

In contrast to alignment on paper, the ‘real’ or lived system alignment might be seen in how the RNLs report their experience of operating within the lines of authority within the system. Each RNL commented on this area and indicative samples are included here. They point to factors such as “alignment from the ... Office for Government School Education [priorities] ... they’re the main drivers. It’s an alignment from the center down to the region down to the network (Respondent R18). Respondent R20 commented that “there’s a reasonably clear line of sight between most things that comes out centrally and what you think your core purpose is.”

One RNL responded:

The role of networks is to ensure government education policy is implemented ... and to ensure Regional strategies to improve literacy and numeracy are implemented in schools. Essentially the network is a compliance instrument to keep principals focused on expected regional outcomes (Respondent P36).

Respondent P25 concurred, stating,
The pressure on the Regional Network Leaders to act as line managers, ensuring that Regional and Departmental imperatives are paramount means that Networks’ and schools’ priorities are marginalized.

**RQ1 Theme Findings: Hierarchy & ‘Who are system leaders?’**

This theme draws together interview data gathered in relation to hierarchies and data in which the respondents specifically identify certain people or groups as ‘system leaders’. We will look first at data relating to hierarchies with the government school system and then consider the perceptions of the three classes of respondents as to who are the system leaders.

A senior manager, Respondent S07, explicitly confirmed the existence of hierarchical relationships saying: “this gets down to the hierarchy of the regional director and the assistant regional director and the regional network leaders ... Most of it is built on relationships” (Respondent S07).

Moreover, the data points to a uniform view across the Senior Managers around notions of earned autonomy. This view can be observed in the following statement from Senior Manager respondent S02:

> The combination of all the work of all those school principals is a very major part of system leadership, more than in many other systems because of the amount of authority we give them. But obviously in the department we set a lot of policies and practices and support for what happens out in the system and of course the regions are an intermediate layer in that system. ... what we’ve been trying to do in our recent reforms is instead of pure autonomy for principals, to have a this idea of earned autonomy which is that, if you are a successful school, successful principal, doing well, getting by without complications we’ll cut you a lot of slack and give you more freedom to keep doing more great things. But where it’s clear that things aren't going quite so well we'll be inclined to come in and check it out, make recommendations, get the regional director to come in and help build stronger leadership and stronger performance.
Senior Managers were consistent in their views as to the nature of the hierarchy and autonomy for Regional and School level leaders, but Senior Manager Respondent S07 felt that Regional Network Leaders did not manage their work in a consistent way. This respondent said, “... in some places people are quite pedantic and that is the role of RNLs. In some others they're fuzzier.”

Regional Network Leader respondents tended to describe their position in the hierarchy in terms of the people they might ‘line manage’ through support and direction, where support is around building relationships in order to effect change, and direction is around alignment with moral purposes or system-wide priorities. This is summed up by Respondent R10 who states,

> You’re there to support them in the collegiate way. You’re there to support them as a learner and as a professional and as a leader and to be able to provide them with some insight into how they can get over that hurdle or that particular block but also bring them back into that system framework and say ‘Hey ... You can’t go that way. That’s just not on. That doesn’t fit the moral purpose of this organization’.

Some principal class respondents, in contrast to the RNLs, were negative in their perceptions of the hierarchical arrangements existing within the system. While a minority expression, the following statements are indicative of this.

> ... the limited environment for discussing matters in depth and too much ‘party line’ hinders us (Respondent P32).

The role of the networks is to implement the directives and initiatives of the [Regional Director] and to support micromanagement (Respondent P28).

The pressure on the Regional Network Leaders to act as line managers, ensuring that Regional and Departmental imperatives are paramount, means that Networks’ and schools’ priorities are marginalised (Respondent P31).
RQ1 Theme Findings: Policy

Policies are the frameworks and regulations that govern operations and, to some extent, relationships within the government school system. In this section we look at data drawn from the interview responses that relate either to policy-making, policy purpose or the effects of a policy change.

Interestingly data from interviews for this theme can only be drawn from the responses of the Senior Managers. Without exception Regional Network Leaders and principals did not speak about any aspect of policy. Maintaining a hierarchical approach to policy and indicating a possible cause of RNLs and principals being silent in these interviews on matters of policy making, two Senior Managers reported that,

The region has a role in policy but is not the main policy maker. The region is the main implementer of a policy, shaping what the policy looks like, the fine allocation of the resources and [Regions are] the ones face-to-face, side by side with the schools saying what's happening, how it's happening and these are the consequences if it's not happening (Respondent S01).

Respondent S04 goes on to say that,

... at the regional level, regional network leaders have that brokering or intermediary roles within the region to take carriage of that policy and to try and see it being exercised.

In various ways all senior manager respondents, three of whom were central to constructing policy across the system, reported that policy making in the DEECD in relation to system leadership has centered on changing cultures within the organization to build greater systemness through reducing both isolation and autonomy that has not been 'earned'. Respondent S02 reported that,
... we are trying to get collaboration across all of those systems in order to promote the best interests of all the young people of Victoria.

This respondent went on to say,

... in a pure devolved system every school is an island and that actually starts to change the whole idea of a system really because the more you move towards devolution the more you move towards the independent school sector where there isn’t a system at all. So, we never moved that far. We always retain some responsibility in head office and regions. But I think what we’ve been trying to do in our recent reforms is instead of pure autonomy, for principals to have this idea of earned autonomy.

Confirmation of a top-down approach where policy is determined centrally and regions and schools are expected to implement it, is shown by Respondent S07 who states: “they [schools and principals] have to accept that the government has now moved to a network system where the deal is that they ... manage provision [of education] for communities ... it is part of the expectations of what they have to do for the money they receive.”

Senior Managers highlight the role of broader social issues in the development of education policy. Respondent S02 believes that driving strategic planning for DEECD are,

... economic factors, social factors, and environmental factors. So there’s no doubt that the importance of education to the economy has been a major influence in recent years. The increasing focus of education has come partly because of the economic imperative about the importance of a skilled worked force.

A concern with the changing nature of the economy and community was also clear in the responses of three other senior managers. As respondent S04 elaborated,
forces have been at play within the Victorian economy and within the Department of Education. We have taken [on an agenda] that says it's really about workforce capability and building internal capacity to respond to the needs of the community.

Concurrent with this was a concern expressed in various ways by each senior manager, to ensure policy benefitted young people, as well as what Michael Barber (2008) might term deliverology, or ensuring that the policy can be made operational and meaningful at the school level. Respondent S03 commented that “if we say that our focus is on quality teaching and learning, and we want to see that in schools, then what is it that we do at a central level that is going to support that in terms of resources or policy.”

The other feature of three responses from Senior Manager respondents around the theme of policy was an awareness of the political environment within which the Senior Managers directly operate and which can have effects on the system as a whole. Respondent S03 provides a typical example of this:

One of the things that happens in any government system is that the political cycles are short. Therefore you are at the whim of the public and voters. So you can get a period of stability if you have a government that is prepared to invest in education you can make significant inroads. But if you are continually changing where you have new ministers, new secretaries, new governments, everyone wants to create their own space ... you move so far with one set of policies [and you might] go back because they have a different set of views. The political climate is probably the most challenging.

**RQ1 Theme Findings: Factors hindering system leadership & Factors assisting system leadership**

All respondents were able to identify factors that would assist the development of system leadership and factors that would hinder its development. Factors hindering and assisting the development of system leadership are presented together here as
both themes expose realities in the operational environment that affect the development of system leadership.

As this theme lends itself to relatively simple strength/weakness identifications, points evident in the data have been grouped into the following table to provide a snap-shot of the areas of interest, satisfaction and concern ordered by class of respondent. While these areas will not be analysed with equal weighting, this table and subsequent analysis here and in the next chapter provide an interesting view of opinions regarding system leadership. In tabulating these responses each respondent is counted only once, regardless of the number of references they made.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.2 Factors Reported to be Assisting System Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Network / networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Managers (n7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNLs (n13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals (n20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks / networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured collegiality / sharing / exposure to other settings and ideas</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom or student learning focus of RNL</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional learning / access to experts</td>
</tr>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
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<td>Common AIP / Strategic plan (alignment)</td>
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Table 4.3 Factors Reported to be Hindering System Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senior Managers (n7)</th>
<th>RNLs (n13)</th>
<th>Principals (n20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competition / Funding formula</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal desire for autonomy / no buy-in</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources for networks including time</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>RNL role clarity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Top-down agenda / low ownership level</td>
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<td>Reluctance of schools / principals to work together</td>
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<tr>
<td>RNL behavior or personality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Groupings within networks – including geographical</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Senior Manager respondents drew attention to a number of positive strategic activities and practices that have been promoted from the ‘center-out’ including the generation of shared language, support for the provision of data and the construction of networks in order to provide tangible benefits for principals. The following responses indicate the breadth of views held by Senior Managers around actions in Victoria that assist the development of system leadership.

... it is about building common language, about trying to create trust in the environment, trying to get people to collaborate for the best interest of all children (Respondent S04).

... what assists [principals] is the network model. It’s got its problems but it’s at least providing a forum to actually get together and be forced to talk about what’s happening. I gather in this region they’re more inclined to share data with each other than schools in other networks from other regions but in the end the data has got to drive everything (Respondent S07).
While generally being more positive in their views, four of the Senior Managers also spoke of ‘old’ ways of operating, specifically competitiveness and isolationism that are a hindrance to the development of the system focused culture. For example, Respondent S03 said,

Competition for enrolments is still very live. [There is a fear that] ‘you might get better than me’ and ‘kids might not want to go to my school’. [Also there] is competition for staff ... sometimes you offer them opportunities and all of a sudden they’ve been offered more money and off they go.

The perception from Senior Managers as well as RNLs that a rump of principals seeks isolation or autonomy and neglect the system is recognized by Senior Manager respondents to be a hang-over from historical ways of operating. There was also, however, a recognition that the problem is two-fold and relates to bureaucratic compliance as much as it does to the learned behavior of principals who have for many years prior to the instigation of the networks operated as “a little business ... on a little island” (Respondent R14). Respondent S07 sums up this view in saying,

... our department has ... templates and standard things for your strategic plan ... and we're forced to follow those. So what happens is they quickly become [about] compliance. ‘I need to have a few words about this and that and then the people in town will shut up and let us get on with our work’.

Four Senior Managers and four Regional Network Leaders identified concerns related to Regional Network Leader role clarity, although principal class respondents did not identify this concern. One Senior Manager stated:

... to me there’s never been that clarity of what the role is and the relationship is for RNLs with principals. I think that's still an issue. It’s never been, it’s still not clear from me that everyone understands the role of the RNL (Respondent S07).
In recognizing the challenges faced by Primary principals who became Regional Network Leaders one Senior Manager respondent said,

Not many people can deal with the complexity and the culture in secondary schools ... the change model in some of those secondary school is different from primary schools. Primary schools are much more compliant, much more sharing. Secondary schools are much more privatised. (Respondent S01)

The concern raised above around the role clarity coming from Senior Management level within the DEECD is born out, again, in the following response from a Regional Network Leader.

... the center hasn’t really figured out what we are ... there are just some ridiculous requests that come out, [even] what we’re called on our contracts and those sorts of things, they really haven’t gotten that sorted ... the model is a good model and I think it’s got a lot of potential, but the bureaucrats have got to figure out how to keep it lean and mean (Respondent R10).

Data from one rurally located RNL indicated that managing schools over a huge geographical area is a specific hindrance to being effective in system leadership:

Travel to my furthest school is probably one hour and twenty minutes but the travel I’m doing is outside work hours so I’d leave home probably seven am some mornings and I’d return, some nights I have a [school] council meeting [at a school] so it’s half past ten but most nights I’d be home by half past seven (Respondent R18).

Regional Network Leader respondents indicated a belief that collegiality and sharing is highly important in assisting the development of system leadership. All Regional Network Leaders and principals interviewed indicated that they participate in network meetings, even though a minority of principals said that they did so reluctantly. The content of these network meetings varied by network, but
more so by region. Respondents from one region indicated that a focus on sharing and using data was central, another region combined this with looking at instructional strategies, and the remaining region focused heavily on literacy and numeracy improvement. The focus on collegiality and sharing was consistent. For example two respondents indicate:

... collegiate groups are quite important, just recently we've been doing sessions with [a consultant] with 2 or 3 schools together where we look at their data ... with their leadership teams and [the consultant] does a bit of a chat and then they talk across schools about why things are the way they are (Respondent R20).

... [the network] brought schools together and allowed them to work in partnerships at both a primary and secondary level and also we have lots of schools where the leaders and teachers are sharing their knowledge and expertise across schools (Respondent R14).

Seven Regional Network Leader respondents pointed out that the generation, interpretation and sharing of school and network data was a powerful tool to build collegiality, particularly when neighboring schools which had been competitive share their data. However, it is also clear from the data that, for some principals, this was confronting and led to fears around sharing, particularly when the data demonstrated deficiencies. Four of the Regional Network Leader respondents spoke of the necessity to establish protocols around the sharing in order to make principals feel protected. Uniformly, however, when Regional Network Leader respondents described the outcomes of sharing of data it was clear that in most cases they felt these fears were overcome.

In our case I asked every school to [share data]. At each network meeting there'd be two schools sometimes three schools telling us their data story, that is, sharing their school’s data with colleagues. [This] was something they’d never done before. Whilst I assumed that was a pretty straightforward thing it turned out for some of the principals [to be] a real challenge and they
found the idea of being public about their school’s performance data with colleagues confronting. But it turned out [well]. Apart from it being really consistent with the message from the department - that it’s all about data - it ended up being a really powerful way of marking the difference between the old and the new paradigm (Respondent R05).

Regardless of this collegiality, nine Regional Network Leader respondents indicated that the lack of buy-in from some principals and a desire for isolation or an ingrained competitiveness harmed collegial efforts. The following is typical of those indications:

[At the start] you were watching people watch each other attempting to work out what the pecking order was... The secondary [schools] were particularly interesting because they saw themselves as being, and continue to see themselves as being, quite separate from the network as a whole. They were used to tossing the odd grain in or completely ignoring and disengaging ... (Respondent R05).

For another Regional Network Leader respondent the solution to this problem was to change the dynamic of the conversation.

... we started to get people talking about their successes with their kids in schools as opposed to whining about having stuff done to them (Respondent R14).

Consistent across all classes of respondents was the idea that competition hindered the potential for system leadership to develop. This point is discussed further under another theme and so will not be elaborated upon here. It is important to note though, that competition and the related concern with principal buy-in, were the dominant hindrances identified by all three classes of respondents.

Another factor identified by Regional Network Leader respondents as assisting in the development of system leadership is the use of common agendas and a common
language to talk about the work of school and system improvement. At the Regional Network level this was evident in the commonality of agendas and the strategic and annual planning conducted by the network and by individual schools within the network. Respondents spoke of the development of the improvement agenda and the use of documentation to support this. For example Respondent R10 indicated:

... each of the principals of those schools has broad agreement [around ‘the work’] so we’re very committed in terms of having an improvement agenda across all levels of performance which means from the principal level to the classroom teacher to the students to the community.

While Respondent R13 stated:

... people are now using the AIP [Annual Implementation Plan – a document required by all schools and networks and reported to the DEECD] whether it’s in their schools or their networks. I think that’s the way to go, through a documentation approach.

Another factor assisting system leadership and referred to consistently by Regional Network Leader respondents was the development of their own capacity through extensive professional learning provided to them. Their views are summed-up by Respondent R13 who said,

The training that we had [was] lavish and I guess we were lucky to have time with Michael Fullan, [Richard Elmore and others] ... even the ‘data wise’ program [from Harvard University] was something that we hadn’t had the opportunity to do before. All of those processes and opportunities to learn were very ... strategic and developed our skills around school improvement.

Regional Network Leader respondents also consistently indicated that professional learning to encourage system leadership was highly important for principals and that part of their role was to provide such learning to principals. For example Respondent R10 stated:
... it’s a bit harder for principals ... if they’re just in their own school. But once you take them out of their school and ... allow them to see the bigger picture I think the pennies start to drop.

In two of the three Regions investigated in this study, the Regional Network Leader respondents indicated that the Regional Offices had engaged consultants to help with the systemic improvement process by working with schools and networks.

We’ve got Professor Munroe, Professor Hopkins, Professor Griffin ... Dr. Sue Cunningham and I think Dr. Peter Sullivan and then Professor Lewis. So we’ve got significant others that ... when they are working with us in the schools with the teachers and the leadership teams they are actually a part of the system (Respondent R17).

Principal class respondents pointed to many of the same factors that assist the development of system leadership. Most principal class respondents supported the development of networks as indicated by Respondent P27, “the networks provide an opportunity for schools to network for a common improvement agenda [and] are supporting schools [to improve] student outcomes.

A smaller number also confirmed the data from Regional Network Leader respondents that without networking, schools can be too narrowly focused:

Networking does give the principal a wider perspective ... It is easy to become too 'own-school-centric' and networks work to prevent this. ... [with] some fresh 'outside' ideas and approaches through sharing (Respondent P26).

Fifteen principal class respondents concurred with the usefulness of networks in enabling a focus on data, promoting collegiality, providing professional learning including access to expert consultants, and acting as a conduit between ‘central office’ and schools. Their views were succinctly put in the following examples:
Regional Networks provide a forum for professional learning, with access to leaders in their respective fields, such as literacy or numeracy, and a chance for principals to discuss best practice (Respondent P38).

The network’s focus on data and allocation of resources to meet agreed areas of need within a school and across the network helps. The networks are a vehicle to translate DEECD policy and programs into effective school based programs. The networks also help provide a more equitable access to resources and services (Respondent P37).

The Regional Network Leaders assist, and generally know their schools well and work positively with us. The Network also provides good opportunities to engage with each other, share problems and good practice and to develop a Network ethos (Respondent P25).

No principal class respondents, as with the other classes of respondents, spoke of professional learning or data use as hindrances to the development of system leadership. However, three principals raised concerns regarding the Regional Network Leader and their personal or human leadership hindering the development of system leadership. Two of these concerns are listed here.

The RNL can hinder us. He does not really understand his schools and their improvement priorities. Principals feel the RNL pushes the overall RNL group or Region agenda without recognizing what is happening in the network or sticking to the agreed Network Strategic plan (Respondent P35).

The personality of the Regional Network Leader can determine whether the climate of the network is supportive or punitive. In our case our RNL supports principals to achieve expectations. The RNL uses meetings of network principals to encourage team work and sharing. Other nearby RNL’s have been known to use intimidation and punishment to meet [Regional] goals (Respondent P36).
Concern around the operation of the hierarchy, or around the agenda of networks and schools being driven from the top, was expressed by several principals. They raise the question of whose agenda is being promoted through the networks. Respondent P32 suggested, “The limited environment for discussing matters in depth and too much ‘party line’ hinders us.” Two other responses sum up the views of these principals.

... in my network ... 'business’ is nearly always system 'top down' driven. Much of our individual identification of improvement based on contextual knowledge gets lost in the system strategies or initiative. This takes us away from the 'ownership' factor that was always hoped for (Respondent P26).

Network [leaders] are unaware of the demands on schools and the volume of competing demands [around] compliance [with DEECD mandates] (Respondent P34).

Competition between schools was also referenced by seven of the principal class respondents as a factor hindering development of system leadership. As discussed previously, this is examined in the subsequent section of this study.

**RQ1 Theme Findings: Cooperation and Competition**

In relation to this study, the term competition refers to the competition for student numbers and related financial security. Cooperation refers to activities that engage school in working together or sharing resources.

Respondent R20 shows the dilemma facing principals in relation to student numbers and finances when seeking to act cooperatively:

Schools are still funded on a per capita basis and that still causes some friction ... [I can] cite examples where there’s competition for kids [particularly] competitions for good kids.
Consistent across all classes of respondents was the idea that competition hindered the potential for system leadership to develop. In fact, competition was the dominant hindrance identified by all three classes of respondents as noted above. Both Senior Managers and RNLs linked this to the level of principal buy-in to Networks.

[Historically] they were in competition for kids and it’s very hard for some people to forgive and forget and start to work together to build bridges. It certainly changes with new principals who come in and don’t have that background and that baggage. So one of the things that gets in the way of schools working together is how long [leaders have] been in place, just for that reason (Respondent R14).

Respondent R10 reminds us that, “the other thing is, there is greed. Your salary level in determined upon your enrolment band. Your resources are as well.” It may seem surprising then to find that, according to five principal class respondents, competition does not exist at all in their network and that for a number of others it appears negligible. Each of these principal class respondents, though, was able to talk about how their network operates in ways that would act against competition. They articulate a clear belief that competition actively reduced the effectiveness of their network. This would resonate with the four senior managers who explicitly spoke of competition harming networks. One of these, Respondent S04, said:

[I believe] that deep collaboration over time will lead to better outcomes than pitting schools against schools ... That’s the hypothesis. So [originating] networks is founded on an understanding of the nature and way in which we engage and work together.

One senior manager went further, relating the intent to reduce competition to a belief that, from a system perspective, schools competing for students indicates that there are too many schools in a particular area. Consequently, as well as promoting
networks to reduce competition, this respondent also advocated planned redistribution of resources, or the closure of schools.

If a government system allows too many schools competing for too few kids which is classically what happened in the metropolitan area, [those schools are] dead. So you must remove competition and to remove competition you must get the right number of schools in the right number of areas (Respondent S01).

In a political environment in Victoria where government policy was that schools had to elect to close rather than be forcibly closed, this was the only statement of this view. However, data from a number of Senior Manager respondents indicated a more developed perspective around the use of competition within a school system. But this was balanced in each case by the expression of concern that one school's success or learning or strategies should be shared in order to advance the system. Two respondents show this more nuanced view of competition.

Every school wants to be the best school ... they'd like their results to be better and they'd like their impact to be better and be renowned for being outstanding. In a sense, there's an element of competition in that, but that's healthy if you want to prove you're a great school. But if you want a great system we want to foster [both] the notion of schools wanting to be outstanding [and] we want to promote best practice within the system [which means] we have to get them to collaborate (Respondent S02).

It's about ... actually understanding that you're part of a system and there are obligations; good obligations. You can make a contribution to the improvement of other schools. It's not necessarily about reducing competition. It depends what the competition is. If it's the trivial stuff about nice brochures and signage, [then] we don't need that. But if it's about better outcomes for kids, well it's not such a bad thing (Respondent R22).
Respondent S05 spoke most directly about real scenarios where the DEECD’s and Region’s focus on system identity and cooperation resulted in counter-competitive practices:

Last year [Region x] had forty million dollars of [federal government funding]\(^3\) handed back from primary schools. The first one was [name] primary school, a brand new school that had just been rebuilt. [The principal said to the Region] ‘I don’t need three million dollars, I just need two-hundred thousand ... you can have and do what you like with the rest.’ [Out of all that money the Region] got a number of mergers and a number of additional facilities put in [a disadvantaged suburb]. That would never have happened five years ago. If you’d have come along and said ‘schools will hand back two and three million dollars …’ it just wouldn’t have happened. Those things make me think this [system leadership] is more than just talk.

Like some senior managers, Regional Network Leader respondents indicated some concerns around the DEECD funding model and its construction of competition, almost exclusively answering questions pertaining to competition in relation to how they worked within their network to generate sharing and collegiality. There was no evidence in the data of other forms of cooperation emerging within the networks.

Most networks I go to, ... seem to focus on sharing of information and providing some [professional development]. It’s not about ‘what are the issues for our network’ and ‘what are we going to do about them?’ ... each network has an annual implementation plan and it’s supposed to have a strategic plan but very much they’re sort of generic ... stuff that doesn’t hit on two or three issues in a network and then actually have people working on it (Respondent S07).

Given that points raised by Regional Network Leaders around cooperation have been expanded on under the factors assisting and factors hindering system

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\(^3\) This funding was related to the Federal governments economic stimulus package during the global financial crisis.
leadership theme, we will not discuss them further here. It is essential to note though, the very strong perception from Regional Network Leader respondents that their activities within their network, and in structuring activities for their network, actively reduces competition.

Where respondents were specifically asked to provide examples of networks working collectively, answers from respondents (other than Senior Managers) revolved around the activities that occurred between principals at network meetings and professional learning activities that were conducted by or within the network. Regional Network Leaders made only passing reference to items like Vocational Education and Training (VET) provision that pre-existed the networks and required schools to share students. One Regional Network Leader explicitly stated that networks are not at an evolved stage where they can do more than establish new practices and cultures: “[system leadership is the] ideal. We are, a bit closer, but nowhere near it. ... we’re not [at the stage of] talking about giving away resources from my school to another school because they need it more” (Respondent 24).

Examples of system leadership emerging at the principal or school level came only from two Senior Manager class respondents who spoke about the ‘regeneration’ of local areas where schools closed and merged under an executive principal. For example Respondent S04 noted:

Regeneration projects have worked highly successfully in Regions to bring schools together to look at the quality of the provision, the quality of the infrastructure and the quality of the curriculum in an area. But ... if we’re looking at school regenerations or amalgamations and closures of schools these are very complex things for groups of principals to be able to orchestrate and pull off. But I think we are in the early days of seeing what might emerge as this model takes hold.
Beyond this, however, there is no sense from the data though that there is, or was, a plan to move Regional Networks beyond the phase of development and the building of collegiality.

Competition has appeared in the data only in relation to the interactions between principals within networks, which can also be expressed as competition between schools within a network or local area. There is no evidence in the data for competition between classes or between regions or networks.

**RQ1 Theme Findings: RNL role**

From the preliminary discussions held prior to the research phase it seemed likely that the Regional Network Leader role was one that would require investigation and this has been born out by the prevalence of responses relating to network leadership. The data shows that most respondents believe that Regional Network Leaders are or should be acting as system leaders.

In describing the role of the Regional Network Leader, all Senior Manager respondents referred to the Regional Network Leaders in terms that we would recognize as being about creating interconnections, or more closely interconnecting schools with each other and interconnecting schools with the central and regional offices of the DEECD. For example Respondent S04 articulated that “the regional network leaders have that brokering or intermediary role within the region to take carriage of policy and to try and see it being exercised [and] delivered.”

Data from all Senior Manager class respondents also indicates a hierarchical relationship in which the Regional Network Leader is the line manager or superior of the principal, Respondent S01 indicating that, “They’re the key first outside person above the school. Key agent for school improvement.”

On a deeper level each of the Senior Manager class respondents spoke of the role of the Regional Network Leader as being both an educational leader and a school improvement leader.
... they essentially have to understand adult learning and student learning and they also have to understand how schools improve to be able to influence principals and their leadership teams (Respondent S03).

They are the drivers of the agenda around lifting [student] achievement... they are the arms and legs to work really closely with the schools and their networks (Respondent S05).

While acknowledging improving school performance to be a role of the RNL, Respondent S07 suggests some uncertainty about whether the role was being fulfilled.

What I’ve always thought was their purpose and I’m not sure it’s actually being played out the way it should was that they would actually take responsibility for the performance of the schools in their network.

However, this concern was voiced by one respondent only.

Most of the Senior Manager class respondents spoke to leadership capacity building as a key component of the Regional Network Leader role. For example Respondent S06 said:

[They have] an enormous responsibility in developing and fostering leadership in those networks [and] building capacity in those networks. The mere fact that they’re responsible for principal selection [shapes] the leadership of that network.

Respondent S05 located this work, and tasks like principal performance reviews, as something that happens within and as part of a broader focus on raising student achievement.
In describing their role, Regional Network Leader respondents all spoke of work conducted in schools. Respondent R05 said that, “the day-to-day is about working closely with individual schools to improve teaching practice and student learning outcomes.” Multiple references drawn from interviews with the Regional Network Leaders show that in a typical week they would expect to spend four days in schools and participate in activities which include working the leadership teams, coaching, presenting to staff, school council meetings, performance reviews, looking at data, conducting professional learning and leading learning walks. All Regional Network Leader respondents linked their work to school improvement as can be observed in these two extracts from interviews with Regional Network Leaders:

Effectively we’re implementing a school improvement agenda and all the work that goes with that. It’s an examination in much more detail of all of the schools ... A big focus has been around how we use data more effectively to inform practice and I guess that is a key feature of the work of RNLs. Taking the school improvement agenda into that more precise space and being able to access and deliver a clear and consistent message (Respondent R13).

... the day-to-day is about working closely with individual schools to improve teaching practice and student learning outcomes (Respondent R05).

A number of Regional Network Leader respondents obliquely referred to differentiating their level of intervention or support for schools. Two respondents were more explicit. One, Respondent R13, used the term “light-touch schools” to describe those schools with whom the Regional Network Leader would spend little time. The other spoke of a “differentiated approach”:

[Our role is] to improve educational outcomes in our schools... We liaise with leadership teams and school improvement teams to really monitor that that work is continuing. ... there’s a differentiated approach ... there are schools who, because their outcomes are a bit better, have not been involved in the improvement strategy (Respondent R20).
Four Senior Managers agree that RNLs work differently depending on the school context. Respondent S07 indicates that when talking to RNLs about their schools they are asked,

... if they're hot schools, are they focusing their efforts there? What are they doing? How can we actually ramp it up there? And, which schools are soft touch schools and why are they soft touch schools...

The data clearly indicates that part of the Regional Network Leader role is to deal with managing DEECD compliance. One Regional Network Leader used negativity associated with compliance to emphasize what they feel is the more necessary work of a Regional Network Leader:

I try to get rid of the compliance work and the unnecessary stuff that comes from the center. So my regular day-to-day work sees myself and my network improvement coordinator either together or more often separately working with leadership teams at their regular meetings, at their planning sessions in terms of putting in a program at the school that will take the school to another level (Respondent R10).

The Regional Network Leader respondents were consistent in describing their role in relation to school improvement. An additional response came from one RNL who consulted her diary and, in addition to the work already indicated, the RNL pointed to work in a range of other areas including:

... there's a lot of principal selection [at the moment]. A lot of work is going into a school observing classes with the principal and providing feedback on how they can improve. Sometimes working with a group of young leaders. We've just run a 'leaders in the making' course working with the graduate teachers in the network (Respondent R18).

Other Regional Network Leader respondents did not directly mention principal selection and working with graduate teachers. However, two Senior Managers
(Respondent S01 and S04) did make reference to the RNL role in principal selection. It is also clear from the researchers’ further investigation of the question that Regional Network Leaders are, in most cases, represented on the selection panel for principal appointments.

In describing the role of the Regional Network Leader, principal respondents tended to focus around two key points: managing compliance from ‘the centre’ or ‘above’, and school improvement. In only one instance did a respondent mention both of these points in a positive light. Respondent P22 pointed out that,

> The RNL is the person who implements anything that comes from central office. Any of those changes would not be possible without the RNL. They are the person who brings those changes to the school. And the converse is true as well, that the RNL is close enough to schools to know what is really going on and they are in a position to bring about change by taking it back to the center. We have this person [the RNL] working with us on improving and having conversations all the time and I think they are pivotal to change.

In relation to the Regional Network Leader role, principal class respondents, in general, did not expand beyond the role statements described by the Regional Network Leaders themselves. What is noticeable, however, is a more frequent mention of compliance or line management as part of the role of the Regional Network Leader. For example: Respondent P34 said that their role is to “coordinate DEECD directions and to ensure valuable [professional development] drives improvement in student outcomes.” Respondent P25 discussed networks and noted, “The role of networks is to ensure that schools are complying with regional and departmental policies and initiatives.” In assessing the development of the RNL role, Respondent P24 said, “As constructed, the role of RNLs is to line manage principals and ensure DEECD priorities are addressed.”

The majority of principal class respondents also acknowledged the Regional Network Leader’s role in school improvement, either explicitly or indirectly, by explanation of improvement areas in their school: Respondent P38 indicated that,
“The role of networks is to support principals and schools in school improvement.” Respondent P37 developed this idea, stating that the RNLs school improvement work was, “to focus the system’s resources to improve student learning [and] the effects of my RNL are all positive.” Respondent P33 introduces the notion of collegiality, stating, “The networks improve student learning and collegiate support.”

RQ1 Theme Findings: Flexibility experienced by the Regional Network Leader

Data gathered for this theme is a sub-set of the data gathered around the role of the Regional Network Leader and is drawn exclusively from the responses of Regional Network Leaders.

Regional Network Leader respondents were consistent in indicating that they believed they were able to act autonomously, but only within certain parameters or agendas that were prescribed for them. Respondent R13 described it thus: “You work for a system and in the system and on the system continually, so autonomy in this role has a different meaning to a principal’s autonomy.”

When discussing Regional Network Leaders’ ability to manage their work schedule and program, the autonomy experienced was described in terms of how the agendas of others were flexibly implemented, as well as, to a lesser extent, how networks could identify their own agendas within set parameters. Indicative of comments on the ability to self-manage the work schedule Respondent R20 says,

... you’ve got to show up at work, in your network, 5 days a week and try and help [schools] improve their outcomes. Within those parameters there is a fair bit of flexibility. I can choose which school I go to, which schools I work with, what strategies I use with those people.

Some respondents made a point of indicating that their role as a Regional Network Leader was, to some extent, to place the needs or direction of the system first. When describing the impact of flexibility on the RNL workload, Respondent R19 cautioned
that "We can [be flexible] but always [keep] in mind that we are part of a network; we are part of a state [system], so that’s always in the back of our minds.”

Other Regional Network Leader respondents acknowledged the primacy of the system’s objectives and indicated that because they felt aligned to the system they are quite able to be flexible. As Respondent R20 illustrates, "I think if you’re feeling okay with the central direction then you might say you could adapt things quite well ... I think we’ve got a fair degree of flexibility.” One respondent described the relationship between experiencing flexibility while being aligned to the system’s objectives in terms of moral purpose.

We’re autonomous but boy we’re reminded very strongly - or we have that sense of moral purpose - that it’s not about us, it’s about what happens to the kids in the classrooms. I think that’s really strong (Respondent R14).

Describing more powerfully the role of the system, Respondent R12 adds,

A strongly connected and tightly coupled system is one that’s going to improve. That doesn’t mean that you can’t have diversity and difference because a strong system can tolerate that. Weak systems are the ones that are autocratic and can’t understand that systems are diverse. Our particular framework actually acknowledges all of that. It’s actually built in there.

Yet other Regional Network Leader respondents described the ways in which they mediated, adapted or flexibly implemented the agendas of others within the context of their network, stating,

We try and ... buffer the initiatives. We try and look at what will work for our network, what we’re working on and whether we’ll implement that straight away or will we almost drip it in. So it’s through figuring out how it all fits. [We ask] ‘What are we doing already?’ [and] if it’s labeled a different way or [is] totally different to what we’re doing [then] can we build it onto what we’re doing already (Respondent R19).
... we get so many initiatives from government and I think you need to filter some and work out which ones are right for now and which ones can wait a while and which out of the ones you're going to do are most important. Prioritizing and giving time and space and structure to some of those government initiatives can be difficult at times (Respondent R14).

Only one Regional Network Leader indicated that they have had their autonomy directly restrained or limited:

... there have been some times where I thought I've had autonomy and that hasn't been the case and I've had a little smack, but that's okay because I'm learning the job (Respondent R13).

It is evident in the data gathered here that Regional Network Leaders have high levels of flexibility or operational autonomy provided that they are able to deliver on the system functions and purposes as they are framed through policy and senior management.
Research Question 2: What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?

This second research question attempts to determine specific human interactions existing around system leadership in Victoria. It is a more refined question as it allows us to investigate the inter-connective and coherence making functions of system leadership in greater detail. Interview data was grouped according to themes that emerged from the data. As the table below indicates this research question was relevant within seven of the fifteen themes identified. Each of these themes will be discussed in relation to the research question.

Table 4.4 Relevance of RQ2 to identified themes

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Before examining the data obtained by interview we will, however, examine data obtainable in documentary form. The documentary data is examined in two parts relevant to the research question. First, we look at documentary evidence of the organizational structure and operational relationships existing within the DEECD. Second, we look at evidence of the policy priorities of the DEECD.

Findings from documentary data:
Much of the documentary evidence relevant to this research question has been described and discussed in the literature review. This section then is a summary of
pertinent documentary evidence that will assist the reader to contextualize the interview data and provide a spine of policy and organizational documentation to compliment the data drawn from interviews. In addition to this some documentary data in relation to organizational mapping is provided here that was not included in the literature review.

• **Documentary evidence for operational relationships**

Organisationally the DEECD is divided into five central offices (Office for Government School Education (OGSE); Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination (OCPC); Office for Policy, Research and Innovation (OPRI); Office for Resources and Infrastructure (ORI) and; Office for Skills Victoria (OSV)). A Deputy Secretary who reports to the Secretary of the DEECD leads each office. Each of these offices can be seen in the organizational chart produced by DEECD in December 2011 (see Appendix 4). The structure presented in Appendix 4 frames the operations of the various functions of the department and shows the linear connections from the secretary to Regions through the Office for Government School Education. The organizational chart provided in Appendix 5) is that of the Gippsland Region⁴ (Gippsland Region, 2011, no page) and is provided as a model that is similar in each Region. Each Regional Office has an Assistant Regional Director responsible for school improvement who is notionally the direct line managers of the Regional Network Leaders. Each Regional Network Leader in turn line manages a number of schools (see Appendix 5).

While we see in Appendix 5 the location of Regional Network Leaders within a Regional structure, little publically available documentation outlines their role. This point was made evident in the investigation of research question one. One Region does however define the role of the RNL in terms that are useful when considering operational relationships between leaders within the system. The Grampians Region⁵ states that Regional Network Leaders:

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⁴ From 2013 Victoria’s Regions have been merged with this seeing a reduction from nine into four. This region no longer exists.
⁵ From 2013 Victoria’s Regions have been merged with this seeing a reduction from nine into four.
• lead the development of a network strategic plan, provisioning plan and professional learning strategy
• develop leadership capacity within and across the network schools
• strengthen the instructional capacity of school leaders to improve the quality of teaching practice, with a particular emphasis on literacy and numeracy
• develop network resources strategically and efficiently
• create a culture of collaboration and collective accountability within the network and across the region
• facilitate partnerships with community, business and other agencies”
(Grampians Region, 2012, no page)

Outside of the DEECD, one document - produced by the McKinsey corporation in 2010 as an international comparative study of high performing school systems - also provides useful information about operational relationships around Regional Network Leaders. The McKinsey report (Barber, Clarke and Wheelan, 2010, p26) examined Victoria’s Regional Network Leaders’ role and found that there was evidence of operational relationships between Regional Network Leaders and principals that focused on principal/school performance as the diagram in Appendix 6 illustrates. This diagram shows the intended priorities, practices and activities of Regional Network Leaders in Victoria as well as the reporting chain from the Secretary through to the Regional Network Leaders.

• Documentary evidence for DEECD policy priorities

DEECD policy priorities for the period under study are to be found in two key documents; the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development. (2008) and the DEECD’s Corporate Plan (2009).

The DEECD’s 3-year Corporate Plan operating from 2009 to 2011 outlines a vision that: “Every young Victorian thrives, learns and grows to enjoy a productive, rewarding and fulfilling life, while contributing to their local and global
communities” (DEECD, 2009). In the same document the DEECD’s mission statement indicates intent to: “Ensure a high-quality and coherent birth-to-adulthood learning and development system to build the capability of every young Victorian” (DEECD, 2009).

Alongside the Corporate Plan the DEECD uses a document called the Blueprint to expand on operationalizing the Corporate Plan. The second DEECD Blueprint (DEECD, 2008) divided the work of the DEECD into three strategic areas: ‘System Improvement’, ‘Partnerships with parents and communities’ and, ‘Workforce Reform’. As can be seen in Appendix 3, each strategic area is further divided into action areas that are indicative of the policy priorities of the DEECD during the period of this study.

Given that, as discussed in relation to DEECD organizational charts, the OGSE acts operationally to create vertical relationships from the Secretary level to the Regions and thereby to principals, it is pertinent to note the priority areas of the OGSE and the policy priorities that these reflect. According to DEECD:

The core function of the Office for Government School Education is to manage, coordinate and implement high-quality government school education across Victoria.

[OGSE] aims to improve the education outcomes of all students in government schools by addressing variations in school performance across the state, developing highly skilled teachers and school leaders, and facilitating parent and community engagement.

(DEECD, 2011d.)

Most significantly, the OGSE has four priority areas, each relevant to our question of whether operational relationships are supporting the achievement of DEECD policy. These can be read in the Findings from documentary data for RQ1 which can be found earlier in this chapter.
These priority areas suggest relationships that are structures and formalized from the centralized OGSE through to schools and school leaders.

**Interview Data**

As discussed above, data gathered from interviews has been used to derive themes that emerged from within the data itself. Data relevant for research question two was located in seven of the fifteen themes derived from the data. Each is explored in more detail below. Two pairs of themes are presented together in the following section. The pairing of themes ‘leadership’ and ‘RNL role’ as well as the pairing of the themes ‘factors hindering system leadership’ and ‘factors assisting system leadership’ has occurred due to the data emerging within these thematic areas uncovering overlapping information.

**RQ2 Theme Findings: Hierarchy**

For research question two, the most readily observable theme to emerge from the interview data related to hierarchies within the DEECD. All classes of respondent were highly consistent in identifying the existence of hierarchies. The theme labeled ‘hierarchy’ was also discussed in relation to research question number one, where it was examined alongside the theme ‘Who are system leaders?’ As the research questions focus on quite different areas reexamination is required. Data to emerge from each class of respondent (Senior Manager class; Regional Network Leader class, and; principal class) is presented separately. Inter-group variations will be noted.

Senior Manager respondents did not speak of their relationships in terms of who they are line managed by, or give strong indication of limits on their operational authority, except in the following example from a Senior Manager working in a Regional Office.

... part of this gets down to technically the hierarchy ... there’s probably some rule somewhere that says how much authority I’ve got ... before I have to go
to [name and position expunged]. In most cases you only draw on those [rules] when things get [tough and are] not working with the people above you and below you. Most of it is built on relationships. At the moment I think I’ve got [name removed]’s confidence that basically I can go out and do whatever I like until I do something wrong and he'll pull me in and that's the mode of operation I've always worked under (Respondent S07).

Senior Manager class respondents all, at some point in their interview, spoke about the existence of hierarchical relationships in what were generally indirect terms. That is, Senior Managers tended to speak of their role in determining policy and practice in ways that enable identification of hierarchical relationships between leaders. This is evident in the way Senior Manager respondents consistently used similar examples to described the transfer of a centrally determined agenda to the school level via the intermediary structure of the regional network. Respondent S06 for example noted:

... the RNLs set [the professional learning] agenda through their network meetings. It's actually the professional learning and the dialogue [Regional Network Leaders] have at their network meetings [that is important, and these] take a focus from the way we work at the region ... level.

While none of the Senior Manger class respondents used the term hierarchy, they each spoke of hierarchical structuring of relationships. The data is clear that Senior Managers believe that hierarchical operational relationships exist. The understanding that direction can be and is given ‘from above’ is apparent in statements such as; “obviously in the department we set a lot of policies and practices and support for what happens out in the system” (Respondent S02). This ideas is replicated across all Senior Manager respondents.

Senior Manager respondents provided little indication of what Hopkins (2009, p4) would describe as autocratic prescription, which is not to say that prescriptive action was absent but rather that the description given to it tended to deemphasize this. The single exception to this came from one Senior Manager class respondent
who tied the function of the principal with accepting the imprimatur of the government directed through the system hierarchy:

[Principals] have to accept that the government has now moved to a network system where the deal is that ... it is part of the expectations of what they have to do for the money they receive as pay, to try and work as a network and to manage provision of communities (Respondent S07).

More prevalent in the data was evidence of Senior Managers describing their work in directing from 'above' in relation to either the effects of their leadership across the system or in terms of partnerships required:

[As a Senior Manager,] through the development of one framework and policy you can actually [not only] impact on the practices in sixteen hundred schools but you can also start to elevate the position of leadership and you can start to build a language and a fluency around the sort of leaders that you want to have in government schools (Respondent S03).

Respondent S01 on the other hand was typical of those that expressed a more expedient preference for partnerships and the involvement of schools and regions in decision-making: “The center does most of the policy work but the region and schools have to be involved.” While different, both types of responses suggest an acknowledgement by these senior managers that the effectiveness of the hierarchy in delivering change depends on the buy-in of the recipients of top-down policy.

One Senior Manager (Respondent S04) stated that Senior Managers “try and push the sense of agency and authorizing environment closer to schools [and away] from the center.” Another (Respondent S01) indicated, “the center does more of the resource allocation in the big lumps but leaves it to the region to do the final tuning.” One Senior Manager described the operational relationships of the DEECD that support this devolution concept in language that would mark them as globally excellent practice:
The combination of all the work of all those school principals is a very major part of system leadership, more than in many other systems because of the amount of authority we give them (Respondent S02).

The understanding consistently evident in the data gathered from Senior Managers was that where autonomy is earned the control from the ‘center’ or ‘above’ can be reduced. Typical of this is Respondent S07:

... you make it clear what people are supposed to do and basically you try to get out of the way and let them do it and basically you provide them with the support that they may need.

There was some acknowledgement from three of the Senior Manager respondents that the expertise of frontline leaders is as valuable and as important as that of the Senior Managers themselves:

All of the network theory is that the expertise is at the extremes of the network and not at the center of it and we’ve just got to develop both simultaneously. From a system point of view there are non-negotiables along the way but there’s a lot of things [where we say] here’s our best advice (Respondent R22).

Allied with this though, is the clear and consistently articulated position from Senior Manager respondents, that greater authority must be paired with greater responsibility or accountability or system-focus. One senior manager in fact suggests that the new arrangements around networks that emerged under the 2008 Blueprint have increased the role of senior and middle managers in ensuring the system’s objectives are met in the devolution of authority (and money) to schools:

Most of the resources go to schools but now the region and the center are taking in a greater role in how they spend it. So now [we say] you can’t just sit on a bank [account] for five million dollars and still have forty kids two years behind in year 3 literacy. It’s just not acceptable (Respondent S01).
Regional Network Leader respondents, as with Senior Managers, indicated the existence of operational relationships that can be characterized in terms of a hierarchy. While there were only minor references to direct instruction coming from Senior Managers this is in contrast to the expectations around compliance that were discussed in relation to ‘factors hindering the emergence of system leadership’ discussed in research question one. However, there were a number of references to the existence of agendas being set from levels above that of the Regional Network Leader. One Regional Network Leader (Respondent R14) suggested, “the agenda for the network has been set even prior to the networks’ [existence].” Data from Regional Network Leaders suggests that these agendas are most actively pursued where they are associated with government policy or finance. For example, one Regional Network Leader spoke of the impact of Federal government finance through the Building the Education Revolution initiative (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009) on the operational work of leaders. This leader suggested that change was being driven in Victoria by the combination of Federal and State government agendas:

... the broader national agenda and state agenda - if you want to call it Blueprint - they’re pretty much aligned. It’s blurred as to what’s driving what but clearly the national and state agenda is what is driving change (Respondent R20).

Most Regional Network Leader respondents indicated that the agendas set from ‘above’ aligned with their personal beliefs and this meant that the agenda was not seen as an imposition. As respondent R20 continued, “I don’t think we feel mandated to do things or agendas are being imposed. I think they’re quite reasonable.” This was a view reflected across most Regional Network Leader respondents.

Another common thread across the Regional Network Leader respondents in two of the three regions (the selected high performing region and the selected rural region) was respect for the vision of the Regional Director class officers (who are
amongst the Senior Manager class respondents in this study). In those two regions the network leaders were uniform in their admiration of their Regional leaders. “He’s very visionary” Respondent R18 reported. Another Regional Network Leader indicated that “[the Regional Director] is obviously a strong advocate for us” (Respondent R20). This type of comment in these two regions was also linked to the perception that the Regional Director class officers provided autonomy alongside support and accountability:

I will go to the RD, however, on occasion I will make the decision ... or I'll think ‘they don’t need to know that’ ... I'll take a risk based on all the information (Respondent R17).

This tends to support previous evidence around earned autonomy when acting in response to policy and other boundaries framed from ‘above’.

One Regional Network Leader suggested that the Regional Network Leader doesn’t “have any impact or any change process up the line” (Respondent R14). While this Regional Network Leader was the only respondent to articulate this so nakedly, no other Regional Network Leaders provided evidence of an ability to do this.

Regional Network Leader respondents emphasized on a number of occasions their role in ensuring that, through their relationships with principals, the agendas of Senior Managers were able to manifest in schools. Respondent R14 indicated this clearly and made a highly pertinent observation that the purpose of the connective relationship between the Regional Network Leader and the principal is to make a policy or program live in practice.

... when you look at the Blueprints and lots of the key documents - E5 is a recent one that’s come out of the department – [the senior managers have] lent very heavily on schools and principals and networks to be part of that work. I think unless the work that the system does is buried in the people that do the work then there is that chance that you’ll have a disconnect of the reality of education at the base with the theory of the department and the
research base. If there is a disconnect or fracture between the two then you could get into a bit of strife.

Respondent R12 presented the same notion slightly differently:

Well I've got an agenda. The agenda is the system's agenda so my agenda is not different. [It has been] to help principals who haven't understood ... [and] now some of them absolutely have. When I talk to them they'll go ‘here it is’ .... They show it to me, they've got it mapped ... The agenda is to bring into the heart of the network what the system reform is.

The understanding articulated here and that is evident across the Regional Network Leader respondents, is that their relationship with principals centers around ensuring alignment. That is not to say that the alignment maintained by the Regional Network Leader is negative or autocratic but it is referent to the idea that the principal is not necessarily entitled to act entirely autonomously of their relationship with their Regional Network Leader. One Regional Network Leader pointed to the frameworks that are in place to ensure cohesion across the system:

If you’re a principal and you get lost, you go back to the effective school model and it pretty much maps out all the time what you need to be doing and if your staff are starting to get antsy you just draw them back to ‘this is the road we’re on. I know you want to go in that way but this is the road we’re on. This is the department’s work.’ Because they're employed by the system, they're not actually independent. They're not their own boss (Respondent R12).

Two Regional Network Leader respondents pointed to examples where their relationship with the principals has taken on directive or autocratic overtones. For example Respondent R13 indicated that:

... in some of my schools we have had to be quite strong about compliance, particularly around literacy and numeracy learning and the requirements
around that because they weren’t compliant and the student data was supporting that the students could do better.

Similarly Respondent R16 noted that Regional Network Leaders at times have to direct the construction of the educational program in a school: “RNLs pinned them down and said okay this is what you have to do. You have to have a literacy block every day, a numeracy block everyday no matter what.”

For the most part, however, the evidence from the interview data suggests that the relationship between the Regional Network Leader and the principals is viewed by the Regional Network Leaders as being one of support. The articulation of this perception takes many forms including coaching, building leadership capacity, positive accountability and most directly through the description of the relationship in terms of direct support. Respondent R10, for example, says:

You’re there to support them in the collegiate way. You’re there to support them as a learner and as a professional and as a leader and to be able to provide them with some insight.

Unlike the other two classes of respondents, principals tended to discuss their relationships with other leaders in terms of the business actioned between classes of leaders rather than discussing any personal dimensions of the relationship.

Consistently, principal class respondents identified the existence of hierarchic arrangements within the DEECD. Principals viewed these arrangements both positively and negatively but from either perspective the hierarchy is evident:

I see myself as part of the system and I do what the system directs even though I might not always like it ... I always make the decision to do what the system requires because I see that as part of my role within the system to accept those system ideas and requirements - but that is a choice I make. It would be possible for me to be more autonomous if I chose to be less compliant (Respondent P22).
Where principal class respondents were more critical of these hierarchical relationships they tended to focus on the perception that direction from ‘above’ is imposed. This was true for principal class respondents talking about their relationship with their Regional Network Leader: Respondent P26 reported that Network “business is nearly always top-down driven” and Respondent P32 indicated the existence of a “limited environment for discussing matters in depth and too much ‘party line’.” There is little evidence of principals discussing the actions of Senior Managers in terms of their relationship with them within the hierarchy and this absence, in itself, is suggestive that there may in many cases be little or no direct or ongoing relationship between principals and Senior Managers. Principals were, however, able to identify the hierarchical relationships beyond the Regional Network Leader and in many cases acknowledged that the Regional Network Leader acted as an intermediary and ensured that the Senior Management’s policy priorities were central to the work of schools and networks. For example, two respondents suggested that:

The pressure on the Regional Network Leaders [is] to act as line managers, ensuring that Regional and Departmental imperatives are paramount [and this] means that Networks’ and schools’ priorities are marginalized (Respondent P24).

The role of the networks is to implement the directives and initiatives of the R.D. [Regional Director, and] to support micromanagement of schools (Respondent P28).

Between the three classes of respondent there is a highly consistent acknowledgement of the existence of hierarchic arrangements within the Victorian Government education system. Senior Manager and Regional Network Leader respondents are more likely to refer to autonomy and flexibility within these relationships than principal respondents.
RQ2 Theme Findings: System Alignment:
Data gathered under this heading is directly relevant to ascertaining how the operational relationships between leaders in the Victorian Government education system support DEECD policies and priorities. The phrase ‘system alignment’ is used to describe the degree to which different parts of the system are aligned to a common purpose or objective. We have established in the data gathered above under the thematic heading ‘Hierarchy’, the existence of hierarchical relationships between three classes of personnel within the DEECD and the direction in which information flows and direction is passed between them. Given these relationships, we look here to data that may indicate whether or not these arrangements support the achievement of DEECD policy priorities.

Senior Manager class respondents demonstrated uniformity in their expectation that leaders across the system should pursue alignment with the system. This was evident in their description of their own work and in their explanation of the environment that has been constructed in Victoria around networks.

Significantly, the Senior Manager class respondents tended to indicate that they would evaluate the effectiveness of Regional Network Leaders and other leaders, in part, by analyzing how aligned they are to the system and how well they promote alignment. Each of the Senior Manager class respondents based in a Regional Office and one Senior Manager class respondent located in a Central Office referred directly to the existence of strategic and annual plans that concertina across different levels within the hierarchy. One of these, Respondent S01, stated:

... you put 20 schools in a network and say “We are a network. We have a network improvement plan which you've all signed off. We have an annual implementation plan which you all signed off.” And [once] their school plans look like a subset of the network plans and the network plans look like a subset of my plans and my plans look like a subset of [the Deputy Secretary's] plans. We've got some alignment and you can actually go to the school and say you’re out of line because you're part of the network. [The] leverage that Regional Networks Leaders have is enormous.
We see here the expectation, common to each of these respondents, that the alignment of strategic plan and annual implementation plan documents across the system supports working towards system alignment. We also see here the expectation that the Regional Network Leaders are in agreement with the plans and that they are authorized to take action to ensure that schools are aligned with the priorities established at the Senior Manager level. This does not, of course, exclude the notion that the networks can also set priorities at the network level and that, from this, schools can be held accountable for those priorities. There is, however, no evidence of senior managers indicating that this can or should occur. However, it can be inferred from many of the statements given by Senior Managers that networks implement the system-wide priorities within a local contextual framework. This is most clear in the following statement from Respondent S03:

There is a line of sight from the government goals and targets through to the corporate plan through to the regional business plan and divisional plans, and regional plans through to the network plans. They still have to report on the same basic outcomes around student learning, engagement and wellbeing, pathways and transitions. The bigger idea of the outcomes [is that] the particular group you target at any one time is dependent on context and how you privilege that within each network.

The same point was expressed by Respondent S01

... a good policy is one that applies [in] a high percentage of the cases but doesn’t apply in every context and so shaping at the local level, context is just as important as pure policy. People accept that. Where people get into trouble is where they actually take a resource and bastardize it. They use it for something else and ignore the strategy... Schools are adept to doing that: taking the money and using it for something else. But it’s our responsibility - if we believe [in] what we’re doing - to monitor.
The expectation that Regional Network Leaders perform a function in aligning schools to the system is premised on the idea that Regional Network Leaders are aligned. Senior Manager class respondents, consistently, referred to the induction and professional learning program undertaken by the Regional Network Leaders as central to their alignment:

... the first thing we did then was a two day induction ... and then another two days. [The Deputy Secretary] kept bringing them back together as a group. All the regional directors were there, all the assistant regional directors and all the RNLs so he had 80 people. All hearing the same message, all doing the same professional [learning]; pretty significant cultural building and pretty significant capacity building (Respondent S01).

The idea of building alignment by bringing leaders together is reflected in the way a number of the Senior Manager class respondents described the purpose of the networks themselves. It is clear that the networks were, in part, intended to construct or redefine operational relationships between leaders within the system:

... I think the architecture that was put in place in Victoria was very much about building capacity. It was about, 'How do we put groups of principals together that learn together in communities of practice that grow their knowledge and skill to undertake increasingly complex work within their local school environment?’” (Respondent S04).

A common notion evident in interviews with all Senior Managers was that cooperative or network arrangements could be used to ensure accountability to system-wide priorities. This idea was generally couched in terms of the cooperative role for leaders in serving the interest of the system as opposed to serving their own interests or the interests of a single school or area. Respondent S07, for example, related this idea to competition for student enrolments:

The culture of education seems to be that individual rewards are frowned upon. [I've] never heard in the education industry being paid a cash reward
for anything but there’s lot of other ways to reward people and I just think that we need to come up with a way to make sure that that [cooperative] behavior is valued more than operating in isolation. So when we talk about a school being successful because it’s grown its enrolments by 20% [that’s good,] but if all we've done is really leased the kids from a neighbouring school then well they haven't actually done all that much in terms of system.

In the data gathered from Senior Managers there is a highly consistent view that system alignment is important to achieving DEECD policy priorities. In addition, there is a clear belief that the operational relationships established around networks ensure system alignment and that DEECD policy priorities are enacted in schools.

Regional Network Leaders typically described their relationship with Senior Managers in terms that indicate a successful structure for transferring policy priorities from the ‘top down’ as explored above under the theme of hierarchy. There was only one Regional Network Leader respondent who diverged from this trend in indicating that the operational relationship between that individual and their Senior Managers was inconsequential: “I think [the relationships between the Central Office and the Region] is okay but ... to me on one level, on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis, it’s almost irrelevant to me because I’m with the schools” (Respondent R10).

Developing a common language and narrative within the network is identified by many RNLS as essential part of their work on building the relationships between principals and between themselves and the principal class. Consistently, Regional Network Leaders referred to the professional learning and establishment phase of the network as critical to building these relationships:

All of our schools have [had] the ‘learning walks’ and our key improvement strategy of our common language. They all know that we do the same thing. We can all talk about the same things and in our network this year there [have] been instructional rounds which have been eighteen days where
principals are together looking at student learning [and] doing professional reading. [This has] had a huge impact on our network (Respondent R19).

It is also clear, and consistently expressed by Regional Network Leader respondents, that the new networks caused a fundamental shift in the operational relationships between principals. Many Regional Network Leader class respondents referred specifically to the sharing of data to indicate how relationships between schools or principals are fundamentally altered by the shift in operational relationships from a competitive to a cooperative focus. Respondent R13 for example stated that:

Critical to [developing relationships] was the data that we had and we established [data sharing] protocols very early. I said that we have to be in a space where we can all share openly ... In fairness to the principals, they had a bit of nervousness but they’ve all come on board ... That opened the door for us to have a complete and thorough analysis of network data [and to] build a framework around how we can improve ... across the network.

The use of data was related by some respondents to the accountabilities owed by the networks to the system and by the schools to their network:

[Networks] brought schools together and allowed them to work in partnerships ... where the leaders and teachers are sharing their knowledge and expertise across schools. ... The rigor end is we now have access to the network data, and there is a lot around, and we can ensure there is accountability internally at the school but also across the network to improve student outcomes for everyone (Respondent R14).

All Regional Network Leader respondents indicated that the operational relationship between the principal and their Regional Network Leader was significant in ensuring alignment and that the policy priorities of the DEECD were enacted. The consistent view presented by the Regional Network Leaders was that this operational relationship is new within the system and that the operational relationship supports schools and supports the system to achieve its priorities:
I think the work of the RNLs ... has been very, very positive. I think there’s been opportunity to get a consistent message, a consistent voice into our schools and actually to sit side-by-side with the principals to. To sit with them and their leadership teams which I don’t believe was possible [previously] (Respondent R13).

Principal class respondents provided little data to indicate the degree to which their operational relationship with other principal class leaders supported the achievement of DEECD policy priorities. There was however, significant data, covered above, to support the idea that the regional networks had created relationships between leaders. Respondent P21 and Respondent P37 both indicated that the relationships between principals had become more cooperative as a result of the action of the Regional Network Leader.

In contrast, principal class respondents provided highly consistent data to indicate that operational relationships between themselves and the Regional Network Leaders supported the transfer of ‘top-down’ policy priorities. Opinions were mixed as to whether the content of the priorities helped or hindered at the local level, however, it is clear that the principal class respondents view their relationship with the Regional Network Leader as an operational relationship that is geared toward aligning schools with system determined or common goals. An indication of this is the report of Respondent P36 who said:

The role of networks is to ensure government education policy is implemented in the local schools. And to ensure Regional strategies to improve literacy and numeracy are implemented in schools. Essentially the network is a compliance instrument to keep principals focused on expected ... outcomes.

**RQ2 Theme Findings: Leadership and RNL Role**
The manifestation of operational relationships within the DEECD is also evident in data gathered under the thematic headings of ‘Leadership Relationships’ and ‘RNL
Role’. However the data is less comprehensive that that gathered above. What we are able to see here is evidence of how leaders describe interconnective or relational aspects of their leadership and the leadership of others.

A significant feature of responses from both the Senior Manager class respondents and the Regional Network Leader class respondents was the emphasis on supportive leadership with this appearing alongside the leader ensuring accountability. Respondent R18 said: “There’s leadership at all different levels and it’s got to be always about … the relationship first.”

Operationally this manifests in a direction given to Regional Network Leaders around working primarily with principals and leadership teams in schools. There is a high degree of consistency in the data gathered from both Senior Managers and Regional Network Leaders that indicates that this direction has manifested in a close operational relationships between Regional Network Leaders and principals.

[The RNL’s primary relationship has to be around] working with leadership teams; pretty much exclusively. [Working with] leadership teams in schools and working with leadership teams more broadly [and] working with network executives (Respondent R22).

This relationship between the Regional Network Leader and the principal has, the data consistently indicates, resulted in greater accountabilities and/or greater control over principals’ work. Respondent R14 articulated a belief in the necessity for this control:

[We at the regional level believed that] if we keep doing [the same thing] we’re going to have the same results so we need this time to change and the region is offering a change [that requires] … convincing, cajoling but probably also demanding people change their practices.

However, the relationship between interpersonal skills or ability in the domain of human leadership and the relative effectiveness of the Regional Network Leader
was noted by a number of Senior Manager and Regional Network Leader respondents. Again, Respondent R14 noted:

... your autonomy [as a Regional Network Leader] is really dependent on how ... effective you are in summing up the needs of schools and being able to support the schools in where they want to go. I reckon that’s probably the strength of your autonomy. If you can’t do that then you’re stuffed. If you can then you’re more empowered as a leader I suppose.

While the introduction of the Regional Network Leader roles created ‘turbulence’, particularly in relation to new accountabilities and expectations, it is clear that for many the relationship between the Regional Network Leader and the school or principal was one that attempted to balance accountabilities with support.

RQ2 Theme Findings: Flexibility experienced by the RNL
Note: With the exception of one statement drawn from an interview with a Senior Manager, all data gathered under this thematic heading is taken from interviews with Regional Network Leaders.

Operational relationships between Regional Network Leaders their managers and subordinates can be observed, in part, through the data gathered around the degree of flexibility or autonomy experienced by the Regional Network leader. We start this section, then, by looking at the way a Senior Manager describes the degree of flexibility granted to Regional Network Leaders:

Alignment is [where we agree with schools] on the same moral purpose. We agree on what the data says. We agree we’re going to do something about it and we agree [what] the best practice is. For example [when an RNL] says this school doesn’t want to do this. Well ... ‘show me what you’re doing that’s better’. So you prove to me that your method is better and I’ll back off. You can use the resources you like but you are responsible for the outcomes (Respondent S01).
This suggests that the operational relationship between the Senior Manager and the Regional Network Leader is one that allows flexibility contingent on shared agreements, and that allows autonomy as long as the outcomes match with the intentions of the Senior Managers’ and DEECD policy priorities. If this is the case then what we observe is a tight coupling of layers within the system hierarchy around shared understandings and policy priorities. Evidence from the interview data with Regional Network Leader class respondents tends to bear this out as the following statements demonstrate:

A strongly connected and tightly coupled system is one that’s going to improve. That doesn’t mean that you can’t have diversity and difference because a strong system can tolerate that. Weak systems are the ones that are autocratic and can’t understand that systems are diverse. Our particular framework actually acknowledges all of that. It’s actually built in there (Respondent R12).

I think if you’re feeling okay with the central direction then you might say you could adapt things quite well (Respondent R20).

You work for a system and in the system and on the system continually so autonomy in this role has a different meaning to a principal’s autonomy (Respondent R13).

The data drawn from interviews with Regional Network Leader class respondents tends to indicate that the nature of the relationship between the Regional Network Leaders and their direct Senior Managers is not autocratically defined and that there is an absence of micro-management within the relationship. This is despite the consistent presence within the interviews of a narrative around the essential importance of alignment with the system’s objectives. For example, Respondent R14 spoke of the autonomy that the Regional Network Leader team has:
... we’re lucky in [this region] because we have a fair bit of autonomy from the regional director. He would argue that it’s earned autonomy because of what we do and the results we’re getting from the work we do indicates that there’s a fair bit of success and there’s a fair bit of progress and we’ve worked long and hard on getting an agreed vision and direction.

Regional Network Leader class respondents were clear in their perspective that the day-to-day operation of their network was their responsibility and that they could manage this autonomously as is evident in each of the following reports:

How do we adapt? ... We try to make the connections with ourselves first before we start talking with principals. We try and ... buffer the initiatives. We try and look at what will work for our network, what we’re working on and whether we’ll implement that straight away or [not]. It’s through figuring out how it all fits ... and if it’s labeled a different way or is it totally different to what we’re doing or can we build it onto what we're doing already? (Respondent R19).

In most instances I’m feeling well supported by the region now and I’m feeling within reason we’re able to make decisions based on our real needs (Respondent R10).

We have processes and procedures here and I thought to myself, look, I can’t wait for this, this needs to be sorted now. So I made the decision and I came back and said to the RD I’ve made the decision, gave him the information and he said ‘yep fine’ - but he could have said ‘No.’ (Respondent R17).

Reports from Regional Network Leader respondents were uniform in indicating that they experience or perceive a high degree of autonomy within a relationship with their direct manager and that within this they are required to ensure the policy priorities of the DEECD are implemented.
RQ2 Theme Findings: Factors hindering and assisting System Leadership

Data gathered in relation to this theme was discussed in detail under research question one and this section attempts not to duplicate any of those discussions.

Data gathered under this heading diverged in the degree to which classes of respondents illustrated their statements with information relevant to the operational or other relationships between leaders. Senior Manager class respondents provided little data under this theme heading relevant to the research question. Regional Network Leaders, while they did discuss operational relationships to a greater extent than the Senior Manager class respondents, also focused less on the operational relationships than the principal class respondents. This variation may reflect the degree of distance between leaders or on the nature of the work of principals and Regional Network Leaders that requires them to engage in operational relationships of a different type that those required by Senior Managers.

Principal class respondents concerns with hierarchical structures that deliver top-down mandates and focus on compliance, which are certainly relevant to this part of the research question, have been well covered above. We focus here instead on data that is specifically relevant to the nature of the operational relationships.

Consistently from all principal class respondents it was clear that the creation of the regional networks had created relationships between principals that had not existed previously. These relationships were, in all but a few cases, viewed as cooperative operational relationships and were contrasted with the competitive relationships that had existed previously. For a number of principal class respondents the residue of competitive relationships still acted as a hindrance for the effective operation of the networks. As Respondent P21 indicated:
Traditional thinking and that schools are forced to compete for both enrolments and academic reputation via [the MySchool website\(^6\)] are a weakness of network arrangements.

The view from most principal class respondents then was that the Regional Network Leader’s role was to facilitate successful operational relationships between principals by, as Respondent P21 stated, “breaking down barriers between schools to reveal best practice. [That is, the] RNL’s should be conduit between schools and be the enablers of this.” The relationships fostered by the Regional Network, most respondents felt, provided an opportunity for what Respondent P32 described as a “united approach [and] opportunity for professional conversations around issues and areas of concerns in networks.” The notion that network based operational relationship between Regional Network Leaders and principals facilitated common goals and approaches was reinforced repeatedly:

The network also provides good opportunities to engage with each other, share problems and good practice and to develop a network ethos (Respondent P25).

The strengths of working together are when group problems are shared, ideas are shared and working with colleagues for the benefit of all (Respondent P30)

Unlike the Senior Manager and Regional Network Leader classes of respondents, principal respondents frequently linked the quality of the operational relationship between the Regional Network Leader and the principal to the performance of the Regional Network Leader in their personal relationships. While these interpersonal relationships are not strictly related to the operational interactions between the two groups the quality of relationship certainly impacts on factors such as buy-in. The following statements are indicative of the range of responses from principals:

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\(^6\) *MySchool* is an initiative of the federal government that reports school data to the public: ([www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au) - accurate as of July 2013).
The Regional Network Leaders assist, and generally know their schools well and work positively with us (Respondent P25).

The RNL can hinder us. He does not really understand his schools and their improvement priorities. Principals feel the RNL pushes the overall RNL group or Region agenda without recognizing what is happening in the network or sticking to the agreed Network Strategic plan (Respondent P35).

The personality of the Regional Network Leader can determine whether the climate of the network is supportive or punitive. In our case our RNL supports principals to achieve expectations. The RNL uses meetings of network principals to encourage teamwork and sharing. Other nearby RNL’s have been known to use intimidation and punishment to meet Regional goals (Respondent P36).

Data indicates that principal class respondents viewed the construction of new operational relationships through the Regional Networks as an opportunity to learn from each other or to work cooperatively. Respondent P26 for example noted that:

Networking does give the principal a wider perspective and area of focus. It is easy to become too 'own-school-centric' and networks work to prevent this. It also gives some fresh 'outside' ideas and approaches through sharing.

However, alongside this there was limited concern expressed by principal class respondents around the construction of the networks including geographical and other factors:

... a factor that hinders schools working together [in the network] is commonality of interest with schools of less than twenty students at the table with schools of 1,200 students (Respondent P27).

Regional Network Leader respondents, in comparison to principal respondents, paid less attention to the personal dimensions of relationships but still provide us with significant data in relation to the operational relationships that exist or are
emerging within networks of schools. The data from Regional Network Leader respondents presents a highly consistent view that operational relationships between principals have been established as a result of the construction of networks: “when one school’s done well other schools have gone out to find what have they done and shared that stuff. Not always taken it up, but certainly become aware that if they do ‘this’ [then] ‘this’ is likely to happen” (Respondent R14). The view that networks have assisted the creation of new operational relationships was echoed by Respondent R12:

... it’s changing the paradigm [from one where] we’re in competition to a strong system that supports each other. That’s how you grow. Now in supporting somebody I can make myself stronger, I don't make myself weaker. If you still want to be in competition, this is the unsaid dialogue, it'll still work for you. But the more I can support someone [and] the more I get to know about me as a leader [and] us as a school ... the stronger we’ll become.
Research Question 3: To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

The table below indicates that this research question was relevant within six of the fifteen themes identified. Each of these will be presented, however, two pairs of themes are considered together. The pairing of themes ‘System Leadership purpose’ and ‘RNL role’ as well as the pairing of the themes ‘system reform’ and ‘cooperation and competition’ has occurred due to the data emerging within these thematic areas overlapping in relation to this research question.

Table 4.5 Relevance of RQ3 to identified themes

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<th>Derived Theme</th>
<th>System alignment</th>
<th>System Leadership purpose</th>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
<th>System Reform</th>
<th>‘Who are system leaders?’</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>System Leadership definitions</th>
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<th>School improvement</th>
<th>Leadership Relationships</th>
<th>RNL role</th>
<th>Flexibility experienced by the RNL</th>
<th>Student Learning</th>
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Before examining the data obtained by interview we will, however, examine data obtainable in documentary form.

Evidence from documentary data:

Much of the documentary evidence relevant to this research question has been described and discussed in the literature review section of this paper. This section then is a summary of pertinent pieces of documentary evidence that will assist the reader to contextualize the interview data and provide a spine of policy and
organizational documentation to compliment other data. In addition, some statistical data is provided here that was not included in the literature review.

Documentary data from within the DEECD that links system leadership to improvements in student outcomes is limited. However, the identification of a system focus or system agenda that is then related to improving outcomes is clear in three significant documents. The first of these is the 2009 Blueprint Implementation Paper, *Supporting School Improvement: Transparency and Accountability in Victorian Government Schools*. The document (DEECD, 2009b, p6) begins by identifying three key challenges for the DEECD, the first of which “is to improve outcomes for every student at every Victorian school.” The authors acknowledge (DEECD, 2009b, p6) that “Some other education systems produce better learning outcomes and at the same time achieve higher equity” and it is implied that this should be emulated. The opinion that leadership is paramount to system success is made clear: “Strong leadership is a precondition for success in all high performing government schools” (DEECD, 2009b, p8) and key leaders within the system are noted to be Regional Network Leaders. Under the heading ‘A World Class Approach to School Improvement’, the authors write that:

Regional Networks and Regional Network Leaders are contributing to school improvement: The 70 networks in the government school system are each led by a Regional Network Leader. Regional Network Leaders play a vital role, working with schools and networks to identify and broker key improvement strategies. They help schools diagnose, analyse and implement their improvement strategies, monitor their impact and respond by suggesting new strategies where improvement is not readily apparent (DEECD, 2009b, p10).

The second document that relates system focus to improvements in student outcomes, *Powerful Learning: Taking Educational Reform to Scale* (Hopkins, 2011) reports on the actions of the Northern Metropolitan Region (NMR) of the DEECD. In his foreword to the document (p.ii), Regional Director Wayne Craig acknowledges the “systemic approach, coupled with flexibility in resourcing and local knowledge” supported the achievement of the Region’s “utilitarian definition of achievement –
knowing more and being able to show you know more – [that] covered the work of students, teachers, principals and regional staff.” The document goes on to illustrate, using Region-wide student achievement data for 2008 and 2009, that the systemic and network improvement focus of the NMR has supported improvements in student outcomes. While noting that the data is too time-limited to observe a trend Hopkins writes that:

... there is now in the state of Victoria and nationally relatively good data on student achievement that can be used to monitor strategic interventions at the regional level. The overall conclusion to be drawn from this data is that over the past four years there has been a quite dramatic shift in the metrics from a largely negative to a strikingly positive direction in NMR.

In particular, literacy and numeracy measures for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are at or near state benchmarks with the data generally trending upwards. VCE data is also beginning to move in a positive direction despite major structural issues associated with the region having a relatively large group of small secondary schools that find it difficult to offer the diverse, quality programs necessary to engage senior students.

Not only are average scores improving across the region, but the proportions of students in the lower bands of achievement are being reduced, while the proportions in the higher bands are being increased (Hopkins, 2011, p18).

The final DEECD document discussed here is titled *Signposts: Research points to how Victorian government schools have improved student performance* (DEECD, 2009c), a report that was based on data collected by the DEECD over several years. The relevance of this document to our research question lies not in its content but in its nature, that is, the document is explicitly an attempt to bring together learning and evidence from across the system (using research commissioned by the DEECD), to share best practices and through this sharing to improve the system as a whole.
Interview Data

As discussed above, research question three is directly relevant to six themes derived from the data. Some of the data relevant here has been discussed in relation to earlier research questions. Consequently this section avoids, as far as possible, duplicating discussions or points made previously and taking those as read.

RQ3 Theme Findings: System Leadership Purpose & RNL Role
Data gathered under this heading that combines two thematic areas, contributes to answering the research question by identifying the degree to which respondents believe that the purpose of system leadership, in general, is to bring about school improvement and the degree to which the more specific group of Regional Network Leaders are achieving this. As research question three asks the extent to which system leadership is leading to school improvement, this section begins with evidence drawn from principal respondents.

In responding around the purpose of system leadership and the role of the Regional Network Leader, the majority of principal class respondents referred to topics that are broadly relevant to school improvement ranging from improvements in literacy programs to improvements in collegial relationships between principals. For two principal class respondents the purpose of system leadership was explained in ways that positioned the principal as a system leader. One stated: System leadership is ... “initiating and contributing positively to things beyond our own schools” (Respondent P33). Another defined system leadership as “being able to help one another succeed ... Collaboration in school and with other schools to address issues” (Respondent P23). These were, however, in the minority. In referring to the purpose of system leadership most principal respondents assigned the role of system leader to others and in all of these cases, to others holding higher-ranking positions.

In nearly all cases where principal class respondent described the purpose of system leadership they used examples involving Regional Network Leaders or roles that we understand to be associated with Regional Network leadership. For one principal class respondent (P37), system leadership refers to “interpreting
government policy direction into effective school plans and programs. Also, assisting schools to access additional resources and services through information, system efficiencies and submissions.”

The functions of the system leader role described here are, as we have seen earlier, typical functions of the Regional Network Leader. Following this, repeated evidence from principals indicates a belief that the networks’ purpose is to achieve school improvement. This can be observed in the following sample statements: “Networks [exist] to link schools together to enhance the school improvement agenda” (Respondent P32); “Networks are supporting schools ... for school improvement [and improvement of] student outcomes” (Respondent P27); “The networks support principals in running their schools” (Respondent P29); “Overall [networks] are to provide educational support for principals and teachers” (Respondent P21), and finally, “[their purpose is] to focus the system’s resources to improve student learning” (Respondent P37).

What is not evident from any of the principal class respondents are identifiable shifts in school performance or student achievement data resulting from the enacting of the reported system leadership.

Like principal respondents, senior manager respondents did not provide any specific examples of instances where the actions of system leaders have led to school improvement as measured by student outcomes. As with principal respondents, the data contains numerous references to actions we might assume lead to school improvement (the provision of professional learning, leadership capacity building, etc) but no concrete evidence of these programs or actions resulting in improvement being realized.

It is clear from the data that school improvement is a driving factor for senior managers in the promotion of system leadership and in particular the regional network initiative. This was most simply put by Respondent S01 who said: “we understand that the main agenda is school improvement.” In this context ‘school improvement’ refers to all schools and not exclusively to underperforming schools,
a point that Respondent S04 echoes: “... school improvement is not just about those schools that are underperforming. It actually is about the performance of all our schools.”

The data suggests that senior managers believe that the Regional Network Leaders are the key human resource to bring about school improvement. Respondent S01 provides a clear explanation of this resourcing saying Regional Network Leaders are:

... the key [and] first outside person above the school [and the] key agent for school improvement. The only justification for a network is as an efficient and effective system for school improvement ... structurally it’s the best thing we've done. We give regional network leaders responsibility for about 20 schools ... We've invested as a system in their development as a group ... They're the prime agent for school improvement around those 20 schools.

Respondent S03 added to this an explanation of the type of knowledge a Regional Network Leader requires to be able to achieve school improvement:

... if you don’t know students learn and you don’t know how schools improve then you can’t be an RNL. Essentially they have to understand adult learning and student learning and they also have to understand how schools improve to be able to influence principals and their leadership teams.

A number of Regional Network Leaders spoke explicitly of their role being about school improvement. Interestingly though, when these respondents made these observations they most typically did so in conjunction with talking about their work toward helping schools to improve teacher practice. Respondent R17 for example said:

The larger purpose was having whole school improvement and using the network model [for this]. But ... it still narrows down to the teaching practice in the classroom that's going to make the big difference because I’m a strong
believer that the person that stands in front of the class is the one that’s going to make the most difference

Similarly Respondent R12 related school improvement work directly to having an impact in the classroom curriculum:

... the work is to help schools see [the importance of] having that broad curriculum framework and what it is they’re actually going to be working on with the students and making sure they’ve mapped it and is consistent in that sense.

Respondent R20 also drew attention to the coaching and mentoring of school based leaders as a function of school improvement work that this respondent undertook within their role: “...being with them in their schools when they’re making decisions and sometimes assisting them with those decisions or reflecting with them about those decisions.”

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, most Regional Network Leaders spoke about using data with schools in their network. However, of the Regional Network Leaders interviewed only one made an explicit statement linking their work to measurable school improvement data although the type of data was not specified in the response: “our data is heading in the right direction so it’s good” (Respondent R16).

**RQ3 Theme Findings: School Improvement**

We have established that senior managers view school improvement as a key role for regional networks and that most principal class respondents also aligned system leadership with the functions of the Regional Network Leaders. Under this thematic heading we explore what respondents perceive school improvement to be.

Principal class respondents were asked to comment on network actions that improve student outcomes. Many commented on actions in their own schools and in
all cases responses were indicative of measures commonly associated with school improvement.

It is possible to draw some common threads from the evidence. The first is in relation to improving student learning outcomes. Respondent P30 stated that “building capacity of staff, students, parents and community ... [and the] provision of first class education for our students” improved student outcomes. This was reflected by Respondent P27 who said the outcome of network’s actions were “accelerated improvement in all measurable outcomes for students, parents and staff.” This joining of the network action with student outcomes can be seen in three similar responses.

Beyond this, in speaking about action undertaken by networks in the context of an individual school, Respondent P21 said, “at my school it is about having rigorous local data that monitors students learning at class level and providing support for teachers not meeting targets” while Respondent P26 stated that “school improvement at our school should be linked to identified areas of need or improvement in our school community.” Similarly, Respondent P35 spoke of identifying and responding to areas of need identified by the individual school: “School improvement at [this school] means analyzing our data and setting improvement goals. The team plans and implements strategies and monitors progress.” The evidence we see here is that some principals re-frame discussion on improving schools to be improving my school. This tension was noted by one senior manager:

“Often principals have seen it as their role to buffer and block out the external forces of change. That might keep the staff happy, [but] it may not necessarily take the school on an improvement trajectory. But nonetheless there is a nuancing and a sensitivity, a contextual sensitivity the principal need to exercise in mediating the change” (Respondent S04).

For senior management respondents there is a clear desire to see networks and Regional Network Leaders acting to improve schools. However, in one instance a
senior manager noted that improvement has not been evident. In doing so, this senior manager illustrated what they believed school improvement would look like:

In general none [of the networks] have hit me [as generating school improvement] and I go to the network meeting every month. I don’t see any evidence ... let’s say year 12 completion is a big issue in our region [or] in our network, what are the schools going to do about it all? Transition from year 6 to year 7 is a big issue. I don’t see any evidence. I’m not aware of any [of] what I would see as big headline issues being managed by networks. I’m probably a little bit too pessimistic here ... most networks I go to, they seem to focus on sharing of information and providing some PD. It’s not about what are the issues for our network and what are we going to do about them. ... each network has an annual implementation plan and it’s supposed to have a strategic plan but very much they’re sort of generic sort of stuff to me that don’t [identify] two or three issues in a network and then actually have people working on it (Respondent S07).

No other senior managers interviewed gave similarly precise descriptions of the behaviors and tasks that would constitute action on school improvement despite each senior manager speaking of school improvement and indicating that the main function of the regional networks is school improvement. This is not to suggest in any way that senior managers are unaware of what school improvement entails but simply to indicate that the evidence gathered here did not specifically describe the actions associated with school improvement that would be undertaken in schools and networks. Certainly one senior manager was clear that it was essential for senior managers to be knowledgeable on how schools improve:

... if central office doesn’t have a clear idea of how schools improve [then we do not] have a concept of what it is we want young people to be able to do. And if our goals and aspirations aren’t shared by people in schools then we have misalignment” (Respondent S03).
Regional network leaders are highly consistent in their descriptions of what school improvement entails and two points emerged repeatedly. Firstly that school improvement relates to improving teachers’ classroom practice. As Respondent R14 said bluntly, school improvement is “significantly about improving teaching practice ... we’d live and die on whether we actually changed teacher practice and as a result of that actually improved the literacy levels and numeracy levels of the kids.”

The second common point to emerge from the Regional Network Leaders as a descriptor of school improvement was the ability to shift school performance data and using this data as leverage for school improvement. For example Respondent R16 described school improvement as: “... trying to lift the performance in key measured areas around literacy and numeracy, VCE, VCAL, VET those areas, trying to lift the performance in schools, having the improvement agenda in mind.” This idea was supported by Respondent R18 who stated that,

   school improvement ... it’s mainly looking at [data]. For example our next network meeting is looking at NAPLAN data, how they compare to state, how they compare to one another and what strategies we can put in place.

The use of data was also suggested by two Regional Network Leaders to be a process for school improvement. Respondent R13 reports that:

   A big focus has been around how we use data more effectively to inform practice and I guess that is a key feature of the work of RNLs. Taking the school improvement agenda into that more precise space and being able to access and deliver a clear and consistent message.

Similarly Respondent R18 said:

   ... we had to focus our energies is that area and then that’s when we were looking at the schools data at what’s going on, what strategies can we put in place to help you improve [and] to intervene where necessary.
In these two instances the Regional Network Leaders are indicating that the use of data is part of a process to achieve school improvement. This is evidently different to suggesting that using data is school improvement. Other evidence from Regional Network Leaders suggested other processes for bringing about school improvement including: “working with principals in a collegiate perspective with a bit of pressure and support” (Respondent R14) and “promoting the network as the organizational model for school and system level improvement” (Respondent R05). From within the evidence gathered only one Regional Network Leader respondent indicated a specific action that was interconnecting schools beyond activities run within the network. In this case Respondent R18 described a scenario in which two network schools swap teachers:

I’m putting up a proposal at the next meeting for us to take a grade 6 teacher from one of the bigger primary schools who have been very successful and for them to move to one of the secondary schools with the year sevens and they work there for a year so it would build the capacity of the year seven [area] and it would support the students because they’ve got a person they can identify with from the primary schools and at the same time sending someone back [from the secondary school to the primary to build their capacity as a grade 6 teacher].

The evidence suggests that Regional Network Leaders are able to describe school improvement activities in a variety of ways and to provide specific examples of undertaking the work they are describing.

**RQ3 Theme Findings: System Reform & Cooperation and Competition**

The two themes of System Reform and Cooperation and Competition are covered together here. While the two themes were coded and extracted separately from the data it became apparent in analysis that there was a logical progression from one into the other.
Uniformly across the interviews, discussion of system reform only became evident in relation to discussion of the formation or operation of regional networks. Across the three respondent classes there was a discrepancy as to which narrative respondents chose in relation to this. Senior managers most commonly spoke of the devolution of control to networks while Regional Network Leaders and principals spoke of the utility of networks and changes in competitiveness or cooperation between schools. Many of the comments made in relation to these points have been referred to earlier in this report under different research questions and themes and the sample responses below can be read in the light of previous sections.

The data gathered from senior manager respondents was uniform in expressing that the intent of the regional networks initiative was to reform the system to devolve some authority and to align the ‘center’ and schools. As Respondent S04 stated:

... the very heart of the network strategy ... was to try and push the sense of agency and authorizing environment closer to schools [and away] from the center, and to say that the center led the school improvement agenda for a period of years and [that] it is very hard to orchestrate that from the center. [The key question was] how do you get schools collaborating together in a locality to look after all of the children in that area?

Similar points were made by each of the senior manager respondents. Respondent S01 described the impact and significance of the reform stating:

In terms of system wide change it had a major impact. Everyone knew that this was happening. There were seventy-two [Regional Networks]. The minister came to [the Regional Network Leaders’] induction and she talked to every one of them [and] we got a lot of resources [for the initiative].

Regional Network Leader respondents were similarly clear that the network initiative was a major system reform and, more so than the senior managers, related this back to school improvement. Respondent R17 commented on the significance of the initiative noting that not only did the networks attract a lot of attention but that
they emerged into a climate where the education community was already engaged in discussing school and system improvement and that in this climate people knew what to expect:

I think most people ... wanted to understand it, they wanted to find information out about it. They might have read about it or skimmed information on it. They had some knowledge [about] this new school improvement agenda or this school improvement framework, whatever you want to call it, they had an understanding of it so when we went to networks or when we went to schools most [people] understood it.

Significantly, Regional Network Leader respondents explicitly made the connection between the reform of the system through networks and a reduction in negative competition. Respondent R13 described this in terms of “collectiveness that’ll drive the improvement even deeper” while Respondent R14 saw advantages in reduced competition in terms of the learning schools and leaders can gain from each other:

... sharing the expertise that they've got across schools is really useful at all levels ... exposing them to other schools and having them talk to a range of people that have been successful in schools in similar areas they can quite often see that there are other things that they could be doing; that they could do better; that they could do different or that they shouldn't be doing.

Emerging consistently across the data is evidence of a belief that there is an attempt within the system to create a balance between healthy school level competition and high degrees of cooperation that focuses on system improvement and collective effort. One senior manager (Respondent S02) described this situation thus:

We've got a large number of schools and since we are a system we do tend to work together, but running a school is a blend of competition and cooperation. Every school wants to be the best school so they’d like their results to be better and they’d like their impact to be better and be renowned for being outstanding. In a sense there's an element of competition in that,
but that’s healthy if you want to prove you’re a great school. But if you want a great system we want to foster [both] the notion of schools wanting to be outstanding [and] we want to promote best practice within the system [which means] we have to get them to collaborate.

As with Respondent S02, competition was not, in most cases, presented as a purely negative experience for networks. Regional Network Leader Respondent R18 for example noted of their schools that, “they can’t help but compare themselves and be in competition with one another and that can be a good thing ... it depends on the relationships of the network.” However this was balanced against a strong agreement around the notion that unhealthy competition, competition that pits schools against each other rather than competition that builds a desire for everyone to do better, is a threat to the sustainability of the system reform and shared school improvement. One Regional Network Leader respondent described what s/he terms the ‘old’ model in reference to their own experience as a school principal and suggests that even in the new networks there are vestiges of this ‘old’ culture:

If I go back to when I first became principal, you were actively encouraged to do the opposite of being a system leader. It was about competition. So I still think there’s a bit of that in the system. [You've also] got funding models [where] every enrolment equals a set of dollars so ... [that] can also be a barrier (Respondent R13).

Consistently Senior Manager and Regional Network Leader respondents expressed that the reform of the system that occurred through the network arrangements was based on restructuring relationships, and that through these relationships school improvement and system reform became possible in new ways. For one senior manager (Respondent S01) the structuring of these relationships around cooperation was critical: “competition kills [this system reform]. As soon as they compete for students it’s dead.”

Data gathered from principal class respondents is broadly consistent on the point that networks have resulted in lower levels of competition. However, the data was
widely divergent as to whether or not competition was a problem for their school or network and as to the degree of the problem. For some principal respondents competition in no way impacted on their ability to work cooperatively within their network and focus on network goals. For others, competition between schools was a major concern. The diversity of this data may reflect the influence of highly localized factors that have not been examined.

**RQ3 Theme Findings: Student Learning**

The focus of this research is system leadership. However, out of the research came some references that aligned the action or achievement of leadership, and particularly system leadership, with student learning. These were common enough to have their own coding item within the data analysis process but typically existed in explanations of broader points related to the philosophy or practice of leadership.

Typical of this was discussion of literacy and numeracy programs happening or planned either through cooperative work in networks or through the actions of a Regional Network Leader in supporting a school. Discussion of a literacy and numeracy focus were present within the data set for each class of respondent and across each region investigated but became more common lower in the organizational hierarchy. One senior manager (Respondent S07) described how networks needed a practical starting point in order to build their profile and generate buy-in and that a focus on literacy and numeracy provided this: “at the moment it is numeracy and literacy ... they're the mantras.” In turn Regional Network Leaders in a number of instances described the implementation of programs around literacy and numeracy. For Respondent R16 this meant that their primary schools were, with the RNL’s support, instituting “a literacy block every day [and] a numeracy block everyday.” This through-line continues to the principal class where there were eighteen discreet references to literacy programs or improvements in student learning data.

The generation of this alignment within networks seems to bear out the idea suggested by Respondent S07 that focusing on student learning provides an
incentive for cooperation and for collective effort to achieve system-wide priorities. For Regional Network Leader Respondent R14 the adoption of a greater focus on literacy and numeracy demonstrated a ‘buying-in’ by principals to the network agenda: “I think what happened was that the schools realized that it was about numeracy and literacy and what we needed to do was put all our energies into that.”

Aside from specific mentions of programs such as those focused on literacy and numeracy, there was another common thread to the theme on student learning. That is, the use of networks to place student learning at the center of the educational discussion in school and system improvement. While this was almost unmentioned in principal class responses there was a high degree of consistency around this idea across Regional Network Leader and senior manager respondents. A common lens to this, as we have discussed earlier, was that of using data about students to inform the school improvement and network agenda. For example, Respondent R20 described how the data is used now:

... [it’s] not just literacy and numeracy but retention, kids choices at year 11 and 12 and their outcomes post [the] compulsory [years]. Now we’re starting to look at what kids are coming into preschool with, coming into primary school with. ... Koori kids outcomes. Basically what we’ve done [is analyze] the network data as holistically as possible.

For two of the senior managers interviewed, placing students at the center of thinking also meant that system leaders have to be aware of the economic outcomes of education and the changes in the economy and society that would shape the future for young people. These predictions in turn shape the type of educational experience that needs to be promoted throughout the system if young people are to be ready to face the future. One of these senior managers said:

... it’s about creating knowledge workers ... There are enormous forces at play around that equation as we are in this transition from industrial to post-industrial information societies where it is really about service based industries, about creativity, about talent management, about competing in
that global arena; and we haven’t done well on the manufacturing front, we
tend to be a quarry and not value-add in that sector so [the questions] 'how
do we grow a competitive economy' has been at play in Australia and
particularly in Victoria as its manufacturing base has declined (Respondent
S04)

Regional Network Leader respondents, in particular, place discussions about
student learning at the center of the dialogue between schools and system leaders.
As senior manager Respondent S03 indicated, the Regional Network Leader role is a
one that relies on deep understanding of “student learning … and how schools
improve.” Within this role the Regional Network Leaders consistently report that
they act as the conduit between system priorities and schools as has been apparent
in earlier sections of this chapter. The consistency of evidence from Regional
Network Leaders suggests a focus on placing student learning at the center of
decision making and discussion is consistent, for them, with meeting system
obligations. Regional Network Leader Respondent R13 stated:

Good leaders have courage, they have the student at the center and when I
say that I mean they make their decisions about what’s going to be best for
students. That doesn’t mean they’re not taking into consideration what’s best
for staff but the student and the student learning is driving the decision
making.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Defining System Leadership

In the literature review we established a ‘starting point’ definition for system leadership that was: “System leadership is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system.” We also inferred from documentary evidence produced by the DEECD, that the DEECD’s definition of system leadership is “the ability to build capacity for improvement across the whole system or at least beyond one school.”

An area of commonality is the rejection of positionality within the definition. Within the interview data discussed above there were only three responses, each from within the principal class, that related system leadership to a position and only one of these, Respondent P26, was explicit in naming a position “… it would refer to positions at Regional Director and above.” The evidence gathered would tend to support abandoning positionality in favor of behavioral and action based definitions.

Similarly, evidence discussed above in relation to system alignment and cooperation support a definition for system leadership that involves connective functions within the behaviors and actions of system leader.

Both the starting point definition determined during the literature review for this research and the definition we have inferred to be that of the DEECD are able to stand against both the above suggestions: rejecting positional definitions and encompassing connective functions. Key differences between the two definitions lie in:

• The DEECD’s specific focus on school leadership rather than a more encompassing focus possible within the starting point definition.
• The DEECD’s focus on the ability to build capacity, which while pertinent for many or most leaders in systems might definitionally rule out leaders who change systems without directly building capacity of others.

Evidence gathered in interviews for this research would validate either the starting point definition or the definition inferred from DEECD documents. However the starting point definition, as it is more open, is likely to be useful in more cases and fields of study for future researchers and, given its wider applicability is appropriate as a definition of system leadership in this study.

**Research Question 1: To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?**

**Discussion of documentary data**
Documentary data presented in the previous chapter demonstrates intent by the DEECD to establish and promote system leadership. The Developmental Framework for School Leaders (DEECD, 2007) suggests that system leadership is at the highest developmental level. The promotion of system-wide initiatives related to the promotion of system leadership are documented within the 2011 priorities for the Office for Government School Education indicating the DEECD division responsible for growing system leadership.

**RQ1 Theme Discussion: System Alignment**
System alignment here refers to the ability of elements within a system to generate coherence across that system. Coherence is central to the definition of ‘system’ established earlier in this work. The defining characteristic of a system is, according to Kofman and Senge (1995, p27), “that it cannot be understood as a function of its isolated components ... the system doesn't depend on what each part is doing but on how each part is interacting with the rest.” Drawing on Meadows (2008), we have previously discussed how all systems have ‘elements’, ‘interconnections’ and a ‘function/purpose’, and that to these three items identified by Meadows we have added ‘coherence’. If system leadership exists then we would expect to find leaders
operating in these interconnective and coherence making domains and the output of these leaders should be the alignment of the system.

In interview DEECD Senior Managers, respondents spoke of the establishment of regional networks as a leveraging strategy in developing the capacity of the system to align. Interestingly, this was couched in terms of a devolutionary narrative or ‘returning’ control to schools or empowering schools and networks to enact the priorities of the system while also critiquing the seemingly excessive devolution of previous practice.

In this study, DEECD Senior Managers linked system leadership to the shrinking of central bureaucratic control while simultaneously moving against the model of schools operating in isolation. We have seen Hatcher (2008), Fullan (2004) and Morrison (2009), and others operating in the academic realm, describing this, with Morrison (2009, p42) indicating that this represents an attempt to “reduce local political influence”, Hatcher (2008, p30) indicating that it creates a vehicle “for the implementation of policy under the control of a reliable new technocratic management cadre” and Fullan (2004, p9) contending that this “new kind of leadership is necessary for breaking through the status quo.”

It is clear that Senior Managers have a consistent view of system alignment and that it is being supported by the introduction of Regional Network Leaders who were offered extensive professional learning opportunities to assist in this process. There is consensus that the move away from schools operating in isolation is a positive one.

Statements in the previous chapter might provide hard evidence for the criticisms of new network arrangements emerging internationally across the sphere of government and expressed by Hatcher (2008) and Morrison (2009). That is, they might indicate that Regional Network Leaders are being used as a tool to manage dissensus and to extend the penetration of central control to the furthest reaches of the system. RNLs may be, to reiterate what Hatcher (2008, p30) said, the mechanism whereby policy is implemented "under the control of a new technocratic
management cadre.” And, indeed, the use of aligned performance and strategic plans from the level of teachers to senior bureaucrats might also support this contention. Not only system planning faces scrutiny under an aligned process, the management of individual performance is also managed in this way. Respondent R18 reported;

[I talked to teachers about] where our Office of Government Schools Education sat and where the other divisions sit … and talked about [how] their performance plan aligned with their principal’s performance plan [and how that] aligned with my performance plan and how it went up so that we assured alignment right across the system…

A key question though is whether the networks that the Regional Network Leader respondents manage provide direction back to the center reflecting a policy by network approach to public policy making (Rhodes, 1997; P. Williams, 2002) rather than being the passive recipients of direction from the center under an authoritative choice model of command and control public policy making (Althouse, Bridgeman and Davis, 2007, p91). There is no evidence emerging from the interview data for a two-way flow occurring. This is born out in the data gathered from principal class respondents. The majority of principal class respondents indicated some form of compliance management or assistance with implementing DEECD priorities was a significant part of their Regional Network Leader’s work.

Although some respondents expressed negative sentiments around being directed from above, the move to generate alignment has clear evidence of success. Even in cases where the principal class respondents were negative, they were able to indicate areas of focus within their school that related directly to areas of focus in their network or across the state. These included “quality of instruction” (Respondent P21), “literacy and numeracy” (Respondents P37; P24; P28) and various references to a range of other items being worked on at the local level that relate directly to DEECD priority areas.

It is clear that the Regional Networks initiative was intended to provide greater coherence and to strengthen existing - and create new - interconnections within the
government education system. This has been put into operation at the Senior Management and Regional Network Leader level through the alignment of individual performance and development and school, network and region strategic plans. At these senior and middle leadership levels it has also been made operational by the creation of professional conversations and professional learning engagements that have brought leaders together to generate a common narrative for change and development across the system. This has marked a significant shift in narrative, directed from the Senior Management, away from the autonomous operation of schools in the highly devolved model existing under previous governments to a narrative of collective responsibility for the system. This narrative shift does not, in theory, preclude high degrees of autonomy and flexibility for principals and Regional Network Leaders. This is aptly put by Respondent S03:

Our schools are the most devolved of any western jurisdiction. Schools have always had a high degree of flexibility. You can’t confuse that with simply wanting to do your own thing because you can pool ignorance and if you don’t have some common views about what effective leadership is, then how can you run a system. ... If that common view isn’t shared across all of levels of the system all you end up with is disarray and idiosyncratic practice and processes. It is ok to be flexible and adaptable within that, but have a pretty good theory about what you are going to do because kids are in classrooms everyday and you don’t go off on a whim.

It is clear, however, from the data gathered in interviews that the further the human element in the system is from the Senior Management class, the greater the frequency of dissatisfaction with the perceived imposition of agendas from the ‘top’ or ‘center’.

The scale of the change brought into being with the Regional Networks initiative has, the evidence suggests, had significant impact across the system. This is indicative of a change movement that has tried to alter both individual leaders and the environment in which they work. Change of this order may seem unnecessary but it is likely that the Senior Managers responsible for the change acknowledge the
admonition of Fullan (2004, p16) to “never send a changed individual back into an unchanged environment.”

In Victoria, a greater degree of alignment exists as a result of the Regional Networks initiative and a system focus that is clearly described and is articulated and understood by leaders at all levels of the system.

**RQ1 Theme Discussion: Hierarchy & ‘Who are system leaders?’**

Senior manager respondents discussed the notion of hierarchy in two distinct ways. Firstly, in relation to how they see themselves within a hierarchy. Secondly, how they see the hierarchy working for others. It is clear from the documentary evidence as well as interview responses that a hierarchy does exist in the government education system. It is a hierarchy that has three main layers below the government: Central Offices – Regions – Schools.

In relation to their own position, senior managers’ responses tended to focus on their level of authority and autonomy. None of the Senior Managers defined their role by the group they line managed. This is a fact that either represents a hesitance to be associated with top-down leadership, or simply a perception that the hierarchy that does exist is normal and natural. The scope of this research does not at this point allow us to confirm which it is, but responses from this group in other areas indicate a desire to foster more and stronger leadership in others, albeit more aligned and less autonomous.

Senior managers, like some Regional Network Leaders, were comfortable speaking of authority, power and autonomy. A phrase that appeared frequently in the interviews with Senior Managers and Regional Network Leaders is ‘earned autonomy’. Data gathered tends to indicate that this earned autonomy is related to the ability of the principal or any other leader to demonstrate success within the parameters of the system’s purposes and foci.
For the most part, the RNL class express satisfaction with the level of their autonomy and responsibility. Typical of this is Respondent R20 who said, “I don’t think we [the RNLS] feel mandated to do things or agendas are being imposed. I think they’re quite reasonable.” Against this general consensus was only one RNL (Respondent R14) who suggested that their network’s agenda had been determined from above prior to the formation of the network.

The majority of principal class respondents are positive and aligned with the system agenda. However, a clearly apparent separation occurs where some principals feel opposed to the expected alignment and to system mandates. These principals may be experiencing less autonomy than their counterparts, particularly if they are not perceived by their RNL to have earned autonomy. Comparison of interview data with school-level student achievement data might yield some answers to this question, but is beyond the remit of this research project. These negative responses may also reflect poor relationships between leaders but this is not objectively measurable in this research.

In terms of ‘who system leaders are’, it is observed that the higher the rank of the respondent, the more limited the group is that they identify as system leaders. That is, senior managers all identified other senior managers and effective Regional Network Leaders as system leaders. Two mentioned that principals could be system leaders with the caveat that only some principals qualified. Regional Network Leaders all identified senior managers and all Regional Network Leaders and some principals. Principal class respondents, on the other hand, tended to identify principals as system leaders more readily than either of the other two classes of respondents.

It is clear from the interview data that a well-established hierarchy exists in Victoria, and that this hierarchy has undergone changes as a result of the introduction of a layer of Regional Network Leaders between the Regional Directors and the principals. Hierarchy itself does not necessarily support or undermine the capacity for system leadership within a system where system leadership is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating,
utilizing or exploiting connections within the system. The hierarchy existing in the Victorian government education system acts to structure formal or extra-personal interconnections within the system. A system leader, by our definition, will demonstrate an ability to exploit these interconnections to bring about change. There are, however, clearly some frustrations at the principal level as to their ability to act outside top-down dictates and this may impact on the quality of interconnection between these principals and other leaders.

When we consider the potential for system leadership to emerge, hierarchical relationships affect the degree to which connections can occur and the question of access becomes important in who can be a system leader. To exercise system leadership by exploiting interconnections, where the interconnections are among people, one must first be able to access these people. For a classroom teacher it may be very difficult to access anyone in the hierarchy beyond their principal. One former principal, now a Regional Network Leader (Respondent R15) indicated that even as a principal “there were times where you could see things were wrong and things that could be fixed but you had no influence...” The likelihood of a classroom teacher having greater success seems unlikely. There will of course be excellent practitioners who, through their work and the sharing of that work are able to influence other teachers and perhaps to influence the system as a whole. However, there is no evidence found in this research for that possibility being realized, even though a small number of principals saw teachers as having the ability to be system leaders.

From the perspective of the three classes of respondents, system leadership is a feature of the Victorian government education system. The hierarchical or system locations where the groups perceive system leadership to exist, however, are not uniform. To ascertain the extent to which system leadership is a feature of the Victorian government education system we must also look at evidence of behavior and practice and in this study we can see evidence of Regional Network Leaders and senior managers acting as system leaders.
RQ1 Theme Discussion: Policy

Policies, whether seen as an authoritative choice (Colebatch, 1993, p33) or seen as more inclusive mechanisms for action (Ball, 2012; Peterson, 2003; Shamir, 2008), are the frameworks and regulations that govern operations and, to some extent, relationships within the government school system. Evidence for this theme was drawn exclusively from the responses of the senior managers, as other respondent classes were silent on the matter. To some extent, in a large bureaucratic organization, this may not be surprising but it is indicative of a policy making process that, contrary to the hopes outlined by Seddon (2008) and Benkler (2008), does not engage in a ‘bottom-up’ policy formation, at least, not in a way that is understood and acknowledged by those in frontline and middle leadership positions within the organization.

The notion of the Region or the Regional Network as mediator between policy making and implementation is interesting and directs us to consider the degree to which policy making might be considered a means of exhibiting system leadership. One respondent described their personal interest in observing “that subtle line between what the system is hoping in policy [and what] is happening within implementation at the school” (Respondent S04).

The evidence gained around this theme suggests very strongly that in the Victorian government education system, policy-making is largely restricted to senior managers. There is no direct evidence of actors other than senior managers having any impact on public policy making through any forms of what Sørensen and Torfing (2006) described as networked governance. Significantly though, senior managers were able to describe the cause and effect of policy making in the realm of system leadership and to articulate the relationship between policy-making and system change. In relation to this there is a low degree of within-class variability in responses from senior managers. This would indicate agreement around the role and function of policy.

None of the Senior Manager class respondents explicitly described policy making as system leadership and it was generally discussed in terms of a bureaucratic process.
and politically driven work rather than leadership activity directed by the respondent. However, that said, the respondents whose role is more operationally aligned to making policy were clearly able to articulate how policy making in the DEECD relates to social and economic factors in the broader economy and society.

Given that system leadership is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system, how then do we assess from the data gathered whether making public policy falls within the realms of ‘system leadership’? Public policy-making clearly satisfies the first component of the definition, that is, through policy making a leader is able to ‘generate change across a system’. The ability of public policy making to satisfy the second component though, the ‘utilisation or exploitation of connections within the system’, was unclear before this research. Without the policy maker using interconnections within the system to bring the policy into practice we cannot say that the policy maker is exhibiting system leadership. It seems likely that the interconnections structured within the DEECD’s hierarchy through networks could make this possible even when it is clear that policy making is a highly centralized practice. This involves a shift toward policy by network, that is “a relatively stable horizontal articulation of interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors who interact … within limits set by external agencies,” as described by Sørensen and Torfing (2006, p9)

The construction of regional networks and the expenditure from government on Regional Network Leaders as an intermediary layer between senior managers and schools creates the potential for more interconnections across the system and most particularly creates a manageable avenue for policy makers to directly influence those leaders whose work turns policy into practice; the RNLs and principals. An important caveat must be stipulated here. The creation of more, and closer interconnections within the system certainly creates the opportunity for policy makers to ‘use and exploit’ those connections. However, a more highly interconnected environment does not make system leadership come into existence. This can only be done through the action of the policy makers. Even within a highly interconnected environment it would be possible for policy makers to make policy
without exploiting connections to make the policy come into practice, and therefore to not be a system leader.

From the data gathered in this research we can judge whether or not policy makers in the Victorian government education system exhibit system leadership. It is evident from analyses of the previous two sections that the Senior Managers responsible for making policy are, by most respondents, held to be system leaders. It is also clear that under the new network arrangements that there is a high degree of system alignment and that this alignment has increased as a result of the implementation of policies around the Regional Networks. It is also clear from the data discussed previously that principals identify the work of their Regional Network Leader, in most cases, as being about ensuring DEECD priorities are fulfilled and also about building the capacity at the school level to achieve those priorities. Senior Managers themselves explicitly referred to using the networks as a means to influence practice at the school level and the data indicates that this is a reality in practice.

There is no indication from the data gathered in this study that Regional Networks have enabled school level practice to be mediated into policy, or indeed that it is the practice of Regional Network Leaders to inform DEECD policy, rather, only the reverse. This suggests the existence of a traditional, hierarchical and authoritative policy making structure that utilizes networks to enact policy more efficiently but that does not systemically draw on the networks as co-creators of policy.

RQ1 Theme Discussion: Factors hindering & Factors assisting system leadership
All interviewed respondents were able to identify factors that would assist the development of system leadership and factors that would hinder its development. Factors hindering and assisting system leadership are grouped together here as they both aim at exposing the operational environment for system leadership.

Respondents from all classes, in response to questions about the factors assisting and hindering system leadership, tended to relate their answers to the development
of the Regional Networks and the establishment of Regional Network Leaders. This response slant is likely to be due to the ‘new’ nature of the Regional Networks and that, therefore, respondents were easily able to identify and speak of factors assisting and hindering the development of system leadership within those roles. This observation is made to avoid the risk of seeming to conflate system leadership with regional network leadership.

A factor that the data suggests hinders the development of system leadership in Victoria is the issue of role clarity. If we are to take it from earlier sections that part of the intent in creating Regional Network Leader roles was to foster system leadership, then concerns around role clarity might be exacerbated by problems with clarifying what system leadership is. This can be observed in the following statement from Regional Network Leader respondent R13:

... we're all part of a system but what system leadership means is a different question and I believe, I might be wrong, but I don’t think the state would have a clear view of what it means.

That there is no clear or common statement of system leadership is born out by examining the documentary evidence from the DEECD (above) where it is necessary to infer a meaning rather than being able to test a DEECD position on it.

Perceptions of a lack of role clarity for Regional Network Leaders are given weight by some responses from Regional Network Leader respondents who presented their role and behavior in ways that are contrary to expectations we have seen stated by Senior Managers.

One problem raised by Regional Network Leader Respondent R14, was their capacity to work confidently with all school sectors. While differential action depending on school’s circumstances is appropriate, what was evident here was a Regional Network Leader who believed they did not have the knowledge base to work with secondary schools, and, a belief that it is not their role to do more than supply resources to such schools. The complexity of secondary schools, as opposed
to primary schools may be overstated. However, it is generally the case that secondary schools in Victoria have more students, more staff, bigger budgets and more complex operations.

This recognition, combined with the hesitance to work with a secondary school expressed by Respondent R14 perhaps indicate that this is an area for improvement by DEECD. Certainly it indicates that the question of role clarity for the Regional Network Leaders is essential to developing system leadership.

The data also indicated specific problems around expectations of the RNLs operating in rural areas where managing schools over a huge geographical area presents specific logistical problems.

Analysis of the evidence reported around this theme provides an array of contributing factors might impact on the success of system leadership initiatives. Clearly the degree to which a factor is an assistant or a hindrance to system leadership is contextual and depended on the perspective and environment of the reporting actor. However, we can broadly say that in the Victorian context the factors that are most likely to assist the development of system leadership are: the existence of networks for networking; middle managers maintaining a focus on classroom learning; structured collegiality for principals and managers including sharing and exposure to other schools, and; high quality professional learning. Similarly, we can broadly say that in the context studied here the factors most likely to hinder system leadership are: competition including competition for funding; frontline leaders' level of 'buy-in' or desire for autonomy; and, limited availability of resources for networks including time.

The items listed above are not listed unproblematically. It is to be expected, for example, that committed participants in any endeavor would like additional resources and this does not of itself mean that available resources are insufficient. Each factor may be similarly problematized. However, respondents from across levels of the DEECD's hierarchy identified each of the factors listed above and this
provides some robustness to the importance of the factors for consideration in any system leadership initiative.

In relation to factors hindering or assisting system leadership, there were strong consistencies between Senior Manager and Regional Network Leader respondents. Principal class respondents showed consistency on some variables, but were less consistent overall. A range of factors were identified, particularly by Regional Network Leader and principal class respondents, that reflect particular local experiences. Those are not discussed as they are not generalizable.

The data indicates high degree of between-class and within-class consistency around concerns with competition between schools as a hindrance to the development of system leadership. That is not to say respondents dismissed or opposed competition in all cases, as is discussed elsewhere. Rather, all respondent classes identified competition as a factor that can be a threat to the development of the system or system leadership. This tends to validate the view that systems can be strengthened through competition suggested by some writers (Apple, 2001; Benkler, 2006; Bonner and Carro, 2007; OECD, 2008; Seddon, 2008).

What is clear from the data is that previously established modes of operating that pre-date moves to structure and develop system leadership through networks in the Victorian education system retain a significant grip on many individuals, processes and practices within the DEECD. This is to be expected as change of the magnitude proposed, particularly to an organization of this size, takes time. However, these vestiges of previous practice present a significant threat to the development of system leadership as they, interview data suggests, can at times result in failures that discredit the change rather than providing evidence of a need for change.

Understanding the perceptions of respondents around the factors assisting and hindering the development of system leadership in Victoria allows us to begin to answer the question of the extent to which system leadership is a feature of the Victorian government education system. The responses provide a lens through which we can assess reality, since it is insufficient to say system leadership exists
because respondents say it does. The ledger between factors that assist and factors that hinder the development of system leadership give us an insight to the realities on the ground. There is more data from all classes, although less strongly from the principal class respondents, that indicates factors existing within the system assist the development of system leadership. Far less data was evident relating to hindrances existing in the system that prevent the development of system leadership. It appears that the operational environment in Victoria is perceived to be conducive to the development of system leadership.

RQ1 Theme Discussion: Cooperation and Competition

To define competition in the Victorian context it is necessary to provide some historical context. We have already seen Victoria described as the most devolved education system in the world. According to Angus (1993, p12-13), in the early 1980s:

Victoria witnessed perhaps the most serious attempt anywhere to introduce democratic principles into educational governance [through the creation of a] devolved educational structure. ... Instead of offering obedience to a central authority, those involved in education at the school level – administrators, teachers, parents and students – were invited to participate in the decision-making process.

Angus argued that in fact “despite significant gains ... participative democratic practices have not, in the main, been institutionalized within the Victorian administrative system” (Angus, 1993, p11; See also Angus and Rizvi, 1990.). It was under the Kennett government in Victoria in the late 1990s that the devolutionary intent was more fully realized. Michael Barber has located the changes in Victoria at this time as indicative of a particular model of governmental service delivery change.
In this paradigm, devolution and transparency, the government can devolve responsibility to the frontline units delivering the relevant service and then use transparency – making public the results in a way that allows comparisons to be made – to drive performance. [Reforms] in Victoria, Australia, under the Kennett government [demonstrates this] philosophy being applied to public education systems (Barber, 2010, p265).

Victorian school principals and school councils were, from this time forward, given control over employing staff and the totality of the school budget. Schools were funded on a ‘price per student’ with a range of ‘equity’ funding lines to cater for students and schools requiring greater investments.

In relation to this study, the term competition refers to the social, economic and political relationships existing between schools that revolve around competition for student numbers and financial security. Cooperation refers to activities that run counter to this competitiveness and, we will observe here that cooperation and system leadership are highly linked. To phrase this link in the reverse using Brian Caldwell’s work (2004, p194), “System leadership is important, although its limitations are acknowledged in networks of schools that are in competition.”

In Victoria school funding and principal remuneration are both related to student numbers providing a strong incentive for competition between local schools. As has been noted elsewhere, data clearly indicated a belief amongst respondents that competition reduced the effectiveness of networks. Additionally, it is evident that the significant majority of principal respondents feel that their network acts to reduce or eliminate competition. With this in mind, data from Senior Manager respondents suggests that the framework for networks was a deliberate strategy directed by senior managers and focused on improving cooperation.

The evidence presented suggests that the DEECD was attempting to move into realms of greater cooperation without necessarily removing the structural and operational factors that have previously embedded competition in a devolved system. Managing this reality is clearly complicated. Uniformly interview
respondents spoke favorably of enhancing cooperation while also noting the many challenges that are associated with it. Data gathered under this theme indicated strong between-class and within class agreement. The one notable variation, where Respondents S02 and S03 indicated that there were positive aspects to competitiveness in terms of drive for school improvement, was balanced by their belief that system improvement required a reduction in competitiveness or a growth in collaboration.

It is clear that the creation of networks in Victoria has been intended, in part, to reduce competition. The reason for this, economically, politically and operationally is not evident from the data gathered under this theme, but will be explored in greater depth elsewhere in this research. It is also clear that it is perceived by all classes of respondents that the network arrangements can act to mitigate competition between schools. While the data lacks specific examples of schools or networks acting to cooperate in a highly integrated fashion, this is expected due to the reality that the networks are in their infancy and that, more recently, a change in government has cast doubt around the future of the networks.

On the whole, the data indicates that the emergence of system leadership at the principal class level requires a reduction in negative competition and building of collaboration, but that networks in Victoria are presently working primarily on changing cultures and attitudes through sharing and professional learning with principals rather than building collaboration around projects with or for students.

If, then, competition poses a problem for establishing system leadership, we can surmise that the possibility for principals in the Victorian education system to work as system leaders will be limited, or, at least, that principal class employees will face greater hurdles to becoming system leaders than the other classes of employee to which this study refers.
RQ1 Theme Discussion: RNL role

From the preliminary discussions held prior to the research phase it seemed likely that the Regional Network Leader role was one that would require investigation and this has been born out by the prevalence of responses relating to network leadership within the evidence gathered. Most respondents believe that Regional Network Leaders are or should be acting as system leaders. However, it is not evident that network leadership roles necessarily require, or indeed that network leaders must, by default, undertake system leadership as we have defined it.

The role of the Regional Network Leader was, from its inception, designed to promote system improvement and to create greater system alignment. Regional Network Leaders engage in a variety of tasks, the nature and scope of which can depend on the region and network. Roles range from ensuring compliance to DEECD policy in schools and principal performance reviews, to working in classrooms and schools with teachers.

Senior Managers demonstrated a strong within-class agreement around what the role of the Regional Network Leader should be and a general, but less strong, agreement around what the role of the Regional Network Leader is. Bearing in mind the local and contextual variation specific to particular regions or networks, data from Regional Network Leaders themselves suggests strong agreement around what their day-to-day work is. Principal class respondents exhibited greater within-class variability in their responses to defining the role of the Regional Network Leader. This is to be expected as each principal works with one Regional Network Leader and is unlikely to have intimate knowledge of the activities of others. Given this, relatively few types of variations are noted indicating that there is a high degree of commonality in the actions of Regional Network Leaders.

Senior manager respondents indicate that in their work toward creating network infrastructure they intended to create a common language and common skill set for the Regional Network Leaders and that, within the variability indicated above, this was successful. Respondent S07 also indicated that there has been effort, in at least one region, to clarify the role of the Regional Network Leaders with principals,
stating, “there's no good [the RNL] being clear on what their role is if the schools themselves aren't clear on those roles.”

Most senior managers located the Regional Network Leader within a conceptual hierarchy where they provide an intermediary layer between the senior managers or policy makers and schools. There is some correlation between this and the data evident from the principal respondents. Most principals spoke of the Regional Network Leader in terms indicative of hierarchical structures and the downward flow of ideas, pressure and actions. This aspect of the role was presented positively by senior manager respondents but was received less positively by some principal class respondents who framed this role around dictating to schools. However, the notion of a system implies system-wide agendas. We have earlier argued that a system is made up of elements, a function or purpose and interconnections (Meadows, 2008) and that systems must have coherence. System-wide agendas represent a function/purpose and the communication of these agendas relates to coherence.

Regional Network Leaders themselves spoke of their role in more precise terms around the activities that they undertake on a routine basis with peripheral indication of their hierarchical or systemic ‘location’ and their role in ‘managing down’. No data indicates what we might call ‘managing up’.

Another area of variability between the respondents of different classes was with regard to compliance and school improvement. Senior managers tended to focus their responses around the role of the Regional Network Leader being primarily school improvement although Respondent S01 did note the presence of compliance activities, stating: “Some of it ... is compliance stuff like the principal performance plans - that's part of the school improvement. They have to review those plans. They have to give feedback to principals.” Both Regional Network Leader and principal class respondents tended to refer to both compliance activities and school improvement activities as roles of the Regional Network Leader, but Regional Network Leaders tended to emphasize activities associated with school improvement to a greater extent than principal respondents.
In ascertaining the role of the Regional Network Leader, absences in the data can also tell us a great deal about the role. There is no data to suggest that Regional Network Leaders engage in activities associated with parent concerns or complaints, student discipline, conflict between teachers or between teachers and principals or issues related to teachers’ underperformance. While these activities may indeed consume some RNL time their absence within the evidence indicates either that they are not part of the activities of an RNL or that they are not viewed as significant in comparison to the activities mentioned by respondents.

Using data from the Senior Manager and Regional Network Leader class respondents we can describe the role of the Regional Network Leader as it is intended to be, that is, focused on school improvement; accountable for school performance in the network; connecting schools and the ‘center’ and mediating between Senior Management and schools; and overseeing performance management of principals. With the addition of data from principals we can also describe the role of the RNL in practice: focused on school improvement through professional learning, use of data and supporting leadership teams; differentially supporting or intervening in schools depending on needs and capacity at the school level; leading capacity building within schools; enabling or creating the environment for sharing and collaboration between schools; ensuring system priorities, strategies and objectives are implemented in schools / managing compliance; involvement in performance management of principals and involvement in principal selection. It seems then that both the intention and the practice of the Regional Network Leader initiative accord, although this does not provide a measure of success.

Our definition of system leadership is that it is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system. From the evidence gathered on the role of the Regional Network Leaders we can say that they are able to undertake a system leadership role. The evidence suggests that Regional Network Leaders are able to
create change across the nested system of their network or region through creating and utilizing connections between elements within the system.

**RQ1 Theme Discussion: Flexibility experienced by the Regional Network Leader**

The regulatory and legislative environment in Victoria frames the degree to which principals are autonomous, but prior to this research the degree of autonomy of the newly created Regional Network Leader roles was unclear.

The importance of investigating flexibility experienced by this class of leader lies in understanding the existence and structure of interconnections and coherence giving narratives within the system. The degree to which a Regional Network Leader, or any leader in the system, is able to act (or is interested in acting) autonomously provides an indication of the degree to which a system narrative (coherence) exists. On a theoretical level, although this is open to debate, a system may function where human elements of the system believe that they are fully autonomous, so long as those individuals innately, or by enculturation, or by some other means, work to achieve the function of the system. This is not the case in education systems, as we know them, as in an education system there are some functions and purposes that are contested and political as the many debates around markets and cooperation evident in the literature attest. The degree to which autonomy is experienced or the ways in which autonomy is facilitated has a bearing on the degree to which the system is able to achieve its purposes.

Interesting for our topic though, is the degree to which Regional Network Leaders indicated that they negotiated or mediated the agendas and programs of other individuals or groups within the system. This point brings to the fore the distinction between the authoritative choice model (Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, 2007, p5) of public policy as “how politicians make a difference” and more open models of policy making (Ball, 2002; Besussi, 2006; Peterson, 2003; Rhodes, 1997; Shamir, 2008). If the opportunity is indeed present for Regional Network Leaders to be flexible in responding to outside initiatives or agendas, this is likely to be effected by the scale
and significance of those initiatives or agenda and the political capital behind it. Respondent R14 made this point aptly arguing:

... very clearly where we don’t have autonomy is with the bigger ticket items. We see some things ... that I wouldn’t touch with a ten foot pole ... The truth about that [situation, is that you have to acknowledge] that’s your opinion and you’re not necessarily right. Everything else fits in with that and it’s not a competition.

Beyond this recognition of the level of clout carried by some external agendas, it is clear that Regional Network Leaders feel they are able to manage and mediate centrally determined policies in response to local context. Further, it is evident that senior managers acknowledge and support a degree of flexibility as necessary to ensure some policy priorities are enacted successfully.

While Regional Network Leader respondents described their level of autonomy differently, in relation to the behaviors and environments described, there is agreement on a number of areas. There is a clear and consistent agreement that the Regional Network Leaders are able to manage and plan their time according to their needs. There was no indication of work schedules or schemas being imposed directly. There was, however, an indication that the senior managers of the region monitored Regional Network Leader work and that digressions were responded to quickly. In this context, the notion of ‘earned autonomy’ mentioned previously is relevant.

Regional Network Leader respondents indicated, consistently, that they believed they were autonomous, but only within certain parameters or agendas that were prescribed for them. This echoes Sørensen and Torfings (2006, p9) definition of network governance that is “interdependent, but operationally autonomous actors [who are] self regulating within limits set by external agencies.” There was very strong agreement around the degree of flexibility experienced by the Regional Network Leader being limited by what were described variously as the impact of government, senior bureaucrats or a system agenda. This limitation was, however,
viewed positively by the respondents who spoke of it in terms of external forces ensuring that they adhered to the system agenda or moral purpose. Regional Network Leader respondents did not identify the limitations on their flexibility as a negative.

There was a very strong agreement that politicized, or 'big-ticket' policy items could be responded to less flexibly than other directives coming from above. However, in most instances, the data indicates, Regional Network Leaders experience significant flexibility in relation to which initiatives they choose to emphasize. This suggests that the Regional Network Leaders, in most instances, felt able to filter the initiatives and directives coming from points across the system and target those that most supported the needs of the network.

These points combined tend to indicate a strong degree of system coherence or narrative and consequently that a punitive or authoritarian approach to ensuring the objectives set by government are met by the system is not required. Where we see Regional Network Leaders able to act with high degrees of autonomy while simultaneously maintaining consistency of intent and approach, we can draw inferences about the success of the system. It is evident that the Victorian Government education system creates direction and structure that reduces reliance on command and control styles of leadership from senior managers. The data gathered in this research tends to suggest that the system narrative is structured by departmental policy rather than the coincidental alignment of individual actors’ beliefs. Consistency in responses around flexibility suggests strongly that DEECD has developed a high degree of enculturation supported by the consistency of message and the alignment, at a central level, of policies and priorities emerging particularly from the Office for Government School Education. Where Regional Network Leaders described high levels of autonomy, this autonomy can only be seen in the context that the individuals exist in, and are highly aligned with, a system that has chosen, promoted and enculturated them as leaders.

It is clear from the data that in the Victorian Government System, autonomy and flexibility for leaders is readily available, so long as their choices and decisions align
broadly with the system’s purpose or function. Further, it is clear that coherence within the system means there is little need for command and control mechanisms to generate agreement.

**Findings on Research Question 1.**

*RQ1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?*

Data gathered in answer to this question can be helpfully grouped under two sub-topics; ‘perceptions of the existence of system leadership’ and ‘manifestations of system leadership existing in the Victorian government education system’.

This research was premised on the idea that a concept of system leadership exists in Victoria, and indeed, the data indicated that this was the case. We also found in testing our premise that there was an evident intent from the DEECD to plan and structure the growth and development of capacity for system leadership. We found that the DEECD has taken specific actions to achieve this end, and that the effects of these were observable in the research.

We also confirmed that our ‘starting point definition’ for system leadership had an evidential basis and can thus be used as an acceptable definition of system leadership: System leadership is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system.

Albeit that no definition by DEECD exists, it was found from an analysis of documentary evidence that the DEECD intends system leadership to be a feature of the Victorian Government Education System. This is particularly evident in the *Developmental Framework for School Leaders* (DEECD, 2007).

Evidence has been presented that senior managers within DEECD, with the support of the then minister for education, intended the creation of Regional Network
Leader positions across the state to foster, develop or create system leadership within the organisation, that is, using our definition, it was intended to provide greater coherence and strengthen interconnections between elements. This was done within the context of meeting the function or purpose of the DEECD that became evident to leaders both in terms of a perceived collective moral purpose and in terms of shared compliance to particular whole-of-system initiatives or policy directives. It was found that system alignment has been pursued through the Regional Network Leaders, but that this alignment has not been fully realized, particularly as one hears evidence from a portion of respondents further removed from decision making expressing frustration with the alignment focus or experiencing it as dictatorial.

It has become clear that a hierarchy exists in the DEECD and that the Regional Network Leaders have been an added layer within the hierarchy. Evidence suggests this has enabled greater line-of-sight interconnection between the senior manager and principal classes within the DEECD, although there is clear evidence that the bulk of influence is exerted downwards and that principals have little if any impact through their Regional Network Leader on the senior manager class. There was no evidence found of any DEECD employee below the principal class having an ability to exert influence across the system. Data gathered from Senior Manager class respondents suggests variation, and sometimes uncertainty, in their view of the interplay and tensions between their system leadership and hierarchical position.

Consistently these respondents articulate a perspective that system leadership necessarily contains top-down direction but there is evidence of tension around this and little clarity from the evidence around how the system feeds up or feeds back to senior managers. We note here that the 2007 OECD case study report on system leadership in Victoria identifies the principals’ Common, ‘Big Day Out’, Principal Internships and the OGSE Deputy Secretary’s Newsletter as mechanisms for feedback and feeding up (Matthews, Moorman, and Nesche, 2007, p16.). However, these were not mentioned anywhere in any context during the interviews conducted for this research with the exception of the Big Day Out which was referred to in relation to the provision of professional learning and policy agenda communication.
Policy makers are able to act as system leaders, by our definition, by acting in ways that utilize interconnections within the system to effect change. Evidence gathered points to senior managers making policy and then using the Regional Network Leaders as an interconnective point to communicate and leverage for change at the school level. None of the senior managers interviewed described policy making as system leadership but, we see evidence from principal class and Regional Network Leader class respondents that, in fact, the senior managers are utilizing systemic interconnections to make their policy operable in practice in schools. This indicates a highly developed and strategically minded bureaucracy using new mechanisms to achieve desired outcomes.

Working from an understanding that the conception of system leadership in Victoria is, to use the definition we infer from DEECD literature, ‘the ability to build capacity for improvement across the whole system or at least beyond one school location’, we find evidence that respondents from all classes rank networks and networking highly in terms of factors that assist the development of system leadership. There is also clear evidence that competition between principals or between schools is perceived to be a significant hindrance to developing system leadership. At the same time, Regional Network Leaders, who are likely to be best placed to comment on principal behavior, identify principal class employees’ ‘desire for autonomy’ or lack of ‘buy-in’ to be the major hindrance to developing system leadership. This perception held by Regional Network Leaders can be linked with criticism from principals of the compliance and accountability measures they face and a perception that top-down agendas reduce their capacity for system leadership.

Respondents’ perceptions around factors that assist or hinder the development of system leadership provide an opportunity to assess the degree to which the environment within DEECD makes system leadership possible. Responses from all classes indicate the existence of more factors operating in Victoria that assist the development of system leadership than factors that hinder it. Leaders believe the environment in the Victorian system, while problematic in areas, is likely to be conducive to system leadership.
All classes of respondents perceive that competition is a problem for the growth of system leadership in Victoria. Significantly Victoria has been able to institute a significant system leadership initiative that requires schools to work cooperatively without dismantling the regulatory and funding frameworks that promote competition. This may be a source of conflict in the future.

Autonomy and flexibility in the role of leaders in the Victorian government education system is, to some extent, contingent on alignment of individuals with top-down agendas or moral purposes established outside the school. This is not to say that these top-down agendas and moral purposes are antithetical to those held by the individuals interviewed. Often we found quite the opposite. As has been discussed above, the existence of top-down agendas determined at a central level did not affect Regional Network Leaders’ ability to act as system leaders.

In relation to the role of the Regional Network Leader there is between class variability in the interview responses. It is evident, however, that the Regional Network Leaders are acting as an intermediary layer between senior managers and principals in schools. This is perceived by respondents in one of two ways: either as the Regional Network Leader performing an inter-connective role between schools and between schools and ‘the center’, or, as a mechanism to convey information and ensure compliance and accountabilities are met. In reality it seems the work of the Regional Network Leader fulfills both of these roles. In relation to the work of the Regional Network Leader, we find that there is variability in the success of the inter-connective function of their role given that there is evidence of some principals opting out of participating with, or at least not buying-in to, the networks. There is also, given the variability in responses of principals, some evidence that the interpersonal success or human leadership of the Regional Network Leaders is varied and that this can impact on principal alignment.

The degree of flexibility or autonomy exercised by leaders within their role is a likely indicator for the existence of system leadership only when this is considered alongside the way in which the system operates to achieve its function or purpose. If
the individual human elements in the system are highly autonomous, the system must rely on powerful enculturation if it is to act as a system – otherwise atomization renders the system non-existent. Conversely, if the human elements in the system experience minimal autonomy, the system would necessarily be relying on powerful structures, processes or controls which in turn might limit the capacity of the leader to generate change. Regional Network Leaders in Victoria are operationally highly autonomous but they are required to implement and deliver on system-wide initiatives and to operate within parameters set for them within a context of strong system-wide narratives that are understood and accepted by leaders.

System leadership does exist in Victoria and it is manifested in a variety of ways. If system leadership is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system, then the senior manager class respondents interviewed for this study can be said to manifest system leadership through their creation or use of the Regional Network Leaders as an interconnective medium to bring about change in schools. Similarly Regional Network Leaders are able to manifest system leadership through creating and utilizing connections within their network or region to bring about change in schools. Examples of this found in the research include professional learning, sharing of data, learning walks, and leadership development programs.

While there is evidence that senior managers and Regional Network Leaders are able to act as system leaders there is no evidence of principals acting or being able to act as system leaders. This is not to say that it is not possible, but simply that it is not evident in this research.

**Further Research**

Further research might be conducted into whether or not high-performing principals can act as system leaders. In this research principals were not selected on the basis of their performance and this cannot be commented upon.
Similarly, action research might be undertaken to test the potential for teachers to act as system leaders through, for example, projects around curriculum innovation. This would require the teacher to be able to access powerful means of interconnecting other human elements in the system.

Further research might also be conducted into the effect of system leadership roles on the people undertaking them. For example, one senior manager respondent (Respondent S01) said: “I’m intrigued by the fact that if you are a system leader and you actually stand for something, you cop a fair bit of shit … but if you want to operate at this level that’s what happens.” Undertaking any leadership role has costs and benefits for an individual and the analysis of these might prove insightful since in the realm of system leadership we are dealing primarily with actions that promote a system view rather than a personal or self-interested view.
**Research Question 2: What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?**

This second research question attempts to determine specific human interactions implicit in the manifestations of system leadership in Victoria and to investigate the interconnective and coherence making functions of system leadership.

**Discussion of documentary data:**

Much of the documentary evidence relevant to this research question has been described and discussed in the literature review. DEECD organizational charts can be seen in Appendix 4 and 5. The structure evident in those charts is the edifice that supports the operations of the various functions of the DEECD. However, the only office that maintains a permanently structured connection from the ‘center’ to the school level is the Office for Government School Education (OGSE) (DEECD, 2011d.). Readers referring to Appendix 4 will note that the Office for Children and Portfolio Coordination (OCPC) also maintains a line to the Regional Directors, however, the OCPC “leads reform in the early childhood [pre-school] sector and action across government and in the community to sustain and improve outcomes for children ...” (DEECD, 2010, p16) and is not relevant to this research.

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<tr>
<th>Table 5.1 Principal to DEECD Secretary delegation and reporting line</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secretary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Secretary OGSE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Regional Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>(School Improvement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regional Network Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
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Within the remit of the OGSE at the time of this research were Victoria’s nine regional offices (Barwon South Western; Grampians; Gippsland; Hume; Loddon
Mallee; Eastern Metropolitan; Northern Metropolitan; Southern Metropolitan; and Western Metropolitan). These regional offices geographically divided the State’s government schools. Each region is led by a Regional Director who is considered a senior executive of the DEECD and reports to the head of the OGSE. Each region at the time of research was further divided geographically into regional networks of approximately 20-25 primary and secondary schools catering for children from Prep (age 5) to Year 12 (age 18) with the early childhood (birth – 5) education functions of the region occurring outside these networks.

Documentary evidence and the findings of research question 1 suggest that Regional Network Leader roles were established with the intention of creating operational relationships between schools and between schools and their regional and central offices. In announcing the creation of the networks the Age newspaper reported the then Minster, Minister Pike, stating that the role of the Regional Network Leaders would be to “lead and manage a network of Victorian Government schools and improve the quality of the education system and overall performance of all students” (Pike, 2008). Minister Pike went on to say, RNLs are responsible for supporting “schools to rollout this Government’s improvement agenda and continue our [sic] commitment to education” (Pike, 2008).

DEECD policy priorities for the period under study are to be found in two key documents referred to the previous chapter; the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development (2008) and the DEECD’s Corporate Plan (2009). In addition, we also find relevant documentary evidence in the framing of the work of the Office for Government School Education as identified in the previous chapter.

Documentary evidence showing both existing or intended operational relationships and policy priorities, suggests that the DEECD has a clearly defined responsibility and accountability hierarchy and divisional structure that shapes relationships and policy delivery. In relation to government schools it is clear that the OGSE provides the critical operational and policy framework within which schools and teachers operate. It is also clear that the Regional Network Leader roles have been created to
assist in the transfer of policy to the school level and to take responsibility for the implementation of many priority areas.

The documentary evidence indicates that schools are connected to the system through a chain of leaders reporting back to the Deputy Secretary of the OGSE. Our findings in research question one suggest that Regional Network Leaders and senior managers in this chain have the potential to act as system leaders according to our definition of system leadership. For school principals in this framework their primary reporting is made to the Regional Network Leader.

The documentary evidence is silent on the effectiveness of the aforementioned relationships in achieving the policy priorities of the DEECD.

**RQ2 Theme Discussion: Hierarchy**
Hierarchical operational relationships are central to DEECD’s structure and, whether they are openly labeled as such by senior manager respondents (none used the term hierarchy) these relationships are used to transmit information and to promote specific agendas. These operational relationships, the data suggests, are normative and seemingly obvious to senior manager respondents. That is, the data indicates the existence of role clarity for the Senior Managers in relation to a hierarchical position. The extent to which Senior Managers consciously or unconsciously acknowledge the interplay and tensions between their system leadership and hierarchical position is evident in data explored for research question one.

There was, amongst data drawn from the Senior Managers, little indication of autocratic prescription (Hopkins, 2009). More prevalent were descriptions of their work in directing from ‘above’ in terms of either the effects of their leadership across the system or in terms of partnerships required. These descriptions suggest a desire to engage in an enculturation process with school principals through the creation of shared values and norms.
Despite the clear evidence of hierarchical relationships, the reports of senior managers indicate a desire to minimize or devolve some aspects of top-down control. This is particularly evident in statements emphasizing moving agency in decision making away from the center. Of note however, is the implication in statements from senior managers that the agency or authority is given rather than the agency or authority being innately within the remit of other leaders’ roles. This ‘giving’ of agency or authority can be taken to mean that the agency or authority is conditional. Indeed, the apparent concern by senior managers to devolve some aspects of hierarchical control is offset by the acknowledgement that this devolution serves the purposes of the system. That is, the minimization of top-down control is possible only within parameters set by the Senior Managers where these parameters ensure both consistency and the possibility of achieving DEECD priorities. The work of senior managers provides direction when this is understood alongside an understanding of the earned autonomy discussed under research question one. Where autonomy is earned the control from the ‘center’ or ‘above’ can be reduced. Regional Network Leader respondents also indicated the existence of hierarchical relationships and that these are of greatest influence where they are associated with government policy, finance or ‘big ticket’ items.

No Regional Network Leaders provided evidence of an ability to push agendas ‘back’ to the center. This may be an indication of the way the relationship between the Regional Directors and Regional Network Leaders operates, that is, strong support and clear role clarity provided by the Regional Director with high degrees of autonomy for Regional Network Leaders within the confines set by the Regional Directors. Paired with this, though, seems to be a limitation on either the opportunity for the Regional Network Leaders to influence or set the agenda of the region and their network or a limit on the effectiveness of the Regional Network Leaders in taking control in this area.

Regional Network Leaders view their relationship with principals as being one of support where this occurs through coaching, building leadership capacity, positive accountability and direct support. However, the hierarchical nature of the role is evident in the Regional Network Leaders’ role in principal selection and
performance management. Principals are divided as to whether this relationship is positive or negative with slightly more positive than negative. Principal respondents tended in most cases to discuss their relationships with other leaders in terms of the actions undertaken together rather than discussing any personal dimensions of the relationship. In this respect the data reflects that of the other two classes of respondents. This is interesting in so far as the range of other leaders that the principal has regular or easy access to is the most limited of the three classes studied and, in fact, might be confined primarily to relationships with the Regional Network Leader and other principals in the network and in such cases we would expect the personal dimension to have an effect on the perspective of the principal.

Across the three classes of respondents there is a highly consistent perspective that relationships between system leaders are ordered through a hierarchy that operates using a top-down model of direction and policy implementation. Variability emerged between the three classes in the degree to which the hierarchic arrangements were described. Senior managers were the least likely to describe the arrangements in terms that might reflect autocratic management, reflecting in this regard a high degree of within-class consistency. Regional Network Leader respondents were more likely to illustrate the hierarchic arrangements using examples of autocratic practices involving the senior manager class. However, the data gathered from Regional Network Leader class respondents was highly consistent in regard to articulating their own personal or philosophical alignment with the agendas and priorities initiated or directed by Senior Managers. Principal class respondents demonstrated a high degree of consistency in both identifying hierarchic relationships and in suggesting that the operation of these relationships was autocratic.

Heterarchical relationships are evident within a class of respondents and, in the case of principals, this has been strengthened by the creation of Regional Networks. Structured meetings of the Regional Network Leaders occurred within the two metropolitan regions. This was not evident in the data gathered from the rural region and is likely the result of the vast distances between networks and the necessity to locate the ‘office’ of the Regional Network Leaders in different rural
cities or large towns. There is clear evidence that most principals meet on a semi-regular basis with other principals within the network and that at these meetings network business is discussed.

We have network meetings twice a term. They have professional learning focus in those meetings. We also have principal cluster meetings where there are groups of five principals who meet twice a term again. We usually have them for breakfast meetings so it’s not as disruptive and that’s talking about their plan, their performance plan and how they’re going with achieving their goals but also that has a professional learning focus as well and that’s about building one another’s capacity (Respondent R18).

As with Regional Network Leaders on a regional level, this indicates the existence of heterarchical within class operational relationships. There was, however, no evidence from the interview data of operational relationships between principals and Regional Network Leaders that resulted in the transfer ‘up’ of initiatives, ideas or direction.

**RQ2 Theme Discussion: System Alignment:**

It is clear that in Victoria there has been considerable work towards establishing system alignment but also that the creation of networks has created potential for empowering flexibility. Flexibility to adapt policy to local circumstances, albeit with strong oversight mechanisms, does not detract from the strength of operational relationships. It may in fact suggest the health of those relationships. The procedural aspects of the DEECD’s formal planning process where we see the concertina of plans vertically within the system provide a documentation based process that sits alongside and to some extent must inform the operational relationships existing within the system. This is evident in the data gathered from Senior Manger class respondents where they indicate that the function of leaders within the system is to monitor and evaluate their work and the work of others in relation to system priorities. This is central to understanding how operational relationships within the Victorian Government education system support the policy priorities of the DEECD.
The evidence seems to indicate that it is these structured operational relationships that enable DEECD priorities to be established and documented across the system.

Foundationally, the expectation that Regional Network Leaders perform a function in aligning schools to the system is premised on the idea that the Regional Network Leaders themselves are aligned. Senior Manager class respondents, consistently across the interviews, referred to the induction and professional learning program undertaken by the Regional Network Leaders as central to their alignment. These, or other factors invisible in the research such as the selection methods for Regional Network Leader candidates, have certainly been successful in generating that alignment.

It is clear that work undertaken in recent years within the DEECD rapidly and effectively improved system alignment and made explicit the level of alignment required for success. The establishment of common language to describe the system and work within the system was certainly significant. More importantly the evidence clearly shows the development of a philosophy and shared belief around the principles of cooperation for the system and that the success of the system is more important that the success of its elements. Certainly the data suggests that this was achieved through professional learning programs, policy documentation and the provision of services, but most importantly it was achieved by establishing a group of seemingly highly aligned leaders who could take carriage of the system agenda and bring it into closer proximity of schools.

The most common approaches to enhancing system alignment were the establishment of a common language and philosophy, engaging leaders in collegial work that required sharing and trust and, the conscious alignment of strategic and annual planning documents at all levels of the system so that a school’s plan was a sub-set of the network plan and so on up the hierarchy. This concertina of planning documentation was viewed as operating successfully by senior managers.

Certainly a greater accountability around system and network success has been applied to the performance management of leaders at school, network and regional
levels. Senior managers and Regional Network Leaders were consistent in expressing that the system's expectation is that every leader is accountable not only for themselves and their direct reports but also for their actions to promote the success of the system.

System alignment requires buy-in. It would be surprising to see complete alignment in data related to a change focused initiative in the short or medium term, and certainly we do not see this in this case. In this data we are looking for evidence of how much leaders have bought-in to the notions of prioritizing the system and to aligning oneself with the priorities established for a system. Significantly we note that the data indicates that all senior managers and nearly all Regional Network Leaders indicated support for these ideas and note that this is less true for principal class respondents.

Principal class respondents provided highly consistent data to indicate that operational relationships between themselves and the Regional Network Leaders supported the transfer of ‘top-down’ policy priorities. This would tend to indicate that the network arrangements have been effective in achieving that purpose. This in turn would suggest that the policies are more likely to be enacted at a school level although the evidence is clear that this is not the case in all schools.

**RQ2 Theme Discussion: Leadership and RNL Role**
The manifestation of operational relationships within the DEECD is evident in data gathered under these thematic headings where we see how leaders describe the nature of their leadership and that of others.

It is necessary to acknowledge at this point that the creation of Regional Network Leader roles was a change that altered operational relationships and impacted upon the personal relationships between leaders and, that this creates turbulence. In this climate then, we can consider the evidence to emerge from the interviews as indicative of how operational relationships are (or are not) being managed or arranged to cope with the turbulence.
Data gathered under the two thematic headings used here suggests that respondents acknowledge that operational relationships are influenced by personal practices and the interpersonal skills and human leadership competencies of the leader. However, the prevalence of notions of accountability and responsibilities evident throughout the data suggests that these dominate concern over the interpersonal relationships except in so far as the interpersonal relationship influences the ability of the leader to effect change in line with DEECD policy and priorities. That is, support is typically framed here in operational terms rather than interpersonal terms.

Results and discussion on the content, nature and scope of the Regional Network Leader role with data included from all three classes of respondent is included under the “RNL role” heading in earlier sections under research question one.

There is no indication (see discussion under the theme heading Hierarchy in this section) that the Regional Network Leader role constructs, has constructed or will construct new or direct operational relationships between principals and senior managers. However the data certainly indicates that the Regional Network Leader role interconnects those two classes of leader to a greater extent than was the case previously. This flags the potential for greater penetration of ideas, agendas and priorities from the Senior Managers through to the school level (see discussion under the theme heading Hierarchy in this section) and for operability of system leadership.

**RQ2 Theme Discussion: Flexibility experienced by the RNL**

Operational relationships between Regional Network Leaders and their managers can be observed in data gathered around the degree of flexibility or autonomy they experience. Where flexibility and autonomy is high we might expect operational relationships to manifest differently from situations where flexibility and autonomy is low. In Victoria Regional Network Leaders are autonomous within certain parameters or agendas that are prescribed for them and in so far as they support
the policy priorities of the DEECD. Flexibility is contingent on the outcomes of autonomy matching with the intentions of the Senior Managers and DEECD policy priorities. This demonstrates a tight coupling of layers within the system hierarchy in Victoria.

In day-to-day operations, Regional Network Leaders manage their network in isolation from senior managers. However, there is very clear and consistent data to indicate that their operational relationship with senior managers is foundational to their work. It is this relationship that guides the intent and the actions of the networks and that enables the agendas determined at a senior management level to be transferred ‘down’ the hierarchy. There is no evidence of Regional Network Leaders being able to push ‘up’ ideas, but there is clear evidence that within certain parameters networks and Regional Network Leaders can flexibly implement directives according to local circumstances.

The operational relationship between Regional Network Leaders and senior managers is best described in terms of direction setting rather than micromanaging from the senior managers. It might also be said that the relationship is based on central determination of broad agendas and priorities coupled with a decentralized and hands-off approach to the enacting of these priorities where this is reliant on preexisting alignment of the Regional Network Leader to system objectives.

The notion of earned autonomy is essential to understanding the relationships existing between the different classes of leaders. Autonomy is earned through evidence of positive achievement paired with alignment with the centrally determined policy priorities and agendas. Where these two factors are present autonomous network operation becomes a safe and minimal cost strategy for senior managers.

**RQ2 Theme Discussion: Factors hindering and assisting System Leadership**

The data evident in this thematic area provided some insight into perceptions of the type of relationships existing for principals and Regional Network Leaders but less
insight into whether or not these relationships support the implementation of DEECD's policy priorities.

The expectation of respondents is that the emerging operating relationships around networks will result in shared work, efficiencies and the improvement of outcomes for students. If these relationships are coupled with the strong top-down compliance agendas that the data suggests exist then the combination of both effective cooperative relationships and clear direction from senior managers should support DEECD priorities being met. The evidence would suggest that collegial activity organized through the network demonstrates that new operational relationships around networks are supporting DEECD policy priorities including work in the areas of literacy and numeracy, Koori student achievement and leadership development. Networks have effectively constructed new relationships that have achieved greater alignment within the system and the possibility for more effective support for the achievement of DEECD priorities.

Findings on Research Question 2

RQ2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?

Operational relationships between senior managers, Regional Network Leaders and principals within the DEECD are clearly hierarchical with no evidence gathered in the interview data that would demonstrate direct operational connections between Senior Managers and principals. The function of the Regional Network Leader within this hierarchy is to create alignment of purpose and culture across the system and to improve the likelihood that DEECD policy priorities will be enacted at the school level.

Leaders within the system have been given new ways of interacting through the creation of the regional networks. Senior Managers are operationally connected to teams of Regional Network Leaders who are the delivery agents of DEECD policy working face-to-face with principals everyday. Regional Network Leaders are
operationally connected to a group of network principals who in turn are connected to each other. Further, within the DEECD Regions examined, the network operates smaller collegiate groups of principals. These principals are engaged in operational relationships with each other in new ways through the sharing of data and professional learning and through the intent that principals take responsibility for the success of the network and therefore shift toward more cooperative modes of operation.

Earned autonomy for leaders exists and is promoted but is allowed only within the confines of policy and priority parameters set from the senior manager level. The balance that it is possible to achieve between earned autonomy and the reality of hierarchical operation and control around policy priorities is a feature of the DEECD system that has emerged from this research and requires a high trust environment with robust systems to promote and ensure alignment.

Through induction programs, professional learning in and outside of schools, the sharing of data and the creation of shared languages and expectations, the DEECD has been highly effective in promoting system alignment. This has been supported by structural and accountability arrangements that have formalized the connection between schools and DEECD policy priorities. Because of this alignment trust exists and flexibility at local levels is not only tolerated but openly acknowledged and pursued. Despite this a significant number of principals express frustration at the imposition of agendas that are not their own. These need to be acknowledged and understood. Some evidence points to a portion of this dissatisfaction being related to the interpersonal skills and leadership style of the relevant Regional Network Leader. Other principals report that some of their colleagues are unwilling to disengage from competitive mindsets and to view their role as one operating as a leader beyond their own school. Balanced against this we also find most principals actively support the systemic focus and cooperative relationships of the networks.

What we observe in this research is a reformation of the interconnective elements of the system, through the creation of a new layer of intermediary leaders that enable the system to operate more effectively to achieve its purpose. That is, the Regional
Networks directly address the necessity for human elements in the system to interconnect and to operate with coherence to achieve the purposes of the system including, in this case, the policy priorities of the DEECD.

**Further Research**
This study has not delved into the leadership styles of respondents although from time to time these are evident. We have suggested above that a Regional Network Leader’s interpersonal skills and leadership style might have an impact on how they are perceived and their effectiveness in generating alignment with system-wide agendas. Much existing research describes leadership styles and evaluates their effectiveness but future researchers may wish to test this research in relation to the styles that best support system leadership.

This study has found no evidence of principals or regional network leaders influencing policy priorities or agendas at a senior management level. Future research into the conditions that would facilitate this ‘pushing up’ occurring and case studies examining any examples would represent significant new work that would have widespread implications for the theory and practices of system leadership and government operations.

Similarly this study has not found evidence of principals effecting change across a system or nested system, and therefore has not found evidence of them acting as system leaders. Given time and development it would seem likely that this may occur through cooperative regional networks but this will require further research.

This study has identified the existence of earned autonomy, both in rhetoric and in practice. This concept originated in the public sector reforms in the UK under the Blair government (Office of Public Services Reform, 2002). Further research could identify the parameters that make this possible and identify the optimal environments in which leaders or organizations can allow or promote earned autonomy for school leaders and other leaders in a contemporary education system.
Research Question 3: To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

We have demonstrated that system leadership exists in the Victorian Government education system. So, then, does the evidence from this research indicate this system leadership is either leading to school improvement or creating the environment in which school improvement is possible?

Discussion of documentary data
It is not possible to determine shifts in statistical data on student achievement in Victoria that are relatable to an effect of system leadership. Even were we able to determine a start point such as the initiation of the Regional Network Leader initiative from which we could attempt to measure an effect of the initiative, this would firstly not be a measure of the effect of system leadership but a measure of the initiative, and, secondly, such an attempt would fall victim to the logical fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc (assigning an outcome to the preceding event without considering the many other impacts on the data).

It is however relevant to discuss here some statistics that provide a background against which we can consider the data gathered in this qualitative research. It is, for example, interesting while considering school improvement in Victoria to note that in the financial data for the period 2008-2009 Victoria spent less per student than any of the other seven jurisdictions in Australia - 10.4% less than the national average for Primary school students and 8.1% less than the national average for Secondary school students - (DEECD, 2012a). Yet, in the following year Victoria’s performance on the nationally mandated NAPLAN (National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy) tests conducted at years 3, 5, 7 and 9 exceeded that of every other jurisdiction except the Australian Capital Territory across the three test areas (reading, writing and numeracy) on every point of data except year 3 and 5 writing results where New South Wales achieved marginally higher results (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2011). Even taking
into account expected measurement errors in this type of testing the data tends to speak of a system that is, if nothing else, highly efficient.

Documentary data from within the DEECD that links system leadership to improvements in student outcomes is limited. However from those available it is clear that senior leaders within the DEECD have constructed the Regional Network initiative in order to use leadership as leverage for system improvement and from this, it can be inferred, improvement in student outcomes. Most noteworthy is the role that Regional Networks played in the Northern Metropolitan Region of the DEECD where the creation by senior Regional leaders of a systemic approach to improvement has seemingly generated a positive shift in student achievement data in a short period of time. Network operations were involved in this work that is reported in Hopkins’ writing for the DEECD (2011).

RQ3 Theme Discussion: System Leadership Purpose & RNL Role
Within data gathered for these two themes there was an absence of examples from principals to demonstrate specific improvements in student outcomes data resulting from the actions of system leaders and in particular Regional Network Leaders. This gap may indicate a genuine absence or that there has been insufficient time for improvement to become evident. The absence of evidence from principal respondents indicating system leaders impacting positively on student outcomes may also result from a desire to ascribe improvements to the school community rather than to outsiders. The limited time during which the regional network initiative has operated means that reliable data on this matter is unlikely to be available in the short term and we note that future research may or may not demonstrate a causal link between system leadership and improvement in student outcomes. Without future research this will remain unknown.

In some cases for principals there seems to be a disjuncture between concepts of school improvement and system leadership. Where principals assigned the system leadership role to principals their definition of it does not accord with our definition of system leadership. System leadership is not simply doing things that help the
system or that help another school. However, nor is system leadership the ability to achieve school improvement. In most cases principal class respondents ascribe system leadership to the Regional Network Leader (or higher) role and describe school improvement as something they do at the school.

Like principal respondents, Senior Manager respondents did not provide any specific instances where the actions of system leaders have demonstrably led to school improvement measured by student outcomes. As with principal class respondents the data contains numerous references to actions we might assume lead to school improvement (the provision of professional learning, leadership capacity building, etc) but no clear evidence of these programs or actions resulting in improvement being realized. From both principal and Senior Manager respondents there is a clear suggestion that school improvement may or perhaps should result from the system leadership activities of Regional Network Leaders. This is a perspective echoed in the data gathered from Regional Network Leaders themselves.

We have also established previously that Regional Network Leaders are able to act as system leaders and we have seen their role described by their managers as primarily relating to school improvement. As system leaders the Regional Network Leaders should be able to bring about change across their network and it is, therefore, reasonable to expect that a result of their leadership would be school improvement. It is also reasonable to expect that a correlation could be made between the effective implementation of system leadership and school improvement. However, data is not available at this time to support that conjecture. We do however have clear evidence of Regional Network Leaders undertaking roles and performing actions such as leadership capacity building, coaching and generating collaboration that are typical of school improvement efforts.

**RQ3 Theme Discussion: School Improvement**

Principal respondents are uniquely placed to comment on the meaning of school improvement given that they are the frontline leaders of the DEECD working in the
school environment. This means that the lens principal respondents bring to discussing school improvement is likely to be sharpened by the actual experience of leadership in schools. It is important also to consider that each principal’s lens is likely to be shaped by the experiences they have had as leaders and the specific environment of their school.

Data gathered from principals in relation to this theme found that respondents frequently turned away from a focus on improvement in the network or across multiple school to a focus on improvement in their own school. This may be indicative of a high degree of ownership perceived by the principal for their school and a relatively lower level of ownership of the network or other schools. It also possibly indicates a perception that the role of the network is to support school improvement rather than system improvement, a point of contention we have observed earlier in evidence from Senior Managers who reverse this order of priority. Certainly one principal (Respondent P38) stated that “the role of networks is to support principals and schools in school improvement”. While these responses tell us little directly about improvements across schools they do provide an indication of the types of school improvement actions that are occurring in schools as a result of networks. The evidence we see here of some principals re-framing discussion on improving schools to be improving my school may be indicative of a mind-set that prioritizes the local over the system or, instead, it may reflect a capacity to redefine system priorities in local contexts reflecting a high degree of autonomy.

Given that the evidence generated from principal and senior manager respondents seems either too close or to distant from schools to provide us a reliable insight into how system leadership is leading to school improvement across more than one school, we are fortunate to have a rich data set generated from Regional Network Leaders who are highly consistent in their descriptions of what school improvement entails. Two points emerge consistently in the evidence: Firstly that school improvement relates to influencing and improving teachers’ classroom practice, and secondly that it is the ability to shift school performance data.
Accounting for variability in principal responses there was, broadly speaking, little variability between the three classes of respondents with all generally agreeing that the focus of school improvement was improving student performance data. The evidence clearly indicates that Regional Network Leaders are using student performance data as a key lever to enable school improvement and that a critical focus is on teacher practice in schools. Regional Network Leader respondents were able to provide specific examples of what school improvement is and also to provide examples from their own work in undertaking these school improvement activities.

A gap in the evidence around school improvement relates to what happens when a school does not improve. In relation to Regional Networks this gap exists due to the limited timeframe for respondents to witness improvement or lack of improvement between initiation of the networks and their interview. However, for Respondent S04 the problem is clearly one being contemplated: “The sharp end of it is what you do with schools that don’t move once the investment has been made and leadership teams have been worked with and the schools don’t make improvement? ... Is it ethical to leave a school languishing?”

Senior Manager class respondents frequently referred to the role of the Regional Network Leader as contributing directly to school improvement although, as has been noted, we find a paucity of examples or data to provide evidence that the actions and behaviors of Regional Network Leaders have resulted in the realization of school improvement.

**Theme: System Reform & Cooperation and Competition**

The themes of System Reform and Cooperation and Competition are dealt with together here as there is a logical progression in this case from System Reform into

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7 The evidence suggests a high-degree of within class variability in the principal class respondents' descriptions of school improvement. This is most likely related to the individual school contexts that the principals operate within. Some principals were able to describe school improvement across a network or group of schools while others spoke exclusively about their own setting.
Cooperation and Competition via discussion of the role of networks in system reform. That logical progression can be described in terms of a narrative that moves from, a) the devolution of control to regional networks beyond the central bureaucracy into b) the utility of networks acting as agents for school improvement and ending with c) whether or not this has resulted in an increase in helpful cooperation or competition.

Uniformly across the interviews conducted, discussion of system reform only became evident in relation to discussion of the formation or operation of regional networks. In relation to discussion of cooperation or competition, network arrangements prefigure these discussions.

The devolution of some operational control to networks was clearly a significant system reform. Fundamentally it shifted the location of some decision making and resourcing away from the center and into the networks, although, as we have amply demonstrated above this occurred within a tightly orchestrated system for delivering system priorities.

Senior managers uniformly agree that the purpose of the regional networks as a system leadership initiative was to reform the system by pushing the action and agency of school improvement closer to the school. Regional Network Leader respondents combined this view with more explicit discussion of the roles networks take in terms of building school improvement

It became apparent in this data that healthy competition can exist within cooperative network structures and that this does not of itself undermine the system reforms around networks that were explicitly designed to promote cooperation and system mindedness. However, this healthy competition can only exist because of the reformation and re-articulation of relationships between schools under the network model.

It is clear that the network initiative has, to a large extent, restructured relationships in a way that is likely to build an environment where school
improvement efforts are more likely to be successful. While there was no evidence provided of specific examples of schools achieving improvement in quantitative data through the actions of their network it is clear that networks demanded a new ethos that required principals to work together toward improving all schools in a network.

**RQ3 Theme Discussion: Student Learning**
At this point in time there is no trend-based evidence available to examine the effect of network or Regional Network Leader actions in the realm of literacy and numeracy. This data may be available as time goes on and, if so, would provide a rich vein for further research into the effectiveness of system leadership in relation to specific learning improvement focused interventions.

Data gathered around the theme of student learning was taken from comments that tended to be illustrative of other points made by respondents or that provided context for explanations of leadership theories or practices. However, the data provides key information on the manifestations of system leadership and its relation to school improvement in practice in Victoria. There is clear evidence that Regional Network Leaders in the areas investigated for this research have caused schools under their influence to engage in work on student learning, particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy, that would not have occurred to the same extent without either the network or the Regional Network Leader. It is evident that the intent to focus on student learning has been structured into the regional network initiative by senior managers with the intent of accelerating school improvement in Victoria.

**Findings on Research Question 3.**

*RQ3.* To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

The research question posed here was deliberately provocative to system thinkers as it seeks to test whether system leadership, which by nature aims at system improvement, could be seen to observably result in improvement at the local level. This is an important challenge to the concept of system leadership and any
assumption that by changing or improving the elements and interconnections within an education system that you change the reality for schools within it.

Defining school improvement is notoriously difficult. Hopkins (2001, p.xi) wrote that “as school improvement becomes an increasingly important feature on the educational landscape so the phrase itself assumes increasing plasticity.” This is certainly the case when one scans the educational literature. What is clear in this case is that insufficient time has elapsed in the explicit introduction of a system leadership and regional network model in Victoria to generate any reliable trend data on student achievement on standardized tests or other measures. However, that does not mean that we cannot judge whether or not school improvement has occurred. If, as Hopkins (2001) suggests, we take an approach to school improvement that sees it as a journey rather than a quick-fix initiative, there is much to be said about the experience of participants in that journey.

It is clear from the documentary and interview data that DEECD senior managers intended for the new layer of system leaders, the Regional Network Leaders, to act to improve outcomes for students in schools. As the 2009 Blueprint for Victorian school education (DEECD, 2009b, p10) stated:

Regional Network Leaders play a vital role, working with schools and networks to identify and broker key improvement strategies. They help schools diagnose, analyse and implement their improvement strategies, monitor their impact and respond by suggesting new strategies where improvement is not readily apparent.

In this articulation of the role of Regional Network Leaders the intent to align system leadership roles with direct school improvement is clear. In this sense the challenge posed by the research question has been answered. But is school improvement occurring in practice? It seems that the answer is anecdotally yes. System leadership being practiced by Regional Network Leaders is causing schools to enter into a journey of school improvement in most cases. While quantitative trend data does not yet exist to support this assertion there is a strong consistency
in data drawn from research undertaken with Senior Managers and Regional Network Leaders to support this. Data drawn from principals is less consistent on this matter and to some extent this is to be expected as each principal deals with a unique context rather than a context that allows for generalization to occur. What this does suggest though, is that the impacts on school improvement have been felt variably across the system and that some principals have perceived the changes negatively.

When principals describe school improvement they describe actions that they undertake. In most instances where specific examples of school improvement were raised, principals linked these to their work within their network or with their Regional Network Leader.

Regional Network Leaders see their role as focused on school improvement and within their class were consistent in their articulation of this. Additionally there was a high degree of consistency around Regional Network Leaders describing their role as bringing about school improvement through enabling schools and networks to focus on student learning. It is clear that Regional Network Leaders are engaged in work such as capacity building, leadership coaching, promoting and utilizing student data and promoting literacy and numeracy teaching strategies as well as other work that we would see as typical of school improvement journeys.

Key senior managers within DEED have, the data strongly suggests, created the regional network structure as a means to take the system improvement agenda and priorities of the DEECD closer to the schools and to use Regional Network Leaders to ensure that priorities and programs are implemented. We also know from the evidence that this is done flexibly and in response to local needs and particularities and that, within this context, Regional Network Leaders have some autonomy.

By bringing agency to undertake system priorities closer to the school level, regional networks support schools in undertaking school improvement journeys. In this regard the networks have created new cooperative arrangements that are assisting some schools to undertake school improvement. That is not to say that competition
between schools does not exist. In fact a number of respondents from each respondent class indicated that competition between schools was not necessarily negative and that in some cases it could cause a desire for improvement.

Regional networks were formed to accelerate and systematize school improvement. In acting as system leaders, Regional Network Leaders undertake the key role in bringing this school improvement to fruition. Presently there is not quantitative data to measure the extent to which system leadership has directly resulted in school improvement. Indeed, while quantitative data would be useful in providing a lens on change over time it may never be able to prove such a connection due to the problems associated with applying quantitative measures to a complex social relationship. With that said, we can confidently say that in Victoria there is a clear narrative and widely held belief that system leadership roles can and will lead to schools undertaking the journey of school improvement within the framework of system improvements more generally.

**Further Research**

Further research is required into any measurable impacts of regional network activities on student learning or school performance data. Assigning cause and effect in this instance will prove difficult but the research might unearth evidence to support or dispute the effectiveness of this particular system leadership initiative in achieving improvement in schools and in student learning. The limited time during which the regional network initiative operated means that reliable data on this matter is unlikely to be available in this case. This research may be possible when suitable trend data is available in another cases.
Chapter 6: Conclusions

These concluding remarks are structured around six general questions and the three research questions that, in their answering, provide a summary of the work conducted and an insight for future researchers. The questions are:

General Questions:
1. What is system leadership?
2. What about Victoria brings the system into focus?
3. What leadership structure does the DEECD employ?
4. Who are system leaders in Victoria?
5. What can be learnt from Victoria about the conditions necessary for system leadership to emerge?
6. Why is the Victorian case significant internationally?

Research Questions:
1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?
2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?
3. To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

Each of these questions is answered below. This is followed by a reflection on the role of the Regional Network Leaders.

1. What is system leadership?
System leadership is the ability to generate change across a system or nested system where this involves creating, utilizing or exploiting connections within the system. This definition was initially determined from a review of relevant literature and an analysis of the weaknesses of pre-existing definitions. The research conducted here validated this definition. Significantly this definition focuses on the actions and effects of the leader rather than their position within an organization to determine their classification as a system leader.
The fundamental precondition for system leadership is the existence of a system. A system exists where there is a function or purpose for collective action, when elements are interconnected and where coherence exists to ensure that interconnected elements achieve the intended function or purpose of the system. System leaders provide interconnections and coherence and enable a system or nested part of a system to change in line with emerging system functions and purposes.

System leadership is not by definition positionally defined, however, position was a factor identified in the Victorian education system. This study found no evidence of school principals acting as system leaders in Victoria, that is not to say that this will not emerge over time through the deepening of autonomy and influence for networks. Similarly, while this research found clear evidence of DEECD senior managers and Regional Network Leaders acting as system leaders, this is not to say that all people in these types of positions have the capacity or opportunity to be a system leader.

System leadership requires a coherent system narrative. In Chapter 2, the OECD report on system leadership internationally (Pont, Nusche and Moorman, 2008) was critiqued for presenting system leadership as ‘mish-mash’ of recent leadership concepts. What is clear is that system leadership is not only about a leaders’ characteristics, but the nature and structure of the system in which they work and its narrative around system identity.

System leaders are identifiable only through examining their actions and monitoring the effect of these actions in bringing about change. They:

- Have an effect across a system or nested system
- Create or cause change
- Engage and activate others
- Connect parts of the system
2. What about Victoria brings the system into focus?

While this study has focused on uncovering present action and belief rather than delving into causality through historical research, it has nonetheless become clear that specific events transpired and ideas manifested in Victoria in such a way as to bring the system into sharp focus.

Certainly it has become clear that Victoria’s system focus and efforts in establishing system leadership were initiated and directed by DEECD Senior Managers operating with the support of the then Minister. Who these managers were, their motivations and histories are not explored in this research. However, without the actions of these people it is now clear that the system focus would not exist in the form it has. The actions taken by these Senior Managers were framed within the DEECD’s Blueprints for education and early childhood development (2003; 2008.) The Blueprints articulate the belief that schools in Victoria could and should improve and that this improvement was a necessity in preparing children for the twenty-first century. The 2008 blueprint set forth the groundwork for the creation of Regional Networks and Regional Network Leader roles. The focus on building a strong government school system as the key driver for change within the education system more broadly is outlined in the DEECD Corporate Plan (2009).

The actions that were taken by Senior Managers to establish regional networks included initial policy design, seeking funding from government and then recruiting seventy individuals who would become Regional Network Leaders. Recruitment was followed by extensive induction and professional development of the new Regional Network Leaders with a particular focus on training them in managing school improvement from the classroom up. With Harvard’s Professor Richard Elmore the Regional Network Leaders engaged in Instructional Rounds (Elmore, City, Fiarman and Teitel, 2009.) to uncover classroom practice. The training of the new leaders was extensive and contributed to the very strong and palpable alignment between these leaders and Senior Managers in terms of pursuing priorities for change and improvement.
The extraordinary alignment between leaders in the system and the consistency with which leaders from the Secretary to school principals expressed consistent ideas and views is evident in the data and is undoubtedly a hallmark of what happened in Victoria to bring the system into focus.

Ideological factors, while not described by any of the respondents, certainly contributed to the DEECD’s focus on the system. The system focus that existed in Victoria’s policy presented a challenge to unfettered or unearned principal autonomy and to the idea that cooperation between schools harms productivity.

The strengthening of the system focus in Victoria occurred with some reduction in principal autonomy. This has occurred in relation to the creation of shared network Annual Implementation Plans that focused on common areas for improvement, noting here though that these have not supplanted schools’ individualized Annual Implementation Plans. However, this loss of autonomy was minor and in fact there is evidence that principals could opt-out of participation in network activities. Principals retained control over their staffing, budgets, curriculum and pedagogical decisions. In this sense the shifts in the realm of principal autonomy were in the vision rather than the meat of the principal role.

Victoria has posed a challenge to the idea that competition between schools is a more effective lever for improvement than cooperation. This supports recent findings from the Grattan Institute where Jensen, Weidmann and Farmer (2013, p35) indicate that:

> By increasing competition, government policies have increased the effectiveness of many sectors of the economy. But school education is not one of them. The impact of interventions to increase school competition has been marginal, at best.

Most interestingly, DEECD initiated a cooperative framework without also changing the financial and structural arrangements that caused competition to emerge between schools under previous governments. That is, there was no challenge to the
notion of parental choice (students can enroll in a non-local school) and there was no change to funding schools primarily on a price-per-student formula. This means that emerging cooperative relationships had to be formed between schools competing for enrolments. Certainly there is evidence that for some principals and schools competition was a motivating factor in limiting engagement with networks. However, in the majority of instances schools and principals engaged in cooperative relationships with neighboring schools. This speaks of a strong moral imperative backed by an effective program of culture shifting.

3. **What leadership structure does the DEECD employ?**
The DEECD’s structure is hierarchical with principals acting as front-line leaders and Regional Network Leaders acting as intermediary leaders between schools and senior management based leaders. There is no evidence of direct upward communication from the principal level to that of the Senior Managers. There is also no evidence of Regional Network Leaders being able to directly influence Senior Managers’ policy decisions. Schools operate in Regions with regional offices that house the Regional Network Leaders and a variety of support services for schools. These regional offices are led by senior managers called Regional Directors.

![Figure 6.1 Simplified DEECD hierarchy for 2012](image)
4. **Who are system leaders in Victoria?**

The research undertaken here has demonstrated that Senior Managers within DEECD who were able to work through Regional Network Leaders to impact on schools were acting as system leaders. In turn, Regional Network Leaders were able to act as system leaders within the nested system of their network and on occasion more broadly. There was no evidence of principals acting as system leaders.

5. **What can be learnt from Victoria about the conditions necessary for system leadership to emerge?**

Critical to the emergence of system leadership in Victoria has been an explicit discussion of and promotion of the system. A clear position has been stated by the DEECD since the first Blueprint (2003) that improving one school or one area is insufficient, and that if education is to serve its social and economic purposes then system improvement is *where it’s at*. Bringing excellent educational practice to scale across a system requires the full effort and focus of all elements of the system. The two key questions for system leaders in their work are firstly, how is this impacting across the system? And secondly, how is this impacting on student outcomes?

It is evident that the DEECD has produced a coherent narrative around systemness and around change. This narrative has been produced over nearly a decade and resounds in the evidence gathered from all leadership classes within the system. The clarity of narrative in Victoria has assisted system leaders, as their work requires other people within the system to be able to change and who see change as purposeful. The strength of alignment in Victoria is clear.

For system leadership to emerge, leaders must be purposefully interconnected and have the power, opportunity or influence to bring about change through these interconnections.

System leadership and competition between elements in a system are not necessarily mutually exclusive. However, competition has to be balanced with
alignment to system priorities and a strong moral purpose that values and promotes improvement as a collective effort.

Cooperative arrangements between elements of the system, such as the creation of networks, generate interconnections within the system and make the enacting of system leadership more likely. The challenge is to leverage these interconnections to make change occur and to support system elements in entering into an improvement journey that is aligned with the system priorities.

6. Why is the Victorian case significant internationally?
Victoria is a case of international significance as there is clear evidence of system leadership in operation. Further, the Victorian system provides insights into combining a parental choice and a highly devolved model with strong within-system cooperation and shared responsibility. Victoria has witnessed the creation of cooperative functions within a system that is also structured to support competitive improvement.

Victoria has established heterarchical sharing and organization through networks at local levels as a means to promote system improvement while retaining its top-down hierarchy in terms of policy transfer. This has particular relevance for the study of public policy and the economic rationality and utility of cooperation. Victoria presents a challenge to the economic idea that collectives require privatization in order to be rational.

Significantly, Victoria has developed a model for policy delivery within education where network and lateral organization has been used to deliver local control and decision making that simultaneously ensures the delivery of system priorities. This has assisted the growth of schools and networks as responsive public institutions that can adapt policy to local environments while maintaining alignment to the system.
Research Questions:

1. To what extent is system leadership a feature of the Victorian government education system and, if present, how is it manifested?

System leadership is established to different degrees at different levels of the DEECD hierarchy as discussed above (general question 4). System leadership was explicitly part of the DEECD’s reform narrative during the period of the study and this was understood throughout the highly aligned leadership structure. System leadership is manifested in the work of senior managers and Regional Network Leaders where they create connections within the system, primarily through networks, and to leverage these connections in order to advance DEECD policy priorities.

2. What are the operational relationships between leaders in the system and are these supporting the policy priorities of the DEECD?

Operational relationships in the DEECD are hierarchically framed with vertical connections between principals and Regional Network Leaders, and between Regional Network Leaders and senior managers. There was no evidence of persisting relationships between principals and senior managers.

Communication of policy direction is unidirectional and downward focused with this creating resentment or frustration for some principals. There was no evidence of pressure or ideas being exerted upwards.

The hierarchies and communication systems within the DEECD are likely to be the cause of principals not exhibiting system leadership as they are not able to create change across the system or to leverage interconnections in the system to the same extent as higher ranked leaders.

The research found that networks were creating new operational relationships between principals but that these principals were not exhibiting system leadership.
The operational relationships between principals generally act to aid cooperation and the creations of system focus – placing the system first.

Relationships between Regional Network Leaders and senior managers were hierarchically framed but Regional Network Leaders, nearly uniformly, expressed a strong alignment and support for the objectives and practices of their senior managers.

Operational relationships identified in this research are assisting the DEECD to implement and drive policy initiatives.

3. To what extent is system leadership leading to school improvement?

There is no quantifiable evidence of system leadership leading to school improvement. There is however a clear indication that the system leadership evident in Victoria is enabling the DEECD to more effectively implement policy aimed at school improvement and that networks are creating a connecting, accountability and leveraging point for the DEECD to do this. By bringing agency closer to schools, newly established networks support schools in undertaking school improvement journeys.

**Reflection on the role of Regional Network Leaders**

This research project has uncovered evidence that Regional Networks established in 2008 have had a significant and apparently widely understood effect on system leadership across the jurisdiction.

It could be asserted that the Regional Network Leaders initiative is an indicator of changes in the way our politics, policy-making and organisations are formed and led. Writers such as Benkler (2005, 2006) and Bentley (2009) indicate that our economic and social systems are undergoing transformations in response to changes in the ways we communicate and cooperate. Bentley (2009, p2) describes this as “a profound shift in the organisation of work and learning which has been
gathering force for a generation.” In this context the initiative is an indicator of new structures of leadership in public systems that might emerge in response to new economic and political discourses and that might manifest through governance and leadership that is geared toward restructuring public organizations away from prescription and toward adaptive practices.

Importantly, the Regional Network Leader initiative represents a reformist approach to restructuring the leadership of systems, emerging as it does from within the system itself rather than in radical contradistinction. This in itself is indicative of the shifting sands of the political economy in which we find ourselves at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Changes in the way our society functions perhaps inhere that the neo-conservative ideologies that predominated in the 1980s and 1990s are increasingly open to being militated by radical systems of social organization emerging from within the system itself.

We can see the regional networks initiative and other developments in system leadership as an example of ‘heterarchy’, which is purposeful horizontal organization. Jessop (2002) explored the idea that heterarchical organisations emerge in response to the problems emerging in the ‘new’ economy that cannot be managed by top-down mandate or market forces. Jessop contends that these problems have shifted the focus of policy makers onto new modes of coordination for the state. In this context, Jessop (2002, p237) would see the initiative as evidence of “the state’s increasing interest in heterarchy’s potential for enhancing its capacity to secure political objectives by sharing power with forces beyond it and / or delegating responsibilities for specific objectives to partnerships” or other heterarchical structures. This implies new network arrangements act as a tool of state management rather than a mechanism by which the state is undermined.

Regional Network Leaders operated within an organization geared to top-down rather than centre-out and bottom-up approaches to the leadership of education. The initiative presents as an opportunity, not yet realized, for heterarchical organization with greater autonomy, self-direction and peer cooperation at local levels but also strengthened supports for policy objectives of government. This
balance between top-down / centre-out and bottom-up approaches is, according to Fullan in *Leadership and Sustainability* (2005), entirely necessary. For, as Fullan contends (2005, p84), networks are good at sharing ideas and capacity building, but they are not “coherence-makers.” For coherence Fullan looks outside of local networks to what Pierre Bourdieu would describe as the ‘field’ of political power. However, unlike Fullan, Bordieu (1996, p386) aligns the growth of “autonomous fields” with an active and intentional diversification of the field of power, much as Jessop (2002, p237) argued that the State intentionally devolves power to heterarchies in order to better achieve their objectives. More recently Bentley (2009) and Benkler (2006) have indicated that *coherence* in the ‘new’ economy can, and perhaps must, come from ‘outsiders’.

Within this context, research into the concept of ‘system leadership’ and the RNL initiative in particular enables us to examine how public systems might evolve, adapt or revolutionise their organisations.

**Recommendations**

1. The following factors are likely to assist education systems in developing robust system leadership across the system:
   - A coherent system narrative where actors in the system understand the existence of the system, their connection to the system and the function and purpose of the system
   - A leadership development framework and capacity building
   - Purposeful cooperative structures to facilitate interconnections between schools and leaders to undertake or achieve common system functions or purposes
   - Interconnective leadership roles that provide opportunity for bottom up and top down communications
   - Policy by network approaches

2. For school principals to be able to act as system leaders would require principals to be able to effect change beyond their school and this will require them to have
a means to influence or create policy or to lead initiatives above the level of the individual school. Policy by network approaches might assist this.

The creation of school networks is a mechanism to enable leading principals to have reach and influence beyond their school. This requires networks to develop and to mature into high trust, high internal accountability and highly expert entities that can respond to local needs and create change in the system as a whole. It also requires the bureaucracy to continue to move away from command and control methods of operation and towards more adaptable frameworks.

Post-Script (Where Victoria is at in 2013).
2010 saw a change in government in Victoria. The interviews conducted for this research occurred prior to the change.

In June 2012 the DEECD released a discussion paper on future directions for school leadership and the teaching profession that made many references to the system but no references, direct or indirect through implied actions, to system leadership as it has been described in this research (DEECD, 2012).

In the 2013-2014 Budget Overview the new government framed changes to education expenditure around “… focusing on empowering school leaders and teachers by devolving more decision making to principals and school communities” (Department of Treasury and Finance, 2013, p13). In part this involved the cutting of the Regional Network Leaders as a role within the DEECD leadership framework. Regional Network Leader roles ceased on July 1st 2012 (Dixon, 2012, no page). Networks notionally continue to exist although it is in the remit of the schools to organize them (Dixon, 2012, no page). Future researchers may be able to examine the costs and benefits of this change in the light of their research.

In the absence of a fixed mechanism to enable purposeful interconnection between elements in the system, Victoria’s education system may see a greater centralization
and an increase in command and control organization. If this occurs this would possibly disempower principals at the local and collective level while also potentially weakening the effectiveness of the delivery of government policy.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questions
(See page 147 and earlier for notes on the use of these questions.)

Senior Managers (DEECD):

1. Conceptually, what is your understanding of what system leadership is?
2. Presently, how is system leadership manifested in Victoria? Who are Victoria’s system leaders?
3. What are the main factors or forces that impact upon strategic planning for the system?
4. To what extent, and in what areas, would you characterize your own work as system leadership?
5. On a day-to-day level, in your experience, what is the work of RNLs?
6. What roles do Regional Network Leaders (RNLs) undertake to address the corporate priorities and strategies of the DEECD?
7. Can you describe the effectiveness of the implementation of the RNL initiative including the effect of any media coverage or local particularities?
8. How does the DEECD build the capacity of educators and both generate and share knowledge?
9. What do effective leaders do to bring about change across a system or across a number of schools?
10. What factors assist or hinder schools working together to improve educational outcomes?
11. Can you describe how a regional network you know operates to improve student outcomes across a number of schools or the system?
12. To what extent can networks flexibly adapt DEECD directives or policies to suit local scenarios?
13. If leadership can be learned, what is a curriculum for system leadership?

Regional Network Leaders:

1. What role do Regional Network Leaders (RNLs) undertake for the DEECD?
2. Day to day what is the work of RNLs?
3. Can you describe the effectiveness of the implementation of the RNL initiative in your region including the effect of any media coverage or local particularities?
4. How have you identified the educational agenda for your network and how will you build the capacity of educators and both generate and share knowledge?

5. What are the main factors or forces that impact upon your strategic planning for the network?

6. What does the term “System Leadership” refer to in Victoria?

7. What do effective leaders do to bring about change across a system or across a number of schools?

8. What factors assist or hinder schools working together to improve educational outcomes?

9. To what extent, and in what areas, would you characterize your work as system leadership?

10. Can you describe how your network, or one you know, operates to improve student outcomes across a number of schools or the system?

11. To what extent can you and your network flexibly adapt DEECD directives or policies to suit local scenarios?

12. In what areas do you and your network exercise autonomy of decision-making?

Principals:

1. What does the term “System Leadership” refer to in Victoria?

2. Who are the system leaders?

3. What do effective leaders do to bring about change across a system or across a number of schools?

4. What factors assist or hinder schools working together to improve educational outcomes?

5. To what extent, and in what areas, would you characterize your work as system leadership?

6. What are the main factors or forces that impact upon your strategic planning for the school?

7. Can you describe how your network operates to improve student outcomes across a number of schools or the system?

8. What is the work or the role of the Regional Network Leaders (RNLs) in Victoria?

The following tables express the relationship between the questions that were determined prior to fieldwork posed in interview and the research questions.

- RQ refers to the research question. These are listed above under the heading “Research Questions.”
• Q refers to the specific interview questions for the listed class of respondent. These are listed above under the sub-heading ‘Interview questions by subgroup (class) investigated’.

• Where a box is ‘ticked’ (✓) this indicates that responses to the interview question (Q) address the research question (RQ).

**Table A.1.1 Interview questions and research questions #1**

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<th>Q2</th>
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* See explanation under the sub-heading “Testing assumptions implicit in the research” – Question 1 was posed to all Senior Managers interviewed while Question 13 was posed to two senior managers with specific responsibilities for determining the strategic leadership development framework of the DEECD. These were used, alongside preliminary fieldwork that does not feature in the data, as a test of two assumptions implicit in the development of the research.

**Table A.1.2 Interview questions and research questions #2**

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**Table A.1.3 Interview questions and research questions #3**

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Appendix 2: Extended Discussion From Meta-Narrative #1

New Ideologies: Knowledge Nationalism

(This appendix expands on points made on page 44 that are relevant to changes in the economic imperatives foundational to the social construction of education systems.)

The premise underpinning many theories that seek to explain the existence of a knowledge economy within economic globalization, is that advanced economies can ‘off-shore’ their manufacturing and industry and become, globally, specialist in knowledge. The gradual (or rapid depending on historical reference point), relocation of manufacturing and industry away from Western nations is clearly evident. Corbett (2004) and Farrell (2004) illustrated the huge growth that has occurred in recent decades in both outsourcing (a contract with a supplier to provide products or services to a company that had previously been produced in-house) and off-shoring of production. Our, particular focus here is off-shoring which might also be described as international outsourcing, the key driver of which is the availability of cheaper labour outside the sourcing country (Farrell, 2004).

The following graph from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicates total employment by sector in Australia between 1984 and 2009 (ABS, 2010).
The number of manufacturing employees has remained relatively static over this period but as a proportion of all employed people and in comparison to increases in employment in other sectors manufacturing employment is clearly in malaise.

A similar pattern is discernible in the United States over the same period.
The graph above represents data from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). While the composition of the industry categorizations differ between the ABS and the BLS we can broadly correlate “manufacturing” with “production occupations.” Like Australian data for the same period there is an apparent stagnation in manufacturing employment.

The trend of comparatively declining manufacturing industry is apparent in many developed nations, although it is important to note the relatively modest decline in some nations such as Germany between 1984 and 2004 in comparison to the more rapid declines in Sweden and the United Kingdom over the same period. The following table draws data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2005, p28) to indicate the change in manufacturing employment in selected nations between the years 1974, 1984 and 2004.

Table A.2.1 Manufacturing Employment in Selected Nations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Japan</th>
<th>France</th>
<th>Germany</th>
<th>Italy</th>
<th>Netherlands</th>
<th>Sweden</th>
<th>United Kingdom</th>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>1,978</td>
<td>14,250</td>
<td>5,953</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>5,420</td>
<td>1,287</td>
<td>1,120</td>
<td>8,030</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>14,330</td>
<td>4,997</td>
<td>8,285</td>
<td>4,876</td>
<td>1,084</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>5,916</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>2,283</td>
<td>11,750</td>
<td>3,971</td>
<td>8,249</td>
<td>4,863</td>
<td>1,116</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>4,268</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The marked decline in the United Kingdom between 1974 and 2004 represents
some 3.76 million jobs. Only Canada (1984 - 2004) and the Netherlands (1984 - 2002) showed an increase in manufacturing employees (363,000 and 32,000 respectively).

This trend of relative decline of manufacturing in the west, unsurprisingly, preempted the more recent clamors for the urgency of Western nations to develop their knowledge economy. Attacks from the left saw in globalization a monster set to consume us all:

... a sinister edge to the process of globalization has emerged on the horizon, alarmingly conspicuous and prevalent. It is becoming increasingly clear that globalization does indeed create opportunities for business, but at a cost. This cost is a process of international rationalization which is currently ravaging the labour market with grave consequences. Globalisation is not what is once seemed to be. (Bloch, 1998, p13)

But in the mediocre world of mass-media and politics the ‘us’ referred to most frequently implies the ‘us’ that is Western or the ‘us’ that is ‘developed’ and requires protection from the ‘other’. From this we see the political and social context for the reconceptualisation of the Western economy as a knowledge economy. And given that, as Kress (1996) indicates, education is often the preserve of the State, the knowledge economy is ubiquitously linked to the strength of the national economy.

However, evidence underpinning the notion that Western nations can become specialists in knowledge production and utilization is less apparent. Any assumption that the West can become specialist in knowledge production and utilization is problematic on a practical level. Consider; what is the infrastructure that is required for knowledge production? Is the utilization of knowledge geographically relative? Where an industrial or resources based economy may prosper on the existence of infrastructure or natural assets in a specific location, knowledge is surely transportable and transposable and does not of necessity emerge in response to national boundaries. Assumptions that knowledge can be geographically defined as a Western specialty denigrates the potential – now being realized – for nations like
China and India to produce large numbers of knowledge workers, let alone the potential for knowledge capital to move (Friedberg, 2007, p35). Education is the principal mechanism through which a Western national government might attempt to develop or contain knowledge, that is, either to intervene in its educational practice to such an extent as to attempt to guarantee that the product of their education system will exceed that of anywhere else in the world, or, to act to limit the access to education elsewhere.

Globalisation with its reduction of trade barriers has certainly resulted in some major economic, social and political changes. These changes have in turn spurred the emergence of new ideologies that are identifiable within some education theory. I am terming this new ideology ‘Knowledge Nationalism’ and recognizing that alongside this ideology of knowledge nationalism come some tendencies toward a ‘knowledge imperialism’.

Almost universally in the developed world, primary and secondary level education is the preserve of nations or those organisations such as churches which might be pan-national, but who nonetheless typically act in accord with nationally prescribed frameworks. Whether organized at local or national levels, primary and secondary education serves the purposes of the nation-state and is structured by the nation-state within which it exists. Where international students access government or state-run primary and secondary education in a nation where they are not a citizen, they do so to consume an education product that is developed and sold in accordance with the educational structure and organisation of the nation-state. This logic extends to schools offering the International Baccalaureate to international students where a legislative and regulatory environment has been enabled by governments to allow this. While enrolment processes and course structures at the tertiary level in many cases have been modified through the internationalization of a tertiary education market, (Altbach and Knight, 2007, p290; Enders, 2004, p361; Van Der Wende, 2001, p431) this is by no means broadly replicated at the primary or secondary level of schooling. International organisations such as the OECD and iNet which have the potential to impact upon national education systems do so only to the extent that they are utilized by the nation, they do not of themselves produce
With this in mind when we consider the focus on developing ‘knowledge economies’, we must consider the purposes for which a nation would pursue the development of a knowledge specialization. Relevant, surely then, is the question of what alternatives Western nations face when the impetus for globalization is extra-governmental and counter the primacy of the nation as an economic unit. Of great importance is the question of whether ‘knowledge work’ reduces inequality within a society or reproduces conflict between capital and labour and social inequality through economic relationships that center on knowledge production or utilisation. In these two senses, knowledge work can be articulated with notions of wealth and security for both the individual and the state. These questions focus us on the outcomes of education for those children who undertake it.

**THE FLAWS WITHIN KNOWLEDGE NATIONALISM**

Knowledge Nationalism, as I am terming it, is an ideology premised in the West on two flawed logics:

1. The first flawed logic of knowledge nationalism is one of Western superiority in knowledge production
2. The second flawed logic is that knowledge work and exploitation are discontiguous.

The economic underpinning of this ideology is expressed clearly by Rosecrance (1999) who wrote:

“Nations can transfer most of their material production thousands of miles away, centering their attention on research and development and product design at home. The result is a new productive partnership between ‘head’ nations, which design products, and ‘body’ nations which manufacture them. (Rosecrance, 1999, p.xi)
Knowledge Nationalism is, at its core, demonstrates a misunderstanding of the economics of imperialism in that, like all other aspects of economic production, knowledge can be exported. The essential factor in imperialism, from Roman times to the present, is the exportability of capital. Knowledge is one among many forms of capital. In her 2007 study into the economic effects of educated migration to the United States, Friedberg makes the following observations:

While roughly half of recent arrivals never completed high school, one in five have at least a college degree, and 8 percent have a master’s, professional, or Ph.D. degree.

A substantial share of the highly educated migrants to the U.S. come from China and India. Though only about one in 10 new arrivals is from one of these countries, they make up 28 percent of college-educated new arrivals. Almost half of these migrants arrived in the last decade, and one in four came in just the last five years.

(Friedberg, 2007, p35)

The first flaw in Knowledge Nationalism, the logic of Western superiority, is primarily epistemological and ontological and revolves around the concepts of superiority and knowledge. While the superiority of outcomes exists on standardized tests such as PISA this does not, of itself, assert any Western superiority in the ability to produce knowledge. The extent to which nations can manufacture knowledge through education and then control or change the quality of knowledge or the volume of knowledge is unclear and not necessarily indicated by improved PISA scores. Knowledge nationalism, in this sense, is based on a supposition that the State can structure knowledge production and that knowledge is controllable in the same way that information production is controllable. Knowledge and information, and knowledge production and information production are qualitatively different. This is evident in the complexity of knowledge construction systems such as the i-System proposed in 2003 by Ma and Nakamori in the field of mathematics, data and game theory. To create knowledge, Ma and Nakamori suggest, five elements are necessary: Intervention (or the drive of the
creator to solve problems), Intelligence (meaning here existing proofs or scientific knowledge), Involvement (human actors acting with a purpose), Imagination, and Integration (using knowledge from within the system) (Ma and Nakamori, 2003).

The advent of the Internet and improved communications technologies, which have been accessed at far greater rates in the West, has made information commodities more readily accessible and tradable but to draw a link between this and knowledge is problematic. Knowledge is cultural and contextual and is learned, thus, knowledge and education are not synonymous just as knowledge and information are not synonymous.

Sir Kenneth Robinson, in an interview in 2009 aptly demonstrated that knowledge is more than information in that, at a basic level, it includes creativity and skills that are not necessarily part of a curriculum that is tested through standardized tests or necessarily taught in formal education:

... the assumption is we've got to keep them at the program, they've got to do conventional academic work, they've got to go to a good university, they've got to do a law degree. And presumably the assumption is once we've all got law degrees, the whole world will get back on its axis. But the truth is, people's lives are not linear like that. They develop much more organically ... [At] the heart of our education systems, of course we need high standards, of course we need to cover common ground, but instead of promoting conformity, we should be promoting diversity of talent. (Robinson. 2009. no page)

Undoubtedly some forms of knowledge are privileged in education systems and it is this regard that Robinson (2009), Alexander (2001) and others attempt to influence discussion as to the content of education. A curriculum for knowledge is, however, impossible to define.

The second flawed logic of Knowledge Nationalism is that work involving knowledge production or utilization and exploitation are seen to be discontiguous.
Brown and Lauder (2006), like Guile (2006), emphasize that the changes to the global economy described by Rosecrance (1999) and others have changed the appearance but not the fundamental labour relations and realities of capitalism in the twenty-first century. In a profound challenge to Knowledge Nationalism, they go so far as to question the possibility for investment in education, presently, to improve economic outcomes for all sectors of society: “further investment in human capital will not narrow inequalities” (Brown and Lauder, 2006, p46).

The ideology of Knowledge Nationalism articulates national wealth and security to the existence of highly educated workers fulfilling roles that require skills and expertise that can only be gained through education. However, driving an expansion of education without the pre-existence of high-value jobs results in what has been termed “credential inflation” (Brown, 2003; Collins, 1981 and 2002). Credential inflation results in the appearance of great progress in education through the sheer numbers of high-school graduates or degrees awarded without the increase in credentials necessarily addressing the economic progress that investment in education intended to advance. A credential has value because it gives evidence of both socialization and of individual achievement. The credential purports to illuminate the performance of the individual relative to their peers. It is on this basis that credentials become necessary preconditions of employment. Credential inflation then occurs when the supply of credentials outstrips the supply of high-value job opportunities. Even given that education is certainly an absolute good, there is also a relational aspect to education in the “differential over the educational attainment of others.” (Brown, 2006, p383) Access to credentials then becomes a source of competition to which those with financial and other resources can dedicate spending. Brown (2006, p395) writes:

\[ \text{... the increasing number of credentials in circulation is seen to reflect a widening of access and opportunities. Governments are reluctant to admit that this has led to a growth in wasteful competition and a weakening of the opportunity to bargain, as they persist with slogans such as ‘learning is earning’ and the ‘opportunity society’.} \]
The problem here is not with education as a social good that should be provided by a nation to all, but rather in the marketisation of that education which increases inequality and limits opportunity. This acts counter to the supposed underpinnings of Knowledge Nationalism which is the strengthening of the knowledge base of the nation in order to compete economically in the absence of manufacturing industry. This marketisation is driven by many complex factors including the actions of schools, parents and other social forces. The result is that the ideological discourse of Knowledge Nationalism - the articulation of national interest with improved education – contributes to the existence of credential inflation.

Recognising the risks of credential inflation is fundamental to understanding the aforementioned flaw in the logic of Knowledge Nationalism, that knowledge production or utilization and exploitation are discontiguous. The representation of ‘new economies’, ‘post-capitalist’ and ‘knowledge economies’ would paint an image of a post industrial world in which conflict between capital and labour, between haves and have-nots, can be eliminated in a highly educated, professionally oriented and intellectually driven polity. To follow this to its logical conclusions (presupposing the possibility of a nation without internal positional conflict and competition for access to education that results in degrees of exclusion) requires the off-shoring of manual labour and industrial conflict and the active repression of knowledge development outside of the ‘knowledge nations’.

Economically, knowledge (and here I use the term broadly to include skills, dispositions and so on) within the global economy is a capital commodity and education is a means of increasing the value of an individual's knowledge capital. Further, knowledge capital is tradeable across national boundaries (Friedberg, 2007) and in order to retain the value of that knowledge capital a nation requires competitive advantages other than the quality, depth or cost of its education system.

The ideological filter through which we apprehend the realities of globalization would have us believe that knowledge work and wealth advancement in the West are synonymous; that it is possible for nation states to be competitive in terms of knowledge; and that our economies have fundamentally changed social
relationships in the West. All this points to the existence of “knowledge nationalism” as a discrete ideological position. Thus, when in 2004 the then UK Chancellor of the Exchequer and later Prime Minister Gordon Brown said; "If we are to succeed in a world where offshoring can be an opportunity ... our mission [is] to make the British people the best educated, most skilled, best trained country in the world" (Brown, 2004) we can identify the link being made between nationalism and the knowledge industry as profoundly ideological. Where globalization may have acted to reduce barriers to international trade it seems it did not end competitive nationalism in the economic realm.

**Imperialism, Transportable Knowledge Capital and the Nation.**

Toffler (1990) Drucker (1993) and others who argued that knowledge, not materials and labour, is the primary unit of modern economic activity engage in an ideological discourse which is fundamentally flawed from a global perspective. If globalization has led to a redistribution of heavy industrial and manufacturing industries to the developing nations then the proportions of the global economy allocated to heavy industry and manufacturing might have changed geographic location but have not ipso-facto changed in importance. Labour and materials are as much a part of the economy as ever they were. The great advances in the internet as a repository and sales platform of information is, for example, reliant on massive resource allocation to light and heavy industry, to technical services and to manufacturing. National economies have changed, as they always have in response to any factors affecting international trade, but the global economy has not. While it was not intended to do so, Rosecrance’s metaphor of ‘head’ and ‘body’ nations demonstrates that ‘knowledge’ remains only one among many units of economic production.

The term ‘knowledge economy’ as it is described here can only be formulated from a national perspective and not a global one, as the global economy is multifarious. This national isolation of the economic activity of knowledge presents a unique problem in that it assumes that the economic unit of ‘knowledge’ can be isolated
within a limited number of national boundaries. When we hear Gordon Brown extolling virtues of off-shoring manual production and the necessity for the British economy to invest in knowledge it is not difficult to identify this assumption. A further assumption is that the isolation of knowledge production within elite nations will ensure that their relative loss of industrial and manufacturing jobs will not result in unemployment or poverty for the working class.

The ideological discourse of those advocating the virtue of knowledge as a privileged unit of production, and for national knowledge economies as a panacea for real or potential economic malaise in advanced economies, is fundamentally incompatible with the economic cause that inspired the development of the discourse in the first place, globalisation. The assumption, most notably illustrated in Rosecrance’s ‘head’ and ‘body’ metaphor, is that western-owned companies - who will ‘offshore’ manufacturing “thousands of miles away, centering their attention on research and development and product design at home” (Rosecrance, 1999, pxi) – necessarily have a commitment to the national economy of their ‘home’. This belief conveys imperialistic tendencies implicit within Knowledge Nationalism: the idea that western nations can and should maintain a competitive advantage in isolating what it is assumed are the high-wealth and low-conflict jobs within their own national boundaries. Expressed another way, this is an imperialistic slant on the idea that knowledge based economies can reach out internationally and competitively to ensure knowledge is isolated within a few national boundaries and that manual labour can be exploited at a low cost per unit in outside nations.

The most obvious flaw in this idea is that new knowledge can only be generated socially and culturally and that a State can only do this in a systematic way through education – where education is understood to be the ‘methodical socialisation’ indicated by Durkheim (1858-1917). Thus, either advanced national economies must restrain education in developing nations or out-compete them. While the West on average has a head-start in wide-spread literacy and numeracy, lower levels of poverty, higher levels of health care they also have polarization of economic outcomes for citizens. Simultaneously, the very engines of globalization (free trade and communication technologies) mean that elites in all nations can access the best
education that the world has to offer, particularly in the higher education sector. This results in the existence in all nations of knowledge rich individuals who may reside in nations outside the West where, with the ever present logic of capitalist production, their knowledge can be utilized by companies and corporations whose interests do not recognize the primacy of the nation state over the corporation. In this we see what Shorris describes as “the growing role of this internationally mobile human capital” (2007, In. Tambar, 2007, p1). Western nations are unlikely to be able to strictly retain knowledge production and utilization within national boundaries.

In fact Williams and Tilley, in a 1996 study, observed markedly different approaches to off-shoring between US and Japanese electronics firms. While the US firms maintained a mechanism of globally coordinated manufacturing through restrictions on the distribution of technology and knowledge outside of the US, Japanese firms engaged in a primarily regional ‘keiretsu’ manufacturing involving the rapid investment in technology, research and development in the off-shore sites. Williams and Tilly suggest that the reason for the difference in approach between the companies of the two nations is a historically caused division. The US manufacturers seek a high rate of return on investment whereas, according to Williams and Tilly, Japanese firms had at the time “taken a much longer view of manufacturing investment [and had] concentrated on market share” (1996, p19) rather than return on investment. The comparative success of the Japanese electronics manufacturers in the late 1990s in turn placed pressure on their anglophone competitor nations.

In 2007, Friedberg argued that in response to the risk of knowledge capital and jobs being ‘off-shored’ to non-western nations the United States needed to encourage higher numbers of skilled knowledge workers to migrate to the U.S. In essence, to maintain competitiveness and economic growth, Friedberg argued, the U.S. needed to import knowledge capital rather than restrict immigration to protect ‘knowledge jobs’:

...if the U.S. were to put tighter restrictions on the number of knowledge
workers allowed to enter the country, the jobs they currently fill would more than likely migrate to where those workers are—places like Shanghai and Bangalore (Friedberg, 2007, p36)

Indeed, evidence of the inability of western nations to constrain the prevalence of knowledge intensive and highly skilled jobs being offshored to nations with a lower cost of labour already exists (Ernst, 2002, Lacity, Willcocks and Rottman, 2008). While there have been predictable problems in these manouvers such as loss of innovative potential from ‘head-quarters’ in the higher labour cost nation (Hoecht and Trott, 2006) and additional costs in training and error in the lower labour cost nation (Shi, 2007) the potential for high-skill and knowledge intensive jobs to be off-shored has been aptly demonstrated. Indeed, the very issues identified by the authors mentioned above and others such as Hayes (2007) have resulted in more refined theories – such as ‘captive outsourcing’ (Hameri and Tunkelo, 2009, p62) – which refine the theory and practice of off-shoring knowledge labour.

Further, and most fundamentally, knowledge – as a function of social and cultural activity – can and does emerge extra to education. To contend that design, creativity, and thought in manufacturing are separable from the machining, moulding and manual components of production is reductive in the extreme. The acknowledgement that knowledge production can and does occur in relation to living and interacting in labour is evident in some feminist theory of the 1980s. Fee (1986) for example indicates that there is “no rigid boundary [that] separates the subject of knowledge (the knower) and the natural object of that knowledge” (p47). Similarly, Smith (1987) suggests that knowledge has a local character, while Harding described knowledge production as a “personal experience” (1986, p240). For Rose, knowledge production is more than personal, it is “sensuous activity” (1986, p72) that is not universal but grounded in the experience of the actor. In 2005, Abdih and Joutz, writing in a working paper for the International Monetary Fund in relation to the use of research and development (R&D) in industry, demonstrated the flaws in economic models positing that knowledge creation is linked to the creative and intellectual capital directed to R&D. For our purposes, the proposed separation of R&D and manual labour stands proxy for the artificial
boundary between education enriched knowledge capital and supposedly base labour; between creative knowledge creation and manufacturing; between ‘head’ and ‘body’ nations. They found that typical R&D based growth models are based on a function whereby the “rate of production of new knowledge depends on the amount of labour engaged in R&D and the existing stock of knowledge” (Abdih and Joutz, 2005, p3). They then point to a 1995 study to demonstrate that in the United States “the number of R&D scientists and engineers has increased sharply over the postwar period while [‘total factor productivity’] growth has been characterized by relative constancy at best” (Abdih and Joutz, 2005, p4). While these authors go on to examine the case for R&D they have also indicated that any assertion that knowledge production is divorceable from other forms of production or from the act of labour is empirically questionable. Knowledge can emerge through the process of interacting with raw materials as it does through traditional education. While it is possible to limit credentials attained through education and to limit access to education, these restrictions are unable to contain the development of knowledge.

Knowledge Nationalism, with its imperialistic tendencies in tow, is a product of advanced economies grappling with the changing face of economic activity. Presented as a profound advancement, the knowledge economy has transformed appearances but maintained the inequalities and social problems of the industrial era. Off-shoring manual production has not reduced social inequalities and as both Marginson (2004) and Levin and Xu (2005) indicate, wealth is the key determinant of access to education.
Appendix 3: 2008 DEECD Blueprint - Strategies and Actions

(This diagram relates to discussion on page 25.)

2008 DEECD Blueprint For Education and Early Childhood Development - Strategies and Actions

[Diagram showing strategies and actions]

Figure A.3.1 2008 DEECD Blueprint Strategies and Actions

(DEECD, 2008, no page).
Figure A.4.1 DEECD Organizational Chart, December 2011 (DEECD. 2011e)
Appendix 5: Gippsland Region Organisational Charts, 2011.

Figure A.5.1 Gippsland Region Organisational Chart, 2011

Figure A.5.2 Gippsland Region Regional Networks Organisational Chart, 2011

McKinsey report: Regional Network Leaders’ roles and priorities in Victoria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victory: regional network leaders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Priorities</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Monitor the performance of ~30 schools</td>
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<td>2. School improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>– 1:1 coaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Enrolling teachers on development courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Bringing in external agencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Identifying leaders and creating links for best practice within their networks. Network leaders develop a close relationship with principals and encourage them to identify and support future leaders</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Manage regional networks</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Networks are divided into smaller “priority work groups” – each focusing on a specific topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promote collaboration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Networks meet once each term for “learning events” where groups of principals can discuss experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunity to support new principals and introduce aspiring principals to the system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Network leader will occasionally take principals on a “study tour” outside their region to explore ideas from further afield</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Lead network meetings</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• Principals and network leaders assess performance data for the network and define very focused network goals (e.g. improving Year 5 and Year 7 understanding of decimal notation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Share strategies, work together, procure resources together</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Work to align network goals, school goals, and individual goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• At the school level, members of the networks will come into one another’s institutions to assist the principal in achieving their goals</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Manage principal performance and development</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>• To help them progress each principal has a performance and development plan that is designed with the help of the network leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Network leader assesses a principal’s individual needs and recommends courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• During contract-renewal period the network leader will compile notes on the principal (collated over four years) and act as his/her advocate</td>
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</table>

Figure A.6.1 McKinsey report: Regional Network Leaders’ roles and priorities in Victoria

(Barber, Clarke and Wheelan, 2010, p26)
### Appendix 7: DEECD Flagship Strategies (1,3,6,7)

#### DEECD Flagship Strategy 1

**Flagship Strategy 1: Student Learning**

- The Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority will identify and develop a broad framework of ‘essential learnings’ for all Victorian students.
- The Government will develop new curriculum and reporting guidelines to assist government schools in deciding on curriculum development, improved teaching methods, assessment and reporting.
- Improved reporting on student achievement will be provided for parents and employers through the development of defined assessment measures of student progress.
- Principles of learning and teaching from Prep to Year 12 will be developed to support teachers’ professional development and provide advice in areas such as diversity of learning and thinking styles, student–teacher relationships and productive learning experiences.
- The Government will develop a knowledge bank that documents and ensures best practice is shared across the system.

(DEECD, 2003, no page.)

#### DEECD Flagship Strategy 3

**Flagship Strategy 3: Building Leadership Capacity**

- An improved principal selection process will be developed that includes increasing principal representation on selection panels, tailoring selection criteria to reflect the school’s needs, and encouraging contact between candidates and the employing school.
- The Government will establish a mentoring program for first time principals and a coaching support program for experienced principals to develop principals’ leadership capabilities.
- The Government will introduce a ‘balanced scorecard’ approach to improve the performance management of principals. This will link principal performance assessment to overall school performance.
- The Government will implement an accelerated development program for high potential leaders. Participants will benefit from exposure to leadership responsibilities, tailored professional development, and mentoring.
- The Government will also implement a development program for high performing principals that includes tailored professional development, placements in challenging schools, and mentoring other principals and aspiring principals.
- The Government will expand local administrative bureaus for networks of small schools to help alleviate the administrative workload of small schools.

(DEECD, 2003, no page.)
DEECD Flagship Strategy 6

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<th>Flagship Strategy 6: School Improvement</th>
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<td>– The Government will implement a differential model of school review to reflect schools’ different stages of development and to better target support and assistance.</td>
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<td>– Clear and widely understood performance triggers will be developed to drive systemic intervention in under-performing schools to ensure that the best possible improvements are made and that cycles of under-performance are addressed early.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– To minimise the administrative burden on schools, a single planning and accountability document will be implemented.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– Parent, teacher and student opinion data will be provided to all schools on a consistent basis to provide insight into school performance and information to support improvement.</td>
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(DEECD, 2003, no page)

DEECD Flagship Strategy 7

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<th>Flagship Strategy 7: Leading Schools Fund</th>
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<td>– The Government will establish the Leading Schools Fund in order to drive whole school improvement. The initiative will build on the knowledge and good practice already existing in schools and provide them with the incentive and opportunity to reach beyond their current practice and performance. It will facilitate strategic partnerships and collaboration between schools so that schools can learn from each other, assist each other and strengthen the government school system.</td>
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(DEECD, 2003, no page).

Appendix 8: Example of coding.

The example below shows part of an interview transcript that was coded using NVivo as relevant to nodes ‘student learning’ and ‘data’.

![Image of a part of a transcript with codes]