Leading Schools for Innovation and Success: Five case studies of Australian principals creating innovative school cultures

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Declaration of Originality

This thesis does not contain material which has been accepted for any other degree in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by any other person, except where due reference is given on the text.

Signature: ____________________________
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Abstract

This study explores the role of five Victorian principals in developing, leading and sustaining innovative and successful government schools. It studies the leadership and management practices of the principals in five schools that are highly regarded as innovative, well-led and with excellent student outcomes and it highlights the contribution that this makes to school innovation and success.

The research uses a multiple case study approach with multiple perspective interviews, relying on qualitative methodology. At each school, perspectives about the school and the principal’s leadership were gained from individual interviews with the principal, regional network leader and school council president and group interviews with members of the leadership team, staff and parents.

The research tells the stories of school organisational culture and change and the key role of the principal in leading and managing to create an innovative and successful school. It harnesses stakeholder perspectives of the principal’s leadership and the school’s success to provide insight into school leadership within cases, and to draw attention to contrast and agreement across cases.

The emergent findings from this research demonstrate the importance of principals’ life stories in defining their leadership style and values. The innovative principals display five common leader perspectives and demonstrate associated key behaviours which characterise their leadership and underpin their school’s success. In addition, the innovative schools share common characteristics of success. A model for innovative leadership was developed that provides a map of reciprocal influence for principal leadership and school innovation and success, incorporating life stories, five leadership perspectives and associated behaviours and elements of school success.

Understanding what works in successful and innovative schools is the first step in developing the connections required to move what is happening in a few schools at the innovative edges, to the centre where most schools can share and learn from the practice of others. This research demystifies innovative leadership, showing that some principals are being very successful at establishing innovative cultures and this includes behaviours that can be learned by others aspiring to innovative and successful school leadership.
CHAPTER 1.  INTRODUCTION

This doctoral thesis presents the findings from multiple-perspective case studies of five schools in Victoria, Australia with a focus on exploring principal leadership and school innovation and success. The study provides new insight into the role of principals’ life stories in shaping their leadership values and characteristics. It highlights the shared perspectives and associated behaviours of principals of innovative and successful schools and argues that these capabilities can be understood, learned and applied by others engaged in school leadership.

This introductory section provides an overview of the research questions, the research methodology used, the purpose of the study and its contribution to future studies of school leadership, innovation and success.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The overarching aim of the research is to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of contemporary school leadership.

This research aims to understand how innovative and successful schools are led and to determine to what extent specific leadership behaviours and/or practices contribute to developing and maintaining innovative school cultures.

1.2 Background Overview

In this 21st century, schools and education systems continue to be challenged by the rate and intensity of change, largely driven by technology and its impact on the learning environment. Today’s principals are expected to meet the increasing expectations of students, families, communities and governments for the provision of relevant and engaging learning experiences that are able to produce knowledge and skills at an improved level for all students. Our education system was never designed to deliver the results which are now needed to equip students for their future, or even today.

The politically driven, constant analysis and comparison of schools and education systems places a lens upon the requirement for focussed, clear school leadership, this
factor being second only to teacher quality in its capacity to impact upon student learning results. “Effective school leaders are key to large scale sustainable education reform” (Fullan, 2002: 16).

1.3 Contribution of the Study

The principal is the key leadership role in schools and their influence is a significant contributing factor to school success, or otherwise. Better understanding the features of schools that are regarded as innovative and successful, and the characteristics and behaviours of their leaders is the primary focus of this work.

Schools are being challenged to question the basic premise of what it looks like to effectively lead, teach and learn. As schools struggle to understand and adapt to a changing paradigm, this research aims to contribute to the knowledge and growth of principals, schools and education systems in developing innovative and successful leaders, schools and systems that are better prepared to respond to the changing dynamics of 21st century schools and the future needs of students.

This work has implications for professional learning programs for school leaders, principal mentoring and coaching programs and school improvement processes including school renewal, principal appraisal and principal selection.

1.4 The Research

The main research question is: In schools that are regarded as innovative, well-led and which have excellent student outcomes, what leadership and management practices of principals promote a culture of innovation?

Six sub questions scaffold the main question:

1. What are the contexts and cultures of innovative schools?

2. Are innovative schools seen as successful schools by stakeholder groups in each school?

3. What are the specific behaviours, skills, knowledge and dispositions of principals that create innovative school cultures?

4. From a life history perspective, what influences have shaped the work of these principals?
5. What other factors might have helped to create innovative school cultures?

6. Do stakeholders see their school’s success and innovative culture as sustainable beyond the leadership of the current principal?

The research examined two secondary and three primary schools, in the Victorian government Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD). It drew responses from a range of people who were stakeholders in the success of the school. The researcher conducted six interviews with individuals or sample groups in each school: the principal, staff group (teachers), leadership team (assistant principals and leading teachers), parent group (parents of children currently attending the school), school council president (voted into position annually by the school council) and regional network leader (DEECD line manager for the school and the principal).

1.5 Methodology Overview

The five schools were recommended to the researcher by senior staff at the Education Policy, Research and Innovations Branch of DEECD as being innovative, well-led and successful. The researcher visited each of the schools, spoke with the principal and undertook a school tour prior to selection for the study and subsequent interviews.

A broad qualitative methodology was applied using a multiple case study approach with individual interviews with the principal, regional network leader and school council president and group interviews with the leadership team, staff and parents. This collection of multiple perspectives provided the primary source of raw data. Semi-structured interviews encouraged the exploration and documentation of the views of individuals and groups towards the principal and the school. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and summarised in detail. Coding and categorising were applied to organise and reduce the data and primarily inductive reasoning was used to develop emergent theory and gain understanding.

1.6 The Research Findings

In documenting the research findings, pseudonyms were used for the names of the five schools and each of the principals. Of the five schools studied, one school was found not to be working to the same level of innovation as the remaining four schools. After extensive consideration by the researcher, bound by the ethical principle to do no unwarranted harm to the school or its research participants, it was decided to profile this school only to a level required to illustrate a contrast in the research findings. In
this way, the study of this case respects the school’s input, adding to the wider body of knowledge and understanding of contemporary school leadership, while taking additional precaution to do no harm to participants and to remove any potential for unintentional identity of the case.
2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the current literature on school leadership, school improvement, innovation and success. It provides a theoretical framework for the study and identifies the potential of this research in furthering knowledge on the subject. The literature review is framed by the following areas which provide the lens for understanding the topic and the sections for discussion:

1. Current Contexts in Education
2. Creativity and Innovation
3. Organisational Culture
4. Transforming Schools
5. Successful School Leadership
6. A New Paradigm in Schools

2.2 Current Contexts in Education

This section explores the current contexts, priorities and challenges concerning schools, education systems and society at the time of this study.

2.2.1 Schools Today

Today’s schools are operating in a dynamic environment of rapid social change, increasingly assertive education policies and increased globalisation, fuelled by the advancement of technology. Many commentators (Beare, 2006; Caldwell, 2011; Christensen, Horn & Johnson, 2008; Leadbeater & Wong, 2010; Pink, 2006; Sorman-Nillson, 2009; Zhao, 2013) emphasise a long overdue need for the revitalisation of education systems away from bureaucratic industrial models, to a more personalised, flexible model of schooling, more suited to the post industrial age. Schools are central to the transformation from an industrial to a knowledge based society, but only if they can become dynamic and responsive to society’s needs, rather than more of the same.
The schooling system created in the 19th century industrial revolution was required to sort the workforce for the industrial age with rigid class boundaries requiring mass skill acquisition, order, deference and compliance. This left little room for creativity, flexibility, independent values, aspirations, thought or the opportunity for collaborative effort. Zhao (2013: 5) highlights the dilemma:

… the employment orientated paradigm is about reducing human diversity into a few desirable skills. When executed well, this paradigm is effective in producing people with similar skills and conformity, indicated by test scores or academic performance. Virtually all schools in today’s world operate under this paradigm.

This model of schooling has been very successful in Western countries and has proven extremely resistant to change. With historical resistance, schools could have been thought to be distant and unaffected by societal trends, but this is increasingly untrue. Lenders and King (2013: 2) explain, “…schools are social constructs designed to serve the needs and aspirations of society and as such are deeply influenced by the social, political and economic context in which they operate.”

Education systems that were developed more than a century ago are increasingly being accused of failing today. Raised expectations of parents and communities for schools to provide skills that prepare students for new ways of learning and working, guarantee all students success and open doors to heightened levels of transparency, mean traditional ways of schooling are no longer meeting expectations. Educators face pressure for high levels of accountability, leading to concerns of unfilled principal vacancies and churn rates of 50% of new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years (Price, 2015: 3).

Zhao (2013: 3) explains the problem:

Today’s education system is inadequate for preparing tomorrow’s citizens. That is the consensus across the world. International organisations, national and local governments, educational institutions, business enterprises and the public all over the world have put forth tremendous efforts with unprecedented courage, to improve education for their children.

Considerable pressure has been placed upon schools to do better and for whole systems to improve, but how to do this is far from clear. Continued government pressure for increased student attendance and longer years at school do not seem to be achieving the desired results. “There is a crisis in education in many nations around the world. Nations that have been proud of their systems of education for more than a century are now struggling to keep pace,” and the performance between low and high achieving students is widening. (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013: 1). In these changing times,
one thing appears certain, “... the era of the large, slow moving, steady, respected, bureaucratic public services, however good by earlier standards is over” (Barber, 2004: 115).

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), in what they define as the ‘Fourth Age’, describe the 21st century as one of profound social, economic, political and cultural change. This is largely characterised by “what’s out there, is now in here,” alluding to the pressures and expectations on schools from parents, school communities and governments. There exists a blur between schools and the outside world. Istance and Kobayashi (2003: 12) concur, stating that some of the main features of this new world order impacting on schools are “globalisation, immigration, the rise of individualism, ICT, the influence of market values and high levels of female employment.” Sorman-Nillson (2009) believes that the blur between outside and inside also applies to business organisations, due to the plethora of opportunities that consumers now have to be “co-producers and co-inventors”. Technology has opened doors for consumers to give feedback and suggest improvements and “These consumers now have whole RnD (research and development) labs inside their business brains” (Sorman-Nillson, 2009: 283).

Drucker’s (1993: 1) reflections over a decade earlier remain pertinent:

... every few hundred years ... there occurs a sharp transformation. We cross a divide itself ... Its world view, its basic values, its social and political structure, its arts, its key institutions. Fifty years later there is a new world. And the people born then cannot even imagine the world in which their grandparents lived and into which their own parents were born.

Zbar (2014: 2) states this timeline is now wrong, “... paradigm shifts of this sort no longer take hundreds of years, and it is our own children who cannot conceive of the world into which we were born.” The pace is fast and requires new mindsets (Christiansen et al., 2008; Leadbeater & Wong, 2010; Pink, 2006; Sorman-Nillson, 2009; Zhao, 2013) and if society and business is struggling to keep up, then none will be more so than government schools, where change has historically been slow and considered, constrained by risk averse community and government expectations.

Hannon (2014: 4) documents the inadequacy of the current education model:

- The system has few supporters other than its suppliers, and its users i.e. learners, are its greatest critic
- Learning outcomes are ‘deeply unimpressive’
• Inequality is rising rather than diminishing
• More is being spent for little improvement which is unsustainable
• A continuing disconnect between education systems and society
• The explosion of digital learning has created new opportunities and
• Schools must compete to remain viable.

Sorman-Nillson (2009: 30) summarises the dilemma described by others (Beare, 2006; Caldwell, 2011; Caldwell & Spinks, 2013; Christiansen et al., 2008; Leadbeater & Wong, 2010; Pink, 2006):

The future is near—at-hand, yet we have no concrete idea what will happen tomorrow. We are now attempting to educate first year school children who will be retiring in 60+ years. We have no idea about the future. We don’t know what is going to happen in 5 years let alone 60, yet we are educating a new generation based upon the same thinking version we engineered for a time gone by.

Sorman-Nillson (2009: 157) highlights the quandary of this new age, “… the older generation grew up with limited choices, while the younger generations appear to have endless options and … no clear direction … high powered and well equipped but no clear direction.”

Given the issues facing education today, the following section presents possibilities of the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ being explored by educational leaders, contemporary leadership theorists and social and business commentators.

2.2.2 Seeking Answers

Chen (2010: 3) states it is now time to “put the edge into education” believing that it is time that learning and teaching became contemporary:

As its most important enterprise, education should be on the cutting edge of society, technology and culture rather than trailing other sectors. However schools function as a large, bureaucratic system, based on politics, preservation of the status quo and daily routines … Nothing seismic ever seems to happen to our schools.

Pink (2006: 1) optimistically looks to skillsets for the future:

The last few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind … But the keys to the kingdom are changing hands. The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind – creators and empathisers, pattern recognisers and meaning makers.
While past societies applied a logical and linear approach, contemporary society favours the more conceptual qualities, such as being inventive, empathetic and having big picture capabilities, which are more able to respond flexibly, dynamically and collaboratively to changing situations (Pink, 2006).

Sorman-Nillson (2009: 22) graphically paints a picture of this new world order:

The world has changed and gone into whack–mode. A tsunami of progress has been unleashed by seismic thinking clashes, drifting economic imperatives and timely global events ... we face a choice to funky up the way we think about the world or get whacked on the side of the head by momentous forces.

Sorman-Nillson (2009: 22) lays the ability to think about the world in new non-hierarchical ways as being the key to success and to not do so is to gain “a VIP pass to irrelevancy in the mental ghetto.” “No longer does colour, creed sexuality or minority status matter. The only thing that matters is your willingness to constantly learn, unlearn and relearn. Most of us are stuck in old ways of thinking.” There are no certainties in this new world, and we must learn to manage those uncertainties – and quickly (Sorman-Nillson, 2009: 27).

However, governments and education systems have not been idle in their response to the crisis looming on the horizon for the past decade. Day et al. (2011: 12) explains, “... since the mid-1990s, national education policies have had an increasingly strong influence on the work of school leaders.” Day, C., Sammons, P., Leithwood, K., Hopkins, D., Gu, Q., Brown, E. and Ahtaridou (2011) cite the UK’s ‘Every Child Matters’ green paper (2003) and its US counterpart, ‘No Child Left Behind’ (Evans, 2009) as examples of governments clarifying and aligning whole scale direction. However they caution, “National policies such as these significantly restrict the autonomy of school leaders and their staffs, forcing attention in schools to the consideration and implementation of government defined priorities” (Day et al., 2011: 12). Hannon (2011:4) expands on this thinking:

An intense focus on standards and academic outcomes has seen countries such as the US make ever more costly investments in education systems, only to see little return in terms of performance. Rather than perpetuating this spiral of more expensive but less effective interventions, many commentators have proposed an overhaul of the theory and practice underpinning education policies.

West-Burnham (2009: 1) goes so far as to question if governments have been improving the wrong thing. “After two generations of policy initiatives, research and incredible professional commitment there are still enormous problems in securing equity across most education systems.”
It is certain that our education systems were never designed to deliver the results which are now required to equip students for their future. While educational underperformance continues to be a source of anxiety for advanced societies, the renewal and restructuring of schools will endure in the form of governance structures, community opinion and influence, transparency and accountability, government standards for content and performance and continually reintroducing changes in approaches to teaching and learning (West-Burnham, 2009). But will this bring the improvement to schools and learning that the next generation so urgently requires?

Hopkins (1994: 75) describes school improvement as:

… an approach to educational change that is concerned with process as well as outcomes. School improvement is about raising student achievement by enhancing the teaching-learning process and the conditions which support it. It is about strategies for improving the school’s capacity for providing quality education.

Elmore (2000: 13) takes a more systemic view, seeing school improvement as, “… change with direction, sustained over time that moves entire systems, raising the average level of quality and performance while at the same time decreasing the variation among units …” The majority of improvement strategies over past decades have suggested a need for modest or incremental change in doing better at what we already do. However, with continual restructuring and often little large scale gain, it is sometimes difficult to decipher exactly what governments and school systems need by way of school reform. Elmore, Petersen and McCarthy (1996: 17) state, “… at some basic level they (i.e. governments) believe that restructuring schools will make them more effective, will cause teachers to teach differently and therefore this will make a difference to the learning and motivation of students.”

By contrast, it is argued by the likes of Beare (2006), Caldwell (2006, 2011), Christensen et al. (2008) and West-Burnham (2009) that what we really need is to challenge the basic premise of what it looks like to effectively lead, teach and learn in our schools. Beare (2006: 12) states “… we are living with imaginaries which are fast losing their potency and need replacement or severe modification.”

This thinking calls for whole scale education transformation or change, the success of which will be measured by significantly increased levels of student achievement, regardless of context. However this requires a shift of mindset for schools and education systems as Caldwell (2006: 15) cautions, “There are signs everywhere, and in greater number than ever before, that learners and learning have changed at a much faster rate than schools have changed – or could have changed – and that a new
conception of school is taking shape.” This might mean a different kind of organisation for the school, a new kind of teaching and learning and a broader conception of the educated person (Hargreaves, 2003: 8).

What might these desired transformations look like and where to start in the complex organisations called schools? Beare (2006: 19-20) urges for a new education mindset based upon interconnectedness, self-organisation, openness and innovation, whereby members become part of their own story which evolves while they participate in it.

While this might be a useful way of thinking for some, schools have traditionally sought clear direction and concrete plans from education systems. Zbar (2013: 3-7) offers a framework for schools and school leaders to consider their future. Firstly, he defines the ‘Known Knowns’ for which schools can prepare. This includes growing public demands, an urgency to improve, disconnectness between how students behave and learn and how schools teach, and developing new skills for today’s workforce. Secondly, Zbar (2013: 8) outlines the 'Important Things That Won’t Change': increased knowledge of ways to improve student outcomes, evidenced in Hattie’s (2009) meta-analysis of what impacts on student learning and Vygotsky’s (1978) incremental learning process. Finally, Zbar (2013: 10-12) proposes some ‘Unknown Unknowns’: the emergence of new products, the need for deeper learning rather than multi-tasking, learning personalisation and changing the physical design and use of schools. To respond to this framework, successful education systems and school leaders will need to embrace a new paradigm of schooling with a curriculum that is relevant to today’s students, improved quality of teaching, and learning that is focussed and continuous (Zbar, 2013: 14).

While literacy and numeracy remain core learning in schools looking to provide a 21st century curriculum, the limited scope of a traditional, content based curriculum makes it irrelevant to the needs of today’s learner. It is the skills of learning that provide the basis for a contemporary curriculum, and the ways that a school addresses learning and its impact on student progress and achievement becomes the priority.

Fadel (2010, 2014) offers a rebalanced curriculum with a shift away from direct instruction towards contextually relevant, student driven, project based, inquiry learning. In this he creates an interdisciplinary approach, referencing critical skills for 21st century learners such as critical thinking, oral and written communications, teamwork, diversity, information technology application, leadership, creativity and innovation, lifelong learning, professionalism and social responsibility (Fadel, 2014: 7).
A case has been built for education transformation, requiring new ways of thinking and for schools to significantly change the face of teaching and learning to better equip students for their future. The degree of change will be further explored later in this chapter. Technology is seen as both the key change driver and part of the solution to future learning. Traditional ways of learning and content based curricula can no longer provide the required skillsets for the future workforce and collaboration, personalisation and integration are seen as priorities for future schooling success.

2.2.3 The Importance of School Leadership

A consistent thread throughout the body of school improvement literature is the recognition that leadership makes a critical difference (Beare, 2006; Caldwell & Harris, 2008; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003a; Hargreaves, 2009; Harris, 2008; Hattie, 2009; Leithwood, 1994; Mazano et al., 2005). The politically driven, constant analysis and reflection and subsequent need for school renewal described earlier in this chapter, places a lens upon the requirement for focussed, clear school leadership; this factor being second only to teacher quality in its capacity to improve student outcomes. Hattie (2009) explains the causal link, “School leaders have an indirect influence on student achievement through their creation of the learning environment and culture, rather than a direct influence on learning.” Effective leadership makes for effective schools and its absence relegates a school to a mediocre performance at best (Fullan, 2001).

With new ways of schooling required, a different leadership skill set is also needed. Returning to earlier thoughts that today’s schools require new ways of thinking (Beare, 2006; Pink, 2006; Sorman-Nilsson, 2009), Kaiser and Halbert (2009) argue for leaders who have a ‘growth mindset.’ Dweck (2006: 6) describes a growth mindset as a passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even when it’s not going well, allowing people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives. This mindset supports principals to be flexible, responsive and innovative in leading their schools in times of significant change.

Given that a new way of looking at school leadership is required, it is worth investigating what we can learn from those innovative principals and successful schools in the field. Dimmock and O’Donoghue’s (1997: 3) empirical research documented the life histories of “… a number of principals who were regarded by educational administrators, peers and staff to be undertaking adventurous change programs to improve the quality of curriculum, teaching and learning in their schools.”
These they termed innovative principals, who they found to be ordinary, as people and principals and were not to be regarded as ‘super principals’. “Rather their leadership was characterised by a strong sense of, and track record in, innovation within system parameters” (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997: 4)

Dimmock and O'Donoghue’s (1997) study demonstrates that developing successful and innovative principals is not about designing programs based on best practice as these provide no guarantee of success. Rather, it is about “the analysis of what innovative principals are doing, how they are doing it and why” (Dimmock & O'Donoghue, 1997: 4), clearly positioning this research. The study of successful schools and innovative leaders, leader behaviours, their drivers for innovation and success and contributing backgrounds and influences provides the research framework.

In the face of urgency for solutions, Chen (2010: 242) challenges us to take heart:

> Many change agents, from thought leaders and policy makers, to principals, teachers and parents as well as students themselves are creating the types of schools and other learning environments that will equip today’s students to become future leaders, citizens and lifelong learners. Their work at the edges of the current school system is gradually moving to the centre. Yet progress has been slow to achieve scale, especially with the pace of technology and global change.

The challenge articulated by Chen (2010), is how then do we move the work at the edges more quickly to the centre of the work in schools and education systems so that our children are prepared for living and working in the world of tomorrow? This question provides the urgency and moral purpose for this study.

### 2.3 Defining Creativity and Innovation

Agars, Kaufman and Locke (2008: 3-4) underline the importance of innovation and creativity in the need for today's organisations to be flexible and responsive.

> Organisational creativity and innovation are inherently complex phenomena and subject to a myriad of broad contextual and social influences. As the evidence grows for a link between organisational effectiveness and, ultimately organisational survival, there is no doubting the need for theoretical and practical advances in our understanding … Indeed some have argued that innovation has become an organisational necessity in the current age of international business and constant change in the world of work.

However, describing creativity and innovation can be difficult. The Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary defines ‘innovation’ as 1. the introduction of something new and 2. a
new idea, method, or device and ‘innovative’ as to make changes, do something in a new way.

Yet Agars et al. (2008: 5) question the simplicity of such a definition:

Despite the growing recognition of their importance, many aspects of organisational creativity and innovation remain to be elucidated ... Despite repeated attention from scholars, defining creativity has remained an elusive accomplishment. Creativity has even been described as defying basic definition, and indeed, it is often not defined.

To highlight this, Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004) analysed ninety articles appearing in the top two creativity journals or peer reviewed journals with the word ‘creativity’ in the title. Of these papers, only 38% explicitly defined creativity, while 33% of non-creativity journals provided a definition. Such uncertainty around constructive definition exacerbates the challenge of understanding and explaining creativity and innovation in organisations.

Agars et al. (2008: 7-11) offer a definition of creativity that considers the concepts of person, place, process and product:

Creativity is the how (ability and process) and the where and when (environment) made by the who (individual or group) making the what (a specific product both new and useful) ... social influence does not simply influence creativity but may actually determine what is or is not creative. If society does not accept a new product or service as creative, then it is not.

Most definitions of creativity have two elements: it must represent something different or new and for something to be creative it must be appropriate to the task at hand. In other words, a creative response must be useful and relevant.

Agars et al. (2008: 13) link definitions of creativity and innovation:

Innovation, when considered as an organisational outcome, is not simply a higher level of creativity, nor is it restricted to a collective. Innovation merely indicates the intentional implementation of a creative outcome, product or process ... which may occur at the individual, group or organisational levels.

Creativity can be simply described as the development of ideas, while innovation is its application. Fullan (2007) describes ‘innovativeness’ as a contagious state of exploration that creates momentum for program and organisational improvement. Creativity and innovation are influenced by organisational culture and group diversity, defined in terms of “race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, education, expertise, department where employed, rank in organisation, personality or abilities” (Agars et al.,
2008: 35). To foster an innovative culture, “... moderate amounts of organisational slack encourage greater experimentation and are beneficial to group innovation, but either too much or too little slack is detrimental to the group’s success” (Agars et al., 2008: 36).

Leadership, and the culture created by the leader, therefore represents a key variable to creativity and innovation, in both the leader’s capacity for creative problem solving and the risk taking environment created for groups and individuals in the organisation.

Agars et al. (2008: 39) explain:

Research examining the effects of leader behaviours on creativity has revealed that while close monitoring inhibits creativity, providing developmental feedback promotes creative outcomes ... leaders who engage in stress reduction, clear communication and active goal setting also enhance the likelihood of creativity. By encouraging or facilitating collaboration, intellectual stimulation, discussion facilitation and conflict resolution, leaders enhance creativity.

Leaders serve as role models for employees who regularly observe their behaviour. The leader’s style and personality, their interactions with followers and the culture of the organisation all contribute to creative and innovative outcomes. However, sometimes it is the emergence of a champion of the creative vision that drives the innovation. While this person could be the leader, it may also be an employee who takes responsibility for ensuring the “perseverance of the creative process” and incites others to get involved in the creative process (Agars et al., 2008: 41).

Questions remain about the definition of creativity and innovation, the impact of contextual factors and the absence of integrated and accepted theoretical models that capture the complexity. This results in the use of subjective definitions and frameworks and consequently varied opinions on what is and isn’t creative and innovative.

For the purpose of this research, based on literature review definitions, creativity is defined as the interaction of person and process to produce a product or idea that is useful and novel as defined by the social context of the time. Innovation is the implementation of that novel idea or application of the product. Educational innovation is aptly described as a deliberate action that leads to significant and sustained overall positive improvement in the performance of a school or system on one or more dimensions of: structure, staff, strategy, systems, style/culture, shared values or skills (Murgatroyd, 2013).
2.4 Organisational Culture and Learning

An organisation’s culture is often simply put as ‘the way things are done around here.’ It is the values and forms of behaviour that characterise different social groups. Culture is a system of permissions. It’s about the attitudes and behaviours that are acceptable and unacceptable in different communities, identifying those that are approved of and those that are not.

Supporting this definition, Deal and Petersen (2009) describe the core elements of school culture as: a shared sense of vision and purpose, shared values, beliefs and assumptions, common rituals, traditions and ceremonies, shared history and stories, mutual relationships and an agreed value of artefacts and symbols. The overlap of context, culture and leadership is evident in this definition and this will be discussed later.

Barth (2002: 1) connects school culture, context and resistance to change:

A school’s culture is a complex pattern of norms, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, values, ceremonies, traditions and myths that are deeply ingrained in the very core of the organisation. It is the history transmitted pattern of meaning that wields a strong power in shaping what people think and how they act … All school cultures are incredibly resistant to change, which makes school improvement – from within or from without – usually futile.

A school’s culture therefore impacts on what people say, think and do within the school environment. It is both determined by the leader and a determinant of how the leader interacts with followers. It predetermines a school’s capacity for innovation and success. It is subsequently impossible to discuss schools and their potential to respond to rapidly changing societal demands, without reflecting on the importance of organisational culture.

A school’s culture is strongly influenced by its history, which if not challenged by clear and persistent leadership or penetrating external forces, can prove to be enduring, closed, individual and extremely resistant to change.

Schein’s (1992) model of organisational culture is often referred to as ‘the iceberg model’. At the peak of the iceberg are the artefacts and creations, which he describes as visible but often not decipherable. In the middle of the iceberg sits the cultural values, which are more obvious and of which members have a greater level of awareness. Below the water level of the iceberg are the culture defining basic assumptions, which are invisible and may not be understood by outsiders, but are
taken for granted by members and influence the total environment of the school – the shared values, social norms, role expectations, behaviours, levels of independence and interdependence - the “way in which the organisation conducts its daily business” (Chance & Chance: 2002: 63). This creates a school climate which is ‘open’ with free flowing communication amongst teachers and administration and teachers highly committed and engaged in their work without the need to be directed or restricted by leadership. Alternatively, it can be ‘closed’, where teachers feel restricted, frustrated, divided and uncommitted to the school. The key to successful school leadership is the ability to analyse and diagnose the cultural problems and the capacity to seek solutions that will return the school’s social system to equilibrium. “To change the culture of the school, the instructional leader must enable its residents to name, acknowledge and address the non-discussables. The health of a school is inversely proportionate to the number of non-discussables” (Barth, 2002: 2).

Organisational learning provides the key to changing school cultures. Collinson and Cook (2007: 8) define organisational learning as “… the deliberate use of individual, group and system learning to embed new thinking and practices that continuously renew and transform the organisation in ways that support shared aims.” Schein (1992) argues that in the ever changing world, organisations have to learn faster and this requires a culture that functions as a perpetual learning system. In today’s fast paced world, this warning holds increased potency. “The primary task of a leader in a contemporary organisation is to create and sustain such a culture, which in turn, especially in mature organisations, feeds back to shape the leader’s own assumptions” (Schein, 1992: 372). Schein’s focus is on the individuals interacting with one another within the organisational setting. These interactions become critically important when we wish to redesign the organisation and its professional culture.

Entwined in Argyris and Schon’s learning theory (Argyris & Schon, 1976, 1978, 1996) is the sense of the organisation as a coherent agent, capable of acting rationally and remembering, inquiring, analysing and evaluating and with the capacity to learn through individual and collective inquiry. They depict single loop learning as that which brings behavioural change and the deeper, more reflective and therefore more difficult to achieve double loop learning, which has the potential to change organisational norms (Argyris & Schon, 1978). In today’s complex environments, single loop learning is seen to be largely insufficient; by engaging in reflection to incorporate double loop learning, organisations challenge their norms, attitudes and assumptions. However
Senge et al. (1990, 2000) outline how schools can become a learning organisation, requiring five leadership capacities: systems thinking, building a shared vision, team working, personal mastery and the development of sophisticated mental models with an emphasis on dialogue to create a positive workplace. While this work does not take into account the situational aspect which may influence the application of the five elements, it provides a holistic understanding of organisational life. Johnston and Caldwell (2001) applied Senge’s model of a learning organisation to three Victorian schools as a template for conceptualising progress towards world class schools and found that the “…power of the Senge model of the learning organisation may reside in its striking capacity to bring together a range of dimensions that allow schools to view their activities holistically and in context” (Johnston & Caldwell, 2001: 94). From this empirical research, they concluded that world class schools had: inclusive collaborative
structures, effective communication channels, integrated and inclusive professional
development programs and learning focussed leadership.

Collaboration, communication, shared practice, learning and leadership are shown to
be central elements in creating positive school cultures. Fullan (2003a) names these
school cultures ‘communities of practice’ and stresses that in these dynamic times,
these are critical as schools and their leaders can’t do it on their own. This is supported
by the Johnston and Caldwell (2001: 94) study, “We know from the Victorian case
studies that the principal alone cannot create or sustain a learning organisation.”

The preconditions for organisational learning and culture building are worthy of
consideration. Mulford and Silins (2003) in their ‘Leadership for Organisational
Learning and Student Outcomes’ (LOSLO) study of Australian secondary schools,
found that organisational learning required establishing a trusting and collaborative
climate, having a shared and monitored mission, taking initiatives and risks and
ensuring ongoing, relevant professional development.

There is now a large body of accumulated evidence which unambiguously supports the
importance of collaborative cultures in schools as central to school improvement, the
development of professional learning communities and the improvement of student
outcomes (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Robinson, 2006; Stoll &
Louis, 2007). Today, in a global society where timely information is critical,
collaboration is inevitable. This applies to teachers who, like principals cannot
effectively manage the multiple demands required of them without working
collaboratively. “Strong collaborative relationships oriented to improvement appear to
be a necessity requisite for quality teaching” (Printy, 2010: 113). Day (2011: 27)
explains this further:

Leaders contribute to productive collaborative activity in their schools by being
skilled conveners of (collaboration). They nurture mutual respect and trust among
those involved in collaborating, ensure the shared determination of group
processes and outcomes, help develop clarity about goals and roles for
collaboration, encourage willingness to compromise among collaborators and
provide adequate and consistent resources in support of collaborative work.

In this section, it is clearly shown that to move schools forward, paying attention to
organisational culture is a critical leadership activity. This requires a clear moral
purpose for improving children’s learning, courage to make things better, a desire to
take others on the change journey, strong interpersonal skills, a desire to work
collaboratively and an understanding of organisational change.
2.5 Transforming Schools

School change, school improvement, transformation are all words used to describe the degree of shift required of schools to enable them to cater for the needs of today’s learners. This will be discussed in the following section.

2.5.1 School Improvement

In outlining the importance of a school’s organisational culture, this literature review has touched upon the need for change and change leadership. It is impossible to talk about school improvement or larger scale school transformation, without discussing change theory.

Schleicher (2007: 4-5) cautioned in the forward to the McKinsey Report (2007) on the world’s best performing schools: “The world is indifferent to tradition and past reputation, unforgiving of frailty and ignorant of custom or practice. Success will go to those individuals and countries which are swift to adapt, slow to complain and open to change.” The same is true for schools, however, nothing really changes for students unless there are changes for the adults who work in schools – this creates knowledge and transforms practice.

Fullan (2007) connects school improvement and change, describing the development of a successful organisation as systematic and sustained self-reflection and improvement, focussing explicitly on change in formal and informal procedures, processes, norms or structures and using behavioural science concepts. School improvement occurs when the leader can influence others. The change process needs to be accepted by teachers and others in the school, who then act as the change agents (Fullan, 1993). Positive change includes building relationships based upon mutual respect and trust … and this takes time. Everyone involved in implementing the change must share an understanding of the school’s direction or vision and see value in the different and innovative practices that are being implemented to achieve this.

Much of the extensive body of Fullan’s work (e.g. 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2007, 2011) is focussed on understanding change in education settings. His description of change relies upon the scientific chaos or complexity theory which considers change as a “complex, nonlinear and often uncertain process” (Fullan, 1993: preface vii). He states the inevitability of change, “… (it is) not possible to solve the change problem but we can learn to live with it more proactively and more productively” (Fullan, 1993: preface vii). Future school leaders will have to respond to contradictory
pressures for change with turbulence the norm, not the exception (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). “The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become. Complexity means change but specifically it means rapidly occurring, unpredictable, non-linear change. Moreover the pace of change is ever increasing. This is the leader’s dilemma” (Fullan, 2001: preface ix).

Building on the ‘chaos’ and ‘complexity’ theories of change, schools urgently require new solutions. However there exists great uncertainty about what these might look like or how to get there and this uncertainty causes anxiety (Fullan, 2003a). Managing change is therefore a key leader activity in those successful schools with a desire for change to have positive effects and to energise people to go further to achieve the goals and desires of the school and its community.

2.5.2 The Process of Change

While the theory exists to lead whole scale change in schools and education systems (Fullan, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003b, 2007,2011; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Kotter & Cohen, 2002), it remains a fraught process with little guarantee of success. As a result of the ‘Schools of Tomorrow … Today’ project (1991) in 12 New York schools, Lieberman, Darling-Hammond and Zuckerman (1991) provided the following advice to school leaders: conflict is a necessary part of change and new behaviour must be learned, team building must extend to the entire school, process and content are interrelated, finding time for change enhances the prospects of success and finally, a big vision with small building blocks can create consensus and progress. They urge leaders to develop initial projects with wide involvement and visible concrete results to sustain the restructuring process, and to utilise facilitators and opportunities for training as these are critical to successful restructuring efforts.

Lists abound of steps for building sustainable learning organisations and leading school and system change and Table 2.1 below presents a sample of these.
### Table 2.1: Literature Sample on Leading Organisational Change

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Increase urgency</td>
<td>1. An inspiring and inclusive vision</td>
<td>1. Shared norms and values</td>
<td>1. A focus on motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Build the guiding team</td>
<td>2. Strong public engagement</td>
<td>2. A focus on student learning</td>
<td>2. Capacity building with a focus on results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Empower action</td>
<td>5. Students as partners in change</td>
<td>5. Collaboration and inclusivity</td>
<td>(capacity to change the larger context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Don’t let up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Tri-level engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Make change stick</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(school, community and district)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vital need to improve schools and outcomes for students by developing a positive school climate through a team based learning community is well supported by the literature sample. Leithwood, Reidlinger, Bauer and Jantzi (2003) affirm this, stating that school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions. Day et al. (2011) agree but add two additional elements of school transformation: collective teacher efficacy and trust. They describe these elements as “the level of confidence a group of teachers feel about their ability to organise and implement whatever educational initiatives are required for students to reach high levels” and “… relational trust includes a belief or expectation on the part of most teachers that their colleagues, students and parents support the school’s goals for student learning and will reliably work towards achieving those goals” (2011: 9). Teacher trust is seen as being an elusive but critical factor to the success of schools.

Organisational culture and building a collaborative learning community is inseparable from any discussion on school improvement and change. Trust is the lubricant that keeps school cultures running smoothly, however it is unsettled by change, providing the potential for conflict and tension. Returning the culture to balance requires collective efficacy, shared vision and collaborative endeavour.
2.5.3 Small V Large Scale Change

The intensity of the change required is a point of difference between change leadership theorists which will be addressed in the following section. It is the scale of the change process and the alignment between practices that sets some schools apart from others in achieving success for all students. Schools generally do not improve their performance by doing a few things differently. They usually have a sustained focus on multiple factors – they intentionally incorporate and link many of their practices and develop these to a high level (DEECD, 2009: 2).

West-Burnham (2009) leaves no doubt about his belief in the need for profound change; this is large scale transformation that is challenging and may require different technologies and strategies, but which addresses fundamental issues in its reconstruction. He believes education is fast approaching its ‘tipping point’ and without a fundamental ‘reconceptualisation’ of its purpose and nature it is in danger of no longer being appropriate to the context in which it operates (West-Burnham, 2009: 17).

However Christensen, Horn and Johnson (2008: 51) argue that schools have been improving in response to challenges, in similar ways to the business world. Meanwhile, society has unfairly moved the goal posts on schools and imposed upon them new measures of performance. Society expects that schools improve to achieve new performance standards, whilst continuing to use old performance measures, resources, facilities, programs and ways of thinking about learning. Christensen et al. (2008: 52) explain the enormity of this challenge:

In essence public schools have been required to do the equivalent of rebuilding an airplane in mid-flight – something no private enterprise has been able to do. On average, however, schools have done just that – adjust and then improve on each new measure. But doing so has not been easy.

Those who argue for large scale change (e.g. Beare, 2006; Caldwell, 2006, 2011; Caldwell & Spinks, 2013; Christensen et al., 2008; Fullan, 2002; Hannon, 2014; Hargreaves, 2003; West-Burnham, 2009 and Zbar, 2013) question the lasting value of education system responses typically based on small step, incremental school or system review and improvement, when societal change demands far more. West-Burnham (2009: 1) provides his opinion on small scale change:

… education systems are becoming immune to school improvement. This does not invalidate the strategy, far from it … working harder and with greater vigour do not seem to improve its limited efficacy given the profound changes in the context in which schools are operating.
Caldwell and Spinks (2013: 13) emphasise the urgency for the large scale change now required. They believe it is essential that we significantly transform our educational institutions, constructs, methods and vision to keep pace with society and that it is “time to fully embrace the potential of this new century and seek new ways to prepare our young for what lies ahead.” Hannon (2011: 4) expands this thinking.

International momentum is building behind those who advocate a far reaching transformation in education. A combination of spiralling costs of high investment, social and demographic change and the pace of technological developments have raised fundamental questions about whether schools are still fit for purpose. Innovation and transformation have become the watchwords of progressive debates about education.

While Hannon (2014) questions the relevance of schools that do not respond to the drive for change, she also cautions on the unpredictable and disruptive nature of the large scale change required, as opposed to the predictable and predetermined, well understood path of incremental improvement (Hannon, 2014: 5). This will require schools to use knowledge in different, more creative ways and leaders who are prepared to meet adaptive challenges, and who are prepared to change personally in order to lead the necessary organisational changes.

This decisive call for large scale transformation does not hold universal support. Levin (2010: 9) maintains that due to public caution around large-scale changes in schools, change is not driven by educators, but rather by larger social forces (e.g. special education, gender equality, completion of secondary schooling). This thinking holds historical credibility, summed up by Stinchcombe (1965), who goes so far as to claim that schools, like churches, universities and governments, cannot change the fundamental characteristics of their organisations as these are defined by the historical period in which they were developed. Both authors surmise that the impetus for change does not come from schools themselves, and while education institutions may play around the edges of changing what they do, in reality it is society which will determine the what, how and why of the change, if it deems change necessary at all.

While Levin (2010) provides no argument against the need for school improvement to better educational outcomes and therefore improve the social and economic circumstances of people’s lives, he cautions against embracing full scale “transformation, and its handmaiden, innovation” and sees this as a distraction from achieving goals that are desirable as well as possible. Levin (2010: 4) claims that most innovation is ineffective or too difficult or too costly to implement. Instead, he promotes the need for the more cautious approach of school improvement, focussing on
improved outcomes for more students, using more practices already known to be 
effective and less practices known to be ineffective, without the risky side effects of 
innovation (Levin, 2010: 4).

Without doubt, schools have a poor innovation track record and Levin (2010: 4) claims 
this is because there is no agreed system for judging innovative ideas most likely to be 
effective. This argument is supported by the work of Hattie (2009) whose research 
demonstrates that many practices traditionally espoused by schools as benefitting 
learning or ‘the next best thing’ (e.g. open learning spaces), have been shown to 
provide little tangible evidence of improving learning outcomes, and in fact some have 
been shown to have a negative impact. Hattie’s (2009) synthesis of over 800 meta-
analyses, measures the effect size of influences applied to schools and learning, in a 
search for what makes a difference to student outcomes. He ranks the variables from 
1-150 by the effect size of each influence and a sample of some common influences 
seen in schools is shown in Table 2.2 below.

Table 2.2: Sample of Hattie’s (2009) Meta-analyses relating to Student Achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>EFFECT SIZE</th>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>EFFECT SIZE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>148</td>
<td>Student retention</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>Teacher subject matter knowledge</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>147</td>
<td>Welfare policies</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>Teacher education</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>145</td>
<td>Open learning spaces</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>Ability grouping</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
<td>Whole language approach</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>Team teaching</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139</td>
<td>Perceptual motor programs</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from this, some variables considered innovative or effective 
professional practice are shown to have little to no impact on student achievement. The 
‘small scale change’ advocates call for a measured approach, making effective use of 
what is known to already work, without a waste of time, energy and resources on
transformation and innovation, which they believe may in fact yield very few benefits for students.

Caldwell and Spinks (2013: 102) disagree with this and contextualise their argument:

Incremental change has had disappointing outcomes in many nations, manifested in flat lining or decline. Working harder or smarter is necessary but the key is innovation that reaches the student, whose needs, interests, aptitudes, ambitions and passions are satisfied …

Caldwell (2006, 2011) and Caldwell and Spinks (2013) argue for disruptive innovation at all levels of education, seen as the “lifeblood of transformation” (Caldwell, 2011: 3) as this rarely comes from mainstream practice and requires support and the development of the right culture for ideas and successful innovations to happen. Whitby (2014) also challenges the small step improvement thinking, claiming the ‘aint broke, don’t fix it’ mantra has been tolerated in schools in the past because of limited resources, lack of concrete evidence, competing priorities and staff and school leader caution – resulting in narrow political agendas. Whitby (2014) justifies that it is easy to come up with new ideas in schools but harder to get everyone on board to embrace these, but this is better than simply tinkering with what may have worked in the past, but is not guaranteed to work in the future.

In summary, Leadbeater (2014: 12-13) makes the case: “By continuing to rely on a containerised form of education which drains children of motivation and treats them as passive recipients, we blight their ability to acquire the capabilities they will need to succeed.” He believes that “the ground is moving” beneath schools and education systems. Past ways of working are no longer showing the improvement desired and new solutions are required, despite the disruptive nature of such change. Rather than attempting to invent new ideas and solutions, what are the practices of schools that have been successful, can these be applied in different contexts and what can be learned from the experience of others? This question is explored in the next section of the literature review.

2.5.4 Successful Schools

Systems of education have not been idle in seeking to understand the practices of education systems and schools that are achieving outstanding results. This is represented by research efforts such as Mourshed, Chijioke and Barber (2010) ‘How the world’s most improved school systems keep getting better’ and Moos, Johansson and Day (2011) ‘How School Principals Sustain Success Over Time: International
Perspectives’. Both these studies will be referenced and discussed further in this literature review.

In 2008, Zbar, Kimber and Marshall conducted a study of eight high performing Victorian (Australia) schools that had achieved better outcomes than other schools of a similar socio-economic level, but also, quite often above state performance levels. The study noted preconditions in schools before improvement could take place, elements evident in the research schools which sustained improvement over time and practices and behaviours that improved student performance and underpinned the improvement elements. These are summarised in Table 2.3 below.

### Table 2.3: Zbar, Kimber & Marshall (2008) – Examination of Eight High Performing Schools Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRE CONDITIONS BEFORE IMPROVEMENT:</th>
<th>IMPROVEMENT ELEMENTS:</th>
<th>KEY IMPROVEMENT PRACTICES &amp; BEHAVIOURS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Strong leadership that is shared</td>
<td>1. Building teaching and leadership expertise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. High expectations and teacher efficacy</td>
<td>2. Structure teaching to ensure all students succeed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ensuring an orderly environment</td>
<td>3. Using data to drive improvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A clear focus on what matters most</td>
<td>4. Culture of sharing and responsibility</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Tailoring initiative to the overall direction of the school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Engendering pride in the school</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Using data</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Coaching, mentoring and sharing expertise</td>
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<td>3. Raising staff expectations of students</td>
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<td>4. Establishing and aligning values, vision and goals</td>
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<td>5. Working in teams</td>
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<td>6. Aligning professional learning</td>
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<td>7. Raising students expectations</td>
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<td>8. Assigning staff to key priority areas</td>
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<td>9. Focussing on literacy and numeracy</td>
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<td>10. Establishing partnerships</td>
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<td>11. Personalising through individual learning plans</td>
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<td>12. Engaging students</td>
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<td>13. Articulating clear staff performance expectations</td>
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<td>14. Targeting resources to student needs</td>
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<td></td>
<td>15. Releasing staff for group learning, dialogue and planning</td>
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<td>16. Recognising staff and student achievements</td>
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In the study, it was noted that these schools’ successes were not achieved in the short term but rather, required a strategic and consistent approach to school improvement and transformation over a number of years. The study also recognised that school
improvement required a “multifaceted approach” and that it is the alignment and interdependence of the factors that characterises the successful schools (Zbar et al., 2008).

These results provide a compass for school improvement and guidance for effective school leadership. The findings highlight the importance of personalising student learning, high expectations, the use of data to guide improvement, developing teacher capacity, building teams for collaborative effort and clear focussed, quality school leadership. Successful schools have been shown to demonstrate these elements and while these can be copied and benchmarked by others, will this be sufficient to develop future-ready schools or is the future already here and requiring a new set of elements, behaviours and practices? Consideration is given to this in the following literature review section.

2.5.5 The Future of Schools

Calls to revisit the moral purpose of education, social justice, equity, systemic shared responsibility and collaborative partnerships have gained momentum as schools and education systems question their relevance in preparing students for their future. Will mimicking successful schools create the system of schools required? Zhao (2013) doesn’t believe so, seeing this benchmarking as providing more of the best of the past. Rather he claims that to cultivate creative, entrepreneurial and globally competent citizens for the 21st century, we will have to invent it (Zhao, 2013).

West-Burnham (2009) offers some strong beliefs to challenge the thinking about developing schools fit for the purpose of 21st century learning. He sees the primary purpose of education being to develop the learning capacity of every individual, provided through personalised learning programs. The curriculum is defined by the learner as a broad learning experience. Schools are integrated community learning resources whose primary purpose is to support and enrich learning in the family and community and who are held to account by the community. Mentoring is the dominant learning strategy and teachers coordinate and support learning, using ICT to manage information. The school is a networked learning community with community members in schools as learners and supporters of learning. Education is vertically integrated across the stages of learning in each community (West-Burnham, 2009: 22-3). While there are elements of this thinking in some schools today, the premise of the school as a community hub with responsibility for the learning of all community members remains a performance metric which most schools have few resources or the wherewithal to
provide, without compromising the learning of the students for whom they traditionally hold primary responsibility.

In reflecting on the pathway for education systems and schools to improve to enable the provision of a relevant, personalised and future orientated education experience for all students, Moursheed, Chijioke and Barber (2010) conclude that, while there is no single path to system improvement, there are commonalties in the nature of the journeys. These apply equally to schools as they do to education systems. A summary of the key findings are:

1. A system can make significant gains from wherever it starts and these gains can be achieved in six years or less

2. Improving system performance … comes down to improving the learning experience of students in their classrooms

3. Each … stage of the school system improvement journey is associated with a unique set of interventions … systems do well to learn from those at a similar stage of the journey … systems cannot continue to do more of what got them past success

4. A system’s context might not determine what needs to be done, but it does determine how it is done

5. Six interventions occur equally at every performance stage for all systems. These are: building the instructional and management skills of principals, assessing students, improving data systems, facilitating improvement through the introduction of policy documents and education laws, revising standards and curriculum and finally, ensuring appropriate rewards and remuneration structures for principals and teachers

6. Systems further along an improvement journey sustain improvement by balancing school autonomy with consistent teacher practice

7. Leaders take advantage of changed circumstances to ignite reforms

8. Leadership continuity is essential … (with 3 years being the minimum and 6 years the average for system leaders).
As we consider the type of schooling required for 21st century learners, this literature review has offered some thoughts to challenge the thinking of what schools might look like as part of a connected, integrated community centre, providing learning for everyone at various life stages across the community, with accountability to the community itself. The pace is fast and if the past has lost relevance and we can’t imitate the successes of now, sharing the journey and learning with others at similar stages offers school leaders some support on the sometimes lonely journey of school leadership. In addition while success elements and frameworks cannot be universally applied, their conceptual application, reflection and modification can provide school leaders with a starting point at least.

2.6 Successful School Leadership

Hannon (2014: 4) poses the question, “Can transformational systemic innovation in education be led? Or is it an emergent, disruptive and unpredictable phenomenon?” The level of transformation being called for is what Heifetz and Linsky (2002) label an adaptive challenge rather than a technical one. A technical challenge is one that we already have the knowledge to resolve, it’s been done before and while not simple, we have the capacity to find the solution. Alternatively, an adaptive challenge is one where the knowledge required to resolve the problem does not already exist, requiring the creation of new technologies and new knowledge and for the person or organisation to adapt. The type of leadership required for today’s schools remains a core question in this research study.

There exists considerable empirical evidence affirming that quality school leadership is a critical element in creating successful schools (e.g. Duignan & Gurr, 2007; Fullan, 2003a, 2003b; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson & Walhstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005; Moos, Day & Johansson, 2011). At its most critical level, successful school leadership effects students’ social and academic achievement, ensuring they gain the most from their educational experience. Leithwood et al. (2006) remind us that within schools, leadership is second only to teaching in its impact on student learning. More broadly, leadership impacts upon teacher and school performance, the school’s organisational climate and its relationships with its community and the education system within which it operates.

Quality school leadership may be provided by one person or shared amongst others within a school – it is characterised by leading with a vision to set direction, intention to
implement the vision and influence to take others to achieve it. Quality school leadership is values based - essentially to improve the lives of students. Leithwood and Riehl (2003: 7) explain “... leaders mobilise and work with others to articulate and achieve shared intentions.” Yukl (2002) defines leadership as intentional influence over other people exerted by a single person or group. Gurr (2014: n.p.) supports this definition stating “Leadership is fundamentally about influence ... there is an opportunity and responsibility to help people be better at what they are doing.” This relationship of influence between the leader and the follower provides the key, with a sense of purpose and confidence given to followers, who are in turn influenced to support and contribute to the leader’s goal achievement (Fidler, 1997).

In the empirical International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP), originally undertaken across eight countries in two phases over more than five years, Moos et al. (2011: 6) claim:

... successful school principals influence school improvement and thus students’ learning and achievement in direct and indirect ways through the effects of sustained application of their values, intra and interpersonal qualities, individual, relational and whole school strategies with staff, community and school environment ... 

With an agreed focus on quality school leadership, seen as critical to the creation of successful schools and the need for adaptive challenges to be resolved with new solutions, the focus on core leadership characteristics, skills and practices remains, and this will be investigated further in this literature review. However, as previously outlined, diverse contexts and cultures of schools hold a relationship of reciprocal influence with leadership practice and this is discussed in the following section.

2.6.1 School Context and Success

Bolman and Deal’s (1997) research examined the range of leadership behaviours and grouped these into different frames – structural, human relations, political and symbolic. Their work recognised the value in leaders reframing their leadership perspective for different situations to expand and enrich the ideas and styles that can be applied to problems and dilemmas. Leaders have preferred styles and the need for situational responses which creates combinations of successful leadership styles (Bolman & Deal, 1997).

School context considers the environment within which school leadership is exercised, determined by factors at a school, community, system and national level. Gurr (2014)
describes the context for principals as ‘a melting pot’ of the many layers, including the broader societal culture and school culture.

School leadership is seen to be highly contextual and contingent. Duignan and Gurr (2007) describe Australian schools as some of the world’s most diverse. Such diversity, and the potential transferability of practice are important considerations for successful school leadership. Research suggests the need for caution in transferring the policies and practices of leaders from one school to another without consideration of its appropriateness in a specific school context. “Contexts are unavoidable elements of the problems leaders need to solve if they are to improve the organisations” (Day, 2011: 3). Successful school leadership is influenced and challenged by:

- Current economic, political and policy frameworks governing the teaching profession
- Location, sector, level and size of the school
- The cultural and socio-economic diversity of the school’s community.

Additionally, the following educational trends have been identified worldwide over the past two to three decades which impact on schools and show no signs of abating:

- Increased accountability for school effectiveness, student achievement and the maintenance of standards (Groundwater–Smith & Sachs, 2002; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Leithwood, 2005)
- Market regulation of education – schools are required to spend time and resources competing for students and funding (Dempster, 2000)
- Increased moves towards self-governing schools with increased accountability and competition (Caldwell & Spinks, 2013)
- Increased complexity of the principal’s role with expectations that principals will perform as managers, marketers and educational leaders (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001)

As a result, the demands and challenges faced by principals today are complex, multidimensional and often contradictory (Duignan, 2006; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Mulford & Silins, 2003). The pressure of this environment impacts on their ability to create adaptive solutions. Day (2011: 4) explains that in such an environment,
principals most commonly adopt solutions rather than solve problems, in the typically frantic nature of their work. “Interacting with different individuals and groups in different contexts to get problems solved and responding (rather than reacting) to a range of external, local and national guidelines and policies is what all successful school leaders do well.” As outlined in the introduction to this literature review, increasing accountability generated through continuous large scale reforms and mounting parental and societal expectations have added intensity and complexity to the leadership role.

Bush and Glover (2003) reported that school size, socio-economic factors, governance, culture, parental activity – as well as the experience, cultural history and commitment of the staff, influence (but do not absolutely determine) the type of leadership most appropriate for the school at any one time. The ways in which principals apply leadership practices – not the practices themselves, demonstrate responsiveness to, rather than dictation by, the contexts in which they work (Leithwood et al., 2006). Mulford and Silins (2003) found that socio-economic status, the home education environment and school size have interactive effects on principal leadership, school performance and student achievement. A host of contextual variables are likely to excise significant effects on principals in their efforts to increase the productivity of their organisations (Day, 2011; Zbar et al., 2008).

School leadership can be carried out in different and overlapping ways and the research literature indicates that this is both possible and desirable for school success (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Leithwood, Steinbach & Jantzi, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1984, 1996). While quality school leadership is an interactive shaping of both the leader, the followers and the school’s learning environment and is not readily transferable to a new or extended context, there are few stories to share about turnaround schools without the intervention of a powerful leader as the catalyst.

Referencing the ISSPP research, Drysdale and Gurr (2011) and Gurr (2014) found that context is an important factor in determining successful school leadership; however its influence is less than expected. While successful school leaders are contextually sensitive, they demonstrate an ability to be less constrained by context than less successful principals, seeming to be able to work within and across contextual constraints (Gurr, 2014). School leaders who apply contingency theory to their work will actively plan for a variety of situations and changing environmental conditions, putting into place response systems that maximise the advantage to their organisation.
In summary, the critical balance between leader characteristics, style and experience and school context will determine the responses most likely to create a positive organisational environment. Day et al. (2011) portrays what teachers do as a function of their motivation and abilities and the situations in which they work. He describes these variables as interdependent and that “changes to all three variables need to happen in concert or performance will not change much.” The overall function of successful leaders is to improve all three variables (Day, 2011: 18-19).

While many other factors may contribute, quality leadership is the critical element at play in influencing school transformation. Successful school principals work to fulfil local and national political demands, whilst at the same time retaining a clear and consistent focus on the core educational and ethical purpose of schooling, which is the development and education of all children (Moos et al., 2011).

2.6.2 Practices of Successful School Leaders

Despite there being an abundance of popular leadership models linked to behaviours and strategies, leadership is complex and leadership types are rarely singular or distinct, in reality they overlap and compete. While context is a variable, never has the need for leadership adaptability and flexibility been more essential than for today’s school leaders. Watterston (2014: 2) writes “… (the) changing role of the modern school principal in Australia requires a different kind of leadership demanding an expanded and more sophisticated skill set … enhanced governance, innovation and a contextual need for strategic improvement are the core elements.”

With this in mind, the research points to some basic leadership practices essential to success. “Almost all successful leaders draw on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices” (Leithwood et al., 2006: 3). Fullan (2002: 18) lists five essential components which characterise leaders of a knowledge society. These are: moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, the ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation and sharing and coherence making.

Additionally, Fullan (2002) adds the personal characteristics of effective leaders: energy, enthusiasm and hopefulness. He advocates for the importance of trust building relationships in leadership, emphasising that improved relationships within schools directly impacts on school improvement.

While many leadership frameworks exist, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) outline four categories of leadership function and associated practices
which provide a practical reference for discussion purposes and which align with the work of others. They are: building vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, redesigning the organisation and finally, managing the teaching and learning program. Each category will now be described in greater detail and referenced to the work of others.

1. Setting Direction

Hallinger’s (2003) review of evidence on instructional leadership found that mission building activities were one of the most influential set of leadership practices. Successful school leadership creates a compelling sense of purpose in the organisation by developing a shared vision of the future, helping build consensus about relevant short term goals (Leithwood et al., 2006). Day et al. (2011: 23) add “... part of vision building (is) the establishment of core organisational values. Core values specify the means by which the vision is to be accomplished.” Gurr (2014: n.p.) concurs, “Ensuring the vision is lived is important and typically the leaders act as both guardians of the vision and champions of change.” Successful school leaders help teachers make sense of and accept their goals and direction, Fullan’s (2002) ‘sharing and coherence making’.

2. Understanding and Developing People

Closely aligned with Fullan’s (2002) link between improving relationships and school success, building staff capacity which leads to a sense of mastery is highly motivational for teachers. This requires quality leaders to provide individualised support, intellectual stimulation and an appropriate model for learning improvement (Day et al., 2011).

Moos et al. (2011) found the focus on ‘developing people’ to be more visible in the five year interlude between the ISSPP case studies. This included building and sustaining trust between principals and teachers. They explain:

There was now more work on building teacher teams ... distributing leadership responsibilities and accountabilities from principals and middle leaders to teacher teams and individual teachers ... there was a growing closeness between principals and teachers in professional and personal relationships of trust, support, care and perhaps most of all clear directions and expectations (Moos et al., 2011: 8).

The research provides consensus on the value of distributed leadership where it is purposeful and based upon mutual trust. Distributive leaders have been found to actively, deliberatively and conscientiously involve teachers, professionals, parents,
community members and students in leadership roles in a school. They distribute responsibility throughout the school to increase school effectiveness without abrogating their responsibilities.

Distributed leadership is not the same as delegating and it is quickly evident when it is used to mask inefficiency or ineffectiveness. Distributed leadership can take many forms; however, essentially it is about interactions, rather than actions and shifting the influencing relationship of leadership from leader to follower to a collective interaction (Harris, 2009). Harris laments, “distributed leadership has sometimes been used as shorthand way to describe any form of devolved, shared or dispersed leadership practice in schools” (Harris, 2009: 1). While much has been written about the contribution that distributed leadership makes to improving organisational climate (Harris, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2006; Spillane, 2006), its practice supports the leader’s success in the complex, multilayered and busy work of schools today. In the ISSPP project Moos et al. (2011: 8) found, “There is an understanding that the principal cannot be sufficiently informed to make all the decisions in a school nor can he/she be present in all places and situations where decisions need to be made.” To achieve a strong distributed leadership model, building trusting professional relationships with staff is a core focus for successful leaders.

Harris (2008: 19) positions the importance of a distributed leadership model in responding to the challenges of today’s schools:

The education terrain is rapidly shifting and the existing structures and boundaries of schooling are fast eroding. Education is being revolutionised through the Internet, Google, outsourcing and 24/7 demands and expectations. Those organisations, destined to be ‘great’ in the rapidly transforming world will be those adept at generating new leadership capacity to meet the changing demands of global schooling.

In support, Gurr (2014: n.p.), referencing the ISSPP research states:

For these successful school leaders, distributed leadership is almost assumed as they will openly say that the success of their school is due to the leadership of many and they genuinely value the contribution of teachers, parents and students … developing leadership is a focus of their work.

3. Designing and Managing Communities

Schools are structural organisations, however they are also communities held together by a sense of identity, common norms and shared commitments to the ethos of the school. Teacher and parent loyalty and commitment to the school cannot be assumed.
Building and keeping it is highly desirable and an activity requiring leader attention and responsibility. Day et al. (2011: 27) explains this as aligning the organisation, “A large body of evidence has accumulated … which unambiguously supports the importance of collaborative cultures in schools as central to school improvement, the development of professional learning communities and the importance of student learning.”

Moos et al. (2011: 9) compare this organisational alignment across the two phases of ISSPP case studies:

In the first visits, principals were encouraging collaborative decision making, team work and distributed leadership in a collective culture and in structures that supported collaboration … In the latest visits, we found that all case schools were developing their organisation into team based networks or webs. Leadership was now being distributed from principal to leadership teams and further onto teacher teams … Principals were aware that teachers needed to be given support and care in order that they could manage the professional choices and find room for manoeuvre, thus creating a safe and secure working environment.

Developing and sustaining collaborative cultures depends on leaders putting into place structures and resources which support this practice. Redefining staff roles and responsibilities to distribute leadership and increase participative decision making, supports the creation of a collaborative culture (Day et al., 2011).

While the above shares a perspective of the importance of building a collaborative organisational culture, the need for alignment with the school, local and wider community environment presents an important leadership challenge for the principal. Moos et al. (2011) refer to this as “leading the environments.”

Schools are dependent on their environments: political, administrative, cultural, and managing and leading the outside world is a vital and ever increasing function of today’s school leaders. Schools need to have the support and confidence of their external environments and principals need to be able to read the signals, understand the expectations and predict the opportunities available, quickly, competitively and confidently. Dinham’s (2005: 343) research found that successful secondary school principals demonstrated “External awareness and engagement … a keen awareness and understanding of the wider environment and a positive attitude towards engaging with it.”

The heightened importance of this function was evident in Moos et al.’s (2011: 11) findings in the ISSPP project:
In the first visits, we had found that many schools were engaged in building working relations with parents and community. Five years later, most case schools had expanded their community work considerably, some in relation to parents and others in relation to partnerships and networking with other institutions and enterprises.

4. Managing the Teaching and Learning Programme

Over the past two decades, there has been “a pronounced shift in global discourse aimed at understanding how school leadership contributes to student learning. This has emerged in the context of government efforts undertaken throughout the world to stimulate economic competitiveness by enhancing the quality of education ...” (Hallinger & Thang, 2014: 43).

Improving and monitoring the provision of a quality teaching and learning program involves leader considerations of staffing, providing teaching support, monitoring school activity and buffering staff from distractions to their core work (Day et al., 2011: 29-30). Moos et al. (2011: 9) review this core function in the findings from the ISSPP study:

In the first phase of the project, an important feature of the leadership for student success was the close attention which principals placed on developing, monitoring and feeding back on teachers’ practice in classrooms, where the core business of schooling takes place. This is often called instructional leadership … (they) found it to be only one part of a combination of leadership strategies employed by principals … principals set and continuously raised standards and expectations and produced classroom and whole school improvement plans.

While Drysdale and Gurr (2011) reference their work to the categories of Leithwood et al. (2006), as a result of their extensive engagement in the ISSPP and other research, they add three additional practices of successful leaders. These are: acknowledging and embracing their influence role, developing themselves and others and, aligning with Moos et al.’s “leading the environments”, a reciprocal engagement with the wider context to ensure the best outcomes for students.

Furthermore, across the leaders’ practice, Drysdale and Gurr (2011) argue for a strong moral or values base to the decisions that are made, parallel with Fullan’s (2002) ‘moral purpose’.

In the practice of reviewing behaviours and frameworks for successful school leadership, Dinham (2005: 253) cautions, “… while these behaviours may appear idealistic, they are not a recipe for success or a ‘quick fix’ but rather requiring sustained input over time.” They are also not activities undertaken by successful school leaders.
all the time or concurrently. Successful school leaders apply a high degree of sensitivity to appropriate timing, action and context.

2.6.3 Leaders in Action

There exists a variety of different leadership style or models, some preferred for a specific context, time or purpose, however in reality principals are required to employ different leadership types at any given time. Successful principals operate in different leadership modes, depending on the context, their leadership style and experience and the priorities of the complex and multiple issues they are facing. A sample of some of the more popular leadership models can be seen in Table 2.4 below.
### Table 2.4: A Sample Overview of Leadership Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERSHIP TYPE</th>
<th>LEADER ATTRIBUTES &amp; RESPONSIBILITIES</th>
<th>REFERENCE EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| INSTRUCTIONAL    | • explicitly builds teacher professional capacity  
• direct responsibility for student outcomes  
• aligns resource allocation to student outcomes  
| MANAGERIAL       | • high level administrative and management responsibilities  
• focus on the smooth operation of the school  
• this model remains important but no longer sufficient                                                                                                      | Bolman & Deal’s structural frame (1997), Cheng’s (2005) structural frame, Sergiovanni’s technical leadership (1984, 1993). |
| TRANSFORMATIONAL | • changes the purposes and resources of the leader-follower relationship  
• pursuit of common goals to make the workplace better  
• encourages intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation  
• encourages experimentation, collaboration and communication  
| INTERPERSONAL    | • emphasis on personal values and strong and positive relationships  
• high emotional intelligence  
• uses quality relationships to activate others to achieve shared goals                                                                                     | Harris & Chapman (2002)                                                           |
| MORAL            | • making a positive difference to the lives of others  
• focuses on the values and beliefs of the school’s moral purpose  
• this model seen as central to school transformation                                                                                                      | Beatty’s ‘inner leadership’ (2009), Duignan & Bhindi’s ‘authentic leadership’ (1997), Fullan’s ‘moral purpose’ (2002), Leithwood’s ‘moral leadership’ (2005), Heifetz & Linsky’s ‘sacred heart’ (2002). |
| STRATEGIC        | • strategically operate to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness over time  
• working on the present and future capacity of the school  
• setting direction, translating strategy to action, aligning the people and the school to the strategy, effectively intervening, developing strategic capability | Bolman & Deal (1997), Davies & Davies (2004), Kotter & Cohen (2002).                |

In addition to this summary, two remaining leadership styles are worthy of particular mention as they are relevant to the challenges currently facing schools and education systems. The first of these is sustainable leadership.

Hargreaves (2003) argues that most school leadership practices create “temporary, localised flurries of change” but little lasting or widespread improvement. Sustainable
leadership is seen as a process or system and avoids the pitfalls created by the charismatic or heroic leader, who leaves the school with little capacity to maintain its success. With the fast pace of today’s workforce, system leaders and governments demand more than this. Sustainable leadership creates and preserves sustained learning, secures enduring success over time, sustains the leadership of the leader and others, is socially just, develops rather than depletes human and material resources, develops environmental diversity and capacity, engages assertively with its environment, monitors the environment to check it is staying healthy, builds on the past in its quest to create a better future and finally, it defers gratification instead of seeking instant results (Hargreaves, 2009). The sustainability of the success of the five schools in this study was seen to be a key focus and one research question checked the perception of stakeholders to the sustainability of the principal’s leadership and the school’s success. Sustainable leadership is a focus in the reported findings from each school.

The second style of leadership worth noting is creative leadership, and unlike the previous models, it is not commonly referenced. To create the kind of learning environments needed to develop 21st century learning skills, Stoll (2011: 11) argues the need for major shifts in teacher practice. “Teachers will need to be more creative, to experiment with their practice and try out new approaches to teaching and learning and designing curriculum.” Looking to the future, principals will be required to foster a culture of innovation for teachers and students to develop better approaches to learning. Stoll (2011: 11) articulates a new type of leadership, “… with creative leadership, a professional learning community can become a springboard for creative practice and provide an environment in which teachers’ and students’ creativity can thrive.” Creative leadership is about seeing, thinking and doing things differently and leading others in a managed risk taking environment, in order to improve the life chances of all students.

Stoll (2011: 11-12) identifies nine leadership practices that define creative leadership:

1. Model creativity and risk taking
2. Stimulate a sense of urgency … create dissonance
3. Expose colleagues to new thinking and experiences
4. Self-consciously let go … teachers need opportunities to experiment and step out of the boundaries
5. Provide time and space

6. Promote individual and collaborative creative thinking and design

7. Set high expectations about the degree of creativity ... promote and value innovation

8. Use failure as a learning opportunity ... value things that go wrong

9. Keep referring back to core values.

Stoll's work is supported by Dinham's (2005) empirical research findings that successful leaders demonstrated a bias towards innovation and action: "... principals use their powers and the rules and boundaries of the system creatively ... they exhibit a bias towards experimentation and risk taking ... they exhibit strength, consistency, yet flexibility in decision making and the application of policy and procedures" (Dinham, 2005: 245).

Similarly, Klimek, Ritzenhein and Sullivan (2008) explain "generative leadership" as a way to collectively shape future schooling. They describe generative leadership as tapping into "the collective intelligence and energy within an organisation to generate productive growth and effective solutions" (Klimek et al., 2008: 2). Generative approaches challenge common sense assumptions, raise fundamental questions, foster reconsiderations of what is taken for granted and furnish new alternatives for action (Klimek et al., 2008: 12).

The central task of the creative or generative school leader is to create an environment that is open to questioning and innovation. As this research considers the impact of principals leading innovative and successful schools, their capacity for creative leadership is a relevant consideration.

Gurr (2014: n.p.) reflecting on over 13 years of involvement in the ISSPP project, states that successful school leaders are unconcerned by leadership models and there is no one model that dominates the work of these leaders. While this questions the practical value of discussing leadership types, using the models provides a way to profile and dissect different leadership behaviours to better understand the practices that enable successful principals to lead their schools and communities.
2.6.4 Leader Characteristics

Given the strong values base of many leadership models, it is reasonable to consider the impact of a leader’s personal attributes on their leadership potential. Subsequently, if a leader’s personal characteristics are shown to be a dominant influence, can these capabilities be learned by others?

Successful school leaders possess a range of attributes and have the capacity to employ these effectively in complex and changing circumstances. Leithwood et al. (2006: 3) found that “A small handful of personal traits explains a high proportion of the variation in leader effectiveness.” The extensive list of types of school leader practices and their characteristics reflects the diversity and complexity of the role (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001; Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006).

While school leaders may vary in their attributes and employment of capabilities, there is agreement that successful leadership is dependent on the ability to integrate and employ various attributes and capabilities in the face of differing tasks and contexts. Duignan, Kelleher and Spry (2003) identified capable leaders as those most likely to be successful in providing influential leadership in times of uncertainty and change. Capable leaders possess knowledge and skills plus the confidence to develop and employ these skills effectively in complex and changing circumstances.

The research literature acknowledges that leaders’ understandings and dispositions strongly influence their interpretation of the challenges they face and the way they respond, with leader experience being an important contextual variable (Day et al., 2011; Duignan et al., 2003). However, a leader’s characteristics also influence how others respond to what they do. Day et al. (2011) explain, this depends on the nature of the “leadership prototypes (internalised models of ideal leaders)” possessed by colleagues and followers and the degree to which the leader matches the prototypes (Day et al, 2011: 5). Four areas of qualities and capabilities are used to frame considerations of leader attributes. These are: personal, relational, organisational and professional and while this list is by no means exhaustive, it provides a summary of relevant research.

1. Personal

Even under challenging circumstances, underpinned by a strong self-belief, successful school leaders believe their leadership can make a difference to the lives of staff, students, parents and the community (Leithwood, 2005; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). This
passion and commitment to the school and its students, staff and community, includes
a desire for success for all students. Day and Gurr (2014) distinguish this from
charismatic leadership in that these leaders are highly inclusive and collaborative,
renaming this “post-heroic leadership”. In the ISSPP studies, the values of social
justice and equity were found to underpin the passion, persistence, optimism and
enthusiasm demonstrated by the successful leaders (Day et al., 2011).

Successful school leaders demonstrate the capacity for critical reflection and routinely
engage in reflective practice (Gurr, Drysdale & Mulford, 2006; Harris & Chapman,
2002). Successful school principals describe themselves as reflective and endeavour
to build the skills of reflective practice into their student, staff and community teams.

2. Relational

Successful school leaders work with the strengths and weaknesses of staff, enhancing
staff sense of pride and self-worth, developing structures and resources that promote
and develop staff capacity. Day and Gurr (2014) found that successful leaders were
people centred. Activities include investing in staff development, providing time for
teachers to observe each other and discuss their practice, providing targeted support to
individuals as required and acting as a mentor to others (Harris & Chapman, 2002),
and seeing students develop (Gurr, 2014). Successful school leaders know how to use
a combination of pressure and support, expectations and independence to encourage
staff efforts in innovative thinking.

Leader and follower trust is seen to be critical in the organisational transformation
process. Tschan nen - Moran (2004) defines trust as the shared understanding by the
entire staff that both the staff itself and the individuals within the staff are reliable. Trust
is considered to be the lubricant that keeps organisations running smoothly. It is a
quality that demonstrates confidence in the behaviour of another person, group or
institution. It is the social glue that binds individuals and groups together for the
purposes of action (Day et al., 2011; Dinham, 2005; Duignan et al., 2003; Kaiser &
Halbert, 2009). Gurr (2014) found that successful leaders have a trusting disposition
and invest in modelling and developing trust across the school community. Organisational trust is the catalyst for developing a positive school climate, collective
teacher efficacy, openness to change and an improvement in student outcomes (Day
et al., 2011; Kaiser & Halbert, 2009; Mulford & Silins, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2005).

Successful leaders demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence, including
capabilities such as being able to remain calm, maintaining a sense of humour,
resilience in the face of adversity, being able to make difficult decisions, dealing effectively with conflict, listening to different points of view and positively contributing to team based projects. Emotional intelligence is commonly thought of as a key capability of successful principals.

Successful school leaders act with fairness, transparency, care and integrity to develop positive relationships, demonstrate respect equally to others, utilise high level interpersonal skills and demonstrate strong communication skills. They acknowledge others and offer support to staff to achieve individual aspirations and to help them through a change process (Gurr et al., 2006; Gurr, 2014).

3. Organisational

Traditionally, the practices of leadership and management have been separated, however successful school leaders enhance the school’s effectiveness with high level managerial skills. Being managerially adept and having generic management knowledge and skills is essential for maintaining clear direction, strong systems, role clarity, support and understanding by all stakeholders (Sergiovanni, 1984; Bolman & Deal, 1997; Cheng, 2005). Successful leaders were found to be able to read and understand the environment, especially their immediate and extended contexts, to think contingently and assess likely consequences. This contextual awareness enabled leaders to differentiate priorities, utilise their background experiences, make strategic decisions and draw upon supporting resources including their established networks (Duignan et al., 2003). Successful school leaders are cognisant of extended and immediate contextual factors (e.g. departmental policies and processes), but do not feel unduly bound by these. They are able to balance competing priorities and tensions, determine and justify their own directions, utilise their personal connections to achieve success, maintaining positive relationships with their school and extended communities.

Successful school leaders think strategically to advantage their school. They balance external contextual pressures for change with core school values and vision when deciding their actions (Day, Harris & Hadfield, 2001).

Successful principals take calculated risks and encourage others to do so. They model personal integrity and trust and provide opportunities for others to try something new. In the initial ISSPP study, Leithwood (2005) found that successful leaders were “cognitively flexible.” They demonstrated open mindedness and willingness to listen to the ideas of others as well as creative, critical lateral thinking with a solutions focus.
Successful school leaders positively manage change (Duignan et al., 2003; Leithwood, et al., 2002). Leadership inevitably involves change and successful leaders help teachers understand the problems the school faces, and to either accept the change or learn to live with it. These leaders respond positively to change, learn from it and support others to do the same. They are less worried about the negative effects of change – they are selective about the internal and external pressures they respond to (e.g. government policies) and are able to harness some of these pressures to serve their school’s priorities.

4. Professional

Successful leaders demonstrate a high level capacity for learning, not simply single loop learning gained through one-off courses, but more enduring double loop learning. They achieve this through engaging means such as mentoring, coaching, networking and use of self and peer feedback against leadership standards, to inform reflections and target improvement.

Dinham (2004: 252) states that successful leaders place a high priority on building the learning of themselves and others, “Principals place a high value on teacher learning and fund staff development inside and outside the school. They model teacher learning, being prepared to learn from teachers, students and others.”

Duignan and Gurr (2007: 158-161) found key themes in their stories of seventeen successful Australian principals. These leaders had a clearly articulated philosophy and deep moral purpose, an unwavering focus on all students and their learning needs, a passionate belief in the significance of what they do, a commitment to making a difference, a focus on and valuing of people, strong support for learning, growth and development, an expectation for high professional standards, a collaborative, collegial and inclusive school culture, a perspective of leadership as service, an acceptance of hard work, a ‘can do’ attitude and a sense of enjoyment in their work.

In agreement with Dweck’s (2006) requirement for transformational leaders to have a “new growth mindset”, Duignan and Gurr (2007) focus on the importance of growth and learning underpinning successful leadership, that of the principal and staff. They also see the moral purpose of leadership as central to successful leadership with the need for building positive relationships and collaboration and networking to achieve goals (Duignan & Gurr, 2007).
Understanding the professional practices, attributes and capabilities of successful school leaders has implications for much of the work of schools and systems in developing and strengthening leaders and the programs required to support this. Successful leaders lead schools through complex and often continuous change with hope and resilience, often achieving extraordinary outcomes for students in innovative, collaborative and sustainable ways.

Day et al. (2011: 236) sums this up:

…it would appear that it is the cognitive, emotional and practical capacities of heads that enable them to both achieve success and meet the increasing range of challenges and significantly more demanding and complex contexts than heads have ever been required to work in.

Moos et al.’s (2011: 17) contextualisation of the Australian model of successful principalship provides a relevant conclusion:

…principals exert an influence on student outcomes (broadly conceived) through a focus on teaching and learning which is driven by their own values and vision, an agreed school vision, elements of transformational leadership and increasing school capacity across four dimensions (personal, professional, organisational and community), taking into account and working with the school context and using evidenced based monitoring and critical reflection to lead change and transformation.

Finally, success as a principal is generally achieved with experience and increased understanding of the requirements of the role (Day & Gurr, 2014), suggesting that over time, with the desire to improve and the right supports, successful school leadership can be learned by others and achieved, at least to some degree.

Levin (2010: 3) establishes a link with this research stating “Autobiography is frowned upon in scholarly work, yet for most of us, our ideas are shaped by our life stories.” Knowing the personal, relational, organisational and professional capabilities of successful school leaders provides a starting point for reflection for those aspiring for success in their personal leadership or their schools. While not all leaders will possess these characteristics to the same degree, with a desire to improve and a moral purpose which extends beyond themselves, such qualities can be understood, refined and developed to a higher level.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.7 A New Paradigm in Schools

The literature on the requirements for leading successful and innovative schools in the current context, and the place of creativity and innovation will be explored in this section.

2.7.1 The Victorian Context

The context of Victorian schools and principals at the time of this research is an important consideration. It frames the practices of the school leaders in this study, identifying alignment and the scale of achievement of expectations with all principals in the Victorian system of education.

By early 2000, trends for school improvement, traditionally shaped by government systems of accountability and responsibility and relying on external measures, had started to favour a more internally driven growth model, with a focus on building the capacity of individual schools, leaders and teachers to improve classroom practice. The climate was one of increased and explicit expectations for school and leader performance. This system-led level of direction and compliance was a significant shift in Victorian schools and for many principals, content to continue what they had always done, often with a high degree of autonomy and community sanctioned success, it represented an unwanted intrusion and a formalisation of their role.

In 2003, the Victorian Government had released the Blueprint for Government Schools, which identified the importance of organisational culture in improving student outcomes. The Blueprint provided a model for strategic and focussed school and system improvement, outlining seven flagships for schools to develop a preferred future, including: Student Learning, Building Leadership Capacity, Creating a Performance and Development Culture, Teacher Professional Development and School Improvement. The flagships were based around a model for school improvement and effectiveness, consistently used by DEECD (formerly Department of Education and Training [DET]) since 2003. The model, adapted from the work of Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995), listed key characteristics of effective schools:

1. Professional Leadership
2. Focus on Teaching and Learning
3. Purposeful Teaching
4. Shared Vision and Goals

5. High Expectations of All Learners

6. Accountability

7. Learning Communities and


For the first time since the creation of self-managing schools in the previous decade, principals were now being given explicit direction in how they would lead, and be held to account, for school improvement.

As part of the ‘Building Leadership Capacity’ flagship, a developmental learning framework for school leaders and aspirant leaders was developed in 2006. This provided leadership domains, capabilities and developmental profiles for school leaders to measure their performance and seek appropriate professional development for improvement.

Like much of the work developed by DEECD at this time, it was motivated and guided by a strong research base and made clear links between school leadership and student achievement. As a result, Sergiovanni’s (1984, 1996, 2005) construct of five areas of leadership capability was central to the leadership understanding of all five principals and leadership teams in this study. This framework was constructed around the domains of technical, human, educational, symbolic and cultural leadership.

Critics of the Blueprint were concerned by the increased levels of accountability and the uniform measures and expectations being imposed upon schools, with little acknowledgment of different contextual factors. However, in terms of school improvement, these reforms offered explicit steps and frameworks, they were research grounded and improvement was embedded within workplace practice, and in some instances the school’s social context (e.g. induction of new staff).

In 2008, a second Blueprint was released which shifted school improvement to a new level and challenged some of the structures that schools had been working with for the past century. This Blueprint underlined the importance for every child to succeed, noting the variation in student achievement across schools. With 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, 2008), the moral
imperative of school improvement was firmly placed. Education systems were now responsible for students from 0-16 years, incorporating the early childhood area. Government responsibility was clearly articulated, with parents and communities seen as collaborative partners in learning. For the first time, education was brought into an integrated framework based upon the learner, rather than fragmented government and historical structures.

In 2002, all Victorian schools were placed into local networks of approximately 25 schools, however it wasn’t until 2008-9 that schools had clear responsibilities and accountabilities within a formalised network structure. The driving force behind this system wide reform was author and researcher, Richard Elmore who had acted as critical friend and advisor to DEECD for several years. Networks were designed to bring a cooperative culture to and between schools, other networks and the broader community, with a vision to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for young people across the area.

This shared responsibility for all students, coupled with the expectation that networks would encourage partnerships within local regions was a move from the traditional model of the stand alone, highly competitive school structure and was seen by DEECD as fostering opportunities for “access, innovation and excellence” (DEECD, 2008). Through the network model, schools were introduced to Instructional Rounds, an adaptation from the medical rounds model, embodying a specific set of ideas about how practitioners work together to solve common problems and to improve their practice. This work heightened expectations in Victorian schools, with explicit direction and compliance demanded. Schools had no choice but to be involved in Instructional Rounds and to implement this practice into their schools.

Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009: 99) views on school networks are worth noting at this point:

> When making change it is important to build new relationships among people engaged in practice together as it is to spread new knowledge to them. One way to disseminate knowledge through relationships is via networks … Attempts to control networks ultimately kill them. Governments cannot control networks, nor should they even mandate that every school belong to one. They can only disturb networks by throwing things in for them to deal with.

The importance of a strong research base for school and system improvement and the development of a growth mindset for Victorian principals were supported by the annual receipt of a personal copy of a significant reading. In 2006, all 1600 plus principals
received a copy of Heifetz and Linsky’s ‘Leadership on the Line – Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading’ (2002), challenging them to explore and lead whole school change in their schools. This was followed in 2007 with ‘How People Learn – Brain, Mind, Experience and School’ (2000). For the first time, understanding the way children (and adults) learn became the domain of the principal, many who had strategically left the teaching, learning and curriculum area to others in the years since they had left the classroom. In 2008, school leaders were urged to consider the moral imperative of their work with Friedman’s ‘The World is Flat’ (2006) and then to 2009 and City, Elmore, Fiarman and Teitel’s ‘Instructional Rounds’ (2009), again placing learning as a principal’s responsibility. Finally, in what could be considered a swing on from 2008 in reinvigorating a commitment to learning and challenging innovation, 2010’s book, Christensen et al’s ‘Disrupting Class – how Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns’ (2008).

The Melbourne Declaration (2008), collaboratively designed for schools in all Australian states and territories, made it clear that schools were more than just academic institutions and were to be seen in a broader context. The personal values identified were resilience, tolerance and ingenuity. The community values included were the desire to work for the common good, as responsible local and global citizens who are able to relate and communicate across cultures. In this, the moral purpose of schooling was set, with education seen to contribute to a socially cohesive society.

Victorian school leaders were being challenged to engage in professional dialogue and reflection around the transformation of learning with each other and their staff. For the first time for many, they were being exposed to research and best practice and provided with a clear framework to work within and for which they would be held to account. This was strong and explicit, system wide change.

2.7.2 Time for Creativity and Innovation

In this explicit and accountable framework of systemised school improvement and principal leadership, the time and place for the adoption of creative and innovative solutions was created. While the minimum expectations were being clearly set for Victorian principals, the ties on what was possible were also loosened. The direction for innovation was set with the two Blueprints and the clearly modelled imperative for all work to be based on sound research. For some principals, this provided the right support and timing to venture into bold, new areas, influenced by societal pressure for change, and critical research at the time which suggested that creativity and innovation
were the keys to responding to such demands. The increasing desire for a ‘futures focussed school’ represented the act of unshackling ties with the past and creating something relevant and new. The key elements and underpinning beliefs of the research on the need for innovation and creativity in 21st century schooling will be discussed in this section.

The place of innovation in creating schools for 21st century learners is central to Beare’s (2006: 29) extensive work on developing ‘future focussed schools’:

Enterprises which thrive in the information-rich economy tend to image their personnel in new ways. The enterprise and its members are flexible, they can make quick and strategic decisions, they encourage innovation and entrepreneurship; they value creativity rather than conformity, they give members the power to take local decisions and to exercise initiative, and they regard the people in the organisation as partners rather than property.

Robinson and Aronica (2009) focus on the needs of the child and future society when they implore educators and families to foster creativity in young people so that they may live fulfilling lives and enable the planet to survive into the next century. They argue that schools are destroying creativity and must change. Zhao (2013: 9) weighs into the creativity debate, urging educators to explore and create new world class education systems and schools through different ways of thinking and teaching. He believes “The future … needs innovators, creators and entrepreneurs” and the reform efforts to date have been improving an out of date paradigm. Stoll (2011: 11) summarises the challenge for educators and schools:

To bring about the changes embodied in 21st century skills and create the kinds of learning environments that will enable learners to be more self-directed requires major shifts in many teachers’ current practices. Teachers will need to be creative, to experiment with their practice and try out new approaches to teaching and learning and designing curriculum … Schools have to be places where teachers can develop the intellectual confidence to explore new ideas, to ask questions and to make mistakes from which they can learn.

The urgency for change is present. Innovative, flexible, collaborative and personalised responses are required to create new paradigms of education (West-Burnham, 2009). However this type of thinking poses new and exciting challenges for school leaders as old solutions will no longer work. Kaiser and Halbert (2009) propose that new mindsets and new expertise are required. This requires schools to work with their communities to gain a shared commitment and a shared moral purpose rather than implementing changes underpinned by control, compliance and achieving externally motivated milestones.
Learners in schools today embody the new paradigm. They have access to information, ideas and social connections unimaginable a few years ago. Teachers are wondering how to engage these learners in new ways and how much change will be involved. “The internet and social networking tools have changed how and when people learn” Levin (2010: 4). Personalised and student centred learning is seen as vital to both student learning, and their ability to continue to learn in circumstances which are currently unknown (Leadbeater, 2006; Christensen et al., 2008; Zhao, 2009; Kaiser & Halbert, 2009; Caldwell & Sprinks, 2013).

This thinking firmly places responsibility for learning on the child, utilising intrinsic motivation and a curiosity to learn. Zhao (2013: 13) forecasts a curriculum that follows the child and their needs:

(It) … does not presuppose or predefine what knowledge or skills are worthwhile. (Nor does it) … assume all children are the same … it does not impose artificial standards or age based grade level expectations. Furthermore, it does not believe children are simply empty vessels ready to be filled with knowledge, but rather it assumes that each child is a purposeful agent who interacts with the outside world.

Developing future citizenship is seen as important element in future schooling. Young people need to develop a sense of belonging, wellbeing, civic engagement and a wide range of capabilities, to live, learn and contribute locally and globally (Kaiser & Halbert, 2009). “Children will no longer live in isolated communities and thus their context of learning and living should not be confined to a physical location anymore. They must become citizens of their local community, nation and also the world” (Zhao, 2009: 14).

Sorman-Nilsson (2009) highlights the role of collaboration, stating that creativity and innovation have always been highly collaborative. Leadbeater (2006) views networks of schools as the “primary vehicle for improvement.” He believes that personalised learning programs are essential but place a great strain on school resources and are only possible if schools work in networks to widen their offerings, share their expertise, minimise duplication and match up their areas of organisational innovation (Leadbeater, 2006: 8).

The idea of innovation in schools has captured the attention of the public – seeing innovation as the way to break through historical ways of schooling. Sorman-Nilsson (2009) describes thinking as the ultimate change management tool and developing collaborative mindsets as a new set of opportunities for business, if it comes with an upgrade in thinking. He says the “flipping of hierarchies” and “ditching the corporate model” enables innovations to bubble up (Sorman-Nilsson, 2009: 240). Schools need
to create organisational structures that enable creative thinking to succeed and Sorman-Nilsson (2009: 284) calls innovation and ideas “the most precious form of currency in our evolving world. Without a constant flow of ideas a business is condemned to obsolescence.” The same could be said of schools, that without ideas, schools and education systems could become irrelevant.

However, while agreement on the need for creativity and innovation is relatively easy, its practice is much harder. Personalised learning that is flexible and responsive to students’ needs, working collaboratively, developing environments which foster thinking and risk taking and promote creativity and innovation, pooling knowledge, expertise and resources in networks of schools, engaging with students and the community to develop and share the vision and developing citizens with a worldwide perspective are all potential directions for successful school leaders to ensure the ongoing viability and success of their schools.

The elements discussed above and considered in contemplating innovation in schools are summed up by Caldwell and Spinks (2013: 122), who used Chen’s (2010) ‘Six Leading Edges of Innovation in Schools’ to create a map of the innovation continuum required for schools, seen in Table 2.5 below.

Table 2.5: Caldwell & Spinks (2013): Elements of Mapping the Leading Edges of Innovation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EDGE</th>
<th>PAST</th>
<th>FUTURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Thinking</td>
<td>Either/or</td>
<td>Both/and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Curriculum</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>21st century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Technology</td>
<td>Few empowered</td>
<td>Many empowered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Time/place</td>
<td>Place bound</td>
<td>Anytime/ any place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Co teaching</td>
<td>Mainly teachers</td>
<td>Partnerships of many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Youth</td>
<td>Students passive</td>
<td>Students active</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The literature pertaining to leading an innovative school will be explored in the next section.
2.7.3 Leading the Innovative School

Traditionally leadership was not seen as a critical influence on creativity and innovation, rather managers needed to stand back and let the really creative people do the work (Mumford, Bedell-Avers & Hunter, 2008). However, thirty years of evidence cited by these authors, indicates that leaders exert a strong influence on innovative cultures. Transformation that is significant, systematic and sustained change aimed at the success of all learners, poses new and exciting challenges for school leaders (Caldwell & Spinks, 2008). Clearly old solutions to old problems will no longer suffice. New ways of thinking, new mindsets and new forms of expertise are required (Kaiser & Halbert, 2009; West Burnham, 2009; Caldwell, 2011).

Dyer, Gregersen and Christiansen (2011: 7-8) claim that “Innovative companies are almost always led by innovative leaders ... innovative founders often imprinted their organisations with their behaviours ... innovative people systematically engage in questioning, observing, networking and experimenting behaviours to spark new ideas.” Innovative ideas develop from a function of the mind and behaviours and therefore by changing behaviour everyone can improve their creative impact or their ‘Innovators DNA’ (Dyer, et al., 2011). They note two common themes in innovative leaders: “First, they actively desire to change the status quo. Second, they regularly take smart risks to make it happen” (Dyer et al., 2011: 25). They developed the following ‘Innovators DNA’ Model, with five key behaviours for generating innovative ideas (Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1**: Dyer, Gregersen & Christiansen (2011: 27): ‘The Innovators DNA’ Model

This model reassures others that innovative behaviour and thinking can be learned, providing justification for this research. The two key behaviours seen in innovative leaders i.e. activating change and modelling and building a risk taking culture are
critical to this study. Each of the five school leaders will bring their own styles, experiences, moral imperatives and attributes to their leadership and the five schools will provide a different context for the study of leadership. The capacity of the leader to use both cognitive and relational skills to connect and develop new ideas may be seen. Caldwell (2011) explains that ‘disruptive innovators’ profiles will differ in the distribution across the elements of the ‘Innovator’s DNA’. He sees the significant influencing factors as: different people, different processes and different philosophies. This study provides the opportunity to view the model through the perspectives of the principal and stakeholder groups in five leadership contexts.

The organisational culture created by the leaders of innovative schools is a critical focus of this study. Klimek et al. (2008) claim that today’s most creative and successful companies create a high challenge, low threat environment – “rich in conversation” and with a “creative and playful atmosphere.” The role of the leader is to intentionally create and sustain a culture that is open to information, welcoming to new ideas and safe for individual risk taking and creativity. Klimek et al. (2008: 51) “… the success of the organisation depends on the team’s continual learning, creativity and innovation … Few schools today fit this picture.”

Questions of leadership practice and sustainability are critical to leading innovative schools. Harris (2008: 19) notes that “those organisations destined to be great in the rapidly transforming world will be those adept at generating new leadership capacity to meet the changing demands of global schooling.” As previously outlined, leadership for sustainability of the school’s innovation and success is an important aspect of this research.

Kaiser and Halbert’s (2009: 9) leadership ‘growth mindsets’ set clear expectations for leading school transformation. These are: having an intense moral purpose, building trust – relationships first, a habit of inquiry – questions before directions, learning for deeper understanding, demonstrating evidence seeking in action, learning orientated design and building connected mindsets – networked leadership.

School leaders who embody these mindsets understand the need for efficiency and display organisational competence and are passionately focussed on developing innovative practices that will better serve the needs of their learners (Kaiser & Halbert, 2009). “Being passionate generates energy, determination, conviction, commitment and even obsession. Passion is not a luxury or a quality possessed by just a few
principals. It is essential to sustaining successful leadership" (Kaiser & Halbert, 2009: 22).

Hannon (2014) provides further detail in the profile of innovative leaders. She outlines the areas in which such leaders invest time and energy, not usually the domain of conventional educational leaders. These are activism – creating a case for change, knowledge diffusion, social networking, modelling cultural competence, technology brokerage and experimentalism (Hannon, 2014: 10).

This propensity for leading change, learning, relationship building and creating a risk taking environment is the hallmark of the innovative leader, underpinned by a strong moral purpose. Creating positive life chances for all learners requires school leaders with passion, persistence, intensity and ethical drive (Day & Leithwood, 2007; Klimet et al., 2008; Kaiser & Halbert, 2009).

Successful school leaders hold a broad definition of success for their students. “They work relentlessly to promote a generous and enlarged conception of learning success for their learners and their schools” (Kaiser & Halbert, 2009: 25). This conceptualisation of success is underpinned by the 1996 Report to UNESCO Learning, which promoted four areas for future learning: Learning to Be, Learning to Do, Learning to Know and Learning to Live Together.

The art of leading the innovative school requires principals who are cognitively able, dedicated, ethical, have a strong personal identity and the ability to develop a clear school identity that “gives meaning and direction to the lives of staff, students and families” (Kaiser & Halbert, 2009).

Successful leadership therefore is a worthy study in innovative schools. Its requirement for school innovation and success is largely without dispute. However its enactment, while not short of models, does not uniformly lead to success and is no guaranteed provider of what is needed for the future.

2.8 Summary of Literature Review

The literature review suggests that schools have been caught out by wide sweeping societal change in expectations, practices and outcomes. While schools have not been alone in this, they have been in danger of being left behind, being traditionally change averse, complacent and reliant on old ways, pressured by risk averse governments, and parents who have memories and expectations of what schools should do.
Creativity and innovation are seen as central to the future success of organisations and schools. The capacity to be responsive, flexible and adaptable in new and potentially unimagined ways, maximising the creative input and engagement of the human resource, is viewed as the way to keep abreast in an ever changing environment.

There exists a breadth of knowledge on successful school leadership and school improvement strategies, as indicated in this review. School context, leadership experience, leader style and capacity, organisational history and culture, school and leader capacity for change, all provide variables which impact on how schools and principals lead change. Successful school leaders respond flexibly to their context, not so much in what they do, but rather how they lead school improvement.

New paradigms require schools and principals to transform traditional ways of learning, communicating, teaching and working, using technology, engaging with local and global communities, collaborating within and outside the school and even the physical learning structures of schools. The call for change is well argued but with little agreement on scale.

School leadership is a proven, critical determinant of school success. Successful leaders today are less interested in control or hierarchical models of leadership, top down communication or managing the bottom line. They are more likely to be highly strategic risk-takers, who encourage and give permission to others to lead and foster a controlled, risk-taking culture.

We know a great deal about the elements that work in school improvement, “but don’t understand enough about how they come together to form a coherent curricular, pedagogical and organisational whole, one that resonates positively throughout the school” (Walker, 2011: 9). The challenge is how to learn from the leadership of those principals who are successfully innovating on the educational periphery; this is the place of this research into the leadership of five innovative and successful schools. While leadership theories abound, the urgency for innovative leadership to lead schools to cater for the demands of 21st century learners, means there remains much to learn from the practice of those who are successful. Understanding their mindsets, practices and life experiences provides the opportunity to make successful leadership more mainstream and accessible.

This research creates the possibility for likeminded, successful school leaders to collaborate to create flexible and adaptive schools and education systems, as this is
where the real innovation may lie, in preparing our schools, students, staff and communities as a collective mass for an unknown future.

Finally, Hattie (2014: 12) says, “... if we become more successful at scaling up significant, systematic and sustained change, and if everyone (or at least a critical mass) shares and celebrates the enormous success that is all around us”, then we would have a self-transforming Australian education system. This research adds practical intent to existing knowledge on leading innovative and successful schools in the hope that it may add to sharing the knowledge about how to leverage educational innovation to transform Australian schools and systems.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the methodology used in the study. It outlines the research question, the selection of a multiple case study approach, the use of a multiple perspectives method, the selection of research sites and the data collection and analysis method, providing a chain of evidence for theoretically meaningful understanding. It considers issues of ethics, authenticity and trustworthiness and explores the limitations of the study.

The key objective in using the chosen methodology was to investigate the characteristics and behaviours of the principals' leadership in five Victorian government schools deemed to be successful and innovative by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD).

3.2 Research Questions

The main research question is: In schools that are regarded as innovative, well-led and which have excellent student outcomes, what leadership and management practices of principals promote a culture of innovation?

This question is seen to present a gap in current knowledge of educational leadership as argued in the literature review chapter. The use of the term ‘innovation’ has increased greatly in the past decade, loosely used to describe ‘something special’ that some organisations do or have, which is not common or shared across the broader spectrum. In schools, as in the business world, innovation is seen as highly desirable but is rarely described as a set of behaviours, skills, knowledge or attitudes that might be understood, copied or learnt from.

Sub questions relate directly to the main research question and break down the abstract into the practical, so that they can be investigated individually to build an answer to the main question (Walliman, 2010: 33). In undertaking this research, the following sub questions framed the study:

- What are the contexts and cultures of innovative schools?
• Are innovative schools seen as successful schools by stakeholder groups in each school?

• What are the specific behaviours, skills, knowledge and dispositions of principals that create innovative school cultures?

• From a life history perspective, what influences have shaped the work of these principals?

• What other factors might have helped to create innovative school cultures?

• Do stakeholders see their school's success and innovative culture as sustainable beyond the leadership of the current principal?

3.3 Qualitative Methods and the Research Design

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study. Qualitative methods provided a means for exploring and understanding the meaning that different individuals and groups ascribe to the principal's leadership and each school's success and capacity for innovation, exploring the experiences, ideas and feelings of participants (Creswell, 2009; Kervin, Vialle, Herrington & Okely, 2006). It allowed the principal's leadership to be placed as central to the study of each school within its natural context and culture, satisfying the key objective of the research.

A qualitative tradition draws on “both inductive and deductive logic, appreciates and takes into account subjectivities, accepts multiple perspectives, recognises the power of research over both participants and researchers and does not shy away from political agendas” (O'Leary, 2014: 130). It provided a strong framework for the study of principal leadership in schools as seen from the perspective of the principal and key stakeholders. Qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting (the schools) to obtain understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants (the principal and stakeholders) perceive them in the context. It traditionally delves into social complexities to “truly explore and understand the interactions, processes, lived experiences and belief systems that are a part of individuals, institutions, cultural groups, and even the everyday” (O'Leary, 2014: 130). By using qualitative methodologies, this study searches for holistic meaning to gain an intimate understanding of the principal, the school, the school's culture and specific situations at a particular time through rich engagement with the reality being studied.
Within the qualitative research design, a multiple case study approach with five schools was undertaken. A case study is described as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon or social unit bounded by time or place (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). However, the term ‘case study’ can be used loosely and it does not lead itself to a straightforward description. A case study is described as an in-depth exploration of a particular context using largely qualitative methods within interpretive inquiry (Stake, 1995). It can also be logically argued that case studies are not methodology, but more a site of investigation and data gathering (e.g. O’Leary, 2014: 194). The researcher is not trying to present the general picture but the particular case or cases in order to explain the how or why of a phenomenon and single cases can be compared to other cases (Hammond & Wellington, 2012: 17). The research question explores how principal leadership in each case might have contributed to the school’s success and capacity for innovation, fulfilling the criteria set by Kervin et al. (2006: 70), that the case study may be ‘exploratory’, where the researcher is trying to understand why things are the way they are. Furthermore, a multiple case study design can be undertaken as single cases, taking place in multiple cases across sites (Hammond & Wellington, 2012; Yin, 1994) as occurred in this study.

A multiple case study approach has been chosen because:

- It enabled the study of principal leadership of successful and innovative schools to occur within each school’s real life context (Bassey, 1999; Yin, 1994, 2003)

- It enabled the collection of viewpoints of the principal and different stakeholder groups within each site, supporting deeper rigour of the study and triangulation of the findings (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1998)

- It enabled the study to occur when the boundaries between principal leadership, school success and the school context were not clearly evident (Bassey, 1999; Yin, 2003)

- It enabled the deep analysis of single cases and the comparison of different cases as multiple sources of evidence for comparison and discussion (Hammond & Wellington, 2012)

- It coped with the collection of rich descriptive data with many variables, demonstrating the complexities of school leadership (Bassey, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995) and supported the interpretation and analysis of these
• It benefited from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (Bassey, 1999; Yin, 1994, 2003) building on previous studies of school leadership while still allowing flexibility for researcher designed frameworks and the potential for emergence of new phenomena.

Critics of a case study point to its alleged lack of generalisability and overly descriptive account, often without emergent theory (Kervin et al., 2006; Yin, 1994). The inclusion of multiple cases supports the validity of the generalisations in this study. The study provides a descriptive account, building this into an interpretative approach, developing conceptual categories to illustrate and support or challenge theoretical assumptions of school leadership. Multiple perspective interviewing, analysis of secondary documents and researcher observations and reflections deepen the rigour of the study by using supporting data gathering techniques.

In addition to the more obvious inductive approach used (see Figure 3.1) to generate relevant themes from the ground up, as the research progresses in the five school sites, more linear deductive techniques were used to explore knowledge of educational leadership and organisational theory; a gradual process of ‘deductive verification’ (O’Leary, 2014: 306). This combined approach was continually applied to emerging themes and comparisons between schools. It is a more rigorous process than a purely inductive method, while continuing to allow for alternative inductive explanations.

As well as using a multiple perspectives, multiple case study approach, consideration was given to the life history influences on each principal’s leadership. Life histories are particularly helpful in studying aspects of socialisation and acculturation in institutions and professions (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 116). Using the life histories approach taken in Dimmock and O’Donoghue’s 1997 case studies, as outlined in the literature review, a deeper understanding of each principal’s leadership, personal development and values base was gained by asking the principal and stakeholders a question on the possible influences that may have shaped the principal’s work (see Table 3.2). While life histories can also be accused of making generalisations difficult (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 117), when combined with other methods, greater reliability and trustworthiness are achieved. The life history perspective provided a depth to the study, adding a layer of understanding to the principal’s story, their values and meaning making and the influence of this on their personal leadership, contributing to the research method of inductive understanding.
Finally, consideration was given to secondary data sets: the Australian Bureau of Statistic’s [ABS] 2011 Census Quickstats which profiles geographical area socio-economic data and the 2011 Australian Curriculum and Research Association’s [ACARA] MySchool data which publishes schools’ annual NAPLAN results, student achievement gains compared to like and Australian schools and a range of socio-economic data. Using secondary data sets allows the researcher to ‘skip’ data collection processes and work with samples that may otherwise have been inaccessible or samples that are much larger than could be achieved solely (O’Leary, 2014: 256). However secondary data is only as good as the collection processes. “Government statistics and data provided by large, well known organisations are likely to be authoritative, as their continued existence relies on maintaining credibility” (Walliman, 2010: 84). Both these secondary data locations provide data sets from reliable government sources. Secondary data was also obtained from the schools’ websites and DEECD and other websites which had used the schools’ work as examples of best practice.

3.4 Positionality and the Research Approach

Managing subjectivity is a key consideration in qualitative research compared to the more definitive data types used in quantitative methodology. “The question is not whether researchers are subjective entities (everyone is), but whether we recognise ourselves as subjective, and whether we can manage our personal biases” (O’Leary, 2014: 50). Some perspectives in this study were understood and drawn from the researcher’s experience and worldviews as a long standing principal, school leader, past teacher and parent of children in the Victorian government system of education. This held obvious advantages in understanding the schools and the system within which they operated, as well as gaining access to DEECD personnel, principals and schools. However, it also required the researcher to constantly work towards neutrality without judging others in relation to their leadership and schools. For this reason, the identification of schools was sought from DEECD personnel in the Education Policy, Research and Innovations Branch, rather than researcher selected. The researcher’s background experience and the required objectivity supported the depth of the investigation.

This qualitative study did not set out to test or prove hypotheses of educational leadership theory. It aimed to provide rich, empirically grounded findings about the characteristics of successful and innovative schools and the practices of principal leadership in these schools. The research design chosen for this case study was
inductive as it allowed for the concepts of social meaning, relative to principal leadership and school innovation and success, to evolve through the gathering of rich, thick, empirical data.

The research takes an interpretative approach, allowing the researcher to develop understanding of the data and the emergent development of theory as the research proceeded. Rowlands (2005: 81) describes the foundation assumption for interpretive research being that knowledge is gained or filtered through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. This study is anchored in the interpretive paradigm, acknowledging the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is being explored, and the situational constraints shaping this process. It aims to produce an understanding of the social context of the phenomena and the process of the phenomena influencing and being influenced by the social context (Rowlands, 2005: 81 - 82). One of the strengths of qualitative methods is that they support an “inductive, naturalistic inquiry strategy for approaching a setting without predetermined hypotheses” (Patton, 2002: 129). This approach is strengthened by the epistemological assumption of the interpretivist approach that the world and reality are interpreted in the context of historical and social practices.

This research relied on an inductive spiral approach as outlined by Hurworth (1999) and adapted in Figure 3.1 below to portray this particular study.
As illustrated in Figure 3.1 the following steps were taken by the researcher in this study:

1. Interest in school leadership and its influence on school innovation and success

2. Develop the research question and sub questions

3. Seek recommendations of innovative and successful schools from DEECD based on criteria

4. Pilot interview with one researcher selected principal. Refined interview questions

5. Meet with eight recommended principals in their schools. Informal interview, observation and principal conducted tour of the school. Researcher note taking of conversation and observations. Selection of five research sites
6. Interview with principal, RNL, SC President, leadership team, staff team and parent group in each school. Return interview with principal as required. Audio taping and researcher field notes of interviews and observations.

7. Begin case data analysis of emerging consistencies and contrasts from interview notes.

8. Search for secondary data for each school including ABS Quickstats, ACARA, school and DEECD websites and journal articles.

9. Transcriptions completed. Summarised for key points and verbatim quotes highlighted for future use. Coding data within and then across schools.

10. Correlation and coding of the data into themes as determined by the sub questions, emerging themes and literature review.

11. Analysis and development of tentative concepts with emerging theory seen in patterns of school leadership across four of the five successful and innovative schools.

These steps will be explained in greater detail in the following sections of this chapter.

3.5 Research Sites

The research studied five Victorian government schools regarded as innovative, well-led and with excellent student outcomes as identified by DEECD personnel. The guiding criteria shared with DEECD for recommendation of the schools included:

- demonstrated innovative practice over a number of aspects of school development
- the innovation had been sustained and built upon over time (approximately 5 – 7 years)
- the school was highly regarded by the system as an example of best practice – and its lead was followed by other schools
- the principal was highly regarded by the system and was the clearly defined leader of the school
- staff were highly regarded by other schools
• the school had received a positive school review report

• student outcomes were above expected levels

• student data had shown consistently strong performance indicators and trends, including NAPLAN data, MySchool comparative school data, student, staff and parent opinion surveys and tertiary placement data for secondary schools

• consideration of both primary and secondary settings.

Initially seven sites were recommended from DEECD and informal meetings were held with principals on the school site. Field notes were taken by the researcher and the sites were reduced to four schools seen to highly satisfy the criteria. As only one site provided a secondary school example, further recommendations were requested of DEECD and one additional school was visited and selected for the study. Formal approval from DEECD was gained for these schools to participate in the research.

The types of schools in the initial research pool are shown in Table 3.1 below.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

Table 3.1: Breakdown of Selected Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Year Levels</th>
<th>Principal - Yrs in School</th>
<th>Approx. Size</th>
<th>Soc Eco Status</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Selection &amp; Pseudonym</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary School 1</td>
<td>Prep – Year 6</td>
<td>22 – 20 as principal</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Outer Metro</td>
<td>Crossroads Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School 2</td>
<td>Prep – Year 6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Mid - High</td>
<td>Regional Centre</td>
<td>Breezes Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School 3</td>
<td>Prep – Year 6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>Woodside Primary School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School 4</td>
<td>Prep – Year 6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Outer Metro</td>
<td>Not Selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary &amp; Junior Secondary School</td>
<td>Prep – Year 9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>Not Selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School 1</td>
<td>Years 7 - 12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Metro</td>
<td>Not Selected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School 2</td>
<td>Years 7 - 12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>Mid - High</td>
<td>Outer Metro</td>
<td>Parkview Secondary College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School 3</td>
<td>Years 7 - 12</td>
<td>8 - 3 ½ as principal</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Regional Centre</td>
<td>Links Secondary College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three schools not selected were part of the initial recommendations by DEECD as they met the agreed selection criteria. However, in each case there existed contextual reasons for the school not being chosen.

Primary School 4 was a large primary school set in a working class area attractive to new immigrants. The school held some similar features to Primary School 1, who it referenced as a model school. It was not selected, partly due to this similarity, and also because of a potential concern, gathered from principal comments and school data, that the perception of the school's success might not be shared broadly across the staff and parent groups.

The Prep – Year 9 School was in political turmoil at the time of the initial research visit with proposed changes to its structure being externally imposed upon the school. While the school's programs and extensive global networks were diverse, the principal
expressed concern that there was ‘a way to go’ to improve the school’s academic achievement. This school was not chosen due to it being in turmoil, but also because it did not demonstrate academic success as measured by its years 3, 5 and 7 NAPLAN achievement scores.

Secondary School 1 was a small inner urban secondary school, widely regarded as ‘doing things differently’. However, the principal expressed doubt that it was an innovative and successful school at this time, as they have not ‘got it all together yet’. This view was supported by the recent NAPLAN results. The principal was also pressured by the DEECD view that they would improve their results and lift enrolments if they were to develop a more conformist approach (e.g. introducing a school uniform). This school was not chosen as it did not have the academic measure of success and the culture of the school was not seen to be unified or stable at the time of the study.

The selected sites and their variations were chosen to best meet the criteria, while also providing rich sources of information in a wide range of contexts. This is ‘extreme or deviant case sampling’, the common factor being that each school was identified as an innovative, well-led and highly successful school and the purpose was to seek to understand and learn from these cases of principal leadership, “… purposefully picking a wide range of cases to get variation on dimensions of interest” (Patton, 2002: 243). Different contexts of school location, size, type, principal gender and experience provided empirically rich data for understanding effective school leadership in diverse contexts, enabling the study of patterns across contexts and consideration of the impact of the variations.

This was not intended to be a broad study, but rather aimed to look more deeply into a small number of sites, a common approach for qualitative method researchers. Knight (2002: 63) explains, “Time taken on interviewing and the complexity of the transcription and analysis tend to restrict the sample size … interpretative research tends not to see sample size as a key indicator of research quality.” Multiple perspectives of the school and the principal’s leadership were sought using three individual interviews and three group interviews over a five day block in each school.

3.6 Access and Selection of Participants

With DEECD approval, access was gained to the school site through the principal. This required an explanatory introduction email, followed up by a phone call. On several occasions it required getting through the Business Manager who acted as the

In this study, positionality supported access as the researcher was known in some professional (but not personal) capacity to four of the five principals and all five responded to a personal email or request for a return phone call. The principal provided the researcher with access to the individual interview participants and arranged for the leadership team to be interviewed. The principal determined the staff and parent group samples as it was not possible for the researcher to readily access these. The principals were provided with an introductory letter for the parent and staff group participants and it was agreed that principals, in negotiation with the researcher, would seek volunteers from the staff and parent groups. Being respectful of the school and the people volunteering, this often meant those involved were asked for convenience as well as relevance. For example, staff not teaching on a particular day may have been asked to give some of their time for interviewing, or a parent group that already existed in the school may have been invited to be involved. Whilst this may engender some bias into the study, it is not a systematic bias and as the focus is on perceptions of leadership of innovative culture, all perceptions are worthwhile recording.

The study required the identification of participants who had the experience of the phenomenon being studied i.e. are experiencing the leadership and success of the school. The process of selecting a small group of participants from a larger group, with the aim to collect data which is as representative as possible, is called ‘sampling.’ The goal was to select samples that were:

1) Broad enough to speak about the population
2) Large enough to conduct the desired analysis and
3) Small enough to be manageable (O'Leary, 2014: 182).

To gain rich data, multiple participants were selected to gather a range of perspectives, providing the opportunity to compare and contrast perspectives from both within and across sites, allowing for data triangulation and emergent concept development. The sample frame of the population of each school is shown in Table 3.2 below.
Table 3.2: Sample Frame of Each Site

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERVIEWS</th>
<th>REASON FOR SELECTION</th>
<th>SELECTION PROCESS</th>
<th>SAMPLE SIZE</th>
<th>CONTACTED BY:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>Focus of study Determined by formal position</td>
<td>DEECD recommendation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Network Leader</td>
<td>Key informant expertise</td>
<td>Determined by formal position</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council President</td>
<td>Key informant expertise</td>
<td>Determined by formal position</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Principal initially Researcher follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Team</td>
<td>Key informant group expertise</td>
<td>Determined by formal position</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>Principal initially Researcher follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Group</td>
<td>Sample subgroup</td>
<td>Negotiated with principal</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Group</td>
<td>Sample subgroup</td>
<td>Negotiated with principal</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sampling was purposive – selected to be information rich and likely to inform the research question. The sampling was informed by existing school leadership research, claiming that successful school leaders have meaningful relationships with key stakeholders (e.g. Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The stakeholders of the school were identified as those who held a stake in the school's performance. The researcher aimed to gather data on the professional and personal characteristics and practices of the principals, as seen and understood through the perspectives of members with a stake in each school's success.

3.7 Pilot Interview

Prior to commencing the interviews in the five schools, a trial interview was undertaken with a Victorian government school principal. While an experienced principal, there was no attempt to ensure he or the school met the selection criteria for the selected schools. The selection for the pilot interview was primarily based upon researcher ease
of access, time restrictions and professional trust for the researcher to receive feedback on the process. The purpose of conducting the pilot interview was:

- To have a trial run through of the interview process
- To reflect on any difficulties with the flow of the interview and the researcher role
- To seek feedback from the pilot principal on the interview
- To practice audio recording and note taking during the interview
- To make modifications to the questions or process based on the quality of the data generated (Kervin et al., 2006; O’Leary, 2014)

As a result of the pilot interview, modifications were made to the background questions and the interview question order, as well as demonstrating the need for a clear and simple definition of innovation. The researcher gained understanding of the need to balance participant dialogue with responding to the questions and managing time. However the pilot interview also affirmed the quality of the semi-structured interview questions. Success criteria not highly met by the trial participant became obvious with subsequent difficulty answering some questions. Careful consideration was given by the researcher to the reasons for difficulties in the trial interview and questions were left unchanged despite difficulties, as this was judged by the researcher to be a gap in the trial principal’s understanding or experience.

### 3.8 Methods of Data Collection

Qualitative research supports a range of methods for data collection to provide contextual insights and understanding. Methods for collecting empirical material may include direct observation, interviews, documents, artefacts and the use of visual materials, to name but a few. Multiple perspective, semi-structured, individual and group interviews have been used as the primary data collection method in this study. This has been supported by the use of researcher observation and secondary document analysis as ‘no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective’ (Patton, 2002: 306).
3.8.1 Interviews

Interviewing is described as “... a group of methods that permit you to engage in a dialogue or conversation with the participant ... It is usually orchestrated and directed by you (and is) ... a conversation with a purpose” (Lichtman, 2006: 115). Interviews can be seen as “unnatural kinds of conversations”, (Hammond & Wellington, 2012: 91) and more a co-constructed account. “The interview is not then ‘the truth’ as seen by the interviewee, but a discourse about a topic, and in the telling of the story the interviewee is making sense of the story; in other words, the story changes in its telling” (Hammond & Wellington, 2012: 93).

Interviews provide an opportunity to delve deeply into ways people make meaning of their experiences and critically, they require the researcher to listen carefully without interruption or driving the conversation. “The researcher explores a few general topics to help uncover the participant’s views, but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses ... The participant’s perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it ... not as the researcher views it” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 101).

“Interviews ‘go deep’ allowing the researcher to see an event or context from the point of view of the people ... interviews are interactive allowing for clarification of questions and identification of unexpected themes” (Hammond & Wellington, 2012: 91). Interviewers and participants co-construct the participant’s story and this may be distorted by personal bias, anxiety or perspective. The use of observations, secondary documents and multiple perspectives attempts to triangulate this to maintain the integrity of the data.

While interviews can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured (Hammond & Wellington, 2012; Kervin et al., 2006; O’Leary, 2014) this study used a semi-structured approach to enable a free flowing conversation within a defined question plan. This allowed for deviation from the plan if unexpected data emerged. While this freedom seeks a lack of bias, it opens up the responses to researcher interpretation and the breadth of responses makes them more time consuming and difficult to code (Walliman, 2010: 98). The questions were not provided to participants and were used by the researcher as a reference to strategically direct the interview to collecting the required data, while allowing for the unexpected.
The goal of the interview questions was to enable dialogue around the school’s context, culture and how this may have developed, the degree and type of innovative activity in the school, the practices and behaviours of the principal which may have supported this, the perceived style of the principal, their beliefs and values and possible life influences, additional influences in the school which may have supported the development of an innovative school culture and the sustainability of the innovation and success.

This goal linked directly to providing answers to the research sub questions thereby leading back to the main research question. While the interview questions for the principal and the other individuals and groups were not identical, the framework provided stratified questions so that comparisons of perspectives could be made and triangulation of the data could occur. All participants were offered the opportunity to add ‘anything else’ at the end of the interview, allowing for the follow up of an idea or unforseen empirical data. As the different cases progressed, care was taken by the researcher to balance flexibility with consistency in the multiple perspective interviews across cases, through the questions asked and the level of detail reasonably explored. This did provide a challenge at times, especially in group interviews, when it was sometimes difficult to remain ‘on track’ to cover the focus areas if a loosely related idea or current contextual ‘hot topic’ was being explored by a group. As a result, the order of the questions sometimes changed to fit with the conversation flow and sometimes the questions were asked to provide the opportunity for participants to summarise something that had already been covered.

The questions for individuals and groups are provided in Table 3.3 below and links are made to the research sub questions.
Table 3.3: Interview Questions Linked to Research Sub Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH SUB QUESTIONS</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE PRINCIPAL</th>
<th>INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the contexts and cultures of innovative schools?</td>
<td>Leader &amp; School Background Qns</td>
<td>Leader &amp; School Background Qns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Your school was recommended to me by DEECD as being innovative. Can you tell me why your school is regarded as innovative?</td>
<td>3. This school was recommended to me as innovative. Can you tell me why this school is regarded as innovative?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is the history of this innovative culture? What people and events have been critical to its development?</td>
<td>4. What is the history of this innovative culture? What people and events have been critical to its development?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are innovative schools seen as successful schools by stakeholder groups in each school?</td>
<td>Does not apply to the principal</td>
<td>All interview questions apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader &amp; School Background Qns</td>
<td>Leader &amp; School Background Qns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you have an educational philosophy which guides your leadership practice?</td>
<td>1. How would you describe the leadership style of the principal? Why do you say this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Is this school a good match with your leadership? Why/why not? Has this changed over your time as principal at the school?</td>
<td>5. What has been the principal’s role in this? (developing an innovative culture)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What has been your role in this? (developing an innovative culture)</td>
<td>6. What have been some of the principal’s successes?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What have been some of your successes?</td>
<td>6. What have been some of the principal’s failures?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What have been some things that have not worked?</td>
<td>7. What have been some of the principal’s failures?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From a life history perspective, what influences have shaped the work of these principals?</td>
<td>Leader &amp; School Background Qns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What past experiences have shaped your leadership (i.e. beliefs and practice)?</td>
<td>2. What past experiences do you think may have shaped the principal’s leadership (beliefs and practice)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What other factors might have helped to create innovative school cultures?</td>
<td>Leader &amp; School Background Qns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What is the history of this innovative culture? What people and events have been critical to its development?</td>
<td>4. What is the history of this innovative culture? What people and events have been critical to its development?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do stakeholders see their school’s success and innovative culture as sustainable beyond the leadership of the current principal?</td>
<td>Leader &amp; School Background Qns</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. What would you like this school to achieve in the future? What is your role in this?</td>
<td>8. What would you like this school to achieve in the future? What is the principal’s role in this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Anything else?</td>
<td>9. Anything else?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the outset, participants were provided with informed consent forms to sign; the researcher explained the research, confidentiality and the way the interview would be conducted. It is important that interview participants are made to feel as comfortable as possible in the setting and that they feel their views are ‘valuable and useful’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 101). The semi-structured interview enabled individuals (principal, RNL and SC President) and group interview participants (leadership team, parent and staff groups) the time and opportunity to more freely express their opinions. It also enabled the researcher to paraphrase responses back to participants and ask additional questions to gain clarity, seek evidence of the depth of support for a statement and increase researcher understanding. Of the 31 interviews, all were conducted face to face and in the school setting with the exception of four RNLs (own offices) and two SC Presidents (office and home) and interviews were timed between 37 – 83 mins with group interviews tending to be longer due to the need for many voices to be heard.

Group interviews provided participants the opportunity to voice their opinions in a collective group, with between 3 - 7 participants. While this study intended to have groups of 6 - 8 participants, this was not always possible due to the predetermined size of the leadership team sample (3 members in two cases) or the unavailability of a staff or parent group member in some cases.

Participants were encouraged to speak out of order, as they wished to respond to questions or build on the conversation. In all group interviews conducted, all participants contributed to the conversation although in some groups, individuals tended to dominate and the researcher carefully solicited the views of others who may not have been heard for some time. Apart from the obvious time and cost efficiencies of group interviews, advantages include the confidence which participants may feel to speak within a group. They are also more likely to jog each other’s memories and thoughts – also a potential disadvantage in keeping conversations aligned to the desired outcomes of the study.

Somekh and Lewin (2006: 43) caution on bringing together “even a pre-existing group for research purposes, we may ask people to cross boundaries which they do not normally do in the contexts in which they usually meet” and that the researcher cannot abdicate responsibility for the impact this may have on continuing relationships within the group. This was particularly true for the parent group in each case in this study as individuals were not always known to each other. Care was taken by the researcher to allow group members to introduce themselves to each other and to stake their claim in
the school’s success (i.e. children in the school) and their informant expertise (i.e. years in the school). At the end of each audio recorded interview, researcher checking took place to ascertain, as much as possible, that all members calmly exited the interview by providing the opportunity to personally reflect on the process. This formed part of the interview exit strategy, the logical but often forgotten extension to the entry, access and ethics of research (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 91).

Cooperation from individuals and groups within the interviews was generally strong, with high levels of personal interaction with the researcher and in groups, between individuals and with the researcher. In one case, in a staff group interview there was a sense of unease recorded in the researcher’s field notes. The reflective diary of observations noted that members were deferring to one senior staff member rather than speaking openly, with a sense that some things were being left unsaid. In another case, a parent group interview, dominated by two very vocal, dissatisfied parents, provided a negative tone which may have influenced the responses of others and which required the researcher to attempt to return the group to a place of neutrality at the end of the interview. During the interviews, the researcher was sensitive to the ‘truths’ being constructed by participants and that these may have included experiences and feelings which were not uniquely their own but which were owned with others. The multiple perspective interview design provided checking mechanisms for possible distortions.

All interviews were audio recorded to retain a full uninterrupted record of what was said. These were then transcribed in order to further analyse the data. While there is not universal agreement on the value of transcribing (e.g. Walford, 2001: 94) as “the tape recording itself is not an accurate record of a conversation” transcripts were summarised and compared with the audio recordings to ensure validity. Individual interview participants were provided with a copy of the interview transcript and offered the opportunity to make modifications. Of 15 interviews, this resulted in minimal changes for one participant and the change did not impact on the key emergent themes. Member checking was not possible for group interviews.

3.8.2 Observation

Varying degrees of participant observation is an element of all qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 100) and was an integral part of this study. During semi-structured interviews, it required a special kind of listening using all senses, to what the actors were doing, what was being said, and possibly not being said and a continuing
mindfulness of the positionality of the researcher (reflexivity). Observation during interviews supported the researcher to work with participants to elicit viewpoints and provided added understanding of participant meaning making and values. Observations were recorded during interviews by the researcher as field notes and as reflective diary entries as soon as possible after the interviews, usually at a nearby offsite location. This enabled the experience to be captured immediately and these observations and reflections informed case understandings, comparisons and emerging concept development.

Two observation examples were entered into the researcher’s diary post interview:

Eye contact, hesitancy and silences – some things not being said. (Participant 1) speaks but others look to (Participant 2) as the most experienced teacher. She held back and sometimes disagreed with what was being said. Group body language closed. Nervous tension. (Observations from Staff Group Interview, Researcher’s Reflective Diary 23/8/11)

His starting position was interesting: arms folded, sitting forward, v. uncomfortable. He seems excited by the entrepreneurial side of his role. (Observations from Principal Interview, Researcher’s Reflective Diary 12/9/11)

While recording sensory images provides invaluable, on the spot data, it is worth noting that there is no such thing as objective observation and we see what we expect to see. The need for subjectivity remained a constant reminder for the researcher with focused interaction for the purpose of the research being the enduring aim. “… it is the fact that we have a position that enables us to make sense of a social situation. Observation and interpretation is necessarily theory laden and to do either without a position is not a neutral or value free stance but is to exist in a state of mental dissociation and disintegration” (Hammond & Wellington, 2012: 119). Awareness of subjectivity was evident in the following reflective diary entry:

(The principal) spoke to me as a principal not a researcher. She asked me questions, she enlisted my understanding and she didn’t readily detail things she assumed I knew. (Observations from Principal Interview, Researcher’s Reflective Diary 23/8/11)

In addition to interview observations, the researcher noted details from being physically present in the school. This included a breadth of observations such as:

- cleanliness and care of the buildings and school grounds
- order of the principal’s office
- initial welcoming feel from the front office staff
• formality of interactions between the staff and the principal

• interactions of the students with each other and their teachers

• student adherence to school uniform

• artefacts on display at the front entry

While this added data to the case story being built, neither was it free from researcher expectation and value, as outlined above.

3.8.3 Documents

In addition to employing multiple perspective interviews to collect primary data, external school documentation was collected and referenced. This included school enrolment data, promotional materials, DEECD articles on the schools, school newsletters, curriculum overviews, NAPLAN results, ABS and ACARA socio-economic data and school website information. This data is secondary in nature, having been collected or developed originally for a purpose other than this study. “When you use data from a source where you have had no control in its collection, you will have to assure yourself that the data is reliable and sufficiently comprehensive and suitable for your needs” (Walliman, 2010: 84). While the ABS and ACARA data is authoritative and reliable, the schools’ data and external publications represent the school identity which is promoted to the wider public for a range of purposes. This is contextual data which needed to be assessed by the researcher for its credibility and used cautiously. Secondary data provided the benefit of being able to contextualise, support or negate interview comments and observations, strengthening the credibility of the primary data.

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to a mass of collected data and presenting this in ways that others will understand. It is a ‘messy, ambiguous, time consuming, creative and fascinating’ process. “It does not proceed in a linear fashion; it is not neat. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships and underlying themes …” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 154). It is noted that there is no formula or single method for transforming qualitative data into findings and each researcher is required to find their way of reaching a ‘final destination’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 157).
The data analysis stage required repeated filtering of raw data and consequently, researcher choices were continually being made and remade. Awareness of internal bias is critical throughout this process, as is recognition that bias can never be totally removed. “... interpretations are always entwined with a researcher’s biases, prejudices, world views and paradigms – both recognised and unrecognised, conscious and unconscious” (O'Leary, 2014: 307). Using field notes, secondary documents and observations, the researcher collected and commenced a process of holistically looking at the data from each case, post interviews but prior to transcription completion. While the researcher’s field notes taken during the interviews were essentially brief and descriptive, the diary reflections were more emotional, drawing on observations and the personal experience of the interview. The secondary documents provided descriptive balance and an initial overall impression of each case was developed by the researcher. Transcripts were completed case by case and as this took up to 12 months, it provided time for the reiterative process of reading and re-reading to gain familiarity and analysis of each case, the time lapse supporting the researcher to approach the transcripts in an objective manner. The cycle of re-reading, reviewing and re-engaging in the raw data initiated a process of immersion into each case, essential for the next stage of reducing the data. "Data reduction is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organises data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified” (Miles & Huberman, 1984: 21).

Once field notes, related documents and diary reflections were collected, the audio-recorders transcribed and the transcription approved by members, a system for making sense of the large quantity of data was required. Creswell (1998: 140) describes this process of reducing the data as “creating displays of information such as diagrams, tables or graphs – means for visualising the information and representing it by case, by subject and by theme.” This involved developing codes and categories to sort and reduce the text and to start developing themes or emerging patterns within and across cases by examining similarities and contrasts line by line. Finally interconnections, concepts and theories were developed to reach the point of meaningful understanding. O'Leary (2014: 307) describes this as a process of ‘drilling in’ and ‘abstracting out’ whereby data is reduced for sense making and enriched to apply theoretical meaning. In Figure 3.2 below, an overview of the data analysis process of this study has been adapted from O'Leary’s model of 'Working with Qualitative Data' (2014: 307).
Transcripts for each case were completed, important quotations were highlighted and transcripts were then summarised to reveal key points under each interview question. From this, a broad conceptual framework was established of the main dimensions to be studied with some ‘presumed relationships’ among them (Miles & Huberman, 1984: 29). Matrix 1 was developed based upon the Miles and Huberman’s (1984, 1994) inductive coding system requiring themes to be developed from the interview questions, combining knowledge of school leadership literature and the raw data. At this stage the data organisation remained broad to ensure a holistic picture was gained and the 26 concept headings are listed in Table 3.4 below.
Table 3.4: Matrix 1 – Codes and Concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Concept:</th>
<th>Code:</th>
<th>Concept:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>History of the Principal</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>School Known For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Principal Background Influence</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Principal Successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Principal Key Relationships</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Principal Failures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Principal Networks</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>School Environment/Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Staff Profile</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Use of Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Vision for School (Principal/Others)</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Use of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Leadership Style</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>RNL Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Personal Qualities</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>School Council President Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Communication/Decision Making Style</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Leadership Team Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Principal Drivers</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Staff Group Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>School Profile</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Parent Group Perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>School Organisation for Learning</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>School Improvement Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To the concept headings of Matrix 1, dot point notes and key quotes from the raw data (i.e. transcripts, observations, researcher notes and secondary documents) were added to illustrate the findings. See example in Table 3.5 below.
### Table 3.5: Matrix 1 - Example of Two Concepts in One Case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code and Concept</th>
<th>Crossroads PS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3.3 Communication Style & Decision Making Style | • major decisions slow, methodical. Others made quickly  
• personal communication more 1-1 with high expectations shared  
• relies on AP (curric)  
• lot of informal communication (STF)  
• shared: ‘its not just I’ship making decisions’ (LSHP)  
  ‘everyone seems to know what’s going on’ (SCP)  
• listens and compromises if needed  
• visible  
• high level social skills  
• ‘it’s everyone’s prof. responsibility to know what is happening in the school.’ (PRIN) |
| 6.1 School Environment/  
Culture                           | • a learning culture based on research implementation reflection  
• student centred  
• professional  
• respect and inclusiveness  
• loyalty expected (PRIN)  
• progressive ‘he says if you are not moving fwd, you are moving bkwd’s’ (LSHP)  
• risk taking  
• ‘no problems only solutions’ (LSHP)  
• high expectations  
• collaborative  
• flexible |

By building up each case in this way, full researcher immersion was possible, enabling each school's story to unfold and patterns to be seen. To fully capture and understand each case, a full summary was developed, using verbatim quotes taken from the transcript to tell the story and capture the uniqueness of each school context and the leader’s characteristics. While these full summaries provided immersion into the study and added significantly to researcher understanding, they were deemed too large to include in the main body of the thesis and have therefore been included for reference in the appendices section. This is with the exception of Woodside PS, the less innovative
school whose full story was not included for ethical reasons, as explained in Chapter 1. However, a less comprehensive summary of the full stories of all five schools was developed and presented in Chapter 4, albeit with minimum detail provided for Woodside PS.

As each case unfolded, it was added to the matrix and written up as a full story; similarities and disparities across cases started to emerge. Using the matrix as a large inductive wall display, the researcher highlighted common themes from the concepts across cases.

As a multiple perspective approach was taken, one conceptual framework applied was to compare the leadership characteristics and practices identified by stakeholders both within and across cases. To support this, a word analysis was undertaken with the adjectives most frequently used by stakeholders to describe the principal. Using the transcripts and the ‘find’ word search button, the adjectives most commonly used by others to describe the principal were collected and counted, enabling stakeholder groups’ agreement on principal descriptors to be seen and for these to be compared between cases. This provided rich data for stakeholder perception of the principals in each case and it was used as a comparison to principal self-perception in the interview transcripts, adding clarity to the principals’ leadership. See example in Table 3.6.
The word analysis stage clearly identified an anomaly becoming increasingly apparent between the Woodside PS principal’s description of her leadership, its intent and impact on key stakeholder groups and the perceptions of the stakeholder groups in her school. At this juncture, a decision was made by the researcher to contrast the Woodside case as not being typical of leadership of school innovation and success, compared to the other four cases.
From the reduced interconnected data, five likely categories emerged across the school sites. Demonstrating the reiterative nature of data analysis, Matrix 1 codes were applied to the five categories to strengthen the process and clarify the emergent picture, shown in Table 3.7 below.

**Table 3.7: Matrix 1 Codes Matched to Five Categories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARTIX 1 CODES:</th>
<th>FIVE CATEGORIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2 4.2 4.3 6.1 7.1 7.2 7.3 8.1 8.2</td>
<td>School Context &amp; Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 5.2 5.3 6.2 6.3 7.1 7.2 7.3 8.1 8.2 9.2</td>
<td>School Success &amp; Innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 2.3 3.1 3.2 3.3 4.1 7.1 7.2 7.3 8.1 8.2 9.3</td>
<td>Principal Leadership of Innovative Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 1.3 2.1 7.1 7.2 7.3 8.1 8.2</td>
<td>Influences on the Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1 7.1 7.2 7.3 8.1 8.2</td>
<td>Sustainability of the Innovation &amp; Success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Categories allowed comparisons to be drawn across the cases and common elements and degrees of variation started to emerge, providing themes or labels for principal leadership of innovative and successful schools, and aside from leadership, common themes of innovative and successful schools. For principal leadership, the themes included the six elements of life stories, vision, style, drivers, personal qualities and communication/decision making. Themes for innovative and successful schools were seen in the schools’ pre conditions, core drivers and success elements, further detailed in Chapter 5, Figure 5.1.

From this predominantly inductive reasoning, a deductive process was applied using the literature review (Dweck, 2006; Hannon, 2014; Kaiser & Halbert, 2009; Mintzberg, 2004) to explore the notion of leadership mindsets or perspectives. Re-reading the data, this led to the theoretical development of the five leader perspectives, clarified through the application of a second matrix (Matrix 2). This used the combined case data elements from Matrix 1, placing them into the six themes and grouped into one of the five perspectives. While some thematic elements overlapped across perspectives, a researcher decision was made for the most likely fit. An example of two themes is seen in Table 3.8 below.
Table 3.8: Example of Matrix 2 – Two Thematic Elements with Five Perspectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMES</th>
<th>GROWTH PERSPECTIVE</th>
<th>COLLABORATIVE PERSPECTIVE</th>
<th>BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE</th>
<th>CHANGE ACTIVIST PERSPECTIVE</th>
<th>MORAL PURPOSE PERSPECTIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VISION</td>
<td>Leading learning community</td>
<td>Shared vision</td>
<td>Advantages the school</td>
<td>Futures focussed</td>
<td>Student centred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building teacher capacity</td>
<td>Builds trust</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STYLE</td>
<td>Lighting flames, inspiring leadership</td>
<td>Shares leadership</td>
<td>Doesn’t do ‘nuts &amp; bolts’</td>
<td>In control, calm &amp; ordered</td>
<td>Inclusive – listens to students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constantly reflecting</td>
<td>Selfless, lacks ego</td>
<td>Prepared to relinquish control but has to know</td>
<td>Driven</td>
<td>Passion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High expectations</td>
<td>Both open &amp; private</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open to new ideas</td>
<td>Gains trust &amp; respect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Talks &amp; listens to others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Using the Five Perspectives and cross referencing Matrices 1 and 2, the researcher aligned the Key Behaviours from the raw data. Finally theory and understanding was gained through the development of a simple pictorial model which summed up the overlapping elements of school and principal innovation and success. This is illustrated and explained in detail in Chapter 6, Figure 6.1. The steps outlined above are presented diagrammatically in Figure 3.3 below.
The data collection and analysis strategies provided an incrementally developed, rich, visual portrayal of school leadership of innovative schools as seen through the perceptions of many, including the principal's self-image. It enabled the data sources to
substantiate or refute findings thereby triangulating the data both within and across schools. It provided answers to the key research question and each of the six sub questions outlined at the start of this chapter.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles frequently focus on doing ‘no harm’ to the research site or participants and possibly being of benefit (Somekh & Lewin, 2006). At every stage of the research, the goal needs to be responsibility and integrity and the rights and wellbeing of those involved in the production of knowledge need to be protected at all times (O’Leary, 2014: 47). Sensitivity and commitment to these principles has guided this study, upholding ethical principles, some relating to managing subjectivity having been previously discussed.

O’Leary (2014: 64) lists three areas of ethical obligation:

- Ensuring respondents have given informed consent
- Ensuring no harm comes to respondents
- Ensuring confidentiality and, if appropriate anonymity.

Following initial contact with the five principals, in accordance with the University of Melbourne ethics process, all participants were provided with a plain language statement, explaining the process to be undertaken, pledging confidentiality and highlighting the voluntary nature of the consent. This included permission to be audio recorded, the opportunity to withdraw at any time and provision of the researcher’s contact details and the names and university contact details of the supervisors. Every effort was made to make participants feel that their contribution was valued, to be comfortable with the researcher and informed of the process. Participants presented as willing and individual participants received copies of the transcripts with minor adjustments made to the satisfaction of one participant.

Confidentiality was ensured with all participants, pseudonyms were used for schools and principals and contextual details were limited throughout the writing to protect schools and individuals from inadvertent identification.
3.11 Rigour and Trustworthiness

From the outset of the research, it was proposed that rigour and trustworthiness would be addressed through the application of a variety of methods to ensure clarity of the research and reliability of the data and its analysis. This included the following strategies:

- Research questions were formed from a sound understanding of the theory and research on educational leadership and school improvement.
- A pilot interview was used to refine the questions and interview process prior to commencement.
- Researcher positionality was managed to minimise possible influence, including DEECD recommendation of innovative schools.
- As much as possible, a consistent approach was applied by the researcher to all interviews across sites. This included the researcher personally conducting interviews, site interviews organised within a 5 day block on each site, conducting interviews in familiar settings and mindfully working through the interview introduction, question and exit process using similar words and sequences. Consistency was applied to data analysis processes across cases.
- All interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and checked against the researcher's notes and reflective diary entries for accuracy.
- Member checking was applied for individual participants to acknowledge the accuracy of the records and to allow for additional information and clarification.
- Transcripts were written into story summaries for each case using extensive verbatim quotes from the transcripts (see appendices).
- Triangulation of data was obtained using multiple perspectives of the principal’s leadership and the school, researcher notes, observations and secondary documents to build up a rich and ‘thick’ account, allowing for ‘multiple data sources to be compared and contrasted with each other to build a coherent analysis of data gathered within a research project’ (Kervin et al., 2006: 203). The multiple perspectives ensured a perception, lie or potential bias of one person or group was not relied upon as typical and that a variation of opinion was able to be checked across the responses.
Data from different sites was used to illuminate or substantiate the research question. Designing a study where multiple cases are used greatly strengthens the study’s reliability and usefulness for other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 202).

The research design, data collection and analysis methods have been explained in extensive detail, are referenced against sound research practice and are therefore ‘auditable and/or reproducible’ (O’Leary, 2014: 132).

“Authenticity indicates that rigour and reflexive practice have assured that conclusions are justified, credible and trustworthy even when truth is dependent on perspective” (O’Leary, 2014: 54). By this measure, this study has demonstrated rigour and is therefore trustworthy and potentially useful to others.

3.12 Limitations and Delimitations

Delimitations derive from the conceptual framework and the study’s design and are conditions beyond the control of the researcher. They state what the study is and is not – its boundaries or delimitations - and how its results can and cannot contribute to understanding. A discussion of these considerations reminds the reader that the study is bounded and situated in a specific context. The reader can then make decisions about its usefulness for other settings (Marshall & Rossman, 2006: 42).

The delimitations of the study are that this is an investigation into leadership in only five innovative and successful schools in the Victorian government education system. It includes schools within one broad area of metropolitan Victoria, Australia and may not be representative of other regions of Victoria or Australia or other systems of education (e.g. the independent sector). This study focusses on obtaining a comprehensive understanding of principal leadership in five schools’ contexts using a multiple perspectives approach. The boundaries support the study to maximise the collection of data and the analysis process both within and across cases.

The limitations of this study relate to restrictions commonly attributed to qualitative research. The interview transcripts rely heavily on the ‘truths’ of the participants and the very presence of the interviewer may influence responses. While it was intended that all group interviews were to be 6 - 8 participants, for reasons beyond the researcher’s control, some groups were smaller, increasing the opportunity for dominant voices to influence group responses. Individuals may have had a personal agenda or bias, consciously or unconsciously, possibly influencing the data. The staff and parent
groups, while selected for knowledge of the principal and school were in some cases selected for convenience (e.g. those who were available and willing to be interviewed). The interviews took place in a one week period in each school and this may not have been typical of other times of the year. However, the range of participants and the inclusion of both individual and group interviews allowed for a breadth of perspectives to be cross checked within cases. All data was compared across cases, filtering anomalies and strengthening the generalisations for developing theory and understanding.

All qualitative research is necessarily influenced by the researcher’s values and mindsets and inductive data analysis methods increase this possibility with continual filtering of data using the researcher’s and participants’ reasoning. However the researcher’s lens is also critical to this process and needs to be accepted as the filter through which information is gathered, processed and organised (Lichtman, 2006: 117).

In this study particular attention was paid to subjectivity and the research methods applied were well referenced to qualitative research in education literature. Limitations were routinely considered and managed and this has been detailed extensively throughout this chapter, including detailing strategies employed to gather credible data which generated trustworthy results in spite of limitations.

3.13 Summary of Methodology

Generalisation is concerned with the usefulness of the research findings in other settings - whether it can be shared, discussed, investigated, applied or modified. A strong chain of evidence has been maintained, supported by research methods literature which maximises the study’s credibility. A qualitative methods approach has facilitated the identification of the beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, perspectives and behaviours of the five principals in their specific contexts, providing rich data and developing understanding on the leadership of innovative and successful schools.
CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings obtained from interviews and documentation pertaining to each of the selected schools and analyses the leadership provided by the principal and others in each school.

In undertaking this research, following recommendations from senior personnel at the Victorian Department of Education’s Innovation and Excellence Branch, the principals of eight schools were contacted and spoken to informally by the researcher. As a result of these initial discussions, three schools were deemed not to be at the same level of innovation and success as the selected five schools and their principals. This has been explained in detail in Chapter 2.

The local areas of the five selected schools were profiled using 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Quickstats socio-economic data. Each of the school’s MySchool data was also used to support the socio-economic data and to report on the academic success of the school. The five selected schools were studied using documents pertaining to the school and the principal, such as the Annual Report, newsletters, school website, newspaper articles and academic journals.

The participants were interviewed individually or in groups in each of the case study schools as seen in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: List of Participants in each School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>ABBREVIATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>PRIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional Network Leader</td>
<td>RNL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Council President</td>
<td>SCP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Team</td>
<td>LSH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Group (non-leadership)</td>
<td>STF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Group</td>
<td>PAR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this chapter, some comparative socio-economic and student achievement data is examined with a view to building up the profile of each school and its socio-economic context. The key elements of each school’s profile and context are outlined and case study findings are described under the following headings:

1. Features of the School
2. Culture of the School
3. Success of the School
4. The Principal
5. Other Factors That Have Led to the School’s Innovation and Success
6. Sustainability of the Innovation and Success
7. Summary

A full and more detailed analysis of each case study can be found in the appendices. These were initially written as a story, using verbatim quotes taken from the transcript to portray a full picture of each site as part of the methodological process, explained more fully in Chapter 2. However, due to the length of these stories and the overall impact on the length of the thesis, they were moved to the appendices section and summarised for Chapter 4.

As a result of the research undertaken, one of the five selected schools was deemed not to be to the same level of innovation as the other schools in this study, due to the existing and historical culture of the school. As stated previously, it was decided by the researcher to profile this school only to a level required to illustrate a contrast in the research findings. In this way, the study of this case adds to the wider body of knowledge and understanding of contemporary school leadership, while taking additional precaution to do no harm to participants or the school.

A picture emerged of each school, the principal’s leadership style and personal characteristics, key leader behaviours, the school culture and its capacity for innovation and success. Various sub themes emerged from this research and these will be discussed further in Chapter 5.
4.2 Selected Schools Comparative Data

The 2011 ABS Quickstats were used to provide a socio-economic snapshot for the localities of the five schools. The median age across the five localities ranged from 34 to 40 years. Unemployment was from 4.4% to 7.7%, against the 2011 Australian average of 5.6%. While most employment categories across all localities were listed as professional or clerical/administration, these were closely followed by technical and trades. The multicultural background, indicated in the percentage of English being the only language spoken at home, ranged from a little over 40% to over 80%, and being Australian born, from 46% to almost 80% in some areas. Families separated or divorced ranged between 8.4% and 16.8%, compared to the Australian average of 11.4%. The data for the local area in each case study has been compiled into Table 4.2 below.
Table 4.2: 2011 Census Quickstats for Selected School Localities.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 CENSUS QUICKSTATS</th>
<th>CROSS - ROADS PS</th>
<th>BREEZES PS</th>
<th>WOODSIDE PS</th>
<th>LINKS SC</th>
<th>PARKVIEW SC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGE of POPULATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>38yrs</td>
<td>40yrs</td>
<td>34 yrs</td>
<td>38 yrs</td>
<td>37 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-4yrs</td>
<td>5.70%</td>
<td>5.40%</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
<td>6.60%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-14 yrs</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
<td>11.20%</td>
<td>10.60%</td>
<td>10.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-24 yrs</td>
<td>13.20%</td>
<td>14.30%</td>
<td>14.00%</td>
<td>13.50%</td>
<td>11.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-54 yrs</td>
<td>40.90%</td>
<td>37.70%</td>
<td>42.40%</td>
<td>40.80%</td>
<td>43.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-65 yrs</td>
<td>13.60%</td>
<td>12.60%</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>12.30%</td>
<td>10.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+ yrs</td>
<td>14.50%</td>
<td>17.20%</td>
<td>12.80%</td>
<td>16.20%</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMPLOYMENT</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/T Employment</td>
<td>61.40%</td>
<td>55.40%</td>
<td>59.50%</td>
<td>57.00%</td>
<td>60.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed (Aus Av. 7.1%)</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>7.10%</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCCUPATION</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>27.30%</td>
<td>26.40%</td>
<td>16.40%</td>
<td>23.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
<td>8.90%</td>
<td>11.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales Workers</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>12.10%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td>9.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community &amp; Service Workers</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>10.10%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical/Admin</td>
<td>16.10%</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
<td>16.40%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>16.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical &amp; Trades</td>
<td>15.20%</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>13.10%</td>
<td>17.60%</td>
<td>14.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers</td>
<td>14.40%</td>
<td>6.20%</td>
<td>7.50%</td>
<td>10.50%</td>
<td>7.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machine Operators/Drivers</td>
<td>12.40%</td>
<td>3.50%</td>
<td>4.70%</td>
<td>7.20%</td>
<td>4.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SPOKEN LANGUAGE AT HOME</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English only</td>
<td>42.70%</td>
<td>87.70%</td>
<td>54.20%</td>
<td>82.80%</td>
<td>74.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more languages</td>
<td>56.50%</td>
<td>11.40%</td>
<td>46.60%</td>
<td>14.30%</td>
<td>22.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIRTHPLACE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>46.00%</td>
<td>79.50%</td>
<td>54.70%</td>
<td>69.60%</td>
<td>67.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td>7.70%</td>
<td>4.20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>5.60%</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>2.40%</td>
<td>5.10%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>4.60%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>3.90%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>3.80%</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
<td>1.20%</td>
<td>2.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents born o/seas</td>
<td>70.90%</td>
<td>23.50%</td>
<td>56.80%</td>
<td>32.70%</td>
<td>51.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MARITAL STATUS</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married (Aus Av. 48.7%)</td>
<td>50.70%</td>
<td>56.60%</td>
<td>48.80%</td>
<td>38.30%</td>
<td>46.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated/Div. (Aus Av. 11.4%)</td>
<td>11.60%</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
<td>8.40%</td>
<td>16.80%</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Most popular employment category*

*Second most popular employment category*
This data highlights the breadth of socio-economic localities across the research and some compelling factors at play in each locality. Key features of this data will be drawn upon in the explanation of each case study and its socio-economic status.

In addition to the socio-economic profile of each school, the 2011 MySchool data was collated from the MySchool website. This shows the ICSEA (Index of Community Socio Educational Advantage) scores across selected schools compared to the average ICSEA value of 1000. ICSEA is 'an index of student and school characteristics' gained from gathering “information on the occupation and education of parents, along with school enrolment data to calculate an ICSEA value for each school” (acara.edu.au). The ICSEA distribution of students across the quartiles (bottom/lower middle/upper middle/top) is shown with 25% in each quartile being the average Australian distribution. The MySchool data includes NAPLAN achievement scores. Table 4.3 below shows the 2011 results for Reading, Writing and Number, comparing these to schools with a similar (Sim) ICSEA score, and all Australian schools (All) at the progress points of Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. Some additional information on student destination post-secondary schooling is provided for the two secondary colleges.
### Table 4.3: 2011 NAPLAN Results. Reference: ACARA, www.myschool.edu.au

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>pop:428</th>
<th>BREEZES PS</th>
<th>pop:609</th>
<th>WOODSIDE PS</th>
<th>pop:239</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CROSSROADS PS</td>
<td>READ’G</td>
<td>WRT’G</td>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>READ’G</td>
<td>WRT’G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YEAR 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sim</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>439</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>459</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>423</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>407</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>416</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>416</td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINKS SC</td>
<td>READ’G</td>
<td>WRT’G</td>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>READ’G</td>
<td>WRT’G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YEAR 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sim</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>519</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>534</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>521</td>
<td>509</td>
<td>523</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>574</td>
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<td></td>
<td>540</td>
<td>529</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>529</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LINKS SC</td>
<td>READ’G</td>
<td>WRT’G</td>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>READ’G</td>
<td>WRT’G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>YEAR 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sim</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>573</td>
<td>543</td>
<td>568</td>
<td>590</td>
<td>585</td>
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<td></td>
<td>560</td>
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<td>574</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>580</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>583</td>
<td>580</td>
<td>566</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESTINATION:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAFE/Vocational</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ICSEA 997 (40/21/25/13%)**
**ICSEA 1072 (19/19/38/24%)**
**ICSEA 1139 (16/9/25/50%)**
The preceding table shows the range of sizes of selected schools, from 239 students at Woodside PS to almost 1400 students at the large Parkview SC. The primary schools with higher levels of educational advantage, shown in above average ICSEA scores (Breezes and Woodside) also demonstrated strong academic performance, seen in Table 4.3 with the green highlighting placing them above or well above all schools in most areas. Crossroads PS, with slightly below average educational advantage, profiled strong academic performance in year 3 and maintained an average performance at year 5. Neither secondary school profiled strongly in academic performance. However, while Links SC’s academic performance was below all schools achievement standard in most areas, it was able to maintain expected performance levels compared to schools with similar levels of socio-economic disadvantage in all subject areas. On the other hand, despite a strong academic reputation and a higher level of educational advantage, Parkview SC’s performance was at expected level in almost all subject areas.

The research findings from the case study schools and the principals' leadership are profiled in the following sections formed around each case.

4.3 Crossroads Primary School: Tom - The Networking Principal

4.3.1 Features of the School

Crossroads Primary School was an outer suburban school, catering for approximately 430 students in years prep to six (five to twelve years of age). The majority of students came from low to middle income families with 30% of parents unemployed, and those employed predominantly engaged in trades and factory work (see Table 4.2). The area was traditionally attractive to new immigrant families, with 64% of students designated as having a LBOTE. In 2010, 52% of school families qualified for the Educational Maintenance Allowance from the state government, based on family income. This information is supported by the school’s 2011 ICSEA data (see Table 4.3), which placed 40% of family backgrounds in the bottom quartile and only 13% in the top quartile (compared to the Australian distribution of 25% across each quartile).

The school had maintained enrolments in a locality of declining school age children with significant enrolments from outside the local area. Anecdotally, some change had occurred in the last decade with families becoming more financially established but choosing to stay in the area rather than moving to a more affluent suburb, or relocating to a more affluent neighbourhood, but continuing their enrolment at the school.
The school was originally built to an open plan design in 1977, but classrooms were closed in with dividing walls and furniture in the years prior to the commencement of Tom, the current principal. Tom stated that he inherited a very traditional school which had always had a good reputation in its community. Families valued education as a means to social and economic improvement for their children and generally supported the school to do its job.

Physically, the school was organised into four open plan modules, called Learning Centres with students grouped in like grade levels (prep, years 1/2, years 3/4 and years 5/6). In 2010, under the federally funded Building the Education Revolution (BER) scheme, the school built a new Gymnasium, Music Recording Studio, Art Room and Multi-Purpose Area/Community Facility. The grounds, while surrounded by established homes, were spacious and included an oval, student designed wetlands and pond, vegetable garden, adventure playgrounds, central covered courtyard with outdoor stage area and two Wii screens for student use in the playground. Internally, the school had an Environmental Science and French Centre, Learning Resource Centre (library), Activities Room, Multimedia Centre including a Radio Station and Media Room and TV screens throughout the school. The school offered specialist programs in Visual Arts, Music, French, Environmental Science, Physical Education, Communications Technology and Dance. The school presented as extremely tidy, well cared for and organised for purposeful learning.

High levels of technology were apparent across the school. This included computers, laptops, I-pads, Interactive Whiteboards in all classrooms, cameras, sound and recording equipment, digital microscopes, playground Wii’s and television screens (some playing Foxtel news) throughout the school. Technology was visibly used by students and teachers as a learning tool across classes and specialist areas.

Apart from Tom, the school’s leadership team included two assistant principals who held whole school roles as teaching and learning coaches. Two leading teachers and a number of aspiring young leaders with responsibility for leading the different learning centres and curriculum areas completed the team. The staff profile was young to middle age, the principal stating that there was ‘a lot of inexperience’.

4.3.2 Culture of the School

Tom described the school’s culture as primarily a learning culture based on research, followed by implementation and then shared reflection and modification. Other
stakeholders described the culture as professional, highly collaborative, progressive, respectful and inclusive. There was strong agreement of the school having a student centred culture. High expectations were held for everyone and Tom expected, and received loyalty to the school, his leadership and the shared work. It was described as a flexible and risk taking culture, characterized by the staff group repeating an oft said statement by Tom, “there are no problems, only solutions.” The staff group described the ‘filter down’ decision making process as being representative of Crossroads PS’s culture. They outlined this as: you start with an idea, self-check that it fits with school direction, discuss the idea with Tom or the assistant principal, research the idea and talk it over with your teams, modify the idea as required and then go back to discuss your findings with Tom, the assistant principal and your teams. The idea might then progress to implementation as a small trial, where it will be analysed, modified and reflected upon and results discussed with the principal team and the whole staff, before implementation on a larger scale. This explicit, collaborative, inclusive and supportive approach to new directions was repeated by stakeholders as an agreed whole school approach.

4.3.3 Success of the School

Outwardly, Crossroads PS had highly visible markers of success in the education arena. The school was recommended as being innovative, having recently been awarded the Victorian Education Excellence Award for Curriculum Innovation and selected as a Leading School Trial in a professional coaching program.

The school had been selected as a Microsoft Worldwide Mentor School (1 of 12 internationally) and a CISCO Ingenious School in the Innovative Schools program (1 of 10 internationally). The principal had been recently awarded the state’s highest educational leadership honour in the Victorian Education Excellence Awards, for Most Outstanding Leadership. On separate occasions, the school won state awards for achievement in Science and Mathematics. Crossroads PS received a steady stream of educational visitors from Victoria and interstate and had been the subject of many international research and educational tours. Tom regularly addressed international and interstate conferences on his school’s success journey.

The principal expressed his view of the school’s success from the DEECD’s viewpoint, nominating key points as: 1. technology and the way it is used, 2. flexible learning spaces and 3. team work across the school; all points serving as a best practice model for other schools. He believed that DEECD would affirm the improvement in student
learning outcomes, increased enrolment and drop in absenteeism as positive markers, supported by highly positive staff and parent opinion and student engagement surveys. He summed this up as, “I think the main thing they’d probably see is we’re doing things differently and getting good results.”

Collectively, perceptions of Crossroads School by stakeholders within the school and its wider educational and local communities were that Crossroads was well regarded for:

1. Its research based pedagogical practice, designed to develop 21st century learning skills such as collaboration, flexibility, inquiry, learner independence, metacognition, etc.

2. The range and use of technology and ways this was integrated into learning programs

3. The achievement of high academic standards in a traditionally underperforming socio-economic area

4. Strong and shared leadership and good governance

5. High levels of student, staff and community engagement in the school and its learning programs

6. Elite level external partnerships which provided funds and a strong profile for the school

7. A strong learning community with an improvement focus, “this is a place where everybody learns and everybody learns all the time.”

During the interview, the RNL mentioned several times of a tension between the perceptions of the school’s success and its achievement data, believing that Tom held “a longer term view of that.” Tom stated that data collection was very important to the school and “you’ve got to have a lot.” While he spoke of using data for a purpose and changes that had been made to the school’s practice as a result of data, he did not speak a great deal about the achievement standards of students other than to express an opinion of DEECD’s perspective, “… they would see that the improvement in the learning outcomes as being quite significant over a number of years.” This comment appears to contradict the RNL as he believed that “the data was not as flash as it could be.”
In looking for things that have been unsuccessful in the school, Tom said that at one stage he made some key mistakes when he "took his eye off the ball … (I) made a lot of assumptions that things were going alright and they weren’t. There was an underlying thing there in the subculture and it wasn’t good."

Other participants struggled to nominate something unsuccessful in the school. All reinforced the decision making process being slow, deliberative, highly flexible and collaborative, reflecting a measured approach where mistakes were not able to develop. The RNL described Tom’s role in this, “He seems to be more the tortoise than the hare, he’s slow and deliberate from what I can see, rather than rush into something where you’re likely to fall over.”

4.3.4 The Principal

Tom has been an educator, teacher and school leader for 44 years, 22 at the current school. He originally came to the school as a leading teacher, a position he held for less than 12 months. He was assistant principal for several years, before taking up the principal position, which he has held for over 20 years. This was his first and only principalship.

Tom’s educational background has been in low socio-economic communities. He came to the school and moved into the assistant principal position as the previous principal neared the end of his career. Tom expressed feelings of frustration at this time, due to the lack of change in the school and a sense of there being ‘better ways to do things’ to improve outcomes for students. He was influenced and guided by a key mentor, an experienced local principal, who he described as ‘a professional friend for over 20 years’ and as ‘being ahead of his time’. In the early days of Tom’s principalship, his mentor principal challenged him as to whether he wanted to be ‘an administrator or an educator’ and Tom used this as a guiding driver for his work as an educator.

Privately, Tom had a rich and successful life running parallel to his school leadership. Coming from a country background, he worked in his father’s business, developing a strong work ethic and the need to take responsibility from an early age. He was a gifted athlete, playing Australian Football League (AFL) football, rowing from a young age and representing Australia in running. Through this, he developed persistence, resilience and independence and was influenced by older role models. He became an AFL umpire and with eleven years of senior umpiring experience, was well regarded as an elite AFL umpire. He coached and mentored junior umpires for many years during
and after this time, and continued to have an expansive network of influential people from this early life experience.

Tom’s vision was to build a learning community which was student centred and where everyone could achieve, regardless of their home background. Staff saw Tom’s vision as being the school’s vision for its future.

Tom described his style as “laidback and calm” and leadership as “a game but you are really in control”. Being prepared to ‘draw the line’ on what matters and demonstrate strength of conviction and courageous leadership was part of a story of Tom’s leadership that had become a cultural myth, shared across the school community. It was told to the researcher by Tom, and referred to by parents and the leadership team. Tom saw this as a key moment in time, when he decided to exert his leadership to establish new school direction based on an improvement model. The story told was that not long after Tom had taken up the principal position, he came in during a school break with some friends and knocked down all the dividing walls of the classrooms to open up the learning spaces. Staff came in on the Monday and had to adjust to new ways of teaching in the new spaces.

Tom saw himself as ‘the driving force’ of the school’s direction but over time his role had changed and was now “… more mentoring the staff (and) the leadership team … while I’m still passionate … I think it’s contagious.” He described the act of leadership as “… (the) fire’s got to be lit from somewhere” and “throwing little seeds in and … selling ideas.”

Tom described his communication and decision making style as slow and methodical, although decisions could also be made quickly if needed. He stressed the importance of personal communication one on one with staff to share high expectations.

Tom described himself as a strategic networker and that “knowing the right people is important, exceptionally important.” He provided an example, “I always aim to get to know one new person wherever I go (conferences, meetings, etc.) – that’s strategic and it benefits the school.” Tom was a key figure in a local collegial group of experienced male principals who met weekly for breakfast, gym club and Friday drinks and which included his friend and mentor principal.

Tom saw his role as “trying to do away with your job and create an environment that doesn’t need you.” He held clear goals for the sustainability of his leadership after he departed the school. Tom had recently rejected offers to lead other schools, one a
larger state school and another large, high profile, private school that wanted him to recreate the success of Crossroads PS.

The principal was seen to be visionary by those who worked closely with him. He was forward thinking, had a clear picture of the school's strategic direction and provided clarity for those responsible for implementation. Across the interviews, the portrayal was of a confident leader very comfortable with himself, who invested in building trust and developing positive relationships with staff, students and parents. Underpinning the development of trust and building relationships was Tom's collaborative style, repeatedly affirmed by participants.

The staff group outlined how Tom led the school's collaborative culture, stating there was a “lot of informal communication” and decision making happening across the school. Visiting the staff room at recess and lunchtime affirmed to the researcher that the staffroom was a lively communication hub, with the staff, leadership team and principal constantly crossing between personal and professional lines. It was described as a place where everyone came together, where you wanted to be, to belong to the school and identify with its culture. Tom's personal, committed and inclusive communication style appeared to have created a school culture of shared decision making and strong communication patterns through informal means.

The leadership team spoke of Tom’s hands on approach, that he knew what was happening in the school and was a visible presence, “he comes in and watches, observes, has discussions with us … he’s right there involved … he’s walking around into learning centres and talking to the kids, talking to teachers the whole time.” Both the leadership team and parent group used the metaphor of a family for the staff team, underpinned by strong and respectful relationships which operated in a non-hierarchical manner.

The leadership team and RNL spoke of the risk taking culture fostered and promoted by Tom. They referred to the high levels of trust that he had built with people. However, the RNL also spoke of the strength of Tom’s leadership:

I think he uses fairly subtle mechanisms to hold people to account … the accountability, he puts more in the teams … I don’t get a sense of a hierarchical line of authority here. OK (Tom’s) the boss and people know that but … I get a strong sense that the highest level of accountability here is teacher to teacher.

(RNL)
This was supported by the leadership team who attested to Tom’s ability to hold staff to account, “He’s very good at finding ways to get the message across without laying blame … guiding how to have those difficult conversations in a way that doesn’t offend and doesn’t stifle the work that’s being done.”

From across the interviews, the picture constructed of Tom’s leadership style was someone focused on building trusting relationships, collaborative, inclusive, an expert communicator, strong and clear on the school’s direction, hands on and able to hold people to account. He had built an inclusive family, established some rules through a shared vision, he actively stepped aside to let members get on with their work and held them to account for the outcomes.

The RNL expressed a belief that Tom enjoyed the attention gained by the school’s success. Other interviewee’s described Tom as humble with ego not being a part of his work. Tom may have enjoyed the ‘limelight’ and have been proud of his achievements, but he was also quiet about his success with others. This was especially true with his principal peers, who may have felt threatened or jealous of the attention and financial resourcing that Tom achieved for his school. Tom didn’t share openly with his line manager RNL, possibly not wishing to be seen as self-promoting or for the RNL to use this information in other ways which Tom would have little control over.

The RNL left no doubt about the intentionality of Tom’s leadership style:

… he’s a pretty good, a very subtle manipulator, very skilled at it. But again if you ask him an upfront question about that, he’ll give you a big grin and smile and then you’re off on a tangent somewhere. He’s cagey, a bit like a fox, but a very benign sort of fox. (RNL)

The participants agreed that the key driving force for Tom’s leadership was to provide opportunities for students that they wouldn’t have otherwise, summed up by the leadership team:

… he’s trying to give them every possible tool and advantage as they can get, that they can go out and do great things … creating a place where kids like to be, where they experience success … they get opportunities here that they might not get … in their home environment especially in this area. I think they get that chance to try things that they would never ever be exposed to unless they came here. (Leadership Team)

The staff group summed up the unwavering strength of Tom’s drivers for school success, “The change in the school over the last twenty-three years that he’s been here, I think that’s his biggest achievement, he’s getting the school he wants.”
4.3.5 Sustainability of Innovation and Success

One indicator of the perception of participants of the role of the principal in leading the school’s innovation and success is to consider its duration if he was no longer in the school. At Crossroads PS, participants saw the school’s culture as being strong and “not reliant on the principal”, underpinned by the belief that staff, school leaders, School Council and parents would continue the work. Staff stated that the school would “change and evolve” but “we would always stay true to what he’s tried to build here.” And the SC President concluded that a new principal would need to share some ‘village vision’ and that “they wouldn’t be allowed to lower the standard.” Participants saw the stakeholders in the school as the guardians of the culture that had been built by the principal over a sustained period of time, a culture which everyone in the school subscribed to.

4.3.6 Other Factors that have led to the School’s Innovation and Success

Tom is seen by the participants to have a strong and enduring connection to the school, built up over a sustained period of leadership. His personal connection with the school was common knowledge, his two children attended and his wife worked at the school in past years.

Tom identified placing key staff into pivotal positions as being a key factor in the success of the school. Staff and leadership team members left little doubt that this comment referred to the school’s assistant principal, who was in charge of leading school wide curriculum. While Tom was the key person who selected staff, the assistant principal (curriculum) worked closely with young leaders in a coaching and supportive relationship. The close professional relationship between Tom and this assistant principal was identified by the staff group as a success factor, as was the role that she played in their mentoring and coaching. This is also mentioned by the RNL, “I think he has, from an outsider’s perspective, a strong trust in and reliance on (assistant principal) for a lot of the teaching and learning.” The staff group added, “…she’s made such an impact on our school, in a positive way.”

4.3.7 Summary

Tom’s leadership longevity in the school impacted on participants and their consistency of opinion, clarity of purpose and trust in his leadership. He had built a successful school, an image that gains strong agreement from all stakeholder groups, reinforced
by external perceptions of the school and generally supported by the school’s data, showing achievement at or above expected levels despite its educational disadvantage.

At the essence of Tom’s leadership, and building upon his early development, he was a networker and relationships builder. At this stage of his principalship, at the time of the research, he had the confidence and school wide support to lead through the work of others. He had built a family at Crossroads PS to share the work and had created something which gave meaning to those involved. Tom’s vision and drive was to provide the best possible opportunities for the students at his school. He achieved this by doing things differently, informed by research, school need, input from students, staff, parents and council members and his access to high level international agencies.

Tom had built a risk taking environment where anything was possible, providing it was aligned to agreed school wide processes. While the words ‘innovative’ and ‘creative’ were seldom used by participants, all groups used the language of ‘doing things differently’ to describe the school’s culture.

While Tom worked collaboratively with people, there was no doubt that he was skillfully manipulating internal and external factors to achieve his vision for the school. He was a strong leader and staff knew and accepted that he was prepared to take a stand if required. While this was a factor in his early leadership and the culture perpetuates this story, over time Tom was able to shape expectations and build the trust and understanding with others, so this behavior was rarely required anymore.

While there is little doubt of the strength of his conviction and leadership, Tom went about his work, in the school and with principal colleagues, in a quiet and unassuming way, preferring to highlight the work of others in his school and to engage with trusted colleagues rather than the RNL. However, he openly shared his work in the broader educational arena, possibly to contribute to the improvement of the system in a way that wouldn’t draw attention from peers. Crossroads PS took ownership and pride in their school’s work and its culture and this was affirmed by all who engaged in the school.
4.4 Breezes Primary School: Jan - The Wellbeing Principal

4.4.1 Features of the School

Breezes Primary School was located in a large regional city and while the region had areas of high socio-economic disadvantage compared to other parts of the state, it also had pockets of affluence. The residential location of Breezes PS traditionally attracted middle class, Australian born families. The 2011 Census Quickstats profiled the local area as an aging population (median age 40 years) of predominantly Australian born, English speaking residents with high levels of employment, mostly in professional areas (see Table 4.2). This information is supported by the school’s 2011 ICSEA data which lists Breezes PS with 10% of students with a LBOTE, and an ICSEA score of 1072, 1000 being the Australian average ICSEA score (see Table 4.3).

The continuing expansion of the local university into areas close to Breezes PS, coupled with the school's longstanding strong reputation had contributed to its increasing size. The school catered for approximately 610 students in years prep to six (five to twelve years of age), an increase of approximately 100 children over the past five years. However, with the school’s success widely acknowledged, over 50% of the student body were now drawn from outside the school's local catchment area and strong enrolment pressure was being felt at the time of this research.

The school was originally built in 1963 as part of the post war 1950’s residential expansion, with two pebble-mix covered buildings, single classrooms opening off one or two sides of long passageways that cut through the length of the buildings. The school had always held a strong reputation in the tightly interconnected, regional community. Jan commenced at the school as principal in early 2007, following her first principalship at another local school, widely regarded as ‘a tough school’ in a low socio-economic area. The previous principal of Breezes PS left to take up a DEECD senior leadership position. Loyalty to him and his past leadership of the school was evident in interviews, with both educational and community sectors. Jan stated that she “…was pretty lucky to inherit a school that … had a reputation of being quite forward in terms of curriculum and had been really well-led.” However, she explained that the teaching practices were very traditional, characterized by “single classrooms with teachers working behind closed doors … teachers sure they were teaming together to plan, but when they actually did their core business it was in isolation.” This view was strongly supported by the staff group. The SC President, RNL and parent group all reiterated
that Breezes Primary School “has always been fairly ahead of the pack in schools, it’s always had a good reputation for high academic excellence.”

The school’s motto was Aim High. Its website stated, (the school)... “is an innovative school which prides itself on trying to achieve the best possible outcomes in student learning.” In 2009 the school participated in an action research project with the local university, supported by the DEECD’s Innovations and Next Practice division. The focus was on using pedagogy and space to engage senior students in their learning, by providing a personalised, relevant and current curriculum.

Although regarded as large by primary school standards, and certainly large for its regional location, the school prided itself on having a small school feel. It was organised into four distinct groups, called learning communities at the prep, junior, middle and senior levels of the school. The communities were designed to engage staff and students in smaller learning groups, with a focus on personalised learning for students and collaborative work teams for staff. When required, the learning communities opened into larger collaborative spaces.

The facilities included a new open plan building developed in 2010 as part of the BER scheme, with art, science, home economics, construction and library areas and a senior area with student access to art, science, a theatrette and outdoor learning spaces. All teacher offices were shared and separated from the learning spaces, indicating student ownership of learning spaces. Additionally the school had a Library and ICT laboratory; technology infrastructure supported its integration across all learning areas. Technology hardware included banks of IBM and Mac laptops, netbooks, I-pads, desktop computers, interactive whiteboards and a range of digital tools. The school engaged students in multimedia through its TV and radio station. It offered students specialist classes in French, Physical Education, Music, Library and Visual and Performing Arts.

While students were using laptops and desktop computers as appropriate to their tasks, and teachers were using interactive whiteboards to support student learning, student and staff use of technology were not highly visible to the researcher across all areas of the school. Jan stated that technology required a renewed focus and all staff had recently been given use of a school I-pad to drive this regeneration.

The physical appearance of the school was open and accommodated the purposeful movement of large numbers of children and small group and individual selection of working spaces and modes of learning. It was extremely well organised, quiet,
purposeful and tidy with evidence of collective pride in the school. The overwhelming sense was that the school was highly organised, purposeful and tightly managed.

The senior learning community curriculum included traditional subject areas such as Literacy and Numeracy as well as Deep Knowledge Units. Students chose workshops in specialist classes including Art, Music, French, Drama, Library, Computer Lab and Physical Education. Students created personalised timetables for their weekly lessons, based around the achievement of learning goals which were set and monitored by students in weekly conference consultations with teachers and which parents could attend.

The school’s leadership team consisted of the principal Jan, one assistant principal and two non-teaching leading teachers who had whole school responsibilities as instructional coaches. Reflective of change in the school, the leadership team members were all new (or recently returned) to a leadership position in the school in the last two years. Previously, these positions were held by longer term staff, who had worked closely with Jan in initiating and establishing the new directions and engaging with staff to drive and implement the improvement model.

The staff team was a mixed profile, with many new and younger, inexperienced staff working with more experienced teachers who had been at the school for a long time; some having worked with Jan and the previous principal. The principal expressed a strong value of bringing in new graduate teachers, the non-negotiable requirement of working in teams and the desire to ‘grow their own’ staff.

4.4.2 The Culture of the School

The principal described the school’s culture as one of continuing change. She reflected on the current challenge being that much of the earlier change hadn’t been as deep and as sustainable as desired, partly due to the change culture being so rapid and some staff discomfort with this.

Jan described the school as having a learning culture with instructional coaching and feedback at its core, based on data, research, feedback and explicit instruction.

The staff group strongly supported the view of the school having a learning improvement culture. “There’s that constant encouragement for people to continue to learn … I don’t think there’s really been a standstill moment … I think that’s the culture that’s with the students, the teachers and the school as a whole.” The SC President
and the parent group saw the school's culture as a positive one, with a collaborative staff culture and shared drive ensuring teachers remained adaptable and current in their practice.

The RNL provided an external view of the school’s culture as driven to be the best. She held that educators outside the school observed Breezes PS staff having a shared language, and the ability to hold their ground about what they do from a trained perspective. She said that the teachers “have an understanding that (the school) is a good school, so the way they do it is the right way to do it.” This point emphasises the pride that the staff had in the school, its achievements and the unique way it went about its business. It also highlighted the shared language and strong research base of the school’s work.

Across the interviews there was evidence of fractures in the school’s culture. The leadership team, with its new members, presented as a strongly unified voice in their cohesive group of two leading teachers and assistant principal, but they were not unified with the principal stating, “I think we’re on a different page to (Jan).” They outlined the impact of their arrival on the school’s direction, “… our collective view of three is very, very different to the leadership team that (Jan) did have prior to the three of us coming in.” They seemed aware of the cultural challenge their voices presented for the principal, (The school’s) “been held up in such high esteem for such a long time and then … all of a sudden the three of us are starting to see holes.”

Another fracture was evident in the staff group who stated with some hesitation, that they weren’t aware of what happens in other learning units in the school and were frustrated about the lack of opportunities to learn from the experiences of others, and ‘getting lost’ in their units. The leadership team also mentioned this fracturing, especially in relation to the initial success of the Senior Learning Community, which had been used as the model for change and had “very much its own identity, it has its own structure” and this had not moved to a whole school model. “… I think the staff are happy that the spotlight’s been taken off the SLU (Senior Learning Unit) … there were some staff that often I heard say … I’m almost tired of hearing about the SLU because it was, what about the rest of us?” The leadership stated “… in terms of getting together and talking about practice across units … no it doesn't happen.”

This was affirmed by the researcher’s diarised observations of the staff room as having little on display indicating a shared culture with few staff coming into the staff room at break times, most staying in their unit’s shared office spaces. Researcher diary
reflections note, “The staffroom puzzled me. It felt unowned. It didn’t seem that anyone had put their stamp on it.”

The staff group expressed a connection with and trust of the principal:

Staff is one of her number one priorities in terms of supporting us and making sure that we feel comfortable in our position, and we know what we’re doing and we’re making professional growth, individually as well as the school. (Staff Group)

However, the leadership team were critical of the staff group, with staff workload issues a cause of frustration. They believed that ‘we work too hard’ was a favorite catchphrase of staff and that this was being used as a reason for not moving forward on new leadership directions.

Fracturing was evident in interviews with the staff group where the researcher diarised a personal observation that much was being left unsaid. Several times during the group interview process, individuals started speaking, hesitated and deferred to the most experienced teacher, who sometimes disagreed with what was being said and which they did not challenge.

4.4.3 Success of the School

Breezes PS was widely regarded in the Victorian education system as a successful and innovative school, providing a model of best practice for other schools. Its profile had been highlighted through the work with DEECD’s Innovations and Next Practice branch, and the school had been the recipient of several awards in recognition of this. The school received regular visitors from across Australia, and in response had been required to manage demand by requesting a charge per visitor, which resourced further school improvement directions.

The 2011 OECD/CERI report outlined the successful case study provided by Breezes PS for the Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) Research Study, and in doing so highlighted areas of success for which the school was known:

(The school’s) innovation has been to engage students and teachers in renewed notions of what it means to be a learner and a teacher. This has involved changes to the ways in which students and teachers engage with the processes of schooling. To summarise the key aspects of the student experience described above, the students are involved in:

- Personalised learning through individual goal setting
- Selection of workshops to meet individual learning needs
- Negotiation of principles for flexible learning through privilege bearing trust licenses
- Independent sessions with access to roving teachers
- Weekly conferences where goal setting, selection of workshops, negotiation of flexible learning principles and progress in independent sessions are monitored. (Blackmore, Bateman, Cloonan, Dixon, Loughlin, O'Mara and Senior, 2010, p.11. Nature and Quality of Learning, para. 1, www.learningspaces.edu.au/schools ...).

The principal expressed some anxiety and a lack of confidence about the reasons why the school might be recommended to the researcher as an innovative school. However she added that “It’s got to be around the fact that maybe we are having a good hard crack at doing things differently” and that this most probably aligns “with what the Department want(s).”

Jan’s explanation, supported by the SC President’s opinion, was that that they had been ahead of other schools, providing a model for change and innovative thinking. However recently, with the federally funded BER building project, where all Victorian schools were required to build open plan spaces and to consider the pedagogy that took place within the new buildings, there was a sense expressed that the rest of the educational community had caught up with the school.

The leadership team, reflecting the singular focus they placed on their team, stated a belief that Jan’s choice of leadership team members was a critical success factor, as each of them brought a unique perspective to the school.

Jan reflected that following a recent three month period when she had stepped out of the school for personal reasons, it became evident to her that the strength of her relationship with others was a key success factor in her leadership, especially in supporting staff and contributing to their wellbeing. Jan’s strength with relationships, the inclusive nature of the school and her family choices were strongly affirmed by the parent group.

The RNL believed that building leadership capacity and looking beyond the school had been the school’s greatest success as well as “being able to market what (Jan) believed was best practice.” She added:

The school has probably influenced many other schools and given many other schools the opportunity to think differently, that without some of the practices that kick started here, other schools may not have taken off with new initiatives … (RNL)
Jan felt that the areas that had not been successful were associated with sustainability of the improvement journey. These were not found to be embedded as deeply as initially thought, or as would need to be for ongoing improvement. This included the integrated use of technology into the learning experience and the inquiry curriculum which had been an early success factor but which had lost its focus with new staff and new projects. Jan also reflected on the pace of change at the school, indicating that she was aware of staff anxiety around this. She explained her thinking:

…even though it does make you feel uncomfortable, you do have to harness the unrest, because it actually tells you that you are pushing the boundaries and that’s when you see the next stage of growth and an enormous sense of satisfaction and enjoyment when people see the results. (Principal)

The RNL questioned the appropriateness of Jan’s tight leadership style in the school’s current context, which she said had served it well in developing a whole school practice but which now could “…loosen off those processes … take on the creativity and flexibility … its really well placed to do what it wants, where it wants to go. It’s about … ensuring leadership throughout the school has the opportunity to think beyond quite a directed approach.”

4.4.4 The Principal

Jan came into primary education as a mature age teacher, after she had her own family. Finishing secondary school, Jan followed her mother into a day training centre as a teacher’s aide for a year and then completed her special education teacher training. After ten years in special education, Jan converted to primary teaching. With five years as an assistant principal at a large school in the local area, she was asked by the regional director to take up an acting and then substantive position as principal at a smaller but very challenging school, where she stayed for 5 ½ years. Jan’s leadership of this school was highly regarded for its innovative nature and ability to make a significant difference to challenging and underprivileged children, especially boys.

Jan moved to Breezes PS, which was a bigger, successful school with the opportunity to develop a new vision in a different culture. This was a change from her previous background of working with the socially or physically disadvantaged. While this was Jan’s second principalship, she had not worked in regular school settings for as long as might be expected. In this time, Jan had been asked to take up other roles outside the school context. Prior to moving to Breezes, she was an acting RNL, however after six months returned to the school context. She explained her decision, “The days that I
enjoyed most were the days that I was in schools, so I decided that was telling me something."

Jan sees herself as more of a team player than an autocratic leader:

... part of my role is to keep myself up with the work that they're doing and the change that’s happening and making sure it’s all still aligned ... there’s a lot of people out there doing lots of fantastic stuff, it doesn’t all come from me, a lot of it comes from them. (Principal)

She described her leadership and decision making style to be intentional, improvement focused and the team deliberations provided her with the confidence to move forward with decisions. She believed she was a good networker with a clear vision for the school. Jan described her need to be ‘hands on’ as an instructional leader, with high visibility around the school.

Speaking of her beliefs and drivers, Jan spoke at length of the importance of catering for the future needs of the child, “creating creative, inquisitive, confident (students)" however not at the expense of literacy and numeracy and developing a “passion for things like science and maths” to develop skills for lifelong learning.

Jan reflected on her approach to her work and ways that experience had taught her to develop leadership resilience stating that she didn’t “take things as seriously anymore as I used to...” She also touched on the difference between her approach and that of her inexperienced leadership team, and her belief in the need to have a positive rather than a deficit lens on the improvement journey:

They’re terribly passionate, terribly driven, and sometimes I sit there and I feel like saying to them … remember to smell the roses as you're going through or don’t be too hard on them (teachers), they have come a long way, honour the journey … we’ve still got so far to go ... but you’ve still got to celebrate where we’ve come from. (Principal)

Jan talked about the pressure that she feels comparing herself to other principals that she worked closely with through the Innovations and Next Practice project, including Tom from Crossroads PS. “I get the speed wobbles sometimes and I actually think I’m actually probably way more conservative than maybe people think I am.” Jan affirmed her key role in the school as one of being aware of what is happening in educational best practice and inspiring others to lead new directions for the school.

The profile developed of Jan as a strong, strategic and passionate leader was supported by participants. Jan was described as visionary, strong and sometimes
authoritarian, tending to control the process of school improvement. However at the same time she was profiled in wellbeing terms, such as 'supportive', 'fair', 'consultative' and 'empowering of others'. It built a picture of a leader with clarity of vision, high level knowledge of the school improvement process, the ability to motivate, influence and work closely with others, including an extensive professional network to motivate her and support her to achieve her goals.

The parent group profiled the more inclusive, caring side of Jan’s style, describing her as ‘a role model’ but they emphasized that she knew what was happening and was clearly in control of school direction. Both the staff and parent groups indicated high levels of trust in Jan's leadership.

The leadership team articulated their frustration with the principal’s style, questioning the speed of Jan’s decision making and implementation, “she is constantly thinking about the next step.” The leadership team acknowledged Jan's hands on style, but once again questioned the gap between Jan’s perception of the change journey and the reality that they experienced when working with teachers. This suggested that Jan’s leadership style was overly optimistic and supportive, rather than critical and based on hard facts, summed up by the leadership team, “… there’s often that gap between her perception and what’s really happening.” While Jan was seen as a leader who listened to the problems, her passion, desire for change and strong need to gain engagement and presumably agreement from the wider staff group, was seen by the leadership team as something obstructing her view of reality and deep improvement.

The leadership team explained that Jan had been absent from the school for a term and they had been in charge of driving the school’s improvement agenda. With her recent return as the school’s leader, the struggle between Jan and the leadership team for control of the strategic direction and pace of implementation was evident. However the leadership team suggested that this tussle would be resolved by Jan with a high level of trust, that she hears what they are saying and would work with them to consider their differing opinions, “She’s been very open about what we believe needed to happen.”

Jan was portrayed as a passionate leader who took control of the agenda to provide the best possible opportunities for all students. This may have been influenced by her early background in Special Education and with disadvantaged communities, working to ensure that all children had the same opportunities that she wanted for her own children.
The staff group agreed that Jan was engaged in school improvement to improve student achievement, “The drive to be in the 21st century … Preparing our children for the future.” Jan was also perceived to be driven to work closely with teachers to support them to engage in the work and to affirm the direction of her leadership and the school. This signaled a need for Jan to receive positive affirmation from staff, however she was also prepared to ‘tough it out’ to get to the longer term objectives. This drive to be liked by staff possibly obstructed Jan's ability to critically assess progress or to give staff critical feedback.

Jan was driven to be innovative and visionary, taking up opportunities to work with and maintain an elite professional network that stimulated her thinking and gained advantages for the school.

### 4.4.5 Sustainability of Innovation and Success

The RNL expressed the opinion that Breezes PS was dependant on Jan for its success. She painted an alternative future view of the school, as maintaining the rigour in its approach but building the creativity and flexibility for others to share the leadership direction with Jan. However, she acknowledged the impact of the work of Jan and Breezes PS on other schools and principals, providing a model which was a strong resource for other schools to think and act differently.

The SC President was confident that the work of the school was protected as part of the school’s culture as “we’ve gone too far to go back … any principal who came in and wanted to go backwards, I think they’d have a really hard time.”

### 4.4.6 Other Factors that have led to the School’s Innovation and Success

The parent group, leadership team, RNL and staff group commented on the positive attitude, learning readiness and behavior of the children who attended Breezes PS, indicating that this may be both a factor in, and a result of the school's success.

There was general agreement from all groups, affirmed by Jan, that a key success factor had been the engagement of key staff to drive the implementation. Most groups mentioned the strong role of the coaching program in driving the innovation and ensuring success, contributed to by both past and current coaching staff and a supportive leadership team.
4.4.7 Summary

The timing of this research may have been a key moment in time for Breezes PS and Jan’s leadership, possibly requiring Jan to reassess her style of leadership and the school’s strategic direction. The school was well regarded as a leading school and a successful innovator. The school’s data affirmed its status as a high performing school, as indicated in Table 4.3. However, it had failed to keep in advance of the strong strategic growth in educational practice, and different groups expressed fears that the things it had been well regarded for were now commonplace. The choice was seen to be between progressing slowly, ensuring everyone was sharing the journey and embedding the new practice deeply with rigor, consistency and a shared agreement around the school’s practice or, continuing to build the school’s strong reputation as a creative and innovative school that was ahead of the game. Jan as a leader with strong knowledge, experience and the courage and passion to be innovative, was driven to be a leader in the innovative network of schools, but her inexperienced leadership team did not share this desire and were concerned about what was really happening (or not) in the school. Jan’s pace was fast and she acknowledged that many of the changes had not been embedded as originally thought or desired. Staff were not fully aligned with Jan, with a question of their shared commitment to the vision and the hard work this would involve. With this tension, heightened by Jan’s time out of the school, came a crisis of confidence from Jan in her leadership, her capacity to be innovative and the school’s innovative status.

Jan was a strong leader who held the reins of school direction tightly, possibly contributing to the staff team not being fully engaged in the journey. Influenced by her background in low socio-economic schools and Special Education, Jan was driven by a desire for every child to access a quality education. She worked hard to build relationships with people to achieve this.

Staff teams shared loyalty to each other but not necessarily to the whole school or its direction. The strong team focus across the school had decentralized much of the strategic direction, and may have moved too far, with staff teams unaware of and uncommitted to whole school vision. Jan appeared to be unaware of the power struggle occurring between her and her leadership team, however she was aware that the school was not united. The leadership team indicated that Jan was willing to listen and all groups in the school shared their pride of the school and its achievements. They held a united desire to continue to be successful, if not necessarily agreement on how this would be achieved.
The perceptions of the RNL, as an outsider to the school (and who also held a substantive position as principal in a local school) provided insight into the local education community’s sensitivity towards the success and attention given to Jan’s leadership and the school. Jan engaged in an elite, state wide, professional network of well regarded, highly successful principals who looked to each other and outside Australia to follow educational developments and best practice. This provided Jan with stimulation and the desire to keep moving ahead, deepening the tension of the reality of her school experience.

The school’s ongoing success may be determined by what happens next. The leadership team believed this lay in Jan’s capacity for honest and critical appraisal of the school’s work.

4.5 Links Secondary College: Ann - The Coaching Principal

4.5.1 Features of the School

Links Secondary College was located in a large outer city centre, with approximately 880 students from years 7 to 12 (twelve to eighteen years of age). The city grew rapidly in the 1950s to accommodate the urban sprawl of the post WW2 population boom, establishing itself as a lifestyle area for young families. However in recent times, the local area had entered a socio-economic decline with poor infrastructure, a predominance of older government housing, an aging population and pockets of very high socio-economic disadvantage compared to other parts of the state. The locality had lost favour with young families and cheaper housing had entrenched the social disadvantage in the area. The area had not attracted new immigrants and remained predominantly Australian born and English speaking.

The 2011 Census Quickstats profiled the disadvantage with 16.8% of residents listed as separated or divorced, compared to the 2011 Australian average of 11.4%, and with 7.1% registered as unemployed, compared to the Australian average at the time of 5.6%. Technicians, trades workers and professionals were the most common types of employment in the area (see Table 4.2).

Anecdotally, the aging population and social disadvantage were seen to be entrenched, with local sporting clubs having difficulty attracting young members and nearby preschool and primary schools struggling to maintain enrolment numbers. The school’s 2011 ICSEA score of 957 (1000 being the Australian average), with 51% of
family backgrounds in the bottom quartile and only 7% in the top quartile (compared to the Australian distribution of 25% across each quartile), supported this assessment (see Table 4.3).

The school was built in the 1960s as the local high school, relocating from its 1950’s site in the nearby surf club. However it formed in its current entity in 1997, as a result of a forced amalgamation of the high school and the local technical school. While the high school always regarded itself as successful and held strong community support, the technical school held a reputation as being suitable for a trades education but with a rough and unruly culture.

In 1997 the technical school site closed down and staff were forced to relocate, moving from a small staff group where they were known, with a few hundred students, to a site of over 140 staff and approximately 1800 students. To accommodate the mood of the change, Don was appointed as a new principal but in an attempt to appease both schools, separate assistant principals (two from each school) and twenty four leading teachers were transferred into the newly formed school from the two original schools.

The new high school was renamed using part of both the high school and technical school names. However, any collusion stopped there, with staff operating separately in the new site and with widespread grieving by staff, students and the community, many of whom had attended the original high or technical schools. The school culture at that time was invariably referred to by participants as the ‘wild, wild west’, ‘a jungle’ and ‘a war zone.’ Staff did not identify with the new school and little agreement was in place around behavior management, curriculum or pedagogy.

Adding to the trouble, a larger neighbouring high school actively promoted a strong and broad reputation for academic achievement, offering scholarships for academic success. The newly merged high school went into serious decline, becoming a seriously failing school for students, staff and the local community, a place where you ended up rather than chose to attend.

Ann was appointed by the principal as assistant principal approximately four years after the merger. Don raised the ire of staff and local educators with this appointment, as Ann came from a primary school background as an acting assistant principal and had never held a position of any kind in a secondary school. Ann was appointed with a curriculum tag, having led curriculum development at local primary schools and across the region for a few years previously. Ann remained assistant principal for five years,
working closely with Don until he moved schools. Ann then took up the acting principal position for a year, before being appointed substantively in 2009.

In 2010 Ann determined that the school needed to reimage itself, as it continued to be shackled by the past merger, with remaining wounds evident in staff, who had largely not identified with the new high school. An extensive consultation process was led by Ann, and as a result a new school name, logo, values and uniform were developed.

Links College was born, with a new logo of three universal water symbols profiling the values of Community, Responsibility and Success, derived from student, teacher and parent collective beliefs on success in life. These values underpinned a range of programs and activities that occurred across the school. **Community:** engagement, leadership, citizenship, environment, and mentoring; **Responsibility:** integrity, respect, reliability, independence and resilience and **Success:** personalised learning, learning to learn, goal setting, employability and lifelong learning. The school motto was ‘Leaders in Education’. The uniform exuded a formality more often associated with an independent school with long sleeved white shirts, below knee length dresses, grey trousers and grey socks.

Physically, the school was organised into open plan modules, called MAX (Motivation, Achievement, eXcellence) Learning Centres for students in years 7, 8, 9 and 10. Years 10, 11 and 12 students experienced more formal learning structures with individual subject teachers and classes. Core subjects taught in MAX were Literacy, Numeracy, Inquiry and LOTE (Japanese). Students learning in MAX centres were grouped in large numbers (e.g. 180 students), with teachers allocated to working in a MAX level each year. Students were team taught by several teachers for part of their MAX lesson, breaking into smaller groups or individual working areas to pursue personalised work projects, facilitated by teachers moving around and responding to individual needs.

Students chose to follow senior school pathways in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs or the more standard Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Alternative programs were offered to students in Hands On Learning and Connect programs, designed to engage students at risk of school refusal or significant failure in formal settings. These programs provided strong links with community organisations and offered alternative pathways to youth employment programs.

As a result of several building programs, including a recent Building Futures project, the facilities were mostly new, bright and colorful with modern collaborative furniture.
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The grounds were extensive and the school had a calm and focused tone, giving an impression that it was well cared for by staff and students.

The researcher observed students universally in uniform to a consistently high standard. They clearly articulated to the researcher the accepted consequences for being out of uniform (e.g., removal from class to supervised learning for wearing the wrong coloured socks). Additionally, students and teachers were observed moving through buildings, along corridors and out in the grounds in constant interaction and quiet communication with each other, giving a sense of purposefulness to the learning environment. Technology in the form of computers, interactive whiteboards and laptops were evident as learning tools in classrooms.

The school’s leadership team included Ann and three assistant principals, two with responsibility for junior and senior school management and one leading curriculum design and implementation. Eleven leading teachers held responsibility for student learning, building relationships and behavior at levels of the school with two leading each of the MAX centres, two with VCAL and three with VCE (Year 10-12).

Most of the leadership team had been appointed by Ann and were young, energetic and committed to the school’s direction. Several of these had primary school backgrounds similar to Ann. The staff profile was very mixed, with an older group of staff having been at the school prior to the merger and the development of the Links SC identity. However, at least half the staff were new to the school in the last three to five years. This generally younger group demonstrated a strong commitment to the nontraditional ways of working that was part of the Links SC profile, advertising itself as ‘we do things differently.’

4.5.2 Culture of the School

All participants emphasised the changed culture of the school. Ann described the early days as “like something in one of those movies that you see that are showing a worst case scenario.” She described her early impressions of the school as “confrontational … the teacher against the students’ with the teachers who survived doing so because they were “the good student managers.” She outlined a traditional secondary school organisational structure of leading teachers in charge of key learning areas, curriculum committees, a whole school welfare group, an operations group and no agreed teacher practice, “you didn’t hear any conversations at all about learning, about what the students were doing except that the students were disrespectful and badly behaved.”
She described very traditional teacher practice based on repetition and teachers who were “devastated if they were asked to teach something in one year that was new or different that they hadn’t taught before,” because they already had the resources for their current program.

Over time, Ann formed the view that the merger hadn’t been successful as “teachers didn’t have ownership of it.” Staff still identified themselves as belonging to the technical or the high school and aligned themselves tribally around those connected to their previous schools. All told grieving stories of the merger, without any shared sense of what the school was about, other than it wasn’t a great place to work. There existed a mutual lack of respect between students and staff and a sense of blame and hopelessness, from the leadership down.

The staff group interviewed comprised teachers who had all been in the school for many years, pre the merger. They quickly identified to the researcher which school they had come from as a way of introducing themselves. They grieved for the fact that with so many new staff, the school’s history is largely unknown or it “is ignored a bit or that it’s rewritten to suit whatever the current agenda is …”

While the staff group had much to say about the valued aspects of the school they had lost under Ann’s leadership, such as choosing the areas where they taught, control over student movement and the cohesive nature of the staff team, they unanimously agreed that the school culture was now a learning culture and students were happier with less behavioral problems than previously.

The leadership team described the new culture as having an “overarching sense of calm and tranquility.” Relationships between teachers and staff were key to this, a focus that commenced with Don when the two schools merged. This early direction setting was highlighted by the RNL, “… (Don’s) thing was engagement with kids, he wanted the school to engage with the kids …” However this focus continued strongly under Ann’s leadership and was an essential element of the new culture. There’s “a feeling of mutual respect among the staff and students, and a partnership”, replacing the earlier confrontation and mutual anxiety.

Ann described the current staff culture as one of “continuous learning and learning to do your work to better meet the needs of students.” She called this a culture of ‘responsiveness’ and ‘action’:
… if we feel that something’s not working for the students we respond, we don’t spend a year planning for it … if there’s evidence of a need we’re going to act, and that will have consequences for people, it will put them out of their comfort zone, it will require some different or additional planning from them but … it’s risk taking … (Principal)

Ann outlined the key difference in the school’s past and present culture as now “all decisions are made based on what’s best for the students, whereas previously all decisions were made based on what’s best for the teachers." She described the school as “really calm, the students are compliant and positive. The relationships between students and teachers are absolutely fantastic, really relaxed, trusting sort of relationships”, an element observed and diarised by the researcher while present in the school.

4.5.3 Success of the School

Just prior to this research, Links SC had been identified as ‘punching above its weight’ when measuring its achievement in VCE scores, taking into account its socio-economic status. This trend had continued with the school continuing to achieve higher median study scores than many schools in more affluent areas.

Links College’s courage in daring to be different was notable. As was evident in the primary schools selected for this research, organisation for learning and a strong focus on curriculum design and pedagogy was a new and developing school improvement focus for the most innovative primary schools. However, this was not common place in secondary schools and transferring this successfully to a secondary school setting, dictated by the expectations of subject areas, final year assessments and exams (VCE), was highly unusual and courageous. The success of this endeavor, spread by word of mouth, attracted attention and funding for the Building Futures program and Leading Schools funding. The school was featured in a DEECD publication on the successful development of flexible learning spaces as a secondary school case study.

Additionally, the school responded innovatively to the needs of its students, developing partnerships and creating programs designed to engage and stimulate learners from a range of backgrounds including students with social inhibitors on their capacity to attend school, engage and learn. While the school actively sought out support and endorsements for these programs, it came at a financial cost to the school. Ann described these programs as catering for “the invisibles … they’re in every school but we decided to commit funds to keeping them here instead of just leaving them out there doing whatever they do.”
The perceptions of various groups and individuals highlighted the strong research based, risk taking culture as a key element of success. The staff group saw this as “Thinking outside the box and taking on new kinds of roles and challenges and systems” while the parent group described this success as “the policies and the ideas are a lot different to traditional schools.”

The leadership team highlighted the full commitment made by the school and the clear actions taken to ensure success. They were quick to explain that this journey had taken seven years and had required a ‘relentless pursuit’ and a clear and persistent investment, ‘we’re not tinkering with it, we’re not mucking around and saying “oh we’ll give this a go’ … It’s ‘we believe in this strongly’, we get more people on board that believe it, we build the capacity and we continue to challenge the people that don’t believe in it.”

### 4.5.4 The Principal

Ann was brought up as the eldest of six children in a strongly Catholic family with a paternal expectation that she would set the example for her siblings. She described her younger self as a ‘goody two shoes’, with her family background and Catholic girls’ school contributing to a very conservative and sheltered upbringing. Ann said she wasn’t a risk taker and was shocked by the liberal thinking she encountered in her university years. She described herself as “not a risk taker, not by any stretch of the imagination.”

However this changed when her life took an unexpected turn. Ann taught for several years after graduating and then left the workforce to raise her young nephew and niece whose parents had died in tragic circumstances:

… we (Ann and her husband) were these young people with no children of our own and inherited these two kids who were off the wall, in trouble, very life changing experience. So we had fifteen years with them and in the interim had our own family and it was pretty terrible, we couldn’t undo the damage that had happened to them, it was pretty awful. (Principal)

Ann was surprised by the link made by the researcher between this experience and her leadership of Links College, stating “no one’s asked me that question.” She describes the personal impact, “it definitely shifted my attitude to life and I just thought every day is really precious and every child deserves something pretty special.” The residual feelings that Ann had for this deeply personal situation is illustrated when she said, “we really thought that we could salvage something out of it, but we really didn’t
unfortunately, and that was really hard to accept. But I don’t know how that really … yeah maybe it’s impacted on my career and what I’ve done."

When Ann’s three girls started school, she returned to primary teaching with an emerging passion for curriculum development, evidenced in a variety of informal curriculum leadership roles. After seven years she successfully gained a leading teacher position, but demonstrating courage, the importance of her professional expectations and a need for a match of educational values, she left after a year as “the leadership above me was so dysfunctional … there was nothing I could learn from being at that school.” She worked as a regional consultant with the opportunity to travel around schools and this “cemented my view of myself as a curriculum leader” and provided the opportunity to see other schools. Next, Ann was head-hunted for a leading teacher position as a curriculum leader, in a large primary school, by a principal who shared her educational philosophy. This position included a year as acting assistant principal, and during this time she took on a voluntary role to host regional middle years meetings (years 5-9), exposing her to secondary schools and a different way of thinking and operating.

When the curriculum position became available in the secondary school, Ann said that she “didn’t really speak to anyone much” about this big decision. However, she stated that “My husband strongly encouraged me to apply for the position here.” On questioning, Ann divulged that her husband worked in education and had offered her advice, however she was concerned that her application would not be considered, due to her primary background. What Ann didn’t say, was that her husband of 37 years was a secondary school teacher who, up until shortly before this research took place, had worked at Links College.

The RNL described the reaction to Ann’s appointment in the secondary school fraternity, “… amongst (Don’s) peers there was lots of second guessing of … why on earth … isn’t there anyone in secondary good enough? … You’ve taken an opportunity off someone.” Ann also received a shocked response from her peers:

…of the ilk of ‘are you mad?’ … but I had a core belief that … what worked in primary would work in secondary, and I really didn’t know what I was going to find here, but I probably didn’t care, I just felt that I did have something to offer and the fact that I think the principal here was courageous enough to offer me the job is a bit of synchronicity too, because I think many wouldn’t be that open minded. (Principal)
Reflecting on her early life experiences, Ann described her educational philosophy as the belief that “… every student is truly unique and has the capacity to be successful … education is just one small component of life … (they) deserve for this time to be something really positive and that the measures of success should be diverse.” She described a broad view of a successful student as “one who has the opportunity to identify their strengths and passions and to use their time at school to develop those in meeting a goal that they have identified for themselves.”

Ann highlighted her personal strength of living her values, stating that she has made the school a match for her beliefs. In the early days, she used her intuition and people skills to build a team who shared her values and “… if I couldn’t have made the changes I’ve made, I probably wouldn’t have stayed here.”

At the core of Ann’s values based leadership was courage and commitment to action. She articulated this as, “… we have to be courageous enough to say not only do we believe that’s what’s best for students in the future, we’re prepared to do it and if there is some fallout, well, our moral purpose is not the thing that’s suffering.”

Participants consistently described Ann as a change leader. They built a picture of a leader with a clear philosophical base for school improvement and the ability to engage and work collaboratively with teams across the school to implement a shared vision. Having high level professional expectations and accountability, being visionary and a risk taker was balanced with being approachable, caring, trustworthy, values driven and providing hands on guidance and support. The leadership team saw Ann with high levels of mutual respect, trust and support indicating strong team work. They were also the only group who saw Ann as calm, knowing what happens in the school and using research as a base for strategic direction. This analysis suggests Ann has built the leadership team to be a powerful coalition in the school.

The SC President articulated the balance Ann achieves in driving significant, sustained school change, whilst ensuring she takes people with her on the improvement journey.

When the leadership team talked about Ann’s leadership, the researcher’s observations were that they had difficulty separating her personal leadership from the school’s culture and programs and their strategic teamwork. This suggests that Ann had intentionally and successfully built a strong and united leadership team to share her investment in leading the school. The leadership team described the leadership model as a very distributed one, “you had a lot of scope and freedom to be able to
design and grow and modify your programs and it came back down to that central point … for the good of the students, it’s all about them.”

Referring to Sergiovanni’s leadership framework, the leadership team described Ann as “a symbolic leader, she practises what she preaches” and she takes opportunities to model the practice she expects from teachers at opportunities such as staff meetings. They further describe her ‘hands on’ approach, “(Ann’s) sort of always wandering around, ‘how are you going with this?’, ‘what’s happening?’, yeah she just knows, she’s like Santa, she just knows if you’ve been good or not!”

Ann described herself as a risk-taker and articulated a strong value of this in the culture of the school. This language was repeated by the leadership team:

“… it’s not about … always getting it right, it’s about the having a go and (she) gives permission for staff to get things wrong and to fail miserably but she wants people to try … it’s the having a go that’s important and not tolerating not having a go and sitting back and not changing. (Leadership Team)

Ann took a consultative, coaching style role with the leadership team who describe her as “… pretty reflective and skilled at making you reflect. … I think she has confidence that we have got the answers but sometimes just need guidance in getting there.” This built trust between Ann and key staff, however they emphasised that it did not replace accountability or doing a good job. Ann’s high expectations for the performance of the leadership team were shared and implicitly understood; ensuring team members were intrinsically motivated to do their best. “… when you’re asked to do a job … you want to do it really well and you know that you don’t get away with doing shabby work.”

The staff team interviewed for this research were all long term members of staff, and while mostly jaded with recent system and school trends, they were cautiously supportive of Ann’s leadership style. Interestingly, Ann nominated this group when there would have been many other teachers with more current opinions, who would have been more forthright in their praise of current school direction. However, this group supported the risk taking element of Ann’s leadership, acknowledging that she “has tried to make that happen.”

The staff group complained about the pace of change and the need for the leadership team to take stock. They conceded that “Perhaps people feel supported but … they’ve not necessarily got much say in what’s going to happen.”

Ann demonstrated the confidence to bend the rules to suit her strategic direction when required. She talked about gaining an agreement from DEECD to mark students in the
Hands On program present (and receive full funding) when in reality they were only ever going to be at school for three of four periods a day. She also spoke of giving staff an additional pupil free day the previous year as a response to some additional work they had undertaken.

Ann talked about what she does when she doesn’t know what to do, which was to speak with the leadership team and others to ascertain their responses before making up her mind. She also spoke of using her intuition, “When I don’t know what I want to do and I’m not a hundred percent sure, I go with my gut instinct. I don’t know what that means but that’s what I do, it usually doesn’t let me down.”

Ann felt that her leadership style meant that she didn’t always pay enough attention to the detail and this frustrated some people. “… that’s been a bit of a recurring theme, don’t let the need to nail the detail get in the way of a good idea … that’s probably one of my mantras … if it’s a good idea, it’s worth pursuing and we’ll find a way to make it work …” She reflected that the leadership team were very similar to her in this approach, but she saw strength in this.

The RNL alluded to the personal cost that leading a disenchanted and divided staff, a failing school, disconnected students and a disengaged parent community had on Ann, “It’s taken its toll.” The RNL believed that Ann was driven by a passion for everyone to achieve. He described Ann’s perspective of achievement and success as ‘very broad’ and that she was as proud of the school’s VCE achievements as she was of the students who stay at school in an alternative program and of the staff who start enjoying their teaching in the new learning centres. “So I think she’s not one dimensional and I reckon that’s probably (Ann’s) strength is that … she can define achievement in lots of ways.”

Supporting the RNL’s views, the SC President saw Ann being driven by her care for the people in the school, while the parent group saw Ann as being driven by the school’s potential for the benefit of students. Underpinning these comments runs a theme previously expressed; that Ann wanted the children at Links SC to have opportunities. The parent group said, “…my feeling about it is that she genuinely believes that children deserve a really good education, and so that’s probably the core thing that’s encouraging her to push on.”
4.5.5 Sustainability of Innovation and Success

The sustainability of the strategic work of the school, beyond her leadership was a strong point of reflection for Ann:

I don’t know realistically that you would ever get to the point particularly in a largish school where … if you take the principal out of the picture, where the leadership team are so capable and confident that they can do without that person … does it ever get to the point where you would have the dream team to that extent that you could step away? I don’t know the answer to that. (Principal)

She continued this reflection in light of the school’s ongoing improvement momentum and her perception that “you never get there.” “… that is one of the challenges of managing, actually stopping and reflecting because what’s been achieved is significant but because you’ve always got your eye on something ahead, you’re probably never satisfied with what you’ve done.”

The leadership team, influenced by their collaborative effort, team cohesion and shared sense of purpose, perceived the work of the school to be independent of Ann’s leadership and that they would keep the momentum. However, they acknowledged that it would need to be different:

I absolutely believe things are sustainable … I read a lot of business books about the charismatic leader where the business then fails when they go. And I don’t think we’ve got that, I think we’ve got … a leader that’s had a lot of influence on research based change and then there’s been some awesome capacity building going on that … makes it sustainable. (Leadership Team)

While the RNL agreed with the leadership team’s assessment, he felt it was not yet independent of Ann’s leadership and that it was in a transitional period, “we’re on the journey and we’re certainly moving forward with it, but at the moment I think it’s still very dependent on (Ann).” The SC President agreed with the leadership team, feeling that the school had got ‘that rolling ball’, however he acknowledged that it required the right person to continue with ‘the plan.’ The parent group was as confident that the school could continue without Ann, however they found this difficult to imagine.

4.5.6 Other Factors that have led to the School’s Innovation and Success

Several groups, including Ann, referred to the courage of the previous principal in identifying Ann’s qualities and employing her against the tide of expectations. The leadership team agreed with the RNL’s view of Ann’s appointment being a major
foundational event, believing it established a pattern of courageous decision making for the school.

Demonstrating a skill in making the most of every opportunity, Ann added that a significant event in her leadership of the school was a funding opportunity that arrived at a perfect time for her to establish her leadership.

Finally, the high level capacity and collaboration of the leadership team that Ann had intentionally sought out and built, was a significant factor in the school’s success. The staff group did not discern between one member of the leadership team or the other, but rather spoke about all members with respect and admiration for their persistence towards the shared school vision.

4.5.7 Summary

Ann’s longevity in the school had built a strong foundation of trust in her leadership amongst staff, students and the parent community. Against all odds, the school had transformed itself from a failing school to a successful one, seen by a range of measures, both traditional and academic, as well as the moral and nonacademic, giving disadvantaged children skills and opportunities for success. This success had attracted attention and with this had developed increased pride in the school from all stakeholders, reaffirming the improvement journey.

Ann was a ‘hands on’ leader who shared the work closely with her leadership team and all those willing to work with her. This provided the clarity of purpose seen across the school. Ann was also skilled at holding others to account, and even more skilled in building success as an intrinsic motivator for individuals and teams. She was a strong leader with an understanding of the critical balance of the need for care and support of her staff, students and parents in order to lead and drive others to perform to a high level towards a shared vision.

Ann’s leadership was strongly influenced by her background life experiences, acknowledged by her as life changing. She was a leader confident of her abilities and firmly grounded by her personal beliefs and values. She understood the need for her work to be a life match and was not fearful of walking away if this is not the case. She wasn’t fearful of hard work, temporary disharmony or of putting an idea or plan into action and she had built a team around her to share the work. She was not afraid of taking risks to get what she wanted and believed to be the best outcome for her school. She was also confident and willing to break the rules if the outcome was justified.
Ann’s leadership driver was embedded in doing whatever it took to achieve student success. The language was not around innovation or creativity but more of ‘taking action’ or being responsive to a perceived need in whatever way would best get the job done. She was not hamstrung by what was or wasn’t possible, her intuition, emotional and intellectual intelligence gave her the confidence to ‘do whatever it takes.’

Ann didn’t appear to be a strong networker or systems worker; she was internally focused on her school and her network was her leadership team and her husband, with whom she shared the work. While it was a large school and therefore impossible to speak with everyone, there was little doubt of the high levels of loyalty felt towards Ann by staff, students and parents. Ann understood this, demonstrated by the staff group she selected to speak with the researcher, possibly the most disloyal staff members in the school. She weighed up every activity for its potential as a learning experience and adopted a big picture or strategic long term plan to her work.

Ann built a team around her to do the work, freeing her up to be actively engaged in the process, to be hands on, responsive and strategic. The team adopted a research based approach, having the shared confidence to implement changes and modify this as they developed the work. This ensured the journey would most likely continue beyond Ann’s leadership; however the work would change without the strong convictions and foresight of a confident, knowledgeable and trusted leader.

Links SC was a successful and innovative school, led by a strong leader who had developed a shared moral purpose to the work, an agreed way of implementation and a culture of high expectations for what was possible to achieve for everyone in the school.

4.6 Parkview Secondary College: Jim - The Global Principal

4.6.1 Features of the School

Parkview Secondary College was an outer suburban school catering for approximately 1400 year seven to twelve students (twelve to eighteen years of age); a very large, single campus, coeducational secondary school by state and national standards.

The locality was an older, middle income area with a trend for established families to relocate to newer suburbs nearby. In recent years, with the availability of cheaper housing, an aging population and a new freeway connection to the city, a wave of immigrant families moved into the traditional Anglo Saxon area.
The school’s 2011 ICSEA score of 1039 (1000 being the Australian average), was represented by 24% of family backgrounds in the bottom quartile, 25% and 35% in the middle quartiles and only 16% in the top quartile (compared to the Australian distribution of 25% across each quartile). Parkview’s increasing attraction to new immigrant enrolments was profiled in the LBOTE at 14% in the 2011 MySchool data (see Table 4.3).

This information was supported by 2011 census data, with 60.4% registered in fulltime employment and 5.2% unemployed, slightly below the Australian average of 5.6%. The areas of employment were dominated by middle income workers, with the average age of 37 years. The move away from a traditional Anglo Saxon profile was seen in the fact that 51.9% of both parents were born overseas (see Table 4.2).

The recent attraction of the local area to new immigrants was supported by the wide range of learning pathways offered by the school. This had occurred largely due the school’s successful development of a federally funded, onsite Technical and Trade Centre, offering facilities to provide Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) courses in Engineering, Manufacturing and Automotive subjects. The 2011 MySchool data lists 151 students enrolled in Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses at Parkview, and the 2010 Year 12 student post school destinations as 44% university, 32% TAFE or vocational study and 8% in employment (see Table 4.3).

This intentional diversification of the school’s profile of success, strongly led by Jim, the principal, had not come without some community concern at the branching away from a purely academic stream. This was commented on by the SC President, who demonstrated a strong personal bias in his opinion, possibly influenced by his professional role as a university academic.

The principal, leadership team, staff, parents and SC President all supported the notion that Parkview SC had long been regarded as a good school, “… it was and it still is and it’s always been a good school.” (Principal)

Enrolment in the school was highly sought after, drawing from over fifty primary schools, some from out of the local area. Enrolments had steadily increased over the years with strong demand for entry at every year level. Enrolment included a small number of international fee paying students from China, Korea and Vietnam and refugee students from Myanmar.
The school was built in 1954 and was one of the first high schools to be built in the Light Timber Construction (LTC) style, designed by the Victorian Public Works Department to address a chronic shortage of suburban high schools in the 1950's. The school's footprint was a number of permanent and portable buildings around a large quadrangle, oval and playing fields. Many refurbishments had occurred over the years, with various building styles evident, including the main administration block which was rebuilt after a fire over twenty years ago. The more recent facility was a modern, expansive Technical and Trades Centre and an open plan building which accommodated Year 9 and 10 students. The school appeared well maintained and cared for, although under pressure to provide an adequate space for whole school assemblies, and to replace the twenty four run down portable classrooms required as the school increased in size.

Organisationally, the school was broken into three sub schools – Junior, Middle and Senior - each with its own leader heading a team of community coordinators and form tutors, each broken down into smaller communities of approximately 80 students.

The school website articulated its commitment to digital education, citing the benefits that mobile learning devices bring to student learning. Student use of technology as an integrated learning tool was highly visible, as was the provision of computer suites and labs throughout the school. All year 7 students used a personal I-pad as a key learning tool, having moved to a bookless learning environment in 2011 and the school had provided a one to one laptop program for the past nine years for middle and senior school students.

The school's website listed its vision statement as "(Parkview) Secondary College fosters a learning community that caters for the unique academic, social and emotional needs of all our members. It is achieved through: Learning to be yourself, Learning to do, Learning to think and Learning to live together." The website listed the school values as Respect, Integrity and Personal Best which "enables individuals to be responsible and productive citizens in a global community." The principal, in the webpage welcome, offered his view of the school:

We are a truly dynamic, vibrant and globally engaged school … Our college has a long and successful tradition of academic excellence and innovative learning practices. Our staff take pride in providing a safe and secure learning environment, whilst at the same time providing a full range of dynamic and challenging academic and extracurricular programs (School Website).
Affirming the global perspective taken by the school, it listed sister schools in France, UK, Denmark, Korea, China and Thailand. Partnership visits to and from these schools occurred annually with groups of students and teachers involved. The school performed on a global stage with a Performing Arts World Tour every three years, visiting sister schools and participating in worldwide performances and in turn hosted international visits and performances. It also boasted three concert bands, three string ensembles and two choirs and regularly received state, national and international recognition for its performances. The school supported an AIDS orphanage in Thailand.

Parkview was strongly involved in several local secondary school networks, the strongest being an innovative proposal for a coalition of Parkview and several smaller secondary schools, to collaborate to provide an integrated curriculum across campuses with the provision of new facilities and support funding. Jim had been the leader in this initiative and remained a strong driver and high level networker for the educational and regional opportunities this proposal presented.

There were over one hundred teaching staff and over thirty support staff at Parkview SC. The leadership team consisted of the principal, three long term assistant principals, each with a sub school leadership role and eighteen leading teachers, many of these young teachers, new to leadership roles. The school had an ICT team providing specialist technical and computer support, a student services team with a nurse, youth worker, guidance officer, social worker and chaplain and a strong organisational framework of teaching and learning leaders and curriculum program coordinators.

4.6.2 Culture of the School

Parkview SC was repeatedly described as having a strong and cohesive professional culture by stakeholders. Jim believed this had developed by investing “a lot of time in ‘reculturing’ to develop a strong performance and development culture, through a model that’s been developed over time and was fully owned by the staff.”

Jim explained the framework in detail, calling this a ‘balanced scorecard approach.’ The elements were:

1. Highly effective teaching with reference to the school’s annual implementation plan and 21st century teaching skills
2. Teaming and leadership, “that's really important because obviously a lot of the work that we do in the school is based on working in teams, and leadership can be delivered at a whole range of levels so all teachers are leaders”

3. Professional learning including a personal focus and the school's strategic direction

4. Contribution to the wider school or system “… recognising that an important element of your role as a teacher goes beyond your own classroom or your own school … the discretionary effort that people make.”

This ‘balanced scorecard approach’ at Parkview was documented as a case study by Jensen in a Grattan Institute Report (2011), “Better teacher appraisal and feedback: improving performance”. It was also the subject of an Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) video link, demonstrating professional best practice.

The RNL, who had worked with Jim for thirty two years, as a neighboring principal and now as line manager, provided an informed external perspective of Jim's leadership:

I think (Jim) expects a lot from his teaching staff ... his human leadership capacity is very strong and he is … a follower of ‘recruit hard, manage easy.’ He has very high expectations of his staff in terms of performance but also sees an incredible responsibility to ensure … that they have appropriate professional learning to continue to develop.

And the school:

The school’s set up in a way now which has moved away from the traditional model that you would expect in most schools, to very much a team oriented focus and those teams support one another and … there are structures in place which basically come back right through to (Jim) … he holds his staff for long periods of time … it’s highly sought after by the staff to get into (Parkview) as an employee. (RNL)

The staff group described the school’s culture as a risk taking one, largely due to Jim’s leadership style of pushing staff "into the deep end to see if you will sink or swim." However, they also described a great sense of trust in Jim’s leadership and this underpinned the school’s culture, “(you) haven't been pushed without a life jacket … and you're encouraged to try something new. And he’s always so positive that it’s going to work. You … can’t fail to try and catch that energy as well.”
4.6.3 Success of the School

Parkview SC was recommended as being innovative with Jim, the principal having recently been awarded the Victorian Education Excellence Award for Outstanding School Leadership.

The school’s success was visible across a range of areas and this was intentionally driven by Jim who held strong beliefs around a broad definition of success for all students. There was obvious pride in the Wall of Fame, located in the front entry, which profiled past students’ achievements across a range of endeavours, including sporting champions, performing artists, television stars, mathematicians and scientists.

The school held a strong, longstanding reputation as a school with high academic results. This reputation extended to its performing arts program, with the annual musical production a major highlight of the school and local community calendars, attracting crowds of over 3000 people. The school held an enviable record in sporting success, driven by Jim who had an elite sporting background.

The school and Jim’s leadership provided a very strong and public profile in the use of new and existing technologies to promote student learning. Parkview SC was a Cisco Networking Academy, providing professional learning in IT to a university extension level. It was renowned as one of the top four IT learning providers in the Asia Pacific. This partnership had positioned the school to be at the forefront of new learning technologies.

All participants acknowledged that it was Jim’s strategic leadership and high level networking that provided the key underpinning factors in the school’s success. As a highly astute, articulate, politically engaged and well-connected school leader, Jim’s opinion was regularly sought by major media agencies. As an avid Twitter follower, his thoughts were both shared and shaped on an international stage. Local and state examples were plentiful of Jim positioned with ministers and local, state and federal members on both sides of the political fence, across a range of activities. Parkview students also engaged on this stage when appropriate to their learning context. Using technology to engage at an elite level on an international stage, was an activity driven and closely managed by Jim and this placed the school’s success into the global educational spotlight.

The principal cited the school’s key success as its forward and outward looking direction:
Whilst we’re a school located in (suburban Melbourne), we are very much a school that’s part of an international stage ... building those global links so that we can actually build ... a shared conversation around education in terms of how it looks into the future. (Principal)

Jim listed his thoughts on the external perspective of the school’s innovation and success:

1. Entrepreneurial leadership – his and key staff in the school. “... we’ve actually delivered something back to the Department that is seen as innovative and can be shared”

2. Increasing the diversity of the school’s population over the past fifteen years, currently with 55 refugee students and a close sister school relationship in Thailand

3. Moving from a 19th century framework of thinking about student learning to 21st century thinking with “the much more consistent and appropriate use of technology across the curriculum”

4. Strong success in building the professional capacity of the teaching staff.

The RNL described the school prior to Jim’s leadership as “pretty conservative ... an academic school of excellence ... a strong sporting school, a strong display of all that we know about independent schools, with a uniform and students wearing ties and blazers and a lot of traditions.” However he described the school's current success profile as vastly different to this in that it is “multifaceted ... endeavoring to provide ... a wide range of pathways for all the students that attend that school.” However he stressed that this doesn’t preclude the strong academic programs that were a continuing school focus.

The value of the increased diversity of the student population and the breadth of the definition of success provided a consistent message across educational groups. The community groups perceived the school’s success to be the cutting edge use of technology and the adoption of new ways of teaching, including reorganizing the school to accommodate student learning needs. This consistency, and the trust it engendered, was evident in the staff opinion data. The 2011 staff opinion survey was described by the RNL as “strong, unbelievably strong.”
4.6.4 The Principal

Jim had been involved in education for over 35 years and appeared surprised to reflect that he was “actively involved in leadership roles from a very young age”, at the urging of his early principals and mentors. These experiences gave him confidence to seek leadership roles early in his career, becoming an assistant principal at a small, outer suburban school. It led to his first principal appointment at the same school and the opportunity to learn on the job, whilst working in a close semi-rural community. Jim stated that one of his early lessons as school leader was the importance of ‘hiring hard’ and trying to get ‘the best people in the right jobs’, a mantra that he has lived by ever since. After almost two years in his first principal position, he successfully applied to Parkview SC, where he has remained as principal for over fifteen years.

At Parkview, Jim followed a principal of six to seven years who had moved into a regional position. The school held a strong academic and performing arts reputation in its community, however he found significant, underlying staff resistance to change, accompanied by some subtle staff bullying. He provided an example “... whenever there was a change proposed there was a prevailing view that ... if you had a strong minority view, that you could lobby the principal and the decision would be set aside.” Jim recalls with great clarity the first time he stood against these tactics:

… there was one time where there was a decision around the curriculum structure ... after I’d been here six months ... and there were some recommendations and I basically accepted ... and then there was a bit of pressure went on about changing it and I said “well no, I’m not changing the decision, I’m happy to accept that recommendation, it’s been through appropriate consultation” ... and that caused some interesting reaction including people wearing black arm bands ... But what was really important was that the decision went through ... it was the first step in saying ... where there are changes afoot you can expect that ... where there’s been appropriate consultation, that the school principal, the leader in the school, will stick with that decision and will persevere with it ... when I look back on it, (it was) the most critical thing in terms of starting to send a message that ... change is OK ... the experience of that change wasn’t catastrophic ... (Principal)

He explained the impact of making this stand in starting to shape a professional culture with shared leadership responsibilities, and that staff knew they would be supported to make decisions in the best interests of the school.

Jim described his personal philosophy of education as “a belief that all students can achieve or be successful” and schools needed to provide multiple opportunities for success. He described his view of success for students as ‘multidimensional,’ one element being that students can transition into “the next phase of their life with
something worthwhile to go to, whether that’s work or whether it’s university or whether it’s TAFE.” Secondly, he added “the ability to create young people who actually feel confident about being able to achieve in whatever field of endeavor.” He explained the current challenge as the need to “bridge the gap between how kids live and how they learn.”

When asked about his past leadership influences, Jim responded strongly, showing his pragmatic nature:

… I’m not a great rearview mirror person … someone once said we look in the rearview mirror too much in education and we try and move forward by marching backwards … past experiences can help in terms of understand(ing) the context but I’m not sure that it actually is instructive in terms of thinking about the future … the things that I’ve actually learnt … I think that’s the important part … the willingness to be a learner and to actually inform your thinking by listening to thought leaders, by reading a bit more, by actually trying to understand the landscape. (Principal)

In 1999, three years into Jim’s principalship at Parkview, the Victorian government’s self-governing schools initiative was rolled out, with government school’s opting in for selection on the basis of satisfying a stringent set of guidelines indicating strong organisational capacity. While most of the approximately 1600 schools adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude, Jim was with a group of key educational leaders who were early adopters. Parkview was subsequently with a small group of twenty-five schools and lead principals who provided the model for significant whole school and system change, something that has continued to be a critical success in the Victorian education system and which is currently being looked at as a model for system change by other states, territories and the federal government, albeit some fifteen years later.

This early leadership step into high level, system engagement was referred to by Jim and the RNL as a key event. However the RNL saw the most significant aspect of this as the engagement with, and inclusion in, an elite, experienced, very powerful, forward thinking, technologically minded group of male, secondary school leaders, each whom has gone onto key, influential education leadership positions in Victoria, Australia and overseas.

The informed risk taking, open mindedness and self-confidence required in taking this early leadership stance, set the school apart and placed a spotlight on the principal’s leadership. It was characteristic of Jim’s leadership and has endured from his early days. While Jim acknowledged his self-confidence, “OK, let’s accept that that’s the reality,” as a critical part of his leadership, he was also dismissive, preferring to see the
importance of learning from others as the most important aspect of his leadership style, “... being willing to network and to sound out other people whether they’re local or whether they’re global.”

Jim reiterated that a critical part of his leadership success was the strong capacity and varied strengths of his principal team, getting the ‘nuts and bolts’ done well gives him the time and permission to be leading new initiatives and to step “outside the traditional role of principal in a school.” He described the school's leadership as “multilayered ... But I guess you've still got to have the strength of your own convictions.”

The most frequently used words to describe Jim were supportive, strong, knowledgeable, visionary, innovative, trustworthy, a decision maker, involved and a networker who listens. The words chosen profiled Jim as a self-confident, knowledgeable leader who worked with people to achieve his vision for the school and who was a key shaper in the Victorian system of education. He held the trust of the people in the school who felt highly supported by him and who believed he had the capacity to make the decisions and changes required to lead the school. The parent group enjoyed the profile he held across the school as an involved and committed school leader. The SC President respected Jim for his leadership strength, futuristic thinking and knowledge.

The leadership team and RNL spoke of how Jim was able to be out of the school for significant periods of time and still held a strong presence as leader of the school. The leadership team, who continued the work in his absence, called him ‘Machiavellian’ in that he could “adapt and adopt different roles” at any time. They described him with high levels of likeability and informality.

They also described Jim as “all knowing, all seeing” and that he always knew what’s going on. They openly talked about the fact that he has not been in the staffroom ‘for months’ and no longer publicly shared the dates that he was going to be away, as this occurred so often. They outlined how this worked. He was very accessible and very approachable, using technology to facilitate communication when he was away from the school. He ensured there was constant contact with staff, even emailing all staff so that “when he’s away, he’s still present in a sense.”

The staff group saw Jim’s international forays into educational best practice and his autonomy as sustaining his leadership. “If he was in a school and it was a traditional program and he went to the weekly network meeting and came back, he'd go mad. He’d suffocate!”
The RNL explained that Jim had a strong intuition around when to provide support and when to trust people and let them do their job. He had also assembled a very talented and loyal team around him, possibly the result of his ‘hire hard, manage easy’ mantra.

Despite his willingness to be at the forefront of educational innovation, the leadership team described Jim as a humble leader, “… he doesn’t have an ego trip about it, there’s nothing egotistical in the way in which he works.”

The leadership team described his personal qualities as very open and genuine, “He’s very caring and I think his home life really grounds him and he’s aware of the complexities of life and things come to trip us up when we least expect it and he … shows great empathy.” The RNL summed up Jim simply as “… listener, thinker, networker. He’s knowledgeable and he has a strong thirst for knowledge around education. He’s inquisitive and he has an underlying sense of humour.”

The breadth of Jim’s networking was extensive:

… he’s just spent a week with Yong Zhou over in Oregon and travelling to Harvard and … a conference … in Toronto. He also visited Singapore at a conference earlier … he’s certainly got his eyes open all the time and … he’s listening and he’s taking it on board and he’s seeing how things might be able to apply to his own school. (RNL)

However, the RNL explained that Jim had little time or attention for the more administrative tasks, describing him as ‘a pain in the neck’ in compliance processes, such as principal performance reviews, and while he gets the job done eventually “he’s sort of off on a tangent.”

The RNL offered a different perspective to Jim’s leadership, gained when Jim was a new principal to Parkview and the RNL was principal at a neighbouring secondary school. He explained that, at that time, Jim “… was not highly regarded because we felt that the competition was enormous and that (Jim) gave all indications that he was not a team player, not a system player but more of an individual operator.”

The RNL described Jim’s current leadership style as highly distributed, allowing him to move in and out of the school. He stated that Jim was at an interesting stage of his career with a system leadership perspective gained through experience.

A strong factor in Jim’s leadership was his relationship building with students, something commented on by parents, staff, leadership team and RNL. The RNL stated that “kids absolutely have the highest regard for this person, and he knew them.” The
parents, staff and leadership team all told the story of the shared joy of Jim’s surprise presence at the recent production and provide this as an example of his engagement with students:

School production every year is a huge effort by a large number of staff and … up to two hundred students, and on the last night of production (Jim) will always get up to thank everybody but he will do it in that he will take on the persona of someone … in the production, so he will sing a song or he will come on in a wheelchair dressed up as an old woman … he always does something and the kids would just eat out of his hands, they love it. So this year he was overseas when we had the last night of production so he Skyped in and he sang a song over Skype and the kids just … lapped it up … they know that he values what they do and he’s not afraid to … put himself up for ridicule … (Leadership team)

Staff spoke of Jim’s confidence to ‘bend the rules’ on their behalf (e.g. providing leave in ways not supported by other schools), and they see that he bends the rules to get what he wants from the system to benefit the school. “…he’s not for sweating the small stuff and the small rules. He sees what’s important …”

After speaking quite openly about Jim’s leadership and the school’s culture, both the staff and leadership teams spoke hesitantly and with obvious discomfort about Jim’s capacity to hold people to account, believing that Jim could make the hard decisions but that his style was more supportive than confrontational and they couldn’t say how he would challenge staff or hold them to account, but that “there’d be a support team put in place to work through an issue.”

The SC President saw Jim as “leading from the front foot” although, he was less inclined to believe that the school’s reputation could be attributed to Jim’s leadership, as it had always been a good school and Jim had simply added to this. He described Jim as very persuasive and a “bit of an autocrat and I think that probably rubs a few people up the wrong way.”

The parent group saw Jim as very involved and committed to the school and very friendly and approachable. They valued the way he and the staff knew and cared about their children. They were extremely proud of the school and its achievements and recognised the quality of the professional team that Jim had built around him. They enjoyed the fact that his family was involved in the school and his wife was well known to many parents, providing a personal connection.

The staff group saw the principal as driven by his desire for all students to benefit from a quality education, “the bottom line is what’s in it for (Parkview), what’s in it for the kids
… which is hopefully better learning, better outcomes for their future, that sounds a bit cliché but I think that’s the bottom line.”

The SC President saw this differently to other groups, possibly reflecting a more competitive and combative relationship with the principal. He “certainly wants the school to remain a high achieving school … but I also think … and I know this is a very personal view … but I also think (Jim) sees the school as a lasting memento to him.” He explained what he meant by this, “to leave the school in a better position than he came to it … and to leave the school in such a position that the facilities there were much, much better than when he arrived.”

The RNL, who has known Jim for many years, saw him as always having had “a strong leadership drive.” He explained that in the past Jim umpired AFL football to a very high level, “so he was the elite even in that field, so there was an ‘eliteness’ around him doing other things.” And “maybe that’s an expression of the persona that makes him what he is and wanting to be out in front and leading is just inbuilt and that drives him.”

Agreeing with the staff group, the RNL believed that Jim’s leadership was sustained by his high level networking and the impact this had on the education system. The RNL summed up Jim’s drivers, agreeing with the staff group’s assessment:

He’s able to constantly bring it back to how kids are learning and trying to accommodate their needs. And he has a wonderful vision for what future education might look like and it’s built around digital technologies. (RNL)

The leadership team shared a reflection on Jim’s leadership which came up when the team completed a Herrmann Brain Dominance profile for each member. “(Jim’s results) were interesting … because they were all about innovation for the sake of it and change for the sake of it.” They added with surprise, that Jim had agreed with this assessment.

4.6.5 Sustainability of Innovation and Success

While all groups believed that the school’s culture was strong and they could articulate the elements that were in place for the school’s successful programs to continue, most were unclear of the school’s direction with different principal leadership. They spoke of needing someone to fit the vision and values of the school and the potential impact it would have on the school. The parent group were very aware of the importance of Jim’s leadership in their satisfaction with the school, stating “any school lives or dies on the strength of its principal” and the enormity of this task, “Big shoes to fill.”
The leadership team were uncomfortable contemplating the school without Jim:

... he’s got ... some really strong team members and there’s a really strong school culture and ... it isn’t just about one person’s vision, it’s about how that vision’s been communicated. But at the same time that’s a really big change so it’s hard to just give a really glib answer to it ... I don’t think that’s a very good question to end on, it’s made me feel a bit sad. (Leadership)

The RNL speculated:

Who knows what the future is for (Jim) ... it depends a lot on how much time he believes that he’ll remain in the workplace doing what he’s doing at the moment, and who knows what that (might be) ... I’m not quite sure whether he’d even contemplate going into the (DEECD central offices) anymore. (RNL)

While the principal’s leadership was clear, especially in developing partnerships to advantage the school and setting strategic direction, all groups referred to the strength of the leadership team that Jim had developed. Without doubt, this team’s experience, skills and loyalty to Jim and his direction for the school was a key factor in the school’s model of success.

All groups mentioned the place of Jim’s family in the school and the strong support he received from his family, who had a long and personal history with the school. This reflected well on Jim, making him seem personable and approachable to parents and staff.

4.6.6 Summary

Over time, Jim has built a unique leadership role at Parkview Secondary College. He has used his self-confidence, strong networking and interpersonal skills, capacity for risk taking and IT savvy to lead a highly successful school. Jim’s leadership and the school’s success were universally agreed to by all stakeholder groups.

Jim was a young leader with control and influence from his early career days. Over the years, he has fine-tuned these strategies to lead schools through the work of others, using his own skills to develop knowledge and connections for the benefit of the school. While he had maintained a larrikin persona, there was little doubt that he was the change driver and manipulator of the school’s key directions.

By remaining a principal for the past seventeen or more years, Jim has forgone some of the choices for high level system leadership made by those he would consider his equals. However he has been afforded a role as a distant principal, high level knowledge worker and powerful system shaper by the trust and skill of his leadership
team. He was highly skilled and intuitive at knowing what to pay attention to and when to exert his leadership presence for major impact. Jim used technology to stay connected and remotely in control of his school and he actively used situational context to maintain and increase his influence.

While Jim can sometimes appear shy and ‘standoffish’, his apparent confidence and relaxed, ‘good guy’ approach, sustained his networking. He built strong relationships with his leadership team and across the staff group, who were very protective of him. Jim may have challenged people more openly in the past, however he now has difficulty confronting people and holding them to account, preferring to be the likable ‘good guy’. The school was such a well-oiled machine that there were people and processes in place to manage this, allowing Jim to maintain his persona.

There was evidence that some people felt he was driven by personal glory and self-interest; in fact Jim may have agreed with this assessment. However there was also a sense that Jim’s drivers have matured over time and the competitive nature of his leadership was replaced by system responsibility to provide real life opportunities for all students, within his school and wider community.

The sustainability of Jim’s leadership is highly questionable. His very experienced leadership team had difficulty even talking about his departure and would be unlikely to remain as the current team in his absence. While Jim operated from a distance and he was not required to be the implementer, he maintained firm control over the direction and events of his school. Without Jim’s strategic direction, futures focus and connections, the school would need to recreate a new vision for itself. When he leaves Parkview SC, Jim’s leadership will be difficult to sustain and impossible to replicate. The leadership and Jim are possibly all too aware of this.

4.7 Woodside Primary School- Mary: The Knowledge Principal

While Woodside Primary School was recommended for its innovative curriculum project, throughout the research process, there was evidence that this was not an innovative school, as determined by the selection criteria. Evidence included the inability of the principal to move the school forward from its history of loss, or to embed and share the school’s vision, commitment or strategic direction with others in the school or community. The principal’s leadership did not engender trust across the participants; henceforth the school’s culture was not positioned to be creative or innovative in its practice or mindset.
The following profile has been summarised in briefer detail than the other four schools due to this categorisation. As previously outlined in the methodology, the decision was made by the researcher to use this case study as a point of comparison with the other schools, but to profile it lightly. The guiding parameters were to ensure no harm was done to the principal or the school, and to avoid potential for any unwarranted identification. For these reasons, the full story developed by the researcher at the immersion stage of this case study, to construct understanding of the school and used as a reference, has not been included in the appendices section of this study with the other schools’ case stories.

4.7.1 Features of the School

Woodside Primary School was a metropolitan suburban school catering for approximately 240 students in years prep to six (five to twelve years of age). The majority of students came from middle to upper income families.

While Woodside PS traditionally drew its student population from the local area, this was no longer true, with many families now travelling across one or more neighbouring suburbs to attend. This was singularly due to the increasing popularity of its curriculum program. As a result, the school population no longer matched the local profile, having 75% LBOTE in 2011, a strong increase from 59% in 2009. While families in the senior school held a more traditional, western profile, junior school families represented the change with a predominance of Asian speaking families, mostly with at least one parent of the cultural origin of the school’s Language Other Than English (LOTE) program. With groups holding different expectations of the school, competing community tensions were evident.

4.7.2 Culture of the School

Woodside PS’s culture presented a fractured picture, underpinned by the historical lack of a unified staff commitment to the school’s curriculum program. This fracturing was further impacted by a divided and demanding parent community, unified in their desire to protect and promote the school’s curriculum program but not fully convinced of the compromises they had to make to other areas of the school’s program. At the time of this research, parents were becoming increasingly assertive about decisions being made by the school. Perhaps as a result of the school’s past financial difficulties, all groups were concerned about the financial capacity of the school to provide a broad, quality learning program and there was a strong sense of distrust from the parent
community about the ‘real story’. Mary’s leadership appeared to be under pressure, as were the opportunities for her to exercise creativity or to lead innovative programs and ideas in the current school culture.

4.7.3 Success of the School

Woodside PS was recommended to the researcher as being innovative, having recently been awarded the Victorian Education Excellence Award for Curriculum Innovation. The school, under Mary’s leadership had adopted a strong research base to its curriculum program, based on theories of practice and international programs and it had applied this to the school's current context. The principal explained the theme for the recent award as “… the answers lie within us but we’ve got to seek the theory from outside.”

The RNL identified the link between Mary’s strong Early Years education and pedagogical background and its application to curriculum education, as being at the core of the innovation and the school’s success. The RNL added the belief that Mary had strategically marketed the school ‘exceptionally well’, linking into mutually beneficial partnerships.

While all groups clearly identified that the curriculum program was the key factor for the school’s success, there was some discomfort with the award, the staff group stated that “It felt like it kind of came out of the blue … not everyone was really clear in the beginning about what we got the award for.” Knowledge of the staff climate, organisational culture and community tension underpinned the unease with the award, summed up by the leadership team, “… it’s a bit embarrassing that we got the award.”

The SC President articulated that with the award, Mary lost the opportunity for building trust and communicating a great story to the parent community, describing Mary as “a humble person so she probably would struggle to promote it the way that she could have, so it has not done what it could have done.”

4.7.4 The Principal

Mary had been principal at Woodside Primary School for 3½ years, its third principal in ten years. Prior to this, she had been a leading teacher at a large, highly successful primary school with a large Asian clientele. Mary’s prior role was literacy and numeracy coordinator with a strong focus on working with teachers to implement the Early Years pedagogy mandated across Victorian schools at the time. This role would have
afforded Mary the opportunity to lead in a focused area of the school, on very specific projects with clear boundaries of implementation and influence.

Mary’s leadership philosophy was to provide the best learning opportunities for all students. She described this as a powerful driver, “… it’s about a desire to optimize the learning opportunities for every single child, there’s a sense of urgency about that …”

Mary described herself as an educational leader, with a supporting strength in human leadership, using the Victorian DEECD’s Sergiovanni framework for reflection. She believed she was “really about optimizing everyone to be their best, supporting people to be the best they can be.” However she acknowledged that staff may not agree with this, seeing her as too student oriented and very directive. She explained her need to be a directive leader, “to make sure that change did happen.”

While Mary believed the school was a good match with her philosophical values, she questioned her fit as a school principal, stating that “I don’t like the vulnerability of the role” especially when dealing with aggressive people.

Mary described her love of the teaching role as a lingering passion and she believed she may have achieved everything she wanted to achieve at Woodside.

4.7.5 Summary

At the essence of Mary’s leadership was a focused academic pursuit of knowledge; to find better ways of improving learning for young children. Her earlier leadership roles had allowed her to achieve success in this, through the narrow lens of early childhood literacy programs. Mary had moved into the curriculum education field almost by default. This enabled her to apply her experience, knowledge, skills and passion in early childhood learning, but it was not a role that she chose for the moral imperative of curriculum education. Applying herself to this new context in a focused, research based, project method and self-driven mode had achieved the reputation for Mary and the school as being innovative and successful in delivering quality educational outcomes for LOTE learners.

Most groups in the school questioned the sustainability beyond the project that had been driven by Mary. While the strength of the curriculum model was without question, the underlying problems were not being addressed and Mary’s capacity, or even interest to achieve this was queried by most groups, notably those who worked closely with her in the school. Her readiness for or real interest in the principal role was
unclear, not having had previous experience as an assistant principal to fully understand the role or the breadth of its engagement, and not appearing to have had the capacity to transfer her specific skills in leading early childhood learning into the broader context of whole school transformation.

The leadership team, staff and SC President had the experience and understanding to work through the problems with Mary but she did not fully engage with them in the work. They also had the capacity to draw in other groups to support and drive school improvement, but Mary was deeply distrusting. She preferred to work alone, trusting few to engage in the work of her great passion, other than those who had shown her past loyalty. Even then, their work was more about implementing the program into the school context, allowing Mary the opportunity to engage in the knowledge and theoretical field.

Getting things right was important to Mary and she did not risk this status by delegating important areas to others. This was a safe and controlled environment for Mary, without the presence of confrontation, failure, conflicting opinions and agendas, or the need to manage, manipulate or appease others. Mary was able to pursue her passion single-mindedly, and her considerable intelligence and knowledge was a valued skill, which viewed through this lens guaranteed success.

Mary controlled her environment, trusting few, even in her personal life. Her focus on home and family reflected this, as did her lack of networking with her peers. Her need to feel safe and in control overwhelmed her leadership, restricting the choices she made and making her behavior difficult to understand, when she was risk averse or regularly changed her mind on previously agreed projects. Her driver was a deeply personal experience, as a parent of a gifted but underachieving and misunderstood child.

While Mary appeared to lack the skills to bring people together behind a united cause, she wanted to develop a calm, warm and friendly environment where she felt valued and understood. She listened to and shared with her most trusted staff and more broadly when she was on safe topics, i.e. her family and early childhood learning. While she presented as strong on the surface, she did not appear confident to make difficult decisions or to take risks in unfamiliar areas.

In essence, Mary appeared uncomfortable with leadership and she had developed her exit story of having achieved everything she wanted to achieve and needing another challenge. This personal perspective was misaligned with the reality of the bigger
picture found in the school and was at odds with the perspectives of all other stakeholders interviewed. This propensity to build an overly optimistic picture was demonstrated many times by Mary in the course of the research, repeatedly describing Woodside as an ‘extraordinary school', providing an ‘outstanding learning experience'. It was reaffirmed by the leadership team, who described Mary as being reflective but “I think she reflects on applying it to herself, but reflects seeing it through her lens.”

The curriculum education model was innovative and successful, but in the current school climate it would not transfer to other successes until the broader school culture was addressed. The success of Mary’s leadership and the school rested with Mary’s capacity to change her leadership behavior, to challenge the story telling and gain trust and a shared commitment to a unified image of the school with staff and the wider school community. The innovation award was not able to be used to its potential to build clarity and unification, as Mary appeared to lack an understanding of how to achieve this.

Woodside PS had achieved a successful model for curriculum education, however it was not yet definable as an innovative and successful school in a broader sense. Its success sat at the surface and had not been embedded into a consistent way of working or a school wide source of pride. The school remained trapped in its past, divided on its purpose and profile and at the mercy of strong and divided opinions from staff and the parent community. This was summed up by an English teacher when the researcher visited her class and observed her paying no attention to the lesson being taken with her students by their language teacher. The researcher queried if she was aware of the focus of the lesson. She laughed and replied, “I don’t understand a word they’re saying!”

4.8 Summary of Findings and Analysis

Chapter 4 outlined the process of the selection of the five focus schools. It presented the findings, obtained through individual and group interviews and supporting documentation, to gain multiple stakeholder perspectives of the five schools and their leadership.

The following chapter will discuss the similarities and differences between the findings within the context of the literature review, framed by the research question and sub questions. As previously outlined, one of the five schools, Woodside PS was not found to be working to the same level of innovation as the others in its culture, leadership,
organisational capacity, learning environment, strategic direction, system influence and creative output. While this school continues to be referenced throughout the chapter’s discussion and analysis, often as a point of contrast, for this reason, the researcher has regularly referred to the four innovative schools, i.e. Crossroads PS, Breezes PS, Links SC and Parkview SC.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the findings from the study of leadership in five schools regarded as innovative and successful. It will also consider what can be learned from the successful school leaders by those wishing to “innovate their way out of what seems at times to be an overwhelming burden in leadership” (Caldwell, 2014: 17). This learning could benefit school leaders, aspirant leaders, schools and systems of education.

The overarching purpose of this chapter is to answer the research question, ‘In schools that are regarded as innovative, well-led and which have excellent student outcomes, what leadership and management practices of principals promote a culture of innovation?’ To accomplish this, each of the chapter sections have been linked to a research sub question which will be explained further in each section. The sub questions are:

1. What are the contexts and cultures of innovative schools?
2. Are innovative schools seen as successful schools by stakeholder groups in each school?
3. What are the specific behaviours, skills, knowledge and dispositions of principals that create innovative school cultures?
4. From a life history perspective, what influences have shaped the work of these principals?
5. What other factors might have helped to create innovative school cultures?
6. Do stakeholders see their school’s success and innovative culture as sustainable beyond the leadership of the current principal?

In synthesising these findings, connections with the literature presented, or extended, from Chapter 2 have been used to highlight where this study supports what is already known, and the contribution it makes to the knowledge of leading innovative and successful schools.
5.2 School Context, Culture and Innovation

This section addresses the research sub question: *What are the contexts and cultures of innovative schools?*

All schools had a unique and identifying narrative or context, determined by historical factors and a range of environmental variables which interacted to form their school’s culture. Many of these variables were fixed, however it was how the leader responded to the context which varied, and the environment this created. In support, Day et al. (2011: 3) outlined some central claims on the importance of context in determining successful leadership activity:

1. There is a core set of practices that almost all successful leaders use but

2. To have their desired effect, these practices must be enacted in ways that are sensitively appropriate to the contexts in which the leaders find themselves.

The context of the five schools demonstrated a breadth of variables, illustrated in Table 5.1 below. While Woodside PS’s comparative contextual details have been included, the researcher has omitted these from the background discussion to protect the identity of the school, except where a point of contrast strengthens the point being made for the purpose of this study.
Table 5.1: Contextual Variation between Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual Variable</th>
<th>Crossroads PS</th>
<th>Breezes PS</th>
<th>Woodside PS</th>
<th>Links SC</th>
<th>Parkview SC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Type</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate Age of School</td>
<td>30 years</td>
<td>50 years</td>
<td>60 years</td>
<td>50 years (13 yrs as merged schl)</td>
<td>60 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locality - Distance from Melb. CBD</td>
<td>Outer Metro -35 km</td>
<td>Regional Centre - 85 km</td>
<td>Metropolitan - 20 km</td>
<td>Regional Centre - 56 km</td>
<td>Outer Metro - 30 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size (students)</td>
<td>Medium (428)</td>
<td>Large (609)</td>
<td>Small (239)</td>
<td>Large (875)</td>
<td>Super (1397)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio Economic Status</td>
<td>Middle ICSEA 997</td>
<td>High ICSEA 1072</td>
<td>High ICSEA 1139</td>
<td>Low ICSEA 957</td>
<td>High ICSEA 1039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years as Principal in the School</td>
<td>20 years (plus 2 years as AP)</td>
<td>5 ½ years</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>3 ½ years (plus 4 years as AP)</td>
<td>15 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural History and Current Status</td>
<td>New migrants from varied locations</td>
<td>Predominantly Anglo Saxon</td>
<td>Greek &amp; Anglo Saxon</td>
<td>Predominantly Anglo Saxon</td>
<td>Anglo Saxon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Now includes established migrants</td>
<td>Now includes established Asian families</td>
<td>Now includes established Asian families</td>
<td>Now includes Asian (Chinese &amp; Indian) families</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in Table 5.1, the five schools profiled a range of sizes, however each was managing significant enrolment pressure from families moving into the school zone, in addition to those attempting to enrol from outside areas. All schools demonstrated a strong awareness of the need to manage the size of the school, to protect the quality of the program being offered.

All schools were located in Victoria, Australia, within an 85km radius of Melbourne, the capital city. The locations, multicultural backgrounds and socio-economic status of the schools varied greatly, with the two schools located in the regional centres and at the furthermost extremities of the study (Breezes and Links), profiling two very different socio-economic communities.
While Table 5.1 shows the socio-economic variation, one element unified all schools. With increasing public attention and awareness of its success, each school’s socio-economic status demonstrated an improvement trend, as families seeking better educational outcomes chose these schools, contributing to enrolment pressure.

With the increased social status, came pressure on the school’s traditional local cultural base. For the predominantly Anglo Saxon communities at Breezes and Links, this meant that local families were now under pressure to share enrolment opportunities with other Anglo Saxon (and often more affluent) families outside their local areas. At Parkview, the cultural shift was more dramatic with the traditional, middle class, Anglo Saxon families being pressured by more recently arrived, mostly Asian families, for increasingly limited enrolments. This was accompanied with expectations that the school would meet the different cultural expectations. At Crossroads, a change in the multicultural base and social economic status of the school occurred, with a shift from attracting predominantly working class, new wave migrant families, to these same families remaining at the school with increased affluence, cultural integration and greater stability in the family’s expectations and needs. In all schools there was evidence of high level awareness and engagement by the principal in managing the changing profile of the school to protect its success and innovative capacity.

The age of schools varied less than other factors, with Breezes, the original Links school and Parkview all being built in the post WW-2 boom, common to many Victorian schools. However, Links was relatively young in its new entity as a merged school. Within the ages of the schools, there were a range of stories which had a significant impact on their strategic direction. This included Parkview and Links offering alternative learning pathways for their secondary students, Breezes and Crossroads dismantling the internal physical constraints of their learning spaces and the merger of two seemingly incompatible schools at Links. Each of these decisions held far reaching consequences for the strategic direction and cultures of the schools, far beyond what could have been predicted at the time of the original decision.

The organisation for learning at each school varied although each, with the exception of Woodside, while at different points of organisational maturity, was underpinned by a shared pedagogy of learning flexibility. While Crossroads was an early adopter for whole school, open plan, flexible learning spaces, Breezes, Links and Parkview had progressively adapted their physical structures to include less traditional learning spaces, while retaining some single classrooms for different purposes. All four innovative schools used these learning spaces to group students in a variety of ways,
Chapter 5 - Discussion of Findings

according to student learning need. This included traditional single grade structures, temporary and flexible streamed learning groups, combined larger groups for explicit teaching, smaller breakout groups and groups based on student choice or student identified learning need.

Senge et al. (2000: 477-482) reflected on the interconnectedness between schools and their local communities and the need for schools to publicly engage under the heading, “As the community goes, so goes the school”:

Our children will be living in a world much different from that which exists today. This is a compelling reason for improving the way we learn and teach in our communities. Our underlying purpose … is increased understanding-fostering a deep, down to the bones awareness of the fact that we live in a very interconnected community, state, nation and world … communities will either learn and grow or die. (Senge et al., 2000: 482)

The contexts of the schools reflected the constructs of their local communities, elements both positive and negative. However, this research demonstrated that schools perceived to be ‘good schools’ had a significant, positive influence on the construct of the local community, creating a model of reciprocal influence. Over time, each of the five schools had a significant impact in shaping their local community, either by attracting new families who supported the school’s vision or converting existing families into new ways of schooling.

While the contextual variability between the five schools was broad, the organisational cultures within the four innovative schools held far greater similarity than difference. Barth (2001) states that you cannot change a school’s culture on your own, however you can provide forms of leadership that invite others to join, “as observers of the old and architects of the new.” He nominates some healthy cultural norms for schools on this journey, including: collegiality, experimentation, high expectations, trust and confidence, tangible support, reaching out to the knowledge bases, appreciation and recognition, caring, celebration and humour, involvement in decision making, protection of what’s important, traditions and honest, open communication. These qualities dramatically affect a schools capacity to create a learning environment. They are also central to the school’s collective innovative capacity (Barth, 2001).

Excepting Woodside, and more temporarily, Breezes at the time of the research, each school’s culture was a positive and supportive one. In each of the four innovative schools, high levels of staff collaboration, enthusiasm, motivation, social and professional engagement, discretionary effort and shared strategic direction were
evident. The focus of these schools was firmly on students and learning as the justifiable reason for all decisions made, and this was articulated across stakeholder groups.

The innovative schools had strong, collaborative team based structures which were modelled by the principal and leadership team. The strategic direction of each school was clear and the vision was shared by stakeholders. The school’s activities were openly discussed by stakeholder groups with high levels of input, communication, goal alignment and reflection and very few of Barth’s (2001) ‘non-discussables’.

The staff profile of each school included a mixture of experienced staff, and a less experienced, but energetic and enthusiastic staff group, who were encouraged by the leadership team and given permission to lead critical aspects of the school’s strategic direction, both in formal and informal positions of authority. In each of the innovative schools, these young leaders were coached and mentored by the principal or a leadership team member and their influence extended over all staff groups, thereby upending the traditional experience based, hierarchical model of leadership. These schools had a history of easily attracting quality, likeminded staff who were subscribing to the school’s identified vision for its future, thereby strengthening the culture, skill level and shared strategic direction of the school. In each of these schools, attracting and growing a skilled and cohesive staff team was a key activity of the principal, building loyalty and trust to the school’s leadership across the staff group. Staff demonstrated a strong connection to the schools and their work, and high levels of pride in their achievements.

As detailed in Chapter 2, distributed school leadership is primarily concerned with the reciprocal relationships within the school, between the leader and followers that shapes leadership practice:

A distributed perspective on leadership recognises that leading and managing schools involves multiple individuals and … it is conceptualised as an organisation wide phenomenon in which flatter organisational structures and distribution of leadership take precedence over more formal, traditional models (Harris, 2009: 3).

The four innovative schools had all built a strong, skilled leadership team and at Crossroads, Links and Parkview, these teams held high degrees of loyalty and trust in the principal and their leadership of the school. Leadership was shared, with high levels of engagement and responsibility taken by leadership team members for leading staff teams and whole school strategic direction. These schools provided a model of authentic distributed leadership, with staff being confident with members, other than the
principal for trusted leadership and direction. While in some schools (Crossroads and Parkview), it appeared that others in the leadership team led and managed the school more closely than the principal, this was deceiving. In each of the four innovative schools, the principal was universally the key figure behind the school’s direction, even if this was being done in absentia.

The culture of the four innovative schools encouraged risk taking and this was modelled by the leadership team. This was risk taking within the boundaries of shared expectations, check-ins and alignment with strategic direction, team input, ongoing reflection, implementation, modification and systemisation of the new idea, program or product. Opportunities for input and authority to lead new ideas were open to all staff, but at each school the leader or group was monitored closely and answerable to the principal or a key leadership team member. This flattened organisational structure was accepted and valued by staff; it was seen as the framework for creative thinking and provided shared opportunities for innovative activity, engagement and learning.

Strong and broad stakeholder support was evident in the four innovative schools, this being a significant point of difference for Woodside. While the degree of support varied across the stakeholder groups from school to school, generally the groups demonstrated clarity around the school’s vision and identity, and support and trust of its work and the principal’s leadership. High levels of optimism and permission were given for the principal and the school to continue its business, without the usual accountability to the community, staff and DEECD. This was expressed by the RNL when talking about his role at Crossroads PS, “… there’s no need for intervention here, it’s more for my own learning. So they’re left to their own devices to a degree.” This is despite some groups (e.g. SC President, parent group), at some schools, demonstrating minimal understanding of the educational work of the school or its leaders. High levels of trust and pride by stakeholders in the four schools were evident, allowing the school to pursue its work unimpeded. However this lack of accountability could also be a future risk factor for the schools. At all schools, stakeholder groups noted that the school ‘had always been a good school’, including at Woodside, where groups were questioning this being the current status. In three of the five schools (Breezes, Links, Parkview) the perception of stakeholders was that the previous principal had lain the groundwork for the current principal to achieve its success.

Articulating the shift required from managerial to educational leadership of schools, Robinson (2006: 73) claims, “We need theories of leadership that are firmly grounded in knowledge of the conditions that teachers need to promote their students’ learning.
Good educational leaders are those who have the skills, knowledge and dispositions to initiate and sustain those conditions.” Robinson’s (2007) meta-analysis shows that principal support and participation in professional learning with teachers, leads to better student learning outcomes.

Each of the four innovative schools had developed a strong professional learning community and a growth mindset was modelled by all principals. They were seen by stakeholders as both the spark and the driver of the school’s learning programs. The principals’ role in engaging in and leading learning was openly talked about by staff and featured in newsletters and school publications. It was the source of the Crossroad principal’s mantra, “if you are not moving forward, you are moving backwards” which was repeated by staff and parent groups.

Learning was research grounded, either as determined by the school, or through research frameworks promoted by DEECD. Staff, and in particular leadership teams in all schools, shared the language and theories of widely-regarded research. The learning was accessed by individual staff and action research teams, through opportunities provided within the school, as well as externally. At Crossroads, Breezes and Parkview, professional learning was accessed interstate and overseas. Staff visited best practice sites, met high level researchers and attended conferences to reflect on new ideas, programs and practices to inform their work.

In all four innovative schools, a high level of accountability for professional learning was present, with clear expectations for documentation, alignment with school direction, strong communication and sharing, trial implementation and modification in teams, and ongoing reflection and implementation. At Crossroads, Breezes and Parkview, staff routinely shared their school’s innovative research and programs across their network of schools, this being modelled and encouraged by the three principals. Sharing system responsibility for learning was driven by three factors present in these schools: 1. Principal modelling and expectation, 2. Staff motivation, engagement, application and effort and 3. School implementation and processes for school and system sharing.

In any large scale change effort, culture comes last, not first, and the power of culture is used to help make transformation stick (Kotter & Cohen, 2002: 175). The professional culture in each of the four innovative schools was well established, with little evidence of the conflict and chaos that comes with early change efforts and unstable cultures. In each of these schools, the principal had been in the school’s leadership team for a significant period of time (five to 22 years). The schools’ cultures
had reached a tipping point, where the majority of staff shared the school’s vision and identified with its strategic direction. This was not true for Woodside, whose principal had been leading the school for three years; the school’s culture remained unstable; seemingly in continuous conflict. Having a stable school culture could be seen as a future risk, if the culture was to become so stable that it did not continue to be flexible and responsive to its changing environment, however this was not evident in the four innovative schools in this study.

All schools had undergone significant and sustained change. At Crossroads and Parkview, where the principals had been leading the school for many years, this change was seen to be continuous and a part of the school's culture. The improvement models were similar in each of the four innovative schools with elements of the model including: routine staff engagement and collaboration, supported risk-taking and shared responsibility for informed decision making. This was described by staff at Parkview as pushing staff “into the deep end to see if you will sink or swim … (not) without a life jacket … you’re encouraged to try something new.”

Over the time of the principals’ leadership, the degree of change in the four innovative schools was both broad and significant, challenging traditional staffing models, student timetabling, teaching practice, lines of authority, learner autonomy, student behaviour programs, staff learning, social and professional practices, staff teams and student groupings. These changes were much more than tinkering at the edges in the safe and known areas, and they were achieved over time by the same leader. The longer the four schools had been identified as successful and innovative, the more stable the culture appeared to be, and the more authority given to insiders to simply get on with the task. However the fragility of this was evident at Breezes, where staff who had led the new culture, had left the school and a temporary change of leadership saw issues of trust, power and loyalty undermine the work of the principal by the new staff, at least in the short term as she reasserted her authority.

In summary, a school’s context and the degree to which it has developed a positive, flexible, cohesive and effective professional culture is an important element when considering its capacity for innovation. From this research, leading a school community through significant change and developing a unified, collaborative learning culture, based on a shared vision, that promotes open communication and considered risk-taking, appears to be a pre-condition for innovation. Leading the school in a manner which is both sensitive and responsive to its context, and forming a strong ‘guiding
coalition’ to genuinely distribute the work and shape the context was clearly shown to be a key leadership activity of innovative and successful school principals.

5.3 School Innovation and success

This section addresses the research sub question: *Are innovative schools seen as successful schools by stakeholder groups in each school?*

In discussing this section, elements for identification of successful leadership and successful schools are explored to demonstrate concepts of ‘success’ as perceived by stakeholders, i.e. school parents, staff and DEECD.

To illustrate the success elements, two research studies are referenced: the AESOP (An Exceptional Schooling Outcomes Project) study of middle level leadership in 50 schools achieving outstanding educational outcomes for Year 7-10 students (Dinham, 2005), and the ISSPP (International Successful School Principalship Project) study of successful leadership practices (Gurr, 2014).

Gurr (2014: n.p.) referencing the ISSPP study of successful school leadership in over 20 countries, nominates seven key areas of leadership practice. The first four of these are referenced against the work of others (e.g. Leithwood et al., 2006). These four core practices are:

1. Setting direction
2. Developing people
3. Leading change
4. Improving teaching and learning

As a result of the ISSPP research Gurr (2014: n.p.) adds three additional areas of leadership practice:

5. Embracing their influence
6. Developing themselves
7. Reciprocal engagement with the wider context for the best outcomes for students
Finally, Gurr (2014: n.p.) adds that these leadership practices are underpinned by a moral/values based foundation. While these practices focus on successful leadership, they are inseparable from the practices of successful schools, as seen in the following study.

Dinham’s (2005: 338-356) research highlights the practices evident in successful schools as:

- External awareness and engagement
- A bias towards innovation and action
- Personal qualities and relationships
- Vision, high expectations and a culture of success
- Teacher learning, responsibility and trust
- Student support, common purpose and collaboration
- The core category: focus on students, learning and teaching

With significant researcher interpretation of these elements, one lens to view these findings is to loosely consider the overlap between Gurr’s (2014) successful leadership practices in the ISSPP study and Dinham’s (2005) practices evident in successful AESOP study schools, as shown in Table 5.2 below.
Table 5.2 Overlap between Successful School and Leadership Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External awareness and engagement</td>
<td>5, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A bias towards innovation and action</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal qualities and relationships</td>
<td>2, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision, high expectations and a culture of success</td>
<td>1, 3, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher learning, responsibility and trust</td>
<td>2, 4, 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student support, common purpose and collaboration</td>
<td>4, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on students, learning and teaching</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Applying school context provides greater accuracy in this matching exercise. Each of the five schools in this research was recommended for its success and innovative ideas, projects or programs. In discussing stakeholders’ perception of each school’s success, reference will be made to the two previously mentioned studies on successful schools and successful school leadership as outlined in Table 5.2. The innovation and success elements within each school in this study, as identified by the principal and school stakeholders are shown in Table 5.3 below.
Table 5.3: Innovation and Success Elements in Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Innovation and Success Focus</th>
<th>Crossroads PS</th>
<th>Breezes PS</th>
<th>Woodside PS</th>
<th>Links SC</th>
<th>Parkview SC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Use of technology</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning programs</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Flexible learning spaces</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Local community partnerships</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Global partnerships</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Personalised learning</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional learning community</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improved student outcomes</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• System leadership</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Awards</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
<td>🌟</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All schools were seen by stakeholders to have successful and innovative learning programs which included excellence in literacy and numeracy, as well as successful outcomes in non-traditional areas, creating Dinham’s (2005) “culture of success” and Gurr’s (2014) “improving the teaching and learning”. This included opportunities for students to achieve success across a range of learning areas (e.g. multimedia at Crossroads and Breezes and individual pathway programs at the two secondary schools). However, aligning with Dinham’s (2005) core “focus on students, learning and teaching”, the four innovative schools were perceived by stakeholders to have a strong and clear focus on personalising the learning experience for students. The schools created flexible structures and programs that were readily able to respond to changing student learning need and relied on multiple sources of feedback, including student and teacher input and achievement data, to inform leadership of the needs of students. These schools placed key staff in positions of responsibility for working with staff teams to achieve program outcomes, Dinham’s (2005) “student support, common purpose and collaboration”. They centred the student at the core of their work and developed structures to ensure high levels of consultation with students, using this to guide and inform future endeavour.
All schools were seen by stakeholders and the principal to have improved student learning outcomes. As schools in lower socio-economic localities, both Crossroads PS and Links SC were seen by stakeholders to be achieving better outcomes for students than similar schools. The data in Table 4.3: 2011 NAPLAN Results indicates that Crossroads, Breezes and Woodside were achieving above similar and all primary schools in some or most areas of literacy and numeracy. However, while Links SC was achieving at a commensurate level to similar schools, it continued to achieve below all schools. Parkview achieved mostly at a level close to similar and all schools.

Despite a government focus on the use of student achievement data to drive school improvement, none of the principals placed an overly strong or obvious priority on this. Improving achievement data was present as a cultural element of each school, but it was not seen to be used as a strong and visible driver or measure of school or student success by principals, leadership teams or staff. The RNLs at Crossroads, Breezes and Woodside each referred to the school’s achievement data as not being as strong as might be expected with the RNL at Crossroads (which demonstrated strong Year 3 achievement in its data), stating the school’s data “was not as flash as it could be.” These mixed perceptions suggest that improved student learning outcomes were a concrete measure of school success that was very important for RNL and government accountabilities. However, when considering innovative schools, academic achievement was an outcome of a range of other, possibly longer term factors deemed by the principal to be equally, or perhaps more important to the school’s success, including the community’s perception of success. This was demonstrated by two SC Presidents who, representing the sentiments of their communities, believed that their schools’ data “spoke for itself”, seeing the data as confirmation of the schools’ reputations.

Highlighting Dinham’s (2005) emphasis on “teacher learning, responsibility and trust” and Gurr’s (2014) “developing people” and “improving teaching and learning”, all four innovative schools were acknowledged by stakeholders for an enduring focus on building teacher capacity, fostering the development of a professional learning community. This was a consistent and explicit expectation shared across the schools. Coaching and mentoring featured heavily in the development programs, with a strong focus on the internal matching of staff mentors and teacher self-directed learning. “Innovation will flourish if it is … shorn of the externally imposed agendas. It will also flourish if professional learning is collegial and self-determined” (Price, 2015: 12). The principals were visibly and explicitly involved in leading the learning, constantly

In the four innovative schools, the flexible learning environment included the creation and use of open and shared learning spaces, as well as the development of more specific-use learning areas (e.g. Breezes’ theatre and outdoor learning area, Crossroad’s media lab, radio and TV stations and Parkview’s year 9 centre). These four schools took opportunities for students to work offsite where possible, furthering partnerships with local agencies, aligning with Gurr’s (2014) “reciprocal engagement with the wider context” and Dinham’s (2005) “external awareness and engagement”. They did not view the learning environment as contained by classroom walls or school boundaries. As indicated in Table 5.3, Crossroads and Breezes used technology to a very high level to drive opportunities for broad engagement for students across a range of learning environments and community and global projects, demonstrating Dinham’s (2005) “bias towards innovation and action”.

Supporting this external perspective of successful school leaders in both the referenced studies, all five schools connected with their local communities to benefit the school. This included bringing a local preschool onsite, creating links with local TAFE providers and developing partnerships and MOUs with local charities. This was a significant, deliberate activity of each principal, with some schools connecting at an international level, accessing learning, creating mutually beneficial partnerships and gaining financial advantage for the school (e.g. Microsoft and CISCO partnerships). This was especially true for Crossroads and Parkview, whose principals routinely led their schools to engage at high levels of global interaction with other schools, businesses, researchers, thought leaders and tertiary institutions, showing Dinham’s (2005) “bias towards innovation and action” and Gurr’s (2014) “leading change”. These principals were seen as leaders on a global scale (Gurr’s, 2014, “embracing their influence”), as well as within the Victorian state system of education – a responsibility to which each devoted a significant amount of time and professional endeavour (e.g. presenting at conferences, hosting international and interstate professional groups in their schools, sharing experiences with researchers). This breadth of community engagement affirmed stakeholder pride in the school and widely promoted a reputation of innovation and success.

Each of the five schools demonstrated courage and a cultural acceptance to do things differently, although at Woodside this was confined specifically to curriculum activities. Under the influence of a strong leader, the four innovative schools were not afraid to
take a direction that was not mainstream or widely well regarded. Each school’s principal and stakeholder groups struggled with the concept of failure; this was not something they saw as part of their school culture, Dinham’s (2005) “vision, high expectations and a culture of success.” This was not because they did not fail but rather they saw failure as part of the learning process and believed they had strong reflection, communication and accountability processes which minimised chances of significant failure. While each of the four innovative school's principals could articulate something that had not been successful, they were not unduly worried by this, seeing that with changes, the end result was even better than the original plan, providing the freedom to innovate and fail, and to learn from this; Dinham's (2005) “bias towards innovation and action”. This was in stark contrast to Woodside which focussed heavily on the things that were not working well in the school. Leadership clarity and ‘taking charge’ in turn provided the stakeholders with confidence and trust in the school and the principals’ leadership.

Each school was very strong at self-promotion and had developed a firm and shared school identity. While clearly led by the principal, the activity of school promotion was passed onto other stakeholders at each school. At Woodside and temporarily Breezes, this became a source of conflict as the principal’s view of the school was not universally shared by other groups. At the other three innovative schools, where principals had led for a substantial period of time, the self-promotion was fact, shared by staff groups and the broader educational and business community, thereby building momentum, requiring less input from the principal (Gurr, 2014: “setting direction”, “leading change”, “developing people” and Dinham, 2005: “external awareness and engagement” and “vision, high expectations and a culture of success”). The awards received by four of the schools, as indicated in Table 5.3, embedded these perceptions with stakeholders and the innovative schools were able to capitalise on this opportunity to further promote their schools to the local and wider communities, an opportunity seen to be lost by Woodside. Stakeholders placed high levels of trust in the principals’ leadership. Each leader demonstrated an awareness of this and adroitly managed stakeholder perceptions of themselves and their schools. They applied their “personal qualities to build relationships” (Dinham: 2005) and skilfully, but modestly, shared their expertise and knowledge, which they invested in to retain currency and relevance in the global and local educational arena (Gurr’s: 2014 “developing themselves”).

In addition to Dinham’s and Gurr's research, it is timely to reflect on the work of Zbar, Kimber and Marshall (2008), who analysed eight successful schools in challenging
contexts achieving outcomes significantly above schools of similarly low socio-economic status (as cited in Chapter 2). These findings can be applied to the four innovative schools to consider stakeholder perceptions of school innovation and success.

Zbar, et al.’s (2008) four preconditions for school improvement are: strong leadership that is shared, high expectations and teacher efficacy, ensuring an orderly environment and a clear focus on what matters most, bear relevance to these innovative schools. These elements were clearly evident to the researcher and consistently present on multiple school visits and can therefore be presumed to have impacted on stakeholder perceptions of the school. Unsurprisingly, the most tangible of these elements was the presentation of a tidy, cared for and orderly school, both in its learning processes and the wider physical environment. As with the other preconditions, the presence of an orderly environment required the culture to be cohesive and responsibility to be shared by many, suggesting these preconditions to be important artefacts of a school’s culture. In addition, the “strong focus on what matters most” was highly visible during visits to the schools, in student and staff behaviour and communication, classroom and school artefacts (e.g. Parkview’s Wall of Fame).

Zbar, et al.’s (2008: 4-6) “elements that sustain improvement over time in successful schools” were also present in each of the four innovative schools. Each school was recognised and had received multiple awards for its teaching and leadership expertise, they offered programs guaranteeing access and success for all students, demonstrated the presence of data to inform improvement and exhibited an established collegial professional culture. These schools were masterful at manipulating the alignment of externally mandated system initiatives with the school’s vision for reform and future strategic direction (e.g. Parkview’s Performance and Development framework), demonstrating a strong capacity to take advantage of opportunities to satisfy a range of stakeholder expectations, without compromising personal agendas.

Even as highly acknowledged successful principals, each principal continued to drive whole school improvement, a restlessness for improvement that was also found in the ISSPP principals. The findings of Drysdale, Goode and Gurr (2009) reaffirm this enduring focus of the principal in maintaining sustainable performance. It requires a strong sense of purpose, “not being afraid to address issues head on”, strategic interventions and building relationships with a wide range of individuals and groups (Drysdale et al., 2009). However, the later ISSPP study by Drysdale, Goode and Gurr (2011), takes this further, contrasting the leadership style of two successful Australian
principals and highlighting the need for continued refocussing and change. “One principal was proactive and created more and more change, while the other principal was more reactive to the changes in the external and internal environment and to some degree protected staff from too much change” (Drysdale et al., 2011: 36). The change principal was able to take the school to a higher level of success and to sustain this success for a longer period of time (Drysdale et al., 2011). This purposefulness affirms stakeholder confidence in the school and its leader.

In this study, school improvement was seen as a constant state, the leaders’ improvement lens continually pushed the boundaries about what was possible, requiring constant environmental scanning, critical self-reflection and being open to innovative opportunities. This provided transparency and opportunities for stakeholders to be involved and to understand the directions of the school. Culture built over time ensured sustainability, even when the successful programs had been initiated by a previous principal. At Breezes, the timing of the research saw a crisis of confidence on the part of the school’s leadership, a concern that other schools had caught up and an uncertainty as to the school’s reputation as an innovative school. However the innovative practices of the school were established within its culture, ensuring that it would continue to be daring, to take up relevant opportunities as they arose and modify them in innovative ways to suit their context. This guaranteed that Breezes would continue to be perceived to be ‘ahead of the pack’ when it came to innovation, even if it required a period of stabilisation for the leader to reassert herself and for the school to regain its confidence, cohesion and place. A sustained culture of change and readiness for opportunity is seen to be a critical element in a school's success and capacity for innovation (Drysdale et al., 2011).

The length of time of continuous principal leadership varied across the five schools and this may have contributed to stakeholders’ trust and permission for the schools to innovate. Mourshed et al.’s (2010) report for McKinsey and Co. titled ‘How the world’s most improved systems keep getting better’, as referenced in Chapter 2, bears relevance. The research in the five schools in this study, showed that they were able to achieve success over a broad period of time (five - 22 years), indicating that schools, like education systems can start from any point. Each stage of the continually improving journey had different interventions required and, just as Mourshed et al.’s (2010) report recommended for school systems, schools could benefit from sharing what has been learnt from those who have already found success. Crossroads and
Breezes principals modelled this, belonging to an Innovation and Next Practice group, where they shared their experiences and learned from the practices of others.

The longer the term of principal leadership in the schools, the greater stakeholder trust and autonomy they appeared to have. The Crossroads and Parkview principals spent significant time out of their schools, while trusted and well versed leadership teams capably led the schools and continued the agreed improvement agenda. In agreement with Mourshed et al.’s (2010) report, leadership continuity is preferable for school (and system) success. However, their recommendations for system leaders (3 years minimum and 6 years average) seemed too short for school leadership, based on these research findings. Rather, a longer term demonstrated greater success, especially when aligned with other cultural variables such as flexibility, risk-taking and continuous reflection, improvement and refinement.

While Woodside, with three years continuous leadership had created an innovative program, it could not yet sustain a school wide innovative culture, and consequently was not perceived to be a successful school by all stakeholder groups. Breezes’ five years of leader stability enabled it to experience success and embed innovative programs, and also face a crisis of confidence with some stakeholders. While Links had nearly four years of continuous principal leadership, this principal had been in a leadership role in the school for eight years, enabling a greater impact in a shorter time as principal. Day and Gurr (2014: 203), referencing the ISSPP study state, “The development of successful leadership characteristics, dispositions and qualities takes time … the principals … were mostly experienced educators who had taken many years to become successful principals.” The two long term principals at Parkview and Crossroads had established very successful schools and innovative school cultures, suggesting trust, built over time to be an important element in building successful and innovative schools. Change without trust is more likely to be compliance, and without trust there will not be innovation (Avenell, 2015).

Each of the innovative schools was highly regarded as a certain school ‘type’. For example, Crossroads was a technology school, Links provided opportunities for disadvantaged students, Parkview students accessed alternative pathways for success and Breezes provided a model for student directed learning. Referencing elements of successful schools and successful school leadership, this study has shown that each school was seen as successful by its stakeholders, with the identified elements of success consistent across the schools. Building a school wide success culture, being comfortable with ‘doing things differently’ and having a continuous and expected
improvement cycle were the common foundations for principal and stakeholder perceptions of success across all four innovative schools.

5.4 Principal Leadership in Innovative Schools

This section explores the research sub question: *What are the specific behaviours, skills, knowledge and dispositions of principals that create innovative school cultures?*

As outlined in the literature review, principal leadership is a key influence on a school’s capacity for innovation and success. Hargreaves (2003: 18-19) clarifies this, “…success for organisations depends on nothing less than the power to think, learn and innovate. Building a culture that rewards learning and innovation begins with school leaders.”

This leads to a series of considerations around principal leadership of the five schools in this study, which will now be explored further. This includes the leadership styles, values, behaviours and actions evident in the practice of the leaders of the four innovative schools (i.e. Crossroads PS, Breezes PS, Links SC and Parkview SC) and the consistencies able to be drawn from these. The comparison with the leadership of Woodside PS, as the less innovative example, adds weight to the emerging pattern. Ultimately, leading directly to a purpose of this research, consideration is given to the ‘learnability’ of the pattern of leadership for others.

The literature review provides evidence of specific mindsets or ways of thinking which innovative leaders bring to their professional lives and which influence their leadership behaviours and actions. Some examples are mentioned here to remind the reader. Mintzberg (2004) prioritises the importance of successful leaders developing an engaging and balanced style. This he claims requires the application of five mindsets: being reflective, analytical, worldly, collaborative and managing change. Dweck (2006) describes a growth mindset as the essential ingredient for successful leaders to both thrive and drive significant change, providing flexibility, responsiveness and innovative solutions. Kaiser and Halbert (2009) outline the leadership mindsets necessary for leading school transformation. These include a learning focus, moral purpose, trusting relationships, connectivity, inquiry and seeking evidence. Hannon (2014) adds that transformative leaders demonstrate mindsets that are systems oriented, inclusive, design oriented, entrepreneurial, strategic and grounded to the work. West–Burnham (2009) profiles new ways of thinking about school leadership as understanding and being committed to: transformational leadership, creativity, democratic leadership...
appropriate to educating future citizens, moral leadership, their own emotional literacy,
engaging with fundamental existential issues, international perspectives, creating and
sustaining learning communities and their own learning.

For the purpose of discussing this research, there are outlined a set of perspectives
which were evident in the leadership practice of each of the four innovative school
leaders. These have been named ‘perspectives’ as they afforded the lens through
which the principals' leadership could be viewed, providing a frame of reference for
each of the four leaders’ thinking, attitudes and values as these applied to their roles,
schools and leadership behaviours. While each perspective was strongly present in all
four leaders, it also provides a framework for variations in leadership behaviours across
individuals, which will be discussed further. There is no priority order of importance of
the perspectives, they were often applied concurrently and were intertwined, depending
on context. However this research suggests the perspectives to be the non-negotiables
of leading innovative schools. The five perspectives characterised by each of the four
leaders were:

1. A Growth Perspective – adopting an inquiry learning approach to school
leadership in order to deepen understanding and continually pushing the
boundaries of what is possible for themselves, the school and its community.

2. A Collaborative Perspective – working collaboratively across the school, system
and possibly global communities to connect, engage with, learn from and
influence others.

3. A Business Perspective – implementing a vision, strategic direction and
business principles across the school and to compete with others, if necessary
to obtain advantage for the school.

4. A Change Activist Perspective – understanding change as a continually
evolving process and taking responsibility to actively engage with and lead
others in school improvement processes.

5. A Moral Purpose Perspective – being driven by a strong personal sense of what
is right and using this to shape their leadership and the school.

These perspectives and their associated behaviours will now be discussed in greater
detail as they appear in each of the four innovative schools.
5.4.1 A Growth Perspective

Barth (1990) asserts that principals must be learners in order to be leaders, and that one precedes the other. “Leaders in schools performing better than expected constantly engage in learning dialogues and model learning behaviours for teachers” (Avenell, 2015: 39). Each of the four innovative school principals held a continuous learners’ perspective of their role, discussed earlier in this chapter. While years in the principalship at their current schools varied, none rested on past achievements or strong reputations; instead they continually scanned for new opportunities for their schools. They were highly reflective, critical thinking practitioners, for themselves and their leadership, their schools and others in the school. They adopted an inquiry mindset to their work, continually seeking out what might be possible. In the case of the principal at Parkview, he was seen by others to court controversy in order to challenge the learning experience for everyone. At Crossroads, the RNL articulated this Growth Perspective as, “... this is a place where everybody learns and everybody learns all the time and that expectation is there.” This was also seen in the ISSPP study comparing two Australian principals, where the principal who continued to learn, respond flexibly and drive change was able to take the school to greater success than the principal who created the first wave change, but who then couldn’t continue to drive new ways of thinking, allowing staff to become complacent, resulting in a plateauing of the school’s growth (Drysdale et al., 2011). This latter principal acknowledged the need for leadership change, reflecting on her inability to respond or to lead the school to become a great school (Drysdale et al., 2009).

The four principals sought to understand their work to a deep level of knowledge, being regularly described by stakeholders as “knowledgeable” or “knowing what to do next.” They engaged in a breadth of areas related to education, such as leadership, school improvement, curriculum, pedagogy, technology, 21st century learning. They routinely based their work on evidenced based research and they discussed and shared their understanding of research, learning frameworks and acquired knowledge with others in the school who shared the lead in setting direction. They shared knowledge and built understanding of best practice broadly across their schools. However, these four principals generally took their time with change efforts, responding to their schools’ needs as the implementation progressed, rather than pursuing personal or government driven agendas. The Growth Perspective was strongly profiled in the Crossroads principal who described his leadership role as “lighting the flame” and “sowing the
seeds” of learning and who is vividly portrayed by the RNL as “more of a tortoise than a hare.”

The principals of the successful and innovative schools described an action research type model for decision making, setting new direction and implementing new ideas across their schools. This process provided opportunities for maximum input and engagement, ensuring everyone in the school took responsibility for their learning and school improvement.

These leaders took responsibility for developing young leaders, providing formal and informal opportunities in leadership positions and taking on coaching roles, seen at Breezes as developing programs to ‘grow their own.’ The four principals saw themselves as leaders of a broad learning community, rather than the more contained notion of leading a school, focussing their efforts on developing the capacity of others across the community – students, staff, parents and the wider local, national, and in the case of Crossroads and Parkview, the global communities. They were open-minded about new ideas and possible directions and they encouraged and developed support structures for creative thinking and action in others, fostering the climate for learning and innovation.

The successful and innovative principals were driven to ‘do things differently’ and to push the boundaries of what was possible. They thrived on the exchange of ideas and held a strong belief that learning underpinned everything they did. They sought to prepare themselves and others for the future and they devoted time to this pursuit. At Parkview the principal was seen by staff as “not being locked into the mundane” and that a critical element of his leadership was “getting out and bringing ideas back to the school.”

A Growth Perspective was present at Woodside PS; however this was applied to the principal’s engagement in her passion for curriculum learning, rather than more broadly across the school’s activities. This narrow focus had become the obvious source of discontent for staff and the school community, who expressed a desire for the school to take broader responsibility for student, staff and community learning. The timing was not being paced to suit the needs of the staff or the school community and the principal was not responding to these broader growth needs. By her definition, the Woodside principal felt that the job was done and she was developing an exit story of having “achieved everything she hoped to achieve” and “needing another challenge.” This
narrow interpretation of the Growth Perspective in her leadership was not shared by others across the school community.

The non-negotiable aspect of the Growth Perspective for these leaders was exhibited by the Links College principal who left an earlier promotion position because “there was nothing I could learn at that school.” This highlights the high level awareness held by these principals of their central and persistent need to learn and grow and to influence the learning of others in their schools.

5.4.2 A Collaborative Perspective

The relevance of collaboration to school leadership, professional learning, organisational culture, implementing change, managing complexity in dynamic times and enabling creativity and innovation, underpins the literature review discussion. “The research tells us that collaboration is the relational key exemplified as trusting sharing of ideas, processes and possibilities, all of which encourages innovation” (Avenell, 2015, 38).

Leadership, seen as the art of influence in the leader and follower relationship, holds greater opportunities in collaborative structures. Distributed leadership places this influence at its core, shifting the influencing relationship of leadership from leader to follower to a collective interaction (Harris, 2009). Team based cultures rely on collaborative effort, seeing greater efficacy in motivating many to share the work around an agreed and purposeful framework. Harris (2015: 20) states:

… professional collaboration, in the form of strong teams, is not a soft option but rather a hard edged strategy to raise performance and to secure better outcomes. The best school leaders know professional collaboration is the key to success and that competition alone is insufficient to raise performance in the long term.

As previously outlined in the literature review, building collaborative structures was found to be a strong element in successful school leadership in the ISSPP study. In the sustainability of success cases from the ISSPP study, there was evidence of building teacher teams and distributing leadership responsibilities and accountabilities from principals to others in the school, in those schools that had sustained success. This resulted in increased trust, support, care and personal and professional closeness between principals and others in the school, providing increased clarity of direction and expectations (Moos et al., 2011). Furthermore, in successful schools, principal leadership has an active presence that works openly with the school community, to collaboratively identify their priorities, design expectations and structures to bring these
to life and then lead the process of ensuring collective collaborative learning and consistency across the school (Avenell, 2014).

All four innovative school principals worked collaboratively in their schools, placing a high value on the connected experience and developing school structures to support and engage others in collaborative effort. They possessed high levels of emotional literacy and applied this to their self-reflections and understanding of others. They worked to build a shared school identity and they took a lead role in developing, mentoring and coaching others towards having a Growth Perspective. Their emotional intelligence enabled them to trust their feelings when they were uncertain, as articulated by the Links principal, “When I don’t know what I want to do and I’m not a hundred percent sure, I go with my gut instinct. I don’t know what that means but that’s what I do, it usually doesn’t let me down.”

The leadership style of the four principals was distributive; they shared leadership with others, and actively monitored its alignment with school direction. Each of the innovative school leaders had built a strong and loyal leadership team to share the work and communicate a consistent message to others, Kotter and Cohen's (2002) ‘guiding team’. While this was in crisis at Breezes PS with fractures in the team’s cohesion, the previous leadership team had been unified, loyal and supportive of the principal and recent membership changes had upset this balance. With the experience and skills of the principal, it was expected that in time, this would rebalance to become a supportive and more trusting and trustworthy team.

While at the time of the research, the Breezes principal appeared to lead in a tighter and more controlled manner than the other three innovative principals, they all employed their leadership in non-hierarchical ways, using relationships to influence others, rather than positional power. Consequently, stakeholders viewed the school’s success as not solely reliant on the principal, believing it could be successfully led by others in the leadership team. As supported by the literature review, the Breezes principal had previously invested time in understanding and developing people, which included providing support and consideration, fostering intellectual stimulation and modelling appropriate values and behaviours (Leithwood et al., 2006). With distributed leadership assumed by the principal, the school’s success was seen to be due to the leadership of many, both past and present, aligning with the ISSPP findings outlined by Gurr (2014).
The principals were seen as selfless and humble leaders, not driven by ego or personal achievement. While their leadership style was regularly described as “approachable” and “open” and they held an image of a strong and confident leader, they were routinely described as “private” and sometimes “shy” by those stakeholders who worked closely with them. The four principals were seen to behave in a trustworthy manner and gained high level respect and loyalty from others. They regularly consulted with staff, students and parents and were seen to listen and be responsive to reasonable concerns. The strongest personal descriptor given by all stakeholders for all principals was “supportive”, suggesting this (or at least its perception) to be a key quality required for leading innovative and successful schools. This is supported by the ISSPP findings, “A standout characteristic of the principals is the degree to which they were respected and trusted by their school communities. They acted with integrity, modelling good practice, being careful to ensure fairness in how they dealt with people ...” (Day & Gurr, 2014: 199)

They were skilled communicators, using informal and formal methods and they constantly built shared expectations with others. As one SC President said, “Everyone seems to know what is going on around here!” These leaders could be slow and methodical in their decision making or definite and quick, depending on the buy-in of stakeholders. They took time to be inclusive of different groups across the school, demonstrating care for others and they were continually gaining perspectives and aligning others to their way of thinking. They modelled what they expected; team sharing and decision making being a non-negotiable part of each school’s processes. Day and Gurr (2014: 200) echo these findings in the ISSPP study “… principals were concerned to make decision making transparent and involving all others; the school became a place that is trusted because there is a culture of inclusion.”

The four principals’ use of technology was not consistent, nor was their level of proficiency. However, each ensured there were others in the school driving the use of technology, Hannon’s (2014) “technology brokerage”, so that it had a strong and integrated place in the curriculum. These principals used technology strategically to maintain their influence and to stay connected with others. The principal of Parkview used technology skilfully to ensure he remained the figurehead of the school, despite not being physically on site for large periods of time. He routinely electronically connected with staff, the leadership team, students and parents with his skyping into the annual production seen by the school community as the ultimate performance and a measure of his strong engagement with the school. He utilised Twitter to connect with...
educational leaders and regularly commented on global trends in education and school leadership.

The four innovative principals saw themselves as working in and belonging to a school, local and global communities. In the case of Parkview, Breezes and Crossroads, this extended to their system responsibility for sharing innovation and best practice thinking. Professional networking can be viewed as an element of their Collaborative Perspective, evident in the admission by the Crossroads principal that when attending conferences, his personal goal was to get to know at least one new person as this advantaged his learning (Growth Perspective) and the school (Business Perspective).

Leithwood et al. (2006) suggests that the practice of successful school leaders in “understanding and developing people” is central to the ways that they integrate the functional and the personal. Additionally, the ISSPP study found that “Without exception, the principals were people centred and genuinely enjoyed the engagement with the many people, students and adults that they meet daily” (Day & Gurr, 2014: 201) So deeply connected to their schools were the four innovative principals in this study, that they readily blurred the lines between their professional and personal lives, with each citing examples of family members strongly involved or working in the school in some capacity. While they were very comfortable in their roles and their schools, this may have inhibited opportunities for future career progression. In the case of Crossroads, Breezes and Parkview at least, these principals had foregone other opportunities to lead or promote, in favour of remaining at their schools.

The Collaborative Perspective was not about ‘keeping the peace’ or avoiding challenging others. “… leaders who cultivate emotional fortitude soon learn what they can achieve when they maximise their followers’ well-being instead of their comfort” (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001: 3). The principals were prepared to expose staff to the painful reality of a difficult condition and demand that they fashion a response, sometimes, as in the case of the Parkview principal, intentionally bringing conflicts to the surface for a longer term benefit.

The principal of Woodside had difficulty building and sharing clarity of her vision for the school. She was seen to be non-consultative and someone who didn’t listen to the concerns and opinions of others. She appeared to prefer to work alone rather than engage collaboratively. Her emotional intelligence was questioned by those who worked closely with her, as was her ability to communicate openly. She was not seen to genuinely share leadership of the school and was perceived by stakeholders to be
untrustworthy. The absence of trust in this case, and its importance to the Collaborative Perspective, highlighted the centrality of this perspective in leading innovative and successful schools.

5.4.3 A Business Perspective

Traditionally, there has been a nervous response from education sectors to the suggestion that schools can be compared to the business world. Many educators are inherently distrustful of entrepreneurs and the private organisations (especially those for-profit) that they have created and grown. This is summed up by Collins (2006) who says that we must reject the idea that the path to greatness in the social sectors is to become more like a business. He reasons that in business, money is both an input (a resource) and an output (a measure of achievement), whereas in the social sectors, money is only an input and performance is measured by achieving the mission, not financial returns. In business, Collins (2006) says, to move from a good to great organisation combines passion, being best at what you do and driving the economics. In the social sector, Collins replaces the economic factor with the resource factor (time, money, brand, energy). In the social sectors, the flywheel for improvement relies on attracting believers, building strength, demonstrating results and building the brand through emotions and reputation (Collins, 2006). Paradoxically, while Collins (2006) has rejected the idea of business comparisons to organisations like schools, he has also provided significant overlap in the approach to leadership of both the public and private sectors.

As the more agile business world responds to the modern day call for new ways of thinking and increased innovation, as discussed in the literature review (e.g. Sorman-Nillson, 2009), there is growing acceptance that schools must learn from these endeavours. In disagreement with Collins (2006), Moore and Khagram (2004: 5) explain “...both private and public sector managers ought to be interested in getting the most out of the bundle of assets entrusted to them by figuring out the best use of the assets, and finding ways to produce their products and services or achieve their desired social results at the lowest possible cost.” Whitby (2014) agrees, urging school leaders to adopt a business mindset to link innovation and creativity with the core vision and actions of the organisation.

The Business Perspective, as developed from this study, shares its intent with strategic leadership, underpinned by a desire to benefit the school and ensure its sustainability and effectiveness over time. According to Davies and Davies (2009: 15), strategic
leaders involve themselves in five key activities: direction setting, translating strategy into action, aligning the people and the organisation to the strategy, determining effective intervention points and developing strategic capabilities. Adding to this, the UK’s National College for School Leadership (NCSL) (2004) research established significant characteristics of strategic school leaders. They demonstrate restlessness with the present, prioritise their own strategic thinking and learning, create mental models to frame their own understanding and practice and have powerful personal and professional networks. These key activities and characteristics provide a framework for considering the Business Perspective as it applies to this study of leaders in innovative schools.

The four innovative school leaders adopted a Business Perspective to their work. While this included the obvious responsibilities for financial, physical and human resource management, these leaders were able to gain advantage for their schools by being skilled and creative in the ways they managed their schools. This was evident in attracting grants, gaining resources, hiring quality staff and obtaining high level sponsorships and strategic partnerships. The Breezes principal saw a business opportunity with strong national and international interest in her school and subsequently charged a per head fee, while the Links College principal outlined a key moment in asserting her leadership being when she was able to gain a funding opportunity to establish her vision for the new direction.

The Business Perspective was at play in the implementation process for new ideas, projects and whole school programs with each school describing a model of inquiry and implementation similar to W. Edwards Deming’s 1950’s (2012) business model of a Total Quality Management Cycle - ‘Plan, Do, Study, Act.’ However, while these leaders used data as evidence for monitoring purposes and articulated that it had a place to focus the school, they were not strongly driven by it, having confidence that there was a longer term view to be had of their work.

The successful leaders were strategic thinkers, who held high expectations of their own performance and that of others. They managed communication carefully, being open, consultative and responsive while continuing to manage the flow of information. In open decision making situations, they commonly held a preferred outcome that they would ideally (and sometimes skilfully) achieve. They consulted widely but knew the direction they wanted to take; they were skilled negotiators but were prepared to learn from the ideas of others. Their Business Perspective gave these leaders an understanding of the need to balance historical attitudes and objectives, while
integrating or positioning the school for new directions, demonstrating that “restlessness with the present” referred to by Gurr (2014).

While the successful principals readily relinquished control of the school’s work to trusted others, they kept up to date and continued to have input into outcomes. This was evident at Parkview during an international crisis when the principal was overseas. The school’s very public media response was seen by the RNL to “have his (i.e. the principal’s) prints all over it.” Across the four schools, stakeholders repeatedly stated the belief that the principal knew what was happening in the school. They were regularly described as being ‘hands on’ but in an ‘all knowing, all seeing’ way, “just like Santa – she always knows if we’ve been bad or good!”

These four leaders were seen to work across the school and to guide its direction, however they were not involved in the daily ‘nuts and bolts’ of school organisation or implementation of teaching and learning programs. This contradicts system and research preferences for instructional leadership models, such as Elmore (2000), Glanz (2009), Hattie (2009) and Robinson (2007). While these four principals were actively involved in the big picture planning, review and modification, they supported others in the implementation process, maintaining a little distance from the action, being prepared to step in as required. Supporting Day and Gurr’s (2014) findings from the ISSPP study, these leaders provided a balance of both instructional and transformational leadership to shape core educational activities in their schools. “They were concerned to motivate and support staff, but also concerned to ensure that teaching and learning was happening in an appropriate way. Whilst they typically weren’t the hands-on instructional leader … they were educational leaders, ensuring improvement in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment by most often working with other school leaders to influence teacher practice” (Day & Gurr, 2014: 201).

At Links College, a Business Perspective was evident in the principal’s response to historical difficulties with the merger of two schools. Adopting a new image, in stark contrast to traditional perceptions of the school, required courage and a sound business approach. The successful leaders were aspirational in their active promotion of their school (e.g. Links College’s advertising phrase ‘Leaders in Education’). Parkview principal’s acknowledgement for gaining the “best contract in self-governing schools” is an example of the Business Perspective maximising opportunities, personal and professional. These four principals promoted collaboration and the collective however they were also quick to compete to gain advantage for their schools (e.g.
gaining awards, attracting enrolments, quality staff), and they saw no contradiction in this.

By contrast, the Woodside principal shied away from making business type decisions, being fearful of ‘getting it wrong’ and being overwhelmed by management decisions such as finance and OHS. She was more comfortable in charge of the ‘nuts and bolts’ of teaching and learning, and as a strong instructional leader, she exerted her considerable knowledge to influence this area. This left the business decisions to others who did not understand the strategic intent of the school, undermining clarity and confidence in the school’s direction and the principal’s capacity to lead. Evidence of this was seen in the strong opinions expressed across Woodside’s stakeholder groups, of the school’s financial capacity to provide a quality learning program, which may or may not have been based on fact.

Finally, these four innovative school leaders paid close attention to the physical environment of their schools, presenting a professional and well cared for image and ensuring they allocated resources to continually upgrade the physical learning spaces, buildings and grounds appearances, giving an impression of adequate resourcing and strong professional management. They took responsibility for and actively managed their reputations. The presentation of Woodside PS was in stark contrast to this, with numerous excuses and blame attributed by the principal for the poor, undeveloped and persistently temporary state of the school buildings and physical environment.

5.4.4 A Change Activist Perspective

Fullan (1993) suggests that successful educators need to become agents rather than victims of change. He claims that we require a new mindset to “get to the heart of the problem” (Fullan, 1993: 8), requiring schools and systems of schools to become a learning organisation expert at dealing with change as a normal part of its work. Fullan (2011) adds that the creative premise for this change leader is not to ‘think outside the box’ but to get outside the box, taking intelligent memory to other practical boxes to see what can be discovered.

Each of the four innovative schools’ principals described their work as “doing things differently” or “thinking outside the box.” The Links principal explained it as building a culture of “responsiveness and action.” These leaders, rather than being fearful, were comfortable with, and even proud of the innovation gap between their work and that of more traditional schools. Stakeholders consistently described their principals as
visionary. They adopted a futures focus to their work using words to describe their vision such as “developing 21st century learning” and “preparing future global citizens.” They reduced the strategic direction of their vision into manageable steps to engage others in sharing the journey.

Importantly, these leaders took control and drove the change agenda in their schools. They were active leaders who expected to take responsibility for leading direction. They were perceived to be ‘hands on’ by stakeholders, who universally saw them as being in charge of the school and its direction, even in their absence or in the presence of other strong leaders in the school, reflecting the findings of Leithwood et al. (2006: 13) that “There is no loss of power and influence on the part of head teachers when … the power and influence of many others in the school increase.”

These leaders were calculated risk takers, unafraid to try a new idea, program or project. The Change Activist Perspective was identifiable in the story of the Crossroads principal who, early in his leadership, came to school on a weekend and pulled down the internal classroom walls to open up the teaching spaces, to the surprise of staff when they arrived at work. The four innovative principals were prepared to make the tough decisions and strategically managed the pace of change. They appeared to be independent and definite but used their Collaborative Perspective to empathise with others, which informed their decision making. In referencing a successful leader in the ISSPP study, Day and Gurr (2014: 198) explain, “While the principal tended to involve others, there was also a sense of responsibility to make decisions, and on some matters to be very directive.” The Crossroads principal’s description as “a benign old fox” provided an image of the skilfully manipulative leader, evident in varying degrees across the four innovative school leader profiles.

The innovative school principals did not appear to fear failure, or see it as part of their practice. They were highly reflective and used their Collaborative Perspective to build safety nets, ensuring that collective review and modification were part of the implementation strategy. As referenced in Chapter 2, this illustrates Stoll’s (2011) ‘creative leadership’ – using failure as a learning opportunity and valuing things that go wrong. The mantra of the Crossroad’s principal exemplified this, “there are no problems, only solutions.” They were not afraid to admit when they were wrong and used humour, often self-deprecating to diffuse a situation that hadn’t gone according to plan. Links College principal profiled a pragmatic approach, typical of others:

… we don’t let things get in our way, we find a solution to things. And I also laugh because there have been times when we’ve had a bit of criticism from staff about
... flying by the seat of the pants and “this really wasn’t thought through” and “we really should’ve done step three before step four.” And I can just look at them and say “yep and next time we will, thanks for that feedback, you’re dead right, we made it a bit chaotic but, you know, we got it done!”

By contrast, the Woodside principal was frightened and overwhelmed by the change process, reflecting that she didn’t like “the vulnerability of the role” and described by stakeholders as “risk averse.” The innovative school leaders saw change, and its partner conflict, as a naturally evolving aspect of their leadership. They held high expectations of their leadership and did not see change as being a fixed point that you reach, rather an ever evolving process. This was described by the Links College principal, “... we’re not there yet but then we never will be, ever, ever ... because you’ve always got your eye on something ahead you’re probably never satisfied with what you’ve done.”

The danger for the four innovative principals is that they become less cautious about the imbalance between their comfort with risk taking and change and that of others in the school, the education community or society. They could move too quickly, make decisions for the school without due caution or be perceived by others (DEECD, leadership team, staff or parents) to be too much or too radical change. This was evident at Breezes where other leaders were using a staff crisis of confidence in the change process to undermine the principal’s leadership, with the principal knowingly describing it as “the speed wobbles”. The four innovative principals demonstrated a critical understanding of the change process and their role in leading it and in the case of Breezes, the principal responded to this crisis with the confident view that staff needed to push through this situation to experience the benefits of the change. When the Parkview principal was challenged that his personality profile indicated that he enjoyed “innovation for the sake of it and change for the sake of it,” he agreed and was comfortable with this assessment! This awareness demonstrated the fine balance that the successful principals walk, guided by their self-awareness and reflection, understanding of the change process and the processes they use to gather and consider the perspectives of others.

Bending the rules to achieve or support people or the vision was evident across the four innovative school leaders’ behaviours. This may have been allocating an additional pupil free day to DEECD sanctioned days, ignoring DEECD reporting formats in favour of a school based template or manipulating staffing processes to gain a strong teacher. These leaders appeared to have weighed up the costs and benefits and stepped outside the regulations to make independent decisions that benefited their schools.
They were also prepared to take responsibility for these decisions if required. The need to ‘have a go’ was modelled across their schools and became the way the school did its business. The critical need for these four leaders to be able to implement a Change Activist Perspective is articulated by the Links principal, “… if I couldn't have made the changes … I probably wouldn't have stayed here.” This was central to the way they work and a non-negotiable element, simply taking it easy and maintaining status quo was not an option.

In contrast, the importance of a Change Activist Perspective in leading innovative schools was seen at Woodside PS, where the reluctance to lead or support change was repeatedly exposed by stakeholders as an area of challenge for the principal. She was seen to avoid conflict around her vision, frustrating stakeholders with her indecisiveness. She was seen to be overly concerned with trying to please everyone and being fearful of getting it wrong, being described as “a very careful principal.”

Talk is not convincing because ideas are not meaningful unless they stem from action and the essence of the change leader is the capacity to generate energy and passion in others through action (Fullan, 2011). This is the essence of the Change Activist Perspective of the innovative principals in this study.

5.4.5 A Moral Purpose Perspective.

Fullan (2007) describes the moral imperative of school leadership as improving society by improving the education system, and thus the learning of all citizens. This is about how people treat each other, lifting expectations and closing the gap in student achievement through innovation.

However having the rhetoric of moral purpose alone is not enough:

… leaders must become morally literate, develop their moral compass, and intentionally operate in the moral sphere in order to transform their values into guides for appropriate actions. They must underpin their leadership platform with well-articulated ethical and moral support pillars, and work collaboratively to generate a culture that doesn’t tolerate ethical blind spots and that encourages all key stakeholders to have clear moral compasses and a commitment to moral agency (Duignan, 2012: 77).

All principals in this study were driven by a strong moral purpose with a clear philosophical base, shaped by past experiences. Each was unashamedly student centred and offered this as the prime driving force for their work and decision making. They listened to students’ opinions to guide their work and developed processes to
collect student views and understand student needs, using these as justification for their vision or actions in the face of opposition. This aligns with the ISSPP findings outlined by Day and Gurr (2014: 206), “There was a strong and persisting sense of responsibility to provide an educational environment that will set students well on their life paths … with many principals seeming to have a passion for working in challenging contexts to help those most in need …”

Across the school contexts, the reasons principals gave for their work showed strong correlation: giving learning opportunities that children wouldn’t have otherwise, bringing out the best in students and staff, achieving in low socio-economic areas, equipping students with learning skills for their future and removing the guilt from failure. These drivers were intensely personal for the leaders, formed through personal experience and shaped into their Moral Purpose Perspective. This perspective was used to justify their actions and influence others, driving the principals to continue to engage to an exemplary level.

The innovative school principals possessed a strong belief in the capacity of others, students and staff, until they proved otherwise. They monitored the performance of staff carefully but were slow to make judgement, expressing a belief in diversity and acceptance of staff. They were prepared to be the protectors or promoters for individual or groups of students, modelling inclusivity in their school. This was seen at Parkview, where under the principal’s direction, the school had moved from being a more formal, academic and Anglo-Saxon school to one with high cohorts of ESL students, 55 refugee students and a range of learning opportunities outside traditional pathways. Across their schools they worked to identify broad opportunities for success for all students, building confidence, valuing contributions and individual growth and celebrating multifaceted success as a source of pride for the school. The Links College principal said she could “define achievement in lots of ways” and that she was “catering for the invisibles”, present in all secondary schools but usually overlooked.

The four innovative principals were positive and optimistic people, the Breezes principal articulating that you “need to have a positive rather than a deficit view of the improvement journey.” Stakeholders described the three primary school principals as passionate. Passion and positivity underpinned their Moral Purpose Perspective and with the Change Activist Perspective, they saw that they were responsible for both their future and that of others and for enacting their values, making their schools a match rather than this being coincidental. They held high levels of integrity and a strong ethical base for living their values and beliefs and the metacognition around their Moral
Purpose Perspective meant this was consciously enacted as a non-negotiable element of their leadership:

To be an authentic leader requires you to be genuine and to have a passion for your purpose; you must practice your values, lead with your heart, develop connected relationships and have the self-discipline to get results ... in the face of the most severe challenges, pressures and seductions ... this will enable you to engender trust and ... motivate (others) to high levels of performance (George, McLean & Craig, 2008: xxi – xxii).

This view of authentic leadership is the Moral Purpose Perspective in action, evident in the leadership practice of the four successful and innovative principals in this study. It also fits with the ISSPP study, which found that in both privileged and challenging contexts, successful leaders had a strong sense of working for those in need. “Personal qualities ... such as integrity, compassion, honesty, respect for others, optimism and curiosity helped them manifest these values and beliefs” (Day & Gurr, 2014: 206).

5.4.6 Applying the Perspectives

While each of the five perspectives appeared central to the innovative school leaders, their development was influenced by previous experiences, or had evolved incrementally over time, with increased experience and confidence in the role. Day and Gurr (2014: 203) state “The development of successful leadership characteristics, dispositions and qualities takes time.” These ISSPP principals:

... were mostly experienced educators who had taken many years to become successful principals ... their success as a principal was generally crafted through a blend of on-the-job learning, formal and informal professional learning, mentoring or sponsorship by significant others, and serendipity in the pathways to leadership (Day & Gurr, 2014: 203).

The ISSPP research findings can be aligned with this study of innovative schools and the five perspectives seen in these leaders. Day and Gurr (2014: 2) note:

The principals clearly articulated their educational philosophy and a strong sense of moral purpose. They had a passionate belief in the significance of their work, an unwavering hope for a better future, and a commitment to making a difference for all students (the Moral Purpose Perspective) ... they focussed much of their work on developing people, including themselves (the Growth Perspective). They developed professional cultures across their schools and communities that were collaborative, collegial and inclusive (the Collaborative Perspectives). They also demonstrated a range of personal qualities that helped them in their work, such as: having a love of learning, having a ‘can do’ attitude and accepting of the demanding and difficult work (the Growth and Change Activist Perspectives).
A proposition put forth by this research is that others aspiring to successful leadership can learn from the view of the principalship through the five perspectives, adopting and adapting to personal circumstance through self-awareness, reflection, genuine and informed feedback and contextualisation. However, a caution is noted:

No one can be authentic by trying to imitate someone else. You can learn from others experiences, but there is no way you can be successful when you are trying to be like them. People trust you when you are genuine and authentic, not a replica of someone else (George, Sims, McLean & Mayer, 2007: 129).

The research is not suggesting aspirant leaders emulate other great leaders, because as the above quote suggests, this may not result in their becoming successful or innovative leaders. Being aware of the findings of this research, such as the five perspectives and the actions that might accompany them, is the first step in developing capacity for, and responsiveness to their particular leadership and personal context and applying this knowledge and awareness to their own journey of leading school innovation and success.

5.5 Influences Shaping Principal Leadership of Innovative Schools

The following section discusses the research sub question: *From a life history perspective, what influences have shaped the work of these principals?*

Earlier discussion has shown that past personal experiences have shaped the professional and personal perspectives of the four innovative school leaders in this study. Dimmock and O’Donoghue’s (1997) empirical research explored the impact of life stories on principal leadership. This research supports their claims, finding the personal experiences of each of the four innovative school leaders to be central to their professional leadership, personal style and moral purpose.

While the backgrounds of the four leaders were vastly different, each had been influenced by personal experiences, shaping their leadership styles to be manifested in ways not dissimilar to each other. Additionally, critical relationships may have influenced each of the leaders’ styles and behaviours, at a time when they were exploring and developing their leadership. This influence continues to the present day in the four innovative school leaders’ relationships with mentors, professional networks and leadership teams, determining the capacity of the leader to develop and sustain an innovative and successful school culture.
5.5.1 Personal Life Stories

The influence of the life experiences of the four innovative principals will be discussed in this section. Self-awareness and its actualisation are sometimes referred to as authentic leadership, referenced earlier in the chapter. “The process of becoming a True North (or authentic) leader starts with discovering your leadership gifts by understanding your unique life story” (George, et al., 2008: 3).

George, et al. (2008: xxv) explain:

Authentic leaders can take their leadership to a higher level of performance because they inspire confidence, trust and loyalty in their organisation and in their work. They have an advantage in aligning others around a common purpose, empowering other leaders, and using the full range of their leadership capabilities.

The uniqueness of the personal life stories of the four principals of the innovative and successful schools makes comparisons difficult, however the similarity of the outcomes exhibited in their leadership perspectives, demands that this be considered. Each leader was shaped by their background, both personally and professionally.

For the Crossroads principal, this came from his country background which developed a strong work ethic and the need to take responsibility. Involvement in elite sporting teams from a young age exposed him to informal life coaches, developing a sense of being in charge and taking control (Change Activist Perspective), working hard to achieve goals (Growth Perspective) and building relationships and belonging to a team (Collaborative Perspective). Years of elite level sport umpiring and coaching provided the opportunity for these principles to be passed onto the next generation of umpires, reinforcing early learning (Growth Perspective).

The need to take charge (Change Activist Perspective) was shared with the life experiences of the Parkview principal. Also shaped by a sporting background and high profile umpiring experience, the Parkview principal stepped into school leadership from an early age, when others less confident in their ability may have waited to learn from experience or to be gradually inducted by others. This early career, aspirational behaviour positioned the Parkview principal to develop a high level network of more experienced, likeminded educational thought leaders, who were to impact on the direction of Victorian state education for well over a decade (the Collaborative Perspective). While membership of this group may have emboldened the young principal in his leadership confidence, it would also have shaped his leadership perspectives.
The Breezes principal’s life experience came from her early work in special education, following in her mother’s footsteps, firstly as a teacher’s aide and then training as a special education teacher. This experience developed a strong philosophical base to her leadership, a belief in equity of opportunity and inclusivity and values of care and support of others (Moral Purpose Perspective). As a parent of primary age children, the drive to move into mainstream education to support her own children’s learning highlighted the strong presence of the personal within the professional role; the Breezes principal using her work to benefit her family situation.

The Links principal, by contrast, was the only leader who told a story of the intervention of a life changing event. While she painted a traditional, somewhat sheltered childhood as the eldest of six children in a strongly Catholic family, with expectations that she would provide a positive role model for success through education (Change Activist and Growth Perspectives), it is the intervention that may have had the greatest impact on her leadership perspectives. As a newly married, young adult and new teacher, through familial obligation, she became the custodial parent to two emotionally disturbed young children. The successive failure of this arrangement over a 15 year period, for the children and by then, for the principal’s own family, formed a legacy for her leadership, to take responsibility to provide opportunities for those who might not otherwise succeed (Change Activist and Moral Purpose Perspectives).

Despite high levels of self-acuity, the innovative principals sometimes seemed unaware of the influence of their life experiences on their leadership. This was best demonstrated by the reaction of the Links principal who, when questioned by the researcher about a possible connection between her background and her leadership values, expressed with surprise, “no one’s asked me that question … it definitely shifted my attitude to life … every child deserves something pretty special … that was certainly a milestone time in my life that must have had an effect on me …” The principals’ life experiences appear to impact, sometimes unconsciously, on their beliefs, attitudes and the responsibility they take for making change happen in line with their values and the perspectives they bring to their leadership and their lives.

5.5.2 Key Relationships – Past and Present

In considering the life stories of leaders of innovative schools, it is worthwhile considering their key relationships and how these may have impacted on their past and current leadership capacity.
(George et al., 2007: 136) state:

Authentic leaders build extraordinary support teams to help them stay on course. Those teams counsel them in times of uncertainty, help them in times of difficulty, and celebrate with them in times of success ... Most authentic leaders have a multifaceted support structure that includes their spouses or significant others, families, mentors, close friends, and colleagues. They build their networks over time, as the experiences, shared histories, and openness with people close to them create the trust and confidence they need in times of trial and uncertainty ... It starts with having at least one person in your life with whom you can be completely yourself ... and still be accepted unconditionally. Often that person is the only one who can tell you the honest truth.

Stakeholders in this study, spoke of each of the four innovative leaders being strongly influenced by their families, in particular a long term significant partner. Their personal lives were positioned within their professional lives, providing life balance and making dedication to their schools and leadership roles an integrated part of their identity. "Integrating their lives is one of the greatest challenges leaders face. To lead a balanced life, you need to bring together all of its constituent elements – work, family, community and friends ..." (George et al., 2007: 137). This overlap of the principals’ personal and professional lives could be viewed as a measure of the success of each school, in that the principals wanted their families to share the opportunities they were providing for others.

This overlap of their personal and professional lives was strongly present in the circumstances of each of the four leaders in this study. The Crossroads, Links and Parkview principals’ spouses had worked in formal or voluntary positions in the schools; the Crossroads and Parkview principals’ children had attended the school and returned for short term work placements. The Breezes principal’s grandchildren were enrolled to start school at Breezes, even though this created some tension, as they were not in the otherwise strictly enforced school zone. While these leaders easily blurred the line between their personal and professional lives, their families impacted on their leadership perspectives, grounding them in the need to remain current and to maintain the quality of the educational experience for all families.

Apart from family, past key relationships which impacted on the leaders included a close friend and mentor of over 20 years (Crossroads), support and guidance from the previous principal (Links) and belonging to an elite group of respected principals and educational change makers (Parkview). While the Crossroad’s principal maintained this relationship, it didn’t appear to be a continuing influence for the Links principal. The Parkview principal may have continued contact with past influencers; however at the
time of this research, he was taking counsel from global leaders, supported through technology.

Other relationships which influenced the principals' leadership in each school included leadership teams or individual members. At Crossroads, this was clearly one of the two assistant principals, who shared the creative thinking and innovation with the principal and some young leaders. At Breezes, the influential relationship had previously included the assistant principal and the leadership team. However with new membership, the team's influence on the principal was less obvious and more constrained. There was evidence that the Links and Parkview principals were deeply trusting of, and influenced by their leadership teams.

More broadly, influential collegial relationships varied across the different leaders. The Crossroads principal maintained a strong network of local principals who he regularly socialised with, the Breezes principal had some loose collegial connections through the innovation network and the Links principal didn’t appear to be active in a collegial sense. The Parkview principal was active in his local collegiate group, however this was purposeful and was seen by others to hold potential advantage for his future leadership – to develop an innovative coalition of schools of which his school was the largest, potentially his Business Perspective at play!

These leaders relied on strong support teams to integrate their work and provide balance to their lives. However, they balanced seeking counsel with a steady and confident presence in their schools and the wider education community. The absence of such behaviour is notable in the Woodside principal’s leadership. The RNL expressed concern that the principal did not value her local network of principals and looked to overseas for principals of similar schools for her connections. While the Woodside principal appointed a loyal assistant principal who she had worked with before, she appeared threatened by this relationship and wasn’t receptive to the feedback being given. Additionally, she was seen by others to be influenced by a well-respected and experienced past principal mentor who held a broad understanding of whole school leadership. However, the Woodside principal’s decisions and behaviour indicated that the mentor’s influence was limited or not well understood.

In summary, the principals in this study were strongly influenced by their background experiences, their close personal relationships and past and present relationships with mentors, collegial groups and key leadership team members. They had assembled strong support teams through which they shared their values, learning and enjoyment
of their work. They had developed perspectives of their work and lives, which guided everything that they did.

These findings strongly align with Duignan and Gurr’s (2007: 162) claims, as they reflect on the “orientation to life and work” of the 17 principals in their study:

Many of the principals draw strength and purpose from their past and present family relationships; religious beliefs and/or other belief and value systems; life experiences; formal and informal learning; and the special challenges of leading their schools. These help in forming their ways of understanding their world, their views on the importance of education, and their own identity … They possess an acute sense of their own identity and ‘throw themselves’ with zest into their work because one senses they see it as their destiny to make a difference in the lives of others.

As outlined, the life stories of the four innovative principals was a central influence on their leadership as illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.

![Figure 5.1: The Five Perspectives of Innovative School Leaders](image)

**Figure 5.1:** The Five Perspectives of Innovative School Leaders

### 5.6 Other Factors which may have contributed to School Success

This section considers the research sub question: *What other factors might have helped to create innovative school cultures?*
Apart from principal leadership, there exist numerous contextual factors which may have contributed to each school’s capacity for innovation and success. While the possibilities are infinite, this might include: other people in leadership positions in the school, the history of leadership of the school, the capacity of the school, the education system’s support and readiness for innovation and the communities’ context and expectations of the school. With many of these elements overlapping to make up a school’s context, the broad leadership influence of the successful principals makes it difficult to determine what can and cannot be attributed to their leadership.

In considering the impact of others, could the school be successful and innovative if the leadership was provided by someone other than the principal? As was illustrated in the case of Woodside PS, in this study, the leadership of innovative and successful schools appeared to lie in the domain of the principal position. While there may have been others who worked with the principal in leading the innovation and success, without the principal’s application of the five leadership perspectives, coupled with their positional authority, the capacity for innovation and success was not demonstrated. The assistant principal at Woodside PS held high level, staff sanctioned authority in the school. She demonstrated some of the perspectives, some to a high degree, as did leadership team members from the other four schools. However, at Woodside this did not amount to building innovative capacity across the school to the same extent as in the other schools, being hindered by the capacity and focus of the principal. The influence of a second layer school leader, with a less skilled or less present principal or top layer school leader, is an area of possible future research.

At both Links SC and Breezes PS, stakeholders expressed a belief that the principal had built upon the successes of a previous principal. This seemed to do little to dent the positive impression of the current principal; rather it seemed to heighten the community’s expectations that the schools and their principals would continue to be successful. These findings were consistent with ISSPP cases where Drysdale et al. (2011) found evidence of success being sustained for some time after successful principals have left. With long term leadership in place at Crossroads and Parkview, it was not possible to know if the previous principals contributed to the schools’ current success. Stakeholders and principals in these schools, referred generally to the schools historically being ‘good schools’ and the foundations for success having been laid by previous principals. However, this did not include any specific leadership behaviours or influences of previous principals, possibly indicating that while this may
have initially been a contributing success factor for the new principals’ leadership, it was not seen to be a strong or enduring factor in the schools’ current success.

As previously outlined in detail, the successful schools’ had a clear, mostly unified culture based on collaboration, reflection and controlled risk taking. The principal was seen to be the greatest influence in creating this culture, and this in turn provided the permissions and processes for innovation. Historically, as new principals, the schools’ cultures had needed to be challenged, redefined and re-cultured, a change process referred to by all four principals of the innovative schools. As previously outlined (e.g. Table 5.1), the four successful and innovative schools profiled a range of contextual and cultural variations, indicating this wasn’t a distinguishing factor contributing to success or otherwise of the schools. However, some of the contextual and cultural factors in the schools may have influenced the state of readiness for innovation and this could impact on the length of time that it had taken the leader to achieve a unified, successful and innovative school culture, seen to be in process at Woodside PS.

As previously detailed in Chapter 2, at the time of the research, the Victorian state education system was in a state of change, with innovation and success regarded as highly desirable drivers of school and system transformation. While the schools in this study were in different education regions, all were largely influenced by the policies and directions of a centralised Victorian education system. Consequently, there was little observable differentiation between schools regarding system support for innovation. However, comparing system support and readiness for innovation (e.g. between different school systems) and its impact on schools could be a possible area for future study.

As for the culture of each school, it is difficult to define clear boundaries around principal influence and the impact of community expectations on school success. Given the contextual variations between the school communities outlined in this research (see Table 5.1) and the support of stakeholder perceptions and alignment with community expectations, in this study these were not seen to be defining factors for school innovation and success, as separate from the principal’s influence.

Within the limitations of the methodology of this research, no significant variants could be clearly determined to have greatly impacted on the schools’ capacity for innovation and success, other than the overwhelming influence of principal leadership.
5.7 Sustainability of School Innovation and Success

The following section discusses the research sub question: *Do stakeholders see their school’s success and innovative culture as sustainable beyond the leadership of the current principal?*

Successful school leadership is sustainable when it is shared and developed across the school community (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Within this definition, the four successful school leaders have proven their leadership sustainability by the breadth of its application. In addition, each principal has held a significant leadership position in their schools for well over the minimum three years, recommended for system leaders in the 2010 McKinsey report, previously cited.

Each principal spoke of times of challenge, when they had to reset their focus or challenge the existing culture of their schools. The Crossroads principal reflected that he "took his eye off the ball … (I) made a lot of assumptions that things were going alright and they weren't. There was an underlying thing there in the subculture and it wasn’t good." Hindsight will tell if Breezes PS was in the midst of a refocus at the time of this research, with the leadership team questioning loyalties.

The concept of sustainable leadership strikes at the core of the capacity of education systems and schools to improve learning for all students. Hargreaves and Fink (2006: 5) state “…leaders want to accomplish goals that matter, inspire others to join them in working towards those goals and leave a legacy after they have gone.” While good schools and organisations are often envied for their positive professional cultures, the findings in this study affirm that positive organisational cultures cannot be maintained indefinitely without a strong leader or guardian of the vision. As the Links College principal said:

I don’t know realistically that you would ever get to the point … if you take the principal out of the picture, where the leadership team are so capable and confident that they can do without that person constantly feeding, nurturing …

Dyer et al. (2011: 7-8) observe that “Innovative companies are almost always led by innovative leaders.” This study showed that the four innovative principals maintained a close eye on the school’s culture to check for imbalances, intervening when the culture deviated from the path of optimal performance.

The ISSPP findings affirm the critical role of the principal in successful schools and the possible challenge presented when they leave the school:
The emphasis placed on the symbolic role could mean that when these principals leave, there might be a mission/purpose gap that will be difficult to replace. Yet many of the principals sustained school success for many years and so even if this was an issue, having them lead a successful school for a decade or more must be worth it; generally they are not short term principals (Day & Gurr, 2014: 199).

The view of the schools’ improvement sustainability, beyond the current principals, drew a continuum of responses from stakeholders across the four innovative schools. This ranged from a general confidence in the autonomy of the school’s journey, to a sense of panic from stakeholders who expressed fear that the principal might leave.

The Crossroad’s principal took responsibility for preparing for leadership sustainability in his school, articulating his role as “trying to do away with your job and create an environment that doesn’t need you.” There was some evidence from stakeholders that he had been successful in preparing others for this transition, developing a shared vision that was independent of his leadership. The SC President described the school as holding a ‘village vision’ that a new leader would need to adhere to. Staff were confident that, with a change of leadership “the school will change and evolve but will always stay true to what he has tried to build here.” The RNL considered that “the culture was not reliant on the principal.” Whether this would be realised remains to be seen, however the confidence had been built into the organisation that the school’s culture and its strategic direction were sustainable, and that this was everyone’s responsibility.

The evidence of sustainability was not as strong in other schools. At Breezes, the RNL believed that, without the principal, innovation and success would not be sustainable due to the principal’s tight control of the improvement agenda:

… I think the staff would drop back into focusing on teaching and learning and building their skills in that area, I think they would hold onto some of the structures that have been put in place because they work well. (Breezes RNL)

While the Breezes SC President believed that the community would protect the vision, because “we’ve gone too far to go back”, he also expressed anxiety that the principal could be “destined for bigger and better things” and appeared less confident that the school could continue its journey without her leadership.

At Links College, this concern was echoed by the principal herself, and her view was supported by the school community, with parents and SC President expressing anxiety around the prospect of the principal’s departure. However, the Links leadership team thought that a new leader would bring a “different flavour” but the work “had many
layers” and would therefore continue. The RNL agreed, believing that the school’s journey was building its own momentum, but at that time remained dependent on the principal.

At the other end of the continuum of responses was Parkview SC, where stakeholder groups were universally unclear about the school’s direction with the departure of its current principal. While they were very clear about the influence of the leadership role, “any school lives or dies on the strength of its principal” and the need for someone new to fit the vision and values of the school, they appeared overwhelmed by the enormity of this task, stating “big shoes to fill.” The leadership team, who in effect led the school during the principal’s regular absences, had the most difficulty contemplating this question, responding with “that’s made me feel a bit sad.” This negative emotional response could also be attributed to the fact that their personal influence in the school would change with a leader who had greater physical presence. There was a sense gained by the researcher that the experienced members of the Parkview leadership team would not continue in their roles past the current principal’s term.

While each of the principals were aware of the need for sustainability of their leadership, only one was seen to explicitly work on it. This strategy appeared to be more successful in building a shared awareness and responsibility for sustainability than developing a distributed leadership structure or building leadership capacity. However at Crossroads, explicit preparation for a handover was also coupled with these leadership development elements, making extrapolation difficult. Explicitly preparing the school for your departure, as a leadership activity, appeared to build the confidence of the group in sustaining school success.

It is reasonable to surmise that each of the innovative school principals would have had opportunities for promotion from their schools over the period of their current principalships. The Crossroads principal had been actively ‘head hunted’ for other school leadership positions, however he declined, expressing a value of the balance that he had now reached in his career, “… do I need to do all the hard work and crack the whip and do all that sort of stuff for a couple of years and probably destroy my own health?” The Breezes principal confided that she had “thought it was time to move on but decided to stay”; also expressing a comfort level and the lack of enticement in the RNL role, something she had previously tried and chosen to leave. Both these principals were comfortable with the level of ongoing challenge in their current schools and the balance this provided them, possibly remembering the significant input a new role required when one held high expectations for personal performance. Lack of a
desire to promote might also be attributed to leader satisfaction and engagement in improving the current state of their schools, with both principals at Crossroads and Breezes demonstrating the “restlessness for improvement” outlined earlier in this chapter.

For Parkview, a belief widely expressed by others was that the principal would have had chances to promote alongside his strong network of system leaders, however he had bypassed these opportunities. He didn’t personally speak of this, and therefore it is impossible to know if this positioning was personal choice or an externally determined outcome. However his current engagement with a coalition of schools left little doubt, in the RNL’s opinion, that the principal held high hopes for new leadership, should this innovative venture be successful.

Whether or not the success and capacity for innovation of the four schools was sustainable beyond the current principal’s leadership was not possible to surmise from this study. The subsequent success of school leadership following a highly successful and innovative leader is an area for potential future research. However these findings demonstrate that explicitly preparing a school community for a successful principal’s departure, builds the capacity of the environment for this to eventuate.

5.8 Summary of Discussion of Findings

Understanding what works in four successful and innovative schools is the first step in developing the connections required to move what is happening in a few schools going about their business in different ways at the edges, to the centre, so that others might share and learn from the experience. How to make this mainstream remains a challenge, however as this research demonstrates, some school leaders are developing innovative and successful schools and their perspectives, behaviours and models can be learned from by others.

Challenging Chen's (2010: 3) claim that “nothing seismic ever seems to happen to our schools”, it can be argued that something significant and sustainable has happened in each of these four schools. For students, learning success had become contemporary, attainable and relevant; in the case of Links College, this was without historical precedent or expectation. These schools were no longer stuck in old ways of thinking, they were able to respond quickly and flexibly to the needs of their students and managed uncertainty through continual learning, or Sorman-Nilsson’s (2009: 30)
“willingness to learn, unlearn and relearn.” And importantly, these schools were developing and refining the learning skills along with their students.

The four successful schools had developed a curriculum that was engaging and relevant for the needs of students. The 21st century learning skills outlined by Fadel (2010) were evident, including high level communication, teamwork, use of information technology, leadership, critical thinking, self-direction and social responsibility. The schools, led by their principals were responsive to students and communities, connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting as required, to ensure they remained current to changing needs and expectations and to be able to take advantage of opportunities as these arose.

Each of the successful school principals intentionally aligned many of their practices and initiatives, developing them to a high level, becoming the ‘golden threads’ through their work. Rather than a narrow focus, the schools held a deep focus across a number of areas, helping to build trust and make sense of the school’s work with others. Trust was a strong presence in the leadership of each of the four successful schools; the lack of it at Woodside impeded the school’s progress and the principal’s leadership at every decision point. The principals directly influenced the trust relationship in their schools. Behaving in a trustworthy manner and trusting staff was an element of each principal’s leadership, even in the case of Breezes, when it would have been advisable for the principal to not do so.

Stoll’s (2011) ‘creative leadership’ and the ‘generative leadership’ described by Klimek et al. (2008), were present in all four leaders – modelling creativity and risk-taking, exposing others to new ways of thinking and experiences, tapping into the collective capacity, embracing failure as a learning opportunity, providing the time and permission for exploration and setting high expectations for questioning, creativity and innovation or Sorman-Nillson’s (2009) “thinking stupid”!

However, in agreement with Dimmock and O’Donoghue (1997) and Day and Gurr (2014), the four successful principals were not seen to be merely charismatic leaders or ‘super principals’. They were inclusive, collaborative and passionate professional educators and school community leaders with “a passionate belief in the significance of what they do” (Duignan & Gurr, 2007: 158). These leaders did not define themselves by their characteristics, traits or styles. They wanted to make a difference and inspired others to join them to achieve their goals.
Zhao (2013) says that to gain the best of the future, we will have to do the invention ourselves. Each of the four schools demonstrated this. In accordance with Hargreaves (2003) these schools changed their organisation, the ways their students learn and their teachers teach and reconceptualised what being successful looked like – for schools and students. While, with the benefit of hindsight, it would be easy to see the solutions the principals embedded into their schools as simple, at the time of implementation there were no models for this work, they were required to step out and be bold, to find new solutions to old problems. These are Heifetz and Linsky’s (2002) adaptive challenges, outlined in Chapter 2 and explained by Heifetz and Laurie (2001: 3) as “adaptive change – the sort of change that occurs when people and organisations are forced to adjust to a radically altered environment – they challenge the traditional understanding of the leader – follower relationship.”

Considering “adaptive change”, it is timely to reflect on the scale of change implemented in the four schools. Transforming schools, as opposed to merely improving them, requires the presence of a particular set of elements (Hannon, 2014). This research demonstrated that these elements were evident, to varying degrees, in each of the innovative school sites. Hannon (2014: 9) details the features of school transformation and this study provides the practical examples:

- Expanded goals, new metrics (e.g. global competence, entrepreneurialism at Parkview)
- New landscapes of providers, from multiple sources (e.g. Microsoft and Cisco partnerships at Crossroads)
- Disruption – a decisive shift away from the factory based model to highly personalised approaches (e.g. MAX learning centres at Links)
- Emergence – not a fixed ‘reform plan’ but an adaptive set of change processes (e.g. ‘speed wobbles’ at Breezes)
- Growing evidence, not being dependent on it – new approaches cannot be wholly evidence based (e.g. Hands On and Connect learning programs to cater for ‘the invisibles’ at Links)
- Openness – to multiple and diverse platforms and influences (e.g. offering alternative learning streams at Parkview).
While transformation was occurring, the four leaders needed to leverage their leadership in new ways and to involve others to redefine the strategic intent of their schools. Leadbeater (2014: 13) galvanises this thinking, “If we made confidence, collaboration, courage, commitment, care and creativity the real mission of schools then our economy would be much more successful”. Klimek et al. (2008: 51) contrast traditional school leader practices as being to “organise, assign, direct, monitor, correct, verify … (and the new leader actions) … to question, stimulate, envision, explore, influence and guide.” The evidence provided by the four schools in this study profiles Klimek et al.’s (2008) new leader actions and Leadbeater’s (2014) aforementioned six elements underscored the strategic intent of each of the schools.

The four leaders influenced others with their courage to innovate; they inquired, observed, networked and experimented with their school’s processes and they created new ideas by linking their thinking with their behaviours, profiling Dyer et al.’s (2011) ‘Innovators DNA’ (see Figure 2.1). These activities can be understood and learned by others with self-reflection, mentoring, encouragement and support, challenging the scenario described by Walker (2011: 8):

The good things happening in schools – our wisdom, our experience, our differences, too often remain hidden behind classroom doors, the newly built walls of our schools and sometimes stubborn mindsets. In other words, schools struggle to function in ways that magnify the effect of successful teaching and leading at scale – this is about connection.

This chapter has detailed the five perspectives of innovative and successful leaders and key influences shaping their leadership. The following chapter details significant findings and presents these as a reflective model which can be used by others with an interest in building capacity for leading innovative and successful schools.
CHAPTER 6. A MODEL FOR SCHOOL INNOVATION AND SUCCESS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter demonstrates how the research findings affirm and extend what is already known and understood about contemporary school leadership. It examines the success elements common across the innovative schools and delves more deeply into the five perspectives, seen as the non-negotiables of principal leadership of innovative and successful schools, adding key learnable leadership behaviours. It culminates in the formulation of a new model of school leadership for leadership theorists or those wishing to apply themselves to leading, or shaping the practice of others to lead, innovative and successful schools. It gives recommendations for further investigations that have arisen as a result of this empirical research.

6.2 Successful Schools

While the context of the five schools varied significantly in elements such as school size, type, locality, age, socioeconomic status, multi-cultural base and years of principalship, similarities existed in the organisational cultures of the four innovative schools. Under the leadership and vision of four different principals, with varying leadership styles and life stories, these schools had led significant and strategic whole school change over time to build positive, professional, highly trusting and collegial cultures, where risk taking and constant reflection were encouraged, open communication and feedback were present, quality learning was central and leadership was shared. The research suggests that these were preconditions for being an innovative and successful school.

Underpinning and consistently driving these pre-conditions, the innovative schools held common non-negotiable core drivers for their work, which stakeholders took as mandatory. These included: having a culture of high expectations and success, ‘doing things differently’ and continual reflection and improvement.

Likewise, the common focus areas for the schools’ innovation, recognition and success varied. However, all schools had improved student outcomes and improved stakeholder perceptions. These stakeholders were participants in their own stories of the school’s success and were optimistic about its future, fulfilling Beare’s (2006: 20)
prediction that in the new mindset required of schools, “Its members are overtly story-makers and story tellers, participants in their own organisation's narrative.”

The success stories of the four innovative schools shared common elements. Each school had undertaken significant strategic change over time and had moved into a more stable period, evidenced by a unified and positive school culture and permission to ‘get on with the job’ of leading improvement and innovation. They had built a success culture across the school, with shared pride and confidence in ‘doing things differently’ from other schools. There was a shared understanding of the school’s engagement in a continuous cycle of improvement and stakeholders took collective responsibility for this.

With the pre-conditions in place and the core drivers understood and shared by stakeholders, the four successful schools demonstrated seven common elements of success in their identification as an innovative school. These are represented diagrammatically in Figure 6.1 below.
6.3 Key Leadership Behaviours

The findings demonstrate that the process of leading the four innovative schools required leaders with a strong and broad influence on their staff and school communities. The principals held a well-developed sense of personal identity and their work could be viewed through five interrelated perspectives or lens: a Growth Perspective, Collaborative Perspective, Business Perspective, Change Activist Perspective and Moral Purpose Perspective. These were present in each of the four innovative school principals and they accounted for the behaviours attributed to their leadership. These ways of viewing the world had developed over time, shaped by the leaders’ life stories.
While the five perspectives were seen to be present in the innovative school principals’ leadership, the behaviours that the perspectives fostered varied and were present to different degrees, determined by context and leader characteristics. This list is not exhaustive; rather it profiles the most common behaviours evident in this research, in most or all of the principals’ leadership and it attempts to match these to the five perspectives, shown in Table 6.1 below.
### Table 6.1: Five Perspectives and Key Behaviours of Innovative School Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERSPECTIVES</th>
<th>BEHAVIOURS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Growth Perspective</strong></td>
<td>1. Use an inquiring mindset with an open and broad interest base</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Apply critical, reflective thinking</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Seek out new opportunities and dare to be different</td>
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<td>4. Seek deep knowledge</td>
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<td>5. Share knowledge to develop self and others</td>
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<td>6. Lead the learning conversation</td>
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<td>7. Scan the environment to inform thinking</td>
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<td>8. Hold high expectations of self and others</td>
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<td><strong>Collaborative Perspective</strong></td>
<td>1. Communicate skilfully</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Apply high level emotional literacy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Develop a shared vision</td>
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<td>4. Develop and lead collaborative work structures</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Distribute leadership in non-hierarchical ways</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. Use technology to influence and connect with others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. Blur personal and professional life</td>
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<td>8. Form deep connections with other individuals, groups and communities</td>
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<td><strong>Business Perspective</strong></td>
<td>1. Compete to advantage the school</td>
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<td>2. Use data to monitor improvement</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Use an Action Research implementation model</td>
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<td>4. Manage the communication flow</td>
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<td>5. Promote the school in an aspirational way</td>
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<td>6. Develop a school identity</td>
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<td>7. Improve and maintain the physical environment</td>
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<td>8. Balance historical and future focussed objectives</td>
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<td></td>
<td>9. Work on the big picture but know what is happening in the school</td>
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<td><strong>Change Activist Perspective</strong></td>
<td>1. Take responsibility for making change</td>
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<td>2. Implement calculated risks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Manage the pace of change</td>
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<td>4. Be persistent and persuasive</td>
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<td>5. Embrace failure as learning</td>
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<td>6. Bend or break the rules to achieve the vision</td>
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<td>7. Implement a continuous change model</td>
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<td>8. Be a symbolic leader</td>
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<td><strong>Moral Purpose Perspective</strong></td>
<td>1. Hold student centred values and actively seek student voice</td>
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<td>2. Articulate a clear philosophical base for the role</td>
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<td>3. Understand and act upon intensely personal drivers</td>
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<td>4. Demonstrate a strong belief in the capacity of others</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Provide broad opportunities for student success</td>
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<td>6. Be optimistic and passionate</td>
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<td>7. Demonstrate value in diversity and be slow to judge</td>
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<td>8. Make the school a match with your values</td>
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6.4 A Model for School Innovation and Success

The following model has been developed as a culminating result of this research. The inter-related components, introduced in previous sections, are brought together and illustrated in one model, briefly summarised in this section. The value of this is in its usability for others, diagrammatically presenting the research in one model as a summary of the findings and a new framework for consideration.

As seen in the following figure, the impact of the ovals in the Model for School Innovation and Success starts with the smallest lower shape and its influences radiates out, successively influencing elements of both principal and school success in each additional oval. However, indicated by the larger blue arrows, this influence also flows back to continually shape and reshape the lived experiences of the principal and to subsequently impact on the elements within each oval. Similarly, Doherty (2008: 193) presents a "Model of School Leadership in an Independent School", which also shows a process of reciprocal influence, involving the continual development and authentic growth of the principal (both personal and professional), impacting on the growth of the school’s capacity as well as the wider school community, resulting in improved student learning outcomes, in turn impacting on improved principal leadership, knowledge and growth. The Model for School Innovation and Success from this study is shown below in Figure 6.2.
Figure 6.2: The Model for School Innovation and Success

**GROWTH PERSPECTIVE BEHAVIOURS:**
1. Use an inquiring mindset with an open and broad interest base
2. Apply critical, reflective thinking
3. Seek out new opportunities and dare to be different
4. Seek deep knowledge
5. Share knowledge to develop self and others
6. Lead the learning conversation
7. Scan the environment to inform thinking
8. Hold high expectations of self and others

**COLLABORATIVE PERSPECTIVE BEHAVIOURS:**
1. Communicate skilfully
2. Apply high level emotional literacy
3. Develop a shared vision
4. Develop and lead collaborative work structures
5. Distribute leadership in non-hierarchical ways
6. Use technology to influence and connect with others
7. Blur personal and professional life
8. Form deep connections with other individuals, groups and communities

**BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE BEHAVIOURS:**
1. Compete to advantage the school
2. Use data to monitor improvement
3. Use an Action Research implementation model
4. Manage the communication flow
5. Promote the school in an aspirational way
6. Develop a school identity
7. Improve and maintain the physical environment
8. Balance historical and future focussed objectives
9. Work on the big picture but know what is happening in the school

**CHANGE ACTIVIST PERSPECTIVE BEHAVIOURS:**
1. Take responsibility for making change
2. Implement calculated risks
3. Manage the pace of change
4. Be persistent and persuasive
5. Embrace failure as learning
6. Bend or break the rules to achieve the vision
7. Implement a continuous change model
8. Be a symbolic leader

**MORAL PURPOSE PERSPECTIVE BEHAVIOURS:**
1. Hold student centred values and actively seek out student voice
2. Articulate a clear philosophical base for the role
3. Understand and act upon intensely personal drivers
4. Demonstrate a strong belief in the capacity of others
5. Provide broad opportunities for student success
6. Be optimistic and passionate
7. Demonstrate value in diversity and be slow to judge
8. Make the school a match with your values

**SCHOOL SUCCESS PRE-CONDITIONS:**
1. Significant & Strategic Whole School Change
2. Unified & Positive Whole School Culture

**SCHOOL SUCCESS CORE DRIVERS:**
1. Culture of High Expectations & Success
2. Doing Things Differently
3. Continual Reflection & Improvement

**SCHOOL SUCCESS ELEMENTS:**
1. Improved Learning Outcomes
2. Broad & Long Term View of Success
3. Strong Community Connections & External Partnerships
4. Flexible & Personalised Learning Environments
5. Aspirational School Promotion
6. Trusting & Stable Principal Leadership
7. Focus on improving Teacher & Leader Expertise
6.4.1 Life Stories

As shown in Figure 6.2, personal life stories were at the heart of principal leadership in this study. These were formed and continually reshaped with experience, sometimes, but not always, during difficult times that had transformative effects on the leader. This was seen in the Links College principal's focus on providing life opportunities to disadvantaged students following her failure to do this with children in her care many years earlier. Life stories defined the leaders' values and leadership styles and helped them make sense of their roles and the breadth of its responsibilities. This alignment helped the principals of the four innovative schools to remain grounded and to integrate their personal and professional lives, finding purpose and contentment with the requirement to commit significant endeavour to the service of others: students, schools and communities. While life stories cannot be copied or changed, they can be learnt from, understood and managed by others with a desire to grow their leadership capacity.

6.4.2 Principal Leadership

Next, the model identifies two ovals of principal leadership. The second shape in the model: ‘Five Perspectives’ is developed from a leader’s life stories and forms as the particular lens or perspectives taken by the school leader to the enactment of their leadership. While an emergent, aspirant or less successful school leader may commence their leadership journey with an incomplete set of perspectives, subsequent additions to the lived experience influences the further development of their perspectives to leadership. Five perspectives (Growth, Collaborative, Business, Change Activist and Moral Purpose) were consistently applied by the leaders of innovative and successful schools in this study, suggesting that an awareness of these perspectives and their application to personal improvement and context, could promote higher levels of leadership innovation and success for others. In contrast at Woodside, an incomplete set of perspectives impacted on the school’s capacity for innovation and success.

The third oval in the model continues the understanding of principal leadership. The application of the five leadership perspectives promoted leader behaviours which characterised the leadership of innovative and successful schools. While many of these behaviours overlapped across the perspectives, they were all found to be present in each of the innovative leaders, although to varying degrees. There were other behaviours present which were not included, as these were not universally present, or
not to the same high degree as the forty one key behaviours listed. As for each of the overlapping ovals in this model, the leaders’ perspectives were reshaped by further experiences, so too would be their behaviours, with context predicting the presence and degree of certain behaviours.

6.4.3 School Success

Common pre-conditions, core drivers and elements of success were found in the successful and innovative schools and this is represented in the fourth oval in the model. Each school had undergone significant whole school change, continued or driven by the current principal and this had formed a positive school culture, underpinned by collective efficacy. Stakeholders expected the school to strive for high levels of success in its work. They took for granted that the school would do things differently to others, if this was where the best solution could be found. School leaders and staff continually scanned their environments, reflecting on their implementation and they appeared restless in the pursuit of the best opportunities for their schools. While the degree of presence of the success elements varied a little, surprisingly, given the range of school contexts within this study, these elements were consistently provided as evidence of each school’s success by the principal and school stakeholders. It would therefore be a worthwhile activity, for other school leaders to consider the seven elements of school success in their schools (see Figure 6.1), as a strategic school improvement framework. Furthermore, as the leader developed experiences, perspectives and key behaviours, the impact of leadership maturity on a school’s elements of success could be expected to clarify and strengthen the success elements.

6.4.4 School and Leadership Innovation and Success

The interplay of influence across the four ovals culminates in the final shape represented in the model. A strong presence of the elements in the previous four ovals appeared to predict a school’s, and its leader’s, capacity for innovation and success. A weaker presence, at any point, impacted on the final circle however, with increased understanding, self-awareness and reflection, motivation and the right support, all schools and school leaders could potentially operate at the level represented by the fifth and final oval. This model provides an opportunity for increased understanding and a framework for reflection, feedback and guidance for future growth for those school leaders and education systems motivated to apply the innovations and successes happening in some schools more broadly, across different contexts.
6.5 Further Research Recommendations

Several areas for further research emerged from the findings of this research and these are considered below:

1. Applying the School Innovation Model as depicted in Figure 6.2 to schools and principal leadership in a variety of contexts, and investigating the results more broadly than possible in this study. This model could also be applied to system leadership for the success of a small collaborative group of schools, regional network or broad system of schools.

2. Comparing different education systems support and readiness for innovative leadership and the impact of this on the innovation present in schools and principal leadership.

3. Investigating the sustainability of success following a highly successful and innovative leader, including the leadership practices of both the outgoing and incoming principals which are seen to build trust and promote further leader and school innovation and success.

4. Exploring in greater detail how those school leaders (other than the principal) contribute to and lead innovative and successful schools. This could focus on the role of assistant or deputy principals, depending on available evidence.

5. At the time of this research, Victorian schools were some of the most autonomous in the world, with responsibility for school finances and related human resource management and high degrees of independent decision making. School autonomy is seen by some (e.g. Caldwell & Spinks, 2013) as the system driver for school innovation. Currently, some governments view school autonomy as the ‘quick fix’ for schools to find innovative solutions. The heart of the question remains: does school autonomy lead to school and leadership innovation and success, and if so, what conditions might promote this?

These five areas hold potential for further consideration and empirical research to extend current knowledge on leading and sustaining innovative and successful schools.
6.6 Final Thoughts

Price (2015: 13) states, “As an industry, education is no different to any other, facing the immense challenges of a disintermediated, fragmented, yet socially connected future.” Innovation is a mindset that permeates the culture of some schools and enterprises. Leading and creating innovative and successful schools holds opportunities for society to understand and seek new solutions in a more systematic way, one that can be shared with other schools and education systems.

These research findings indicate that four of the five principals in this study, understood and directly and indirectly manipulated their school’s innovative capacity to promote and sustain school success.

This study is important because it adds to our knowledge and understanding of the leadership of innovative and successful schools. It contributes to demystifying the concept of innovation so that others might explore its potential in different contexts. It provides a framework or model for other principals, aspirant leaders or system leaders to consider their leadership, their school or system improvement and success and the present culture, which may be inhibiting or enabling innovation. It provides the opportunity to apply a Model of School Innovation and Success, developed through the practical work of other successful school leaders. This study adds to the knowledge and understanding of what good leaders do and advances the work of school improvement by providing concrete examples for others to implement and continue to learn.
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

The main aim of this research has been achieved - to better understand how innovative and successful schools are led and to determine to what extent specific leadership behaviours and practices contribute to developing and maintaining innovative school cultures.

Reflecting on the research sub questions, the contexts, histories and cultures of the five schools in this study have proven to influence the level of success in developing innovative and successful schools. Concurrently, each principal's life story has shaped their leadership; so too has their leadership skills, perspectives and behaviours and the varied ways each has responded to their school's context. This potent mixture of leader background, skills and experience interacts with the school's context, history, culture and expectations of a school leader in a reciprocal way, shaping and reshaping the school and leadership experience.

This mix sits within today's educational environment, which expects schools to be responsive and fast paced, requiring solutions to challenges not previously encountered, coupled with stakeholder expectations that individual needs will be met to an increasingly high degree. With such a vast array of causal effects, is it any wonder that successful and innovative school leadership is often viewed to be rare and almost magical, with qualities sometimes attributed to good fortune, leader charisma, a good school, skilled staff, compliant children or even access to resources? From the potent mixture of school and leadership interaction and reciprocal influence, this study provides a model for innovation and success which demystifies successful and innovative leadership qualities to those which can be reflected upon, personalised, applied, modified and learnt by others.

Schools and their leaders typically spend their day responding to calamities, pressures and others expectations of them. The culminating model in this research: A Model for School Innovation and Success provides an opportunity to refocus leadership for those invested in leading successful and innovative schools, so that with experience, reflection and self-awareness, they too might push the boundaries on what is possible for their schools, staff, students and communities.
REFERENCES

Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [ACARA], www.myschool.edu.au


APPENDICES
Appendix 1:

Principal: Semi-structured interview questions

Warm up questions:

- How long have you been at this school? In what capacity? What was the school like 5 years ago? 10 years ago?
- Tell me about your school now.
- How would you describe its culture?
- Tell me about your past experience as a school leader.

1. Your school was recommended to me as innovative, well-led and with excellent student outcomes. Can you tell me why your school is regarded as innovative? Please give me some examples.

2. What is the history of this innovative culture? What people and events have been critical to its development?

3. What has been your role in this?

4. What have been some of your successes?

5. What have been some of your failures?

6. What do you want to do in the future with the school?

7. Do you have a personal philosophy which guides your leadership practice?

8. What past experiences have shaped this?

9. Apart from your leadership, what else has been important in establishing a culture of innovation?

10. Anything else?
Appendix 2:

Individual and Group: Semi-structured interview questions for:

- Regional Network Leader
- School Council President
- Staff Group- Leadership Team
- Staff Group– Non Leadership Team
- Parent Group

Warm up questions:

- How long have you known xxx (the principal)? In what capacity? What was the school like 5 years ago? 10 years ago?
- Tell me about this school now.
- How would you describe its culture?

1. This school was recommended to me as innovative, well-led and with excellent student outcomes. Can you tell me why this school is regarded as innovative? Please give me some examples.

2. What is the history of this innovative culture? What people and events have been critical to its development?

3. What has been xxx’s (the principal’s) role in this?

4. What have been some of the successes?

5. What have been some of the failures?

6. How would you describe the leadership style of xxx (the principal)?

7. Why do you say this? Please give some examples.
8. What past experiences do you think may have shaped this?

9. Apart from xxx's (the principal's) leadership, what else has been important in establishing a culture of innovation?

10. Anything else?
Appendix 3: Complete Case Story: Crossroads Primary School

Features of the School

Crossroads Primary School is an outer suburban school, located approximately 35km from the centre of the large capital city of Melbourne, Australia. The school caters for approximately 420 students in years prep to six (five to twelve years of age). The majority of students come from low to middle income families with 30% of parents unemployed and those employed predominantly engaged in trades and factory work. The area is traditionally attractive to new immigrant families with 64% of students designated as having a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE). In 2010, 52% of school families qualified for the Educational Maintenance Allowance from the State Government, based on family income.

The maintenance of enrolments … in an area of declining school age children is testimony to the standing (the school) has in the community …There is a large transient rate of 20% annually due to the high level of rental properties and families moving to permanent accommodation in outer areas. The majority of students are from the immediate locality but a significant proportion of the enrolment comes from outside this area (11 local neighborhood areas listed) (School website, 2010).

In the 2011 census, 39.9% of total persons in the school’s neighborhood were aged 25-54 years, 13.2% were 15-24 years and 12.2% were 5-14 years. Only 20.8% of both parents were born in Australia. 56.5% speak two or more languages at home and 42.7% speaking English only. 16% of employed persons over the age of 15 years were employed as clerical or administrative workers, 15.2% as technicians and trades workers, 14.4% laborers, 13.1% professionals and 12.4% machine operators and drivers. (Australian Bureau of Statistics - www.censusdata.abs.gov.au)

Anecdotally, some change has been seen in the last decade with families becoming more financially established but choosing to stay in the area rather than moving to a more affluent neighbouring suburb, or relocating to a more affluent neighbourhood but continuing their enrolment at the school.

This information is supported by the school’s 2011 Index of Community Social and Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 1001(1000 being the Australian average ICSEA score) but with 40% of family backgrounds in the bottom quartile, 21% and 25% in the middle quartiles and 13% in the top quartile (compared to the Australian distribution of 25% across each quartile). MySchool data in subsequent years continues the trend of increasing gentrification of the area.
The school was originally built to an open plan design in 1977, but classrooms were closed in with dividing walls and furniture in subsequent years, prior to the commencement of Tom, the current principal.

It was an open plan design school but functioning traditionally, and it was a shame because the school was a beautiful looking school with these open plan design learning centres but the teachers had actually divided them off so there was four classrooms in each one, there were concertina walls and doors, there were artificial walls and doors, it was very privatized. Staff got on well together, but they didn’t work together and they ran a very traditional program in a very cramped environment with a lot of unused space in the middle which was sad … the culture was very much you don’t rock the boat, it’s a good place to work, we’ll stay here until we retire … (Principal).

Tom stated that he inherited a very traditional school which had always had a good reputation in its community. Families value education as a means to social and economic improvement for their children and generally support the school to do its job of educating their children.

I think the staff probably thought well we’ve got (Tom) as principal, he’s been here for a couple of years, we’ll keep doing what we’ve been doing and things will be nice. The community, I think they were looking for a bit of a change. I think they were thinking well things could happen a bit better, the school could get a bit of life about it, and lots of schools were starting to tinker around playing with different things and I think the community were happy that something different might have been happening but they had no idea what … it wasn’t a place that needed shaking up, but it was a place that was very comfortable (Principal).

The school’s Vision Statement is:

(the school) … is committed to providing a learning environment and educational programs which will motivate, challenge and support students to become lifelong learners. The school aims to maximise student potential in a safe and caring community in which academic achievement, positive self-esteem, cultural diversity and the rights of all are highly valued and respected (School website 2010).

The school’s values are Respect, Honesty, Teamwork, Learning and Responsibility. These values are underpinned by ten explicit Valuable Learning Habits: Thinkers, Communicators, Inquirers, Risk Takers, Open Minded, Caring, Pride, Well Balanced, Reflective and Knowledgeable.

Physically, the school is organised into four open plan modules, called Learning Centres with students grouped in like grade levels (prep, years 1/2, years 3/4 and years 5/6). In 2010, under the federally funded Building the Education Revolution (BER) scheme the school built a new Gymnasium, Music Recording Studio, Art Room and Multi-Purpose Area/Community Facility. The grounds, while surrounded by
established homes, are spacious and include an oval, student designed wetlands and pond, vegetable garden, adventure playgrounds, central covered courtyard with outdoor stage area and two Wii screens for student use in the playground. Internally, the school also has an Environmental Science and French Centre, Learning Resource Centre (library), Activities Room, Multimedia Centre including a Radio Station and Media Room and TV screens throughout the school. The school offers specialist programs in Visual Arts, Music, French, Environmental Science, Physical Education, Communications Technology and Dance. The school presented as extremely tidy, well cared for and organised for purposeful learning.

High levels of technology are apparent across the school. This includes computers, laptops, I-pads, Interactive Whiteboards in all classrooms, cameras, sound and recording equipment, digital microscopes, playground Wii’s, television screens (some playing Foxtel news) throughout the school. The technology is visibly in use by students and teachers as a learning tool across classes and specialist areas.

Apart from Tom, the school’s leadership team includes two assistant principals who hold whole school roles as Teaching and Learning coaches. In addition one leads whole school curriculum while the other leads student wellbeing. The leadership team also includes two leading teachers and a number of aspiring young leaders who hold responsibility for leading the different learning centres and curriculum areas. The staff profile is young to middle aged, the principal stating that there is ‘a lot of inexperience’ in the staffing profile.

The Culture of the School

Tom describes the school’s culture as a learning culture based on research followed by implementation and then shared reflection and modification. Other stakeholders described the culture as professional, highly collaborative, progressive, respectful and inclusive. There was strong agreement around the school having a student centred culture. There are high expectations for everyone and Tom expects, and receives loyalty to the school, his leadership and the shared work. It was described as a flexible and risk taking culture, characterized by the staff group repeating an oft said statement by Tom, “There are no problems only solutions”. The staff group described the ‘filter down’ decision making process as being representative of Crossroads Primary School’s culture. They outlined this as you start with an idea, self - check that it fits with school direction, discuss the idea with Tom or the assistant principal, research the idea and talk it over with your teams, modify the idea as required and then go back to
discuss your findings with Tom, the assistant principal and your teams. The idea might then progress to implementation as a small trial, it is then analysed, modified and reflected upon and the results are discussed with the principal team and the whole staff before being implemented on a larger scale. This collaborative, inclusive and supportive approach to new directions was repeated throughout all the interviews.

The theory was that if we’re going to do something there had to be research around it, so before we make the changes we had to have the research base, and so people would go out and research … and they’d come back with a way of doing something but they could back it up with arguments rather than just gut feeling (Staff Group).

Success of the School

Outwardly, Crossroads Primary School has highly visible markers of success in the education arena. The school was recommended to me as being innovative by senior staff in the Innovations and Excellence Branch of the Department of Education, having recently been awarded the Victorian Education Excellence Award for Curriculum Innovation in 2010 and selected as a Leading School Trial in a professional coaching program.

In 2009 the school was selected as a Microsoft Worldwide Mentor School (1 of 12 internationally in 2010) and in 2010 a CISCO Ingenious School (1 of 10 internationally in 2010) in their Innovative Schools program.

In 2009, (Crossroads Primary School) was one of only 12 schools in the world to be named a "mentor school" by Microsoft. The computer giant's Innovative Schools program selects schools that are ground-breaking in their use of technology to mentor other schools around the globe. Former British minister of state for schools and learners Jim Knight has described (the school) as "unbelievably inspirational". "I only hope that we can replicate what you are doing here back in the UK" (Sydney Morning Herald, Technology News, Apr 27, 2012).

In 2011 the principal was awarded the state’s highest educational leadership honour in the Victorian Education Excellence Awards for Most Outstanding Leadership and on separate occasions, the school won state awards for achievement in Science and Mathematics.

The principal expressed his beliefs of the school's success from DEECD’s viewpoint, nominating technology and the way it is used, flexible learning spaces and team work within the school as a best practice model for other schools. He believes that DEECD’s would affirm the improvement in student learning outcomes, increased enrolment and drop in absenteeism as positive markers, supported by highly positive staff and parent
opinion and student engagement surveys. However he cited one more element in his summation, "I think the main thing they’d probably see is we’re doing things differently and getting good results".

The external perception of Crossroads Primary School being a model for innovation and success is summed up in the 2012 article in the Sydney Morning Herald:

"(the school) is being used as an international template of how schools can provide the sort of 21st century skills employers are demanding. How to teach the so-called soft skills demanded of tomorrow's workforce - creativity, problem solving and the ability to work in teams - is a conundrum preoccupying educators... Technology might be the game-changer, but the educational philosophy championed by (Crossroads) Primary is almost 2000 years old. It is Greek historian and theorist Lucius Mestrius Plutarchus, circa AD45-125, that (Tom) is quoting when he says: "The mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be ignited." Practically, this means children at (Crossroads) pursue their own passions, in what is known as inquiry-based learning... "We know kids have different ways of learning; some are very much into the visual side of things, learning in a different way to someone reading text books," says (Tom) ... teachers at (Crossroads) Primary are more like facilitators ... (Tom) believes the approach is crucial if schools are to stay relevant (Sydney Morning Herald, Technology News, Apr 27, 2012).

Collectively, perceptions of Crossroads School by stakeholders within the school and its wider educational and local communities are that Crossroads School is well regarded for:

1. its research based pedagogical practice, designed to develop 21st Century learning skills such as collaboration, flexibility, inquiry, learner independence, metacognition, etc.
2. the range and use of technology and ways this is integrated into learning programs
3. the achievement of high academic standards in a traditionally underperforming socio-economic area
4. strong and shared leadership and good governance
5. and high levels of student, staff and community engagement in the school and its learning programs.

The RNL spoke of the very visible success marker of the use of technology and its associated high level partnerships which bring in funds and a high profile for the school, "One measure of success would be the number of visitors he (the principal)
has, that’s an enormous success … The esteem that he’s held in by Microsoft and the level of engagement he has with them. The number of requests he has to present at conferences, they’re all indicators (of success).”

The RNL spoke of the different perspectives outsiders have on the place of technology in the school:

Some people would suggest it’s the use of IT, and (Tom), you know, his connections with Microsoft and with Cisco that’s clearly an area of strong interest to him … But when you talk to (Tom) it’s not about the technology … it was nothing about the televisions themselves, it was simply a tool to increase the awareness of the students about the world around them and therefore to better engage them in their learning. And my conversations about technology have invariably come back to that sort of area, what are the outcomes for the kids, it’s that sort of conversation. Now I think most people would sort of … outsiders would see (Tom) as somebody who’s very heavily into technology, yeah he has an interest in it but it seems to be, from my perspective, a means to an end, it’s a tool (RNL).

However the RNL nominated another factor, “the most powerful measure of success from my perspective is the conversation I had around here with his teachers,” the strong learning community that exists within the school was cited as a critical success factor.

… this is a place where everybody learns and everybody learns all the time and that expectation is there. It’s not about the open plan classrooms, it’s not about the technology, those are things that simply facilitate the learning that goes on here. I think that’s not so much an innovation as a way of doing things that people intuitively understand and feel good about but can’t engage in often because of the limitations of the facilities they’re in or the type of leadership they’ve got. (Tom) facilitates the learning community here … have a look at the interactions between people, that’s what’s happening here that personally I’d like to see happening right across the network (RNL).

The RNL spoke of the high levels of student self-directed and independent learning evident in the school’s learning environment:

To me it’s a fantastic way of operating. You can sit in the spaces over there and I’ve done this and talked to the kids about what they’re doing and why they’re doing it and … you can have a very good conversation with those kids about what they’re doing and why they’re doing it and where they’re going with it. Now that to me … is a powerful way to build a learning environment (RNL).

The technology, strong and shared leadership and governance, flexible learning centres and a learning community focus were supported by the SC President as key success factors:

I think the school’s innovative because from what I hear there’s not many other schools that are using as much technology perhaps, that have the open learning
centres that we have. I think the other innovations are good governance and exceptional leadership from the top down ... I think everyone seems to be on the same page and that’s what I find is perhaps what gives it the innovation here ... continuing with the professional development and ... everyone’s researching, everyone’s looking for innovative ideas to bring into the school so it’s not becoming stale … (SC President).

The SC President supported the school having high levels of student engagement in the learning, "... there seems to be the innovations there to motivate them (students) to actually be interested in the learning process … rather than disengaging from it."

The school’s leadership team articulated the belief that the school was innovative because they were always trying to reflect on and improve everything that they do, reinforcing the notion that Crossroads Primary School is a successful learning community and citing Tom’s mantra of “if you are not moving forward, you are moving backwards.” The outward markers of successful innovation were listed as, “The flexible learning spaces, personalized learning, relationships, the role of the teacher with students, teamwork, integrative technology, … the way furniture is used, the curriculum, inquiry learning”, affirming the school’s pedagogical focus on technology, building 21st Century learning skills and student engagement.

The staff group felt that the strength of the leadership team was the critical success factor for the school, referring to its good governance. In addition, the variety of different innovative programs which build current and relevant skills for student personal and learning independence, such as “inquiry learning, discovery time, instead of always doing set lessons for literacy, numeracy …” were seen as factors in the school’s success. The staff group outlined a key success of the school being that it bases its directions and staffing decisions on strong research and best practice, “… tapping into people that are experts and renowned researchers in education and child based innovations and also people that are expert in their own fields.” They added that the school’s links into community projects such as ‘the reality groups’ were a strong success factor in working with parents and the local community to build a stronger learning community.

The parent group clearly articulated the school’s success factors as the Microsoft partnership, the ready access to technology, ‘the awards they keep winning’, the flexible structure of the classrooms: ‘they’re not stuck with one teacher all the time in a classroom’, the improvement focus of the school’s practice, ‘they’re keeping with the times and seeing if they can get ahead of the times too, to be able to give our students something better and something different’ and the life skill opportunities being provided...
students “They’re taught to be very independent.” Their view of the teachers was that they were all excited to be working at the school and this had a positive impact on the students and the quality of the learning experience. They saw strong professional teams being built, “… because of how the learning centres are set up, it’s not just one teacher one class … They’re all in there together, so they’ve got to work together … They look like they are enjoying it.”

The parent group commented with some pride on the research basis that the school has for its projects and an understanding of the flow on benefits for their children in the development opportunities provided for teachers, “… they (the staff) get sent to places … They give them opportunities to experience … so they can understand.”

Throughout the interview, the RNL mentioned several times a tension between the perceptions of the success of school and the school’s data, “Some of his (Tom’s) key successes … In terms of school data, not yet, although some of his Attitudes to School stuff is pretty good. But I wouldn’t … he’s got a longer term view of that.” Furthermore:

The connection between high level outcomes and a lot of the work is possibly not as strong now as it could be, that’s pretty high level work for any school, in fact that’s very high level…I don’t think it’s there as strongly as (Tom) would like it be … there’s a hell of a lot going on here, but I suppose for me is what’s the evidence that it’s having the impact that you want to have, so what is the impact that you want to have (RNL).

Further reflecting on the principal’s view of this tension,

I don’t think he sees himself as being the best school in the state on NAPLAN data, I don’t think that’s of interest to him. By and large the (principal) peer group that he works with … are pretty much of a mind that you’re not about getting stuff that’s going to make you look good … it’s actually about making sure that kids in this area, particularly in this area where it’s such a disadvantaged area, that they get the outcomes that they need and they deserve. So it’s more about the whole child than about the NAPLAN, but my question to (Tom) would still remain, OK what is the vision around that, what are the strategies, we can articulate those, what’s your evidence that you’re actually achieving that (RNL).

While the school’s use of data is evident, it was not highly visible and did not feature strongly in discussions with any group or individual. Reading data for individual students appeared as a Data Wall in the staff room and parent, staff and student opinion surveys were on display in the conference room. However Tom said that “teachers have their own data which drives teaching and learning” and use of data at a class and grade level was supported by the leadership team who said “we look at our data.”
Tom stated that data collection was very important to the school and “you've got to have a lot” While he spoke of using data for a purpose and changes that had been made to the school's practice as a result of data, he did not speak a great deal about the achievement standards of students other than to express an opinion of DEECD's perspective, “I would say that they would see that the improvement in the learning outcomes as being quite significant over a number of years.” This comment appears to contradict what the RNL is saying who goes on to claim that “the data was not as flash as it could be.” However, the parent group believed that the school's outcomes advantaged their children, “… this one being a school where the grade 7’s, or the grade 6’s going into year 7 are well adapted and ahead of their time for learning.”

In looking for things that have been unsuccessful in the school, Tom said that at one stage he made some key mistakes when he “took his eye off the ball … (I) made a lot of assumptions that things were going alright and they weren't. There was an underlying thing there in the subculture and it wasn’t good.” However, other interviewees struggled to find something in the school which was unsuccessful. All reinforced the decision making process being slow, deliberative, highly flexible and collaborative, reflecting a measured approach where mistakes are not able to develop. The RNL described Tom's role in this, “He seems to be more the tortoise than the hare, he’s slow and deliberate from what I can see rather than rush into something where you’re likely to fall over. I’ve never seen any evidence of that sort of thing.” The staff group talked about Tom’s expectations for flexibility in the decision making process, “… he’ll say how are you going to change or modify all that if that's not exactly meeting the learning outcomes for the kids …” The SC President affirmed the principal's highly consultative methods which ensures success, “You might have the vision but you’ve got to compromise and you’ve got to share it and you’ve got to be willing to accept other people’s ideas and views, and I think that’s what (Tom) does really well, you know, without losing track of where it’s going.”

The Principal's Role in Leading Innovation and Success

What is the principal's background and personal perspective on his educational leadership?

Tom has been an educator, teacher and school leader for 44 years, 22 at the current school. He originally came to the school as a leading teacher, a position he held for less than 12 months. He was then appointed as assistant principal for several years
before taking up the position of principal, which he has held for over 20 years. This was his first and only principalship.

Tom’s educational background is in low socio-economic schools and communities. He came to the school and moved into the assistant principal position as the previous principal neared the end of his career. Tom expressed feelings of frustration due to the lack of change in the school and a sense of there being ‘better ways to do things’ to improve outcomes for students. At this time, he was influenced and guided by a key mentor, an experienced local principal who he describes as “a professional friend for over 20 years” and as “being ahead of his time”. In the early days of Tom’s principalship, his mentor principal challenged him as to whether he wanted to be ‘an administrator or an educator’ and Tom used this as a guiding driver for his work as an educator.

I had to get a mentor in your first job as a principal and … I rang someone up I didn’t know and he said to me, “do you want to be an administrator or an educator?” and I thought that’s a pretty obvious question, I want to be an educator. He said, “good, because if you want to be an administrator I’m not going to work with you”. So he challenged me a lot and made me think differently, and I reckon if I hadn’t of got him I’d have been a good administrator. I probably would’ve fallen into the culture of the school and things would’ve drifted along nicely and probably stayed here for a few years and then probably moved on. But he made me think about it differently, he got me doing some research, and I was always a reader anyhow, but he got me reading different things and all of a sudden I thought we can do things better, you know, we can make the changes. Probably in the first six months I was getting restless thinking well, you know, we need to head in a different direction, how are we going to do it? So I starting tinkering around with things in the start but I wasn’t really getting a lot of support and I thought no, have to bite the bullet somewhere along the line (Principal).

Privately, Tom has had a rich and successful life running parallel in time to his work as an educator. He came from a country background, working in his father’s business, developing a strong work ethic and the need to take responsibility from an early age. He was a gifted athlete, playing Australian Football League (AFL) football, rowing from a young age and running for Australia. Through this, he developed persistence, resilience and independence and was influenced by older role models. He became an AFL umpire and with eleven years of senior umpiring was regarded as an elite AFL umpire. He coached and mentored junior umpires for many years during and after this time and continues to have an expansive network of influential people from this early life experience.
Tom’s vision is to build a learning community which is student centred and where everyone can achieve, regardless of their home background. Staff saw Tom's vision as being the school’s vision for its future.

Tom describes his style as “laidback and calm” and leadership as “a game but you are really in control”.

... some principals get into trouble because they become mongrels all the time, they don’t know when to step aside, you know, it’s that control stuff ... I reckon I crack it here about once every two years ... (on this occasion) it was really against our philosophies, it was against supporting the kids, and I said, well as far as I’m concerned you all need to think, because this is completely unprofessional and I’m not going to speak to you until you come back and you’re ready to talk professionally and I just walked out. That was a shock tactic and it was done deliberately, it was only a spur of the moment thing but I walked out. Well next day they came back and the leadership team came and said we were out of line ... and we sat down, it was fine, no animosity ... (Principal).

Being prepared to visibly ‘draw the line’ on what he believes in and demonstrate strength of conviction and courageous leadership is part of a story of Tom’s leadership that seems to have become a cultural myth owned by all members of the school community. It was told to the researcher by Tom and referred to by parents and the leadership team. Tom told this story as a key moment in time when he decided to exert his leadership to open up the possibilities for new school direction based on an improvement model.

Not long after Tom had taken up the permanent position he came in during a school break with some friends and knocked down all the dividing walls of the classrooms to open up the learning spaces. Staff came in on the Monday and had to adjust to new ways of teaching in the new spaces.

I bit the bullet and said ... we’re an open plan school, we’ve got a fantastic environment, we’ve got an opportunity to do something completely different to get better at what we’re doing ... so I sort of said to them ... we’re going to knock down the walls which was almost heretic in those days. Pull the walls out and open up these spaces and then learn how we’re going to work together for six months and then give you the choice of this is where you want to work or not. So I did that (Principal).

Tom sees himself as ‘the driving force’ of the school’s direction but that over time his role has changed and is now “… more mentoring the staff (and) the leadership team … while I’m still passionate … I think it’s contagious.”

If you’ve still got that passion and drive and things are contagious it’ll flow on. But you’ve got to be careful you don’t step in too often because if you start, it comes
back to the old way of being a principal where you’re telling everyone what to do and you’re driving it … you really want them to be driving it with your support … that’s why I see my role more as mentoring. And providing … making sure that what’s needed for it to happen is in place, whether it’s resources or time or finances … But at the same time throwing little seeds in, so we have discussions and I throw seeds of things I’d like to see sort of moving towards and just seeing where they go (Principal).

He describes the act of leadership as “… (The) fire’s got to be lit from somewhere” and “throwing little seeds in” and “selling ideas.” The principal identifies the outcome of this activity as the “next level of leadership needing to follow through on practices – whether they agree or not is irrelevant.”

Tom described his communication and decision making style as slow and methodical although decisions could also be made quickly if need be. He stressed the importance of personal communication one on one with staff to share high expectations. He stated his belief that ‘it is everyone’s professional responsibility to know what is happening in the school.’

Tom described himself as a strategic networker and that “knowing the right people is important, exceptionally important.” He provided an example, “I always aim to get to know one new person wherever I go (conferences, meetings, etc.) – that’s strategic and it benefits the school.” The RNL supported the fact that Tom is well respected by his colleagues, “I think there’d be a high level of respect for (Tom) right across the network … I couldn’t think of a Principal or Assistant Principal who doesn’t think geez (Tom) … he does some good stuff.” Tom is also a key figure in a local collegial group of experienced male principals who meet weekly for breakfast, gym club and Friday drinks and which includes his mentor principal of over 20 years.

They have a gym group that I think is an important part of his life, an important part of the other principals’ (lives) … the important thing for them is not the gym but it’s the professional conversations they have. But I also get a strong sense there’s a very strong or very powerful network in that group … I think those sorts of things have been quite influential on (Tom’s) thinking … (RNL).

Tom sees his role as “trying to do away with your job and create an environment that doesn’t need you.” He has a clear goal for the sustainability of his leadership once he leaves the school. Tom has recently rejected offers to lead other schools, one a larger state school and another a large, high profile, private school that wanted him to recreate the success of Crossroads Primary School.

I realised how good my own school was, the feeling, all the energy that was in the school and all that sort of stuff … And I’m thinking do I need to do all the hard work
and crack the whip and do all that sort of stuff for a couple of years and probably destroy my own health and that. Not sure if you’d make the changes in a school like that, so I said no I’m happy where I am, because I can see we’ve come so far but we can go a bit further (Principal).

How do other stakeholders view the principal and his leadership of the school?

1. **Personal Attributes and Behaviours**

The following Table A3.1 tallies the 20 words most often used to describe the principal by the interviewees.

**Table A3.1: Stakeholder Groups’ Word Analysis for Principal Crossroads PS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Attribute</th>
<th>RNL</th>
<th>SCP</th>
<th>LSH</th>
<th>STF</th>
<th>PAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Supportive-gives supp’t</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Visionary-has a vision</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Gains respect- respected</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trustworthy-gains trust</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Driven - drives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Proud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Approachable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Passionate-shows pass’n</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Works in the system</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Genuine</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Open minded</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Networker-team orient’</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Learner - learns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Measured</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Fair</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Caring - cares</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Values driven</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Committed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Compassionate</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Challenging</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 stakeholder groups agreement  
3 stakeholder groups agreement  
2 stakeholder groups agreement  
1 stakeholder group
The attributes used by the most stakeholder groups were supportive, visionary and gains respect with supportive and visionary being the most frequently used descriptors across all groups. Three stakeholder groups strongly agreed that the principal was trustworthy, driven, proud, approachable, passionate and someone who works in the system.

Across all groups the most frequently used words were supportive, visionary and trustworthy, followed by driven, proud, compassionate and genuine.

The words used to describe the principal might reflect the type of relationship that the principal has with each group. The school council president (SCP) used the words compassionate, trustworthy and genuine with high frequency to describe the principal, indicating a close and mutually respectful relationship between the two. The leadership team (LSH), who would work closely with the principal on implementing change, describes him as supportive, visionary, driven and trustworthy. While the staff team (STF) also saw the principal as visionary, they used the words respect and approachable reflecting a different level of working relationship and interaction to the leadership team. The RNL, who is also the principal's line manager, described him as a networker and open minded. For the parent group (PAR), the principal's pride in the school and his work, his approachability and passion were the key attributes, like the staff group possibly reflecting a more distant relationship.

The principal is seen to be visionary by those who work closely with him, suggesting he is forward thinking, has a clear picture of the school’s strategic direction and provides clarity for those responsible for its implementation. It may indicate a propensity for being innovative or thinking differently but this is not necessarily so. The staff group also sees the principal’s visionary behavior and this is agreed to by the RNL line manager, who is most likely to have an understanding of the strategic thinking behind the principal’s leadership of the school. The leadership team clearly sees the principal as the driver of school direction, something you would expect this team to observe and engage in with the principal in setting strategic direction. Interestingly, this is understood to a lesser extent by the parent group who would be observing and interpreting the principal's behavior from a greater distance. The parents and SC President see the principal as being proud of his achievements, possibly reflecting their own pride in the school; however the RNL affirms this characteristic. The same three groups see the principal as someone who works in (and on) the education system, presumably to get what he wants to reach his vision for the school.
The remaining high frequency words used to most commonly describe the principal are wellbeing words: supportive, gains respect, trustworthy, approachable, genuine and compassionate suggesting the principal deliberately invests time and effort into engaging with stakeholders to ensure he takes his staff and community with him on the school’s improvement journey.

2. Leadership Style

The picture of the attributes of the principal is affirmed by interviewees when considering his leadership style and associated behaviours. Across the interviews, the portrayal was of a confident leader who was very comfortable with himself and who put time into building trust and developing positive relationships with staff, students and parents. The leadership team clearly articulated this, “… you’ve got that trust and that belief in you and so you want to succeed.”

… the conversations you have, it’s not just the professional conversations, it’s the ribbing about the football game on the weekend or it’s everything, it’s just the way he does things and the way that I think he feels comfortable, and we feel comfortable enough going to him about things and he would be just as easily coming back to you … And he knows the things in your personal life I think as well, … it’s that caring about you as an individual and not just as an employee … Knowing people and their families and connections and where you’re from and what things are happening. And be visible … he gets to know each staff member on a personal level just like teachers that teach the students do and we do as teams (Leadership Team).

Underpinning the development of trust and building relationships is Tom’s collaborative style, reaffirmed by all interviewees.

… it seems to be collaborative, he listens, he thinks, and he acts but he acts within the framework of making sure that the outcome is going to be of benefit to the school community … it’s an interesting way he works … he certainly has ideas and really good views but … it’s not railroaded … he’ll listen to what’s going on. And then he’ll apply, using logic, why that way might work or why that’s sort of slightly flawed or whatever. So he’s certainly across a lot of stuff and certainly done a lot of thinking and research … he seems to definitely allow others to come in on it … so he doesn’t sort of own it as his own, you know, to put his hand up and say I did this, I did that, it’s more of a leading a team … definitely leading rather than being the head (SC President).

The staff group outlined how Tom led the expected collaborative culture of the school stating there was a “lot of informal communication” and decision making happening across the school. Visiting the staff room at recess and lunchtime affirmed it being a lively communication hub for the school, with the staff, leadership team and principal constantly crossing between personal and professional lines to deepen relationships. It
was described as a place where everyone came together, a place where you wanted to be to belong to the school and identify with its culture. Tom’s personal, committed and inclusive communication style appears to have created a school culture of shared decision making and strong communication patterns through informal means.

The leadership team spoke of Tom’s hands on approach, that he knew what was happening in the school and was a visible presence, “he comes in and watches, observes, has discussions with us … he’s right there involved … he’s walking around into learning centres and talking to the kids, talking to teachers the whole time.”

The parent group saw Tom as the key factor in the school’s success and expressed strong trust in his leadership. They reaffirmed his ‘hands on’ approach, “He’s got his fingers in every pie.” They described him as:

… not an extrovert, and yet he appears to be the strength, you know he’s the strength … he’s a quiet achiever … He’s friendly, And he actually knows the kids names too … he doesn’t come across with a superiority … he’s out there … not hiding in the office … he’s out and about all the time, you see his face and when you see someone on a regular basis like that … it makes you feel more comfortable (Parent Group).

Leadership team used the metaphor of a family for the staff team, underpinned by strong and respectful relationships which operate in a non-hierarchical manner.

… the big thing that comes out working … is relationships … what holds our school together is just the way everyone works together and everyone supports each other and it doesn’t matter if you’re a Leading Teacher or if you’re a first year teacher … we can do all these fantastic things because of the way we communicate and the way we work in teams … (There is) open communication between everyone at the school and (Tom) values people’s opinions whether they’re a first year graduate or … an assistant principal … We have high expectations of each other (Leadership).

This was supported by the parent group who also used the family metaphor in describing staff, “They work as a team, and there’s a lot of team building done … they’re a family, I think it’s more about the community. I don’t think it’s about individual satisfaction or personal satisfaction.”

The leadership team spoke of the risk taking culture fostered and promoted by Tom:

… everything that he believes in and says, he is proactive about it … he’s right behind there pushing it all of the way from the top. He encourages the teachers to take risks, so if you want to trial something, if you’re a leader or just a teacher in one of the learning spaces you will be supported a hundred percent to trial new things. If it doesn’t work that’s a really good reflection and you talk about personally why it didn’t work (Leadership Team).
The RNL linked Tom’s leadership style with his personal qualities:

… he’s a non-judgmental person, he’s very rarely critical … I think that’s an important element of his leadership style, and I suspect, I don’t have any direct evidence of it apart from the observations of how staff interact with him, that (this) allows people to build a level of trust ‘cause they would know they’re not going to be judged by (Tom) … I’ve never seen any evidence of him making his mind up about something quickly, he tends to sit on things for a while, have a think about them … I’d even suggest if he doesn’t need to make a decision then he probably doesn’t (RNL).

However the RNL also spoke of the strength of Tom’s leadership.

I think he uses fairly subtle mechanisms to hold people to account, and I would suggest to you the accountability he puts more in the teams … I don’t get a sense of a hierarchical line of authority here. OK (Tom’s) the boss and people know that but … I get a strong sense that the highest level of accountability here is teacher to teacher (RNL).

This was supported by the leadership team who attested to Tom’s ability to hold staff to account, “He’s very good at finding ways to get the message across without laying blame … guiding how to have those difficult conversations in a way that doesn’t offend and doesn’t stifle the work that’s being done.”

From across the interviews, the picture built up of Tom’s leadership style is someone who is focused on building trusting relationships, collaborative, inclusive, an expert communicator, strong and clear on where the school is going, hands on and able to hold people to account. He has built a family, included everyone it, established some predetermined rules through a shared vision, lets family members get on with their work and then holds them to account for their outcomes.

The RNL outlined some contrasts in Tom’s leadership style:

I’m very curious about (Tom), he’s a bit of a mystery, he’s very open about most things but he seems to be very guarded about some things, and to understand his leadership style … if I’ve asked (Tom) directly about his leadership style I don’t know that I’ve got a direct response (RNL).

Furthermore,

I think (Tom) does enjoy being in the limelight, he does like the light shining on him … I could see (Tom) really enjoying that (the education awards) from a personal perspective … but he doesn’t make a big deal out of it, he really enjoys it but he doesn’t make a big deal of it … one of the ways he gets satisfaction from the work he does is through the eyes of other people (RNL).

According to the RNL, this ambiguity is highlighted with his principal peers:
... amongst his peers, local peers he’s probably less prepared to ... I won’t say blow his own trumpet because he doesn’t do that, but to talk about the work that he’s doing than he is with people outside. There’s a ... it’s not embarrassment 'cause he’s not embarrassed about the work, it’s almost people are too close ... he’ll happily go to Thailand or to Brazil or to South Africa ... talking at conferences, I think he’ll do that more easily than he would talk to a local network meeting (RNL).

The RNL struggled to understand Tom’s responses to the spotlight of being seen as a successful leader of a successful school however this fits with the humble leader qualities outlined by the interviewees. He may enjoy the ‘limelight’ and be proud of his achievements, but he is also quiet about it when he feels this may have an impact on others. This is especially true with his principal peers who may possibly feel threatened or jealous of the attention and financial resourcing that Tom is able to achieve for his school. And Tom doesn’t share at this level with his line manager RNL, perhaps not wanting to talk about himself or to lose control of how he is spoken about by the RNL to others in a way which could be seen as self-promoting.

The RNL left no doubt about the intentionality of Tom’s leadership style.

... he’s a pretty good, a very subtle manipulator, very skilled at it. But again if you ask him an upfront question about that he’ll give you a big grin and smile and then you’re off on a tangent somewhere. He’s cagey, a bit like a fox but a very benign sort of fox (RNL).

3. Drivers

Interviewees portrayed Tom as the humble leader; he is not leading Crossroads School to draw attention to himself.

Ego is not a big part of ... I think (Tom) has a great deal of confidence in himself as a leader, don’t get me wrong, he absolutely has a great deal of confidence but it’s not about him (RNL).

So what are Tom’s drivers for the work that he has undertaken for the past 22 years at Crossroads School? The interviewees agreed that the key driving force for Tom’s leadership was to provide opportunities for students that they wouldn’t have otherwise, summed up by the leadership team:

... he’s trying to give them every possible tool and advantage as they can get that they can go out and do great things ... creating a place where kids like to be, where they experience success ... they get opportunities here that they might not get ... in their home environment especially in this area. I think they get that chance to try things that they would never ever be exposed to unless they came here (Leadership Team).
The SC President broadened this further to include staff and students and to reinforce his humble qualities.

I think he just has a passion to bring out the best in the people that are around him whether it’s his staff or whether it’s … his students. I just feel that that’s … probably something that’s fairly hard to find these days … I know he doesn’t do it for his own benefit and he was extremely modest when he spoke about it (winning awards) … I broached it because I had a feeling he wasn’t going to say anything and I said just before you start Tony I want to make an announcement, I want to congratulate you on behalf of school council and the parents and everyone … I think he was a little bit embarrassed (SC President).

The staff group summed up the unwavering strength of Tom’s drivers for school success, “The change in the school over the last twenty three years that he’s been here, I think that’s his biggest achievement, he’s getting the school he wants.”

4. **Sustainability of Innovation and Success**

One indicator of the perception of interviewees of the role of the principal in leading the school’s innovation and success is to consider its duration if he was no longer in the school. At Crossroads Primary School, interviewees saw the school’s culture as being strong and ‘not reliant on the principal’, underpinned by the belief that staff, school leaders, School Council and parents would continue the work. Staff stated that the school would “change and evolve” but “we would always stay true to what he’s tried to build here.” And the SC President summed it up saying that a new principal would need to share some “village vision” and that “they wouldn’t be allowed to lower the standard.” Interviewees saw the stakeholders in the school as the guardians of the culture that has been built by the principal over a sustained period of time, a culture which everyone in the school subscribed to.

This sustainability of Tom’s work was outlined by the SC President using the metaphor of building a house.

It’s like when you build a house, you can build a house to the Australian standards, building code, and most of these modern houses are built to within an inch, centimetre, a millimetre of just falling below, but that is the building code and they’re on it and they can say this house is built to the standard. Now it may fall down in ten years but that’s not the worry because it is built to that standard. But then there are others that will build it to a little bit above that standard, maybe even more above that standard because they are that type of person that says, “hey I want my house to stand for a hundred years, even though it’s going to have multiple owners, I want it to be still there in a hundred years” … I think (Tom’s) definitely the one looking at the hundred years (SC President).
Other Factors that Have Led to the School’s Innovation and Success

Tom is seen by the interviewees to have a strong and enduring connection to the school, built up over a sustained period of leadership. It is common knowledge that he has had a personal connection with the school, his two children having attended the school over a decade ago and his wife working at the school in past years. The staff group had a view that Tom’s wife played a key role in his successful leadership of the school.

I’m sure (Tom) would say she (his wife) is his backbone … a sounding board at home, and … she’s supported him when he’s travelled, and I think when he won the leadership award she was proudly there to enjoy it with him along with his kids, they were so proud of him … (Staff Group).

Tom identified placing key staff into pivotal positions as being a key factor in the success of the school. Staff and leadership team members left little doubt that this comment referred to the school’s assistant principal who is in charge of leading curriculum across the school. While Tom is the key person who selects staff, the assistant principal (curriculum) works closely with the young leaders in a coaching and supportive relationship. The close professional relationship between Tom and the assistant principal (curriculum) is clearly described by the staff group as a success factor, as is the role that she plays in mentoring and coaching them. This is further mentioned by the RNL, “I think he has, from an outsider’s perspective, a strong trust in and reliance on (assistant principal) for a lot of the teaching and learning.” The staff group added, “… she’s made such an impact on our school, in a positive way.”

Summary

Tom’s leadership longevity in the school may have had an impact on interviewees and the consistency of opinion, clarity of purpose and the strong sense of trust in his leadership expressed by all groups and individuals. He has built a highly successful school, an image that gains strong agreement from within all stakeholder groups interviewed and reinforced by external perceptions of the school.

At the essence of Tom’s leadership, and building on his formative years of leadership development, he is a networker and relationships builder. At this stage of his principalship, he has the confidence and school wide support to be able to lead through the work of others and has built a family at Crossroads Primary School to share the work and create something which gives meaning to those involved. Tom’s vision and drive is to provide the best possible opportunities for the students at his school. His way of
achieving this is to do things differently, shaped by his research, the school’s need, the input of students, staff, parents or council members and his access to high level international agencies.

Tom has built a risk taking environment where anything is possible as long as it is shaped by the agreed school wide processes. While the words innovative and creative were seldom used by interviewees, all groups used the language of doing things differently; describing a way of working that was representative of the school’s culture.

While Tom works collaboratively with people to achieve his vision, there is no doubt that he knows where he is going and is skilfully manipulating internal and external factors to achieve this. He is a strong leader and staff know and accept that he is prepared to take a stand if needed. While this was a factor in his early leadership and the culture perpetuates the story about this, over time Tom has been able to modify the situations and processes and build the trust and understanding so that he rarely needs to do this anymore.

While there is little doubt of the strength of his conviction and leadership, Tom goes about his work in his school and his network of principal colleagues in a quiet and unassuming way, preferring to bring others on board in his school and to share the work quietly with trusted colleagues. He openly shares his work in the broader educational arena, possibly to contribute to the improvement of the system in a way that won’t draw unwanted attention from his peers.

Crossroads Primary School owns this work as their school’s culture and profile, shared and reaffirmed by all those who engage with school.
Appendix 4: Complete Case Story: Breezes Primary School

Features of the School

Breezes Primary School is located in a large regional city approximately 85km from the centre of the Victorian capital city of Melbourne, Australia. While the regional city has areas of high socio-economic disadvantage compared to other parts of the state, it also has pockets of affluence. The residential location of Breezes Primary School has traditionally attracted middle class, Australian born families. In 2007, 38.6% of total persons in the school's neighborhood were aged 25-54 years, 14.5% were 15-24 years and 12.5% were 5-14 years with 80.3% of the total born in Australia and 89.8% speaking English only at home. Over 50% of employed persons over the age of 15 years were employed as professionals, clerical or administrative workers or managers. (Australian Bureau of Statistics - www.censusdata.abs.gov.au)

The continuing expansion of the local university into areas close to Breezes Primary School, coupled with the school's longstanding strong reputation has contributed to its increasing size. The school caters for approximately 600 students in years prep to six (five to twelve years of age), an increase of approximately 100 children over the past five years. However, with the school's success being widely acknowledged, over 50% of the student body is now drawn from outside the school's local catchment area and strong enrolment pressure is being felt.

In 2011, Breezes Primary School had 10% of students with a Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) and an Index of Community Social and Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 1072 (1000 being the Australian average ICSEA score). 19% of student backgrounds were placed in the bottom quartile, 19% and 38 % in the middle quartiles and 24% in the top quartile (compared to the Australian distribution of 25% in each quartile).

The school was originally built in 1963 as part of the post war 1950’s residential expansion with two pebbledix covered buildings, single classrooms opening off one or two sides of long passageways that cut through the length of the buildings. The school has always held a strong reputation in the tightly interconnected regional community. Jan commenced at the school as principal early 2007, following her first principalship at another local school, widely regarded as ‘a tough school’ in a low socio-economic area. The previous principal of Breezes Primary School left to take up a DEECD senior
leadership position. Loyalty to him and his past leadership of Breezes Primary School was evident in interviews with both educational and community sectors.

I think I was pretty lucky to inherit a school that certainly had a reputation of being quite forward in terms of curriculum and had been really well-led. But given that, where we were ... in terms of education, it was still a long corridor, single classrooms with teachers working behind closed doors ... teachers sure they were teaming together to plan but when they actually did their core business it was in isolation ... the school ... physically looked very different then to what it does now (Principal).

The school's strong reputation is supported by the SC President who says there were “... no bad stories, I think (the previous principal) was well liked and had started some of the things that have carried on since he left ... the groundwork for the school was set to a certain degree.” This view was reinforced by the RNL:

The school from my knowledge was always a school that had ... fairly traditional processes that suited the community in which the children come from. The children came to school quite ready to learn, they had parents who were very interested in the children’s learning, and the school appeared to have clarity around all the processes and structures in place, this is how we do it and this is how we’ll all do it in regards to literacy and numeracy practice (RNL).

The staff group, some who had worked with both Jan and the previous principal, expanded on the growth of the school.

A lot has changed; it was very traditional, lots of single classrooms, some team teaching happening across the school but not the expectation of team teaching that there is now and certainly not the feeling of communities of learners, like the unit communities (Staff Group).

The traditional community support of the school was represented in the parent group comments, “... from my experience (the school) has always been fairly ahead of the pack in schools, it’s always had a good reputation for high academic excellence.”

Breezes Primary School’s motto is Aim High. Its website states, (the school) ... “is an innovative school which prides itself on trying to achieve the best possible outcomes in student learning.” In 2009 the school participated in an action research project linked with academic researchers from the local university and supported by the DEECD's Innovations and Next Practice division. The Senior Learning Community was the targeted area for change. The focus was to use pedagogy and space to engage senior students in their learning by providing a personalized, relevant and current curriculum. The DEECD Innovative Learning Environment Project website (of which the school was a researched case study) states, "(the) ... school community prides itself on being a leading school in the innovation of education. Student engagement in learning and
catering for 21st century learners was the original impetus for whole school cultural change.” (DEECD - [www.education.vic.gov.au/research/researchpublications](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/research/researchpublications))

The school website outlines its physical appeal, “The school is situated on four hectares of land and provides an attractive landscaped environment … It is on a sloping site with large open spaces, new basketball courts and developmental play spaces.” Although regarded as large by primary school standards and certainly large for its regional location, the school prides itself on having a small school feel. It is organised into four distinct groups called learning communities, designed to engage staff and students in smaller learning groups with a focus on personalized learning for students and collaborative work teams for staff. This structure includes:

- Prep Learning Community of four home classes which can open up into two larger spaces,
- Junior Learning Community, also with four home groups opening into two spaces and catering for approximately 160 year 1 and 2 students
- Middle Learning Community with seven year 3 and 4 home groups in a new open plan building developed in 2010 as part of the Building the Education Revolution (BER) scheme, including art, science, home economics, construction and library areas and
- Senior Learning Community with eight year 5 and 6 home groups and ready access to their own art, science, theatrette and outdoor learning spaces. This space was built in 2006 and has been part of an action research project. (Note: while the formal names given are Learning Communities, these are often referred to informally as learning units and the Senior Learning Community as the SLU – Senior Learning Unit).

Units are entered into through purpose built doorways set into the original passage which gives a sense of entry into the learning communities as well as creating boundaries between units. All teacher offices are shared and are separately located from the learning spaces, indicating student ownership of the leaning spaces. Additionally the school has a Library and ICT laboratory; technology infrastructure supports its integration across all learning areas. Technology hardware includes banks of IBM and Mac laptops, netbooks, I-pads, desktop computers, interactive whiteboards and a range of digital tools. The school engages students in multimedia through its TV and radio station. It offers students specialist classes in French, Physical Education,
Music, Library and Visual and Performing Arts. While students were using laptops and
desktop computers as appropriate to their tasks and teachers were using interactive
whiteboards to support student learning, student and staff use of technology was not
highly visible across all areas of the school. Jan stated that technology required a
renewed focus and all staff had recently been given use of a school I-pad to drive this
regeneration. The physical appearance of the school was open and accommodated the
purposeful movement of large numbers of children and small group and individual
selection of working spaces and modes of learning. It was extremely well organised,
quiet, purposeful and tidy with evidence of collective pride in the school. The
overwhelming sense was that the school was highly organised, purposeful and tightly
managed.

The Senior Learning Unit curriculum includes traditional subject areas such as Literacy
and Numeracy and Deep Knowledge Units. Students choose workshops in specialist
classes including Art, Music, French, Drama, Library, Computer Lab and Physical
Education. Students create personalised timetables for their weekly lessons based
around the achievement of learning goals set and monitored by students in weekly
conference consultations with teachers.

The school’s leadership team consists of the principal Jan, one assistant principal and
two non-teaching leading teachers who have whole school responsibilities as
instructional coaches. The leadership team members are all new (or recently returned)
to the school in a leadership position in the last two years. Previously these positions
were held by longer term staff who had originally worked closely with Jan in
establishing the new directions and engaging with staff to drive and implement the
improvement model. The staff team is a mixed profile with many new and younger,
inexperienced staff working with more experienced teachers who have been at the
school for a long time; some having worked with Jan and the previous principal. The
principal expressed her approach to staffing, the value of bringing in new graduate
teachers and the non-negotiable requirement of working in teams.

… it’s easier to grow our own than unlearn some others, teach others … we do
take experienced teachers but we try to make sure that they’re a match … it’d be
devastating for us if we had to take someone in here that was not because it has
such a distinct impact on the team … we have to be really careful about the people
who we do employ. We’re quite specific about this … you don’t teach behind
closed doors and you have to be receptive to coaching and you’ve got to be a
team player…part of the reason we took on coaching is we had so many graduate
teachers … they need the curriculum support … but we’d rather do that (Principal).
The Culture of the School

The principal described the school’s culture as one of continuing change. She reflected on the current challenge being that much of the change hadn’t been as deep and as sustainable as they had wished, partly due to the change culture being so rapid and there was some staff discomfort with this.

… the culture around that is a culture of change … the change at the moment is perhaps a little bit rapid which is why there’s probably a few people (saying) “… it’s all too much, let us just do one thing at a time.” But then if you ask them do they want to stop any of it, none of them would say “yeah, I want to go back to the way I was”… they all want the change, I think they want the support and the time through the change, they need to see the whole cycle of it … (Principal).

Jan went on to describe the school as having a learning culture with instructional coaching and feedback at its core, based on data, research, feedback and explicit instruction.

The type of coaching we used has changed, so it’s gone more from what would you like to do, nicely, nicely, to here’s what the data’s telling us, this is what the research is telling us, this is around explicit instruction. But people are actually ready for that, they’re ready for honest and reflective feedback (Principal).

This view was supported by the leadership team who described the school’s culture as starting to see evidence of deeper change.

… it’s a school that’s entered a new phase of learning and has started to take some baby steps towards what will be a significant shift in practice for our teachers … a significant shift in learning and belief in themselves, in our kids and in the way they learn (Leadership Team).

The staff described the different, more inclusive culture that has evolved under Jan’s leadership.

(The previous principal) … was a pretty clear cut sort of head that everyone answered to … so leadership had the view of what was going to happen in the school and that’s what happened … the shift now is to unit teams who have a much heavier involvement in making decisions at a unit level and … (its) much more distributive (Staff Group).

The staff group strongly supported the notion of change and the school having a learning improvement culture.

… it’s open to everybody, it’s not just open to unit leaders or leadership teams the opportunities to explore…in terms of the research and the sharing process, very rarely is it just the leadership that does the learning, … it’s not being accumulated from the top and then ’spruiked’ to everyone else. And there are just constant things that people are able to go and do …There’s that constant encouragement
for people to continue to learn … I don’t think there’s really been a standstill moment … I think that’s the culture that’s with the students, the teachers and the school as a whole (Staff Group).

The RNL provided an external view of the school’s culture, being a driven culture based on wanting to be the best. She held that educators outside the school observe Breezes Primary School staff having a shared language and the ability to hold their ground about what they do from a trained perspective. She said that the teachers “have an understanding that (the school) is a good school so the way they do it is the right way to do it.” This point emphasises the pride that the staff have in the school, its achievements and the unique way it goes about its business. It also highlights the shared language and strong research base of the school’s work.

Internally, the SC President sees the school’s culture as a positive one and the parent group reinforced this, seeing the collaborative staff culture as a positive sign ensuring teachers keep up to date and are adaptable with their practice.

… everybody is driven here, it seems like the teachers are, they’re really striving. They’re passionate … about learning … They’re stimulated to think about it … they’re right on top of everything … you often hear them talking about things that they’re going to do and there always seems to be someone putting up their hand for going overseas and learning about … new teaching practices … That culture is encouraged in the school, let’s have a go, let’s try something different, there’s encouragement for teachers to step outside their comfort zone, … they’re constantly learning … they all just collaborate together (Parent Group).

Across the interviews there was some evidence of fractures within the school’s culture. The leadership team presented as a strongly unified voice in their cohesive group of two leading teachers and assistant principal but they were not unified with the principal stating “I think as a leadership team we actually need to sit down and determine our perception of say, student lead as opposed to teacher lead, ‘cause I think we’re on a different page to (Jan).” They outlined the impact of their arrival on the school’s direction,

… new people come in and … you know what it’s like, new people come in, they have new ideas, they have a different perception of things, their view is different, and our view, our collective view of three is very, very different to the leadership team that (Jan) did have prior to the three of us coming in (Leadership Team).

They spoke about their strong team cohesion however they were not including the principal in this team,

… having three people that even though we think along the same lines we do stimulate each other, it’s not like we’re little robots for each other … we challenge
each other all the time ... so that has made our leadership, this team very strong I think (Leadership Team).

Furthermore, they seem aware of the cultural challenge their voices present for the principal, (The school’s) “been held up in such high esteem for such a long time and then...all of a sudden the three of us are starting to see holes ...”

Not only do they see themselves as separate from the principal, they also see their team as different to the staff, especially compared to the previous staff members in the leadership team positions,

It (the previous leadership team) was a very nice culture, everything was nice, everything was wonderful, yeah, everyone was good ... they were held up in such high esteem I don’t think they would’ve got much opposition ... the reason they didn’t get opposition is ‘cause they thought the same way they (the staff) did and they supported their current work. We’ve come in from different backgrounds with different thoughts, different ideas, challenging that way. And they came from here ... so they were within this culture, so they just virtually fostered that same culture ... they've never taught anywhere else. They didn’t bring anything ... Whereas we’re all outsiders (Leadership Team).

The staff team expressed some hesitation that they weren’t aware of what happens in other learning units in the school and frustration about the lack of opportunities to learn from the experiences of others and ‘getting lost’ in their units. The leadership team also mentioned this fracturing, especially in relation to the initial success of the Senior Learning Community which was used as the model for change

... there is no... forum for them to have those types of discussions. In regards to the senior learning unit and moving through the school that’s not what has occurred. That is very much its own identity, it has its own structure and it doesn’t resemble the other units in how they operate ... I think the staff are happy that the spotlight’s been taken off the SLU (Senior Learning Unit) and shared across the whole school now, because when I first arrived it was very much ... about the SLU. And there were some staff that often I heard say, you know, not in a derogative way but almost just as an “I’m almost tired of hearing about the SLU because it was, what about the rest of us” (Leadership Team).

This was reinforced by my personal observation of the staff room as being the only room in the school (that I saw) that had little on display representing a shared culture and few staff seemed to come into the staff room at break times, most preferring to stay in their unit shared office spaces. In my daily diary, I wrote, “The staffroom puzzled me. It felt unowned. It didn’t seem that anyone had put their stamp on it.” Leadership team affirmed this,

Although staff can be quite separate here, I mean the teachers that live down here in the MLU (Middle Learning Unit) very rarely leave this building, they would only
go up to the staffroom on a Wednesday for soup if it was soup club time or cake for birthdays otherwise they stay, and pretty much across the school you could say categorically people stay in their offices, in their little pods which they’ve created and they stay, they might go up and wander up and get a hot cup of tea or coffee or whatever but it’s straight back. And even you notice when we have staff meetings they tend to sit in their units even when they’re not required to. And we’ll try and mix it up, try and have a mix of seating every now and then depending on what the task is that we want them to do. But when they’re together everyone gets along really well, it’s not like people don’t know each other and they socialize quite well outside of school, there’s a number of little groups that are friends. But in terms of getting together and talking about practice across units … no it doesn’t happen (Leadership Team).

The staff team expressed a connection and trust of the principal:

Staff is one of her number one priorities in terms of supporting us and making sure that we feel comfortable in our position and we know what we’re doing and we’re making professional growth individually as well as the school (Staff Group).

However, this trust does not always extend to the work of the leadership team as a whole. Workload issues expressed by the staff team were a cause of frustration for the leadership team. They stated that ‘we work too hard’ is a favourite catchphrase of staff.

Furthermore, this staff perception is:

… often a barrier that we constantly face in regards to wanting to move forward in certain things… really if you ask them I don’t know that they could actually … give you a long list of things where you could go geez, you know, you really are overworked, we are just pumping it into you, but they couldn’t. We’ve asked them a number of times, tell us what it is, they can’t define it … The thing that gets me is that what we’ve brought in, to me we haven’t created any workload for them … But they put it back to us that we’re creating this workload for them but I really don’t think we are (Leadership Team).

This fracturing was evident in interviews with the staff group where I had a strong sense that much was being left unsaid. As individuals they often started speaking, hesitated and deferred to the most experienced teacher, who sometimes disagreed with what they were saying.

**Success of the School**

Breezes Primary School is widely regarded in the Victorian education system as a successful and innovative school providing a model for other schools to emulate. Its profile has been highlighted through the work with the DEECD’s Innovations and Next Practice branch and the school has been the recipient of several awards in recognition of this. The school receives regular visitors from across Australia and, in response has been required to manage this huge demand by requesting a charge per visitor, which then resources further school improvement directions.
The 2011 OECD/CERI report from DEECD Victoria, outlined the successful case study provided by Breezes Primary School for the Innovative Learning Environments (ILE) project and in doing so highlighted areas of success for which the school is known.

(The school’s) innovation has been to engage students and teachers in renewed notions of what it means to be a learner and a teacher. This has involved changes to the ways in which students and teachers engage with the processes of schooling. To summarise the key aspects of the student experience described above, the students are involved in:

- Personalised learning through individual goal setting
- Selection of workshops to meet individual learning needs
- Negotiation of principles for flexible learning through privilege bearing trust licences
- Independent sessions with access to roving teachers
- Weekly conferences where goal setting, selection of workshops, negotiation of flexible learning principles and progress in independent sessions are monitored (DEECD - www.education.vic.gov.au/research/researchpublications).

The report summarises the impact and effectiveness of the project in the school,

A key feature of the school was its commitment to and the capacity of the school community to embed these fundamental reforms within the school culture. The ILE has attracted sustained interest and attention since its implementation, as evidenced by numerous local and international visitors to the school. The ILE has also resulted in an increased number of families sending their children to (the school) rather than to schools closer to their home (DEECD – www.education.vic.gov.au/research/researchpublications).

The principal expressed some anxiety and a lack of confidence about the reasons why the school might be recommended to the researcher by DEECD as being an innovative school. When asked directly, she responded:

It’s interesting isn’t it because I wonder why they think it’s innovative … if you want to see 21st century learning spaces there’s lots of them around now, you don’t need to come to (the school) to see that anymore and we feel quite frustrated with some of our spaces. I think it’s what happening inside them that matters …It’s got to be around the fact that maybe we are having a good hard crack at doing things differently (Principal).

Later she added,

… we (educators) look at what others are doing and adapt it and move it around and develop it. I can understand why, because so many people have been here because our space was so different to begin with, and so many people that are on maybe an earlier journey … like to go and see something. And for that reason it’s just kind of grew legs and we’ve done a lot of work with … lots of different people
because of that … I could say we probably align with what the Department want (Principal).

Jan’s explanation, supported by the SC President’s opinion, is that they had been ahead of other schools, providing a model for change and innovative thinking. However recently, with the federally funded BER building project, where all Victorian schools were required to build open plan spaces and to consider the pedagogy that took place within the new buildings, there is a sense that the rest of the educational community has caught up with the school.

The staff team, indicating a lack of awareness of the big picture of their work responded in a similar way to the principal around what are the school’s key success features, “I often wonder, because we work hard!” However they also reinforced the principal’s notion of doing things differently, “I don’t think there’s ever been a time at (the school) where we haven’t been working on something new.”

The parent group were clearer of the reasons for the school’s successful reputation, listing the open learning spaces, personalised learning, student centred interviews, goal setting and “always doing something new” as the success markers. They could see the growth of the original change model:

… we always seem to be putting our hands up, we always seem to have lots of teachers coming here from other schools to see how we work. I think the senior learning unit was completely groundbreaking when we did that, very groundbreaking. Now we’ve got the middle learning unit, we’re putting juniors into little learning hubs as well, it’s basically a whole school focus, so I think in that respect hugely innovative (Parent Group).

The parent group included the inclusive culture for parents, staff and students as a visible sign of the school’s success, “that culture of inclusiveness is encouraged … if we ever had any issues … there was consultation, teachers were open to different ways of communication … it’s that openness … teachers do have relationships with their students … they know their students better.” The SC President, reflecting on his role in the school, saw the success of the school in terms of its ongoing financial viability and its ability to resource innovative projects without compromising the financial stability of the school.

The staff group deepened the parent view of the school’s success, articulating key successes as:

… getting a whole school shared vision and everyone working towards having student learning goals, individual learning goals across the curriculum … she’s
worked really hard to build up this staff where there's so many different levels of expertise and different areas, almost when a new person comes you kind of think “oh I wonder what their skill is” because obviously she’s hired that person for a reason and they’re going to develop with the team somehow (Staff Group).

The leadership team reflected on their team (assistant principal and two leading teachers) and that Jan’s choice of leadership team members was a critical success factor as each brought a unique perspective to the school.

Jan reflected that following a recent three month period when she had stepped out of the school for personal reasons, it became evident to her that the strength of her relationship with others was a key success factor in her leadership, especially in supporting staff and contributing to their wellbeing. Jan’s strength with relationships was strongly affirmed by the parent group:

She took last term off for her family and she put her family first … that showed a lot about who she was … the passion for the school though was not lost while she was gone … people missed her, you could tell, even the students (Parent Group).

The RNL expressed an opinion that the school’s success was more opportunistic.

I believe that time has been on (Jan's) side to a certain extent and I believe that the thinking around education has changed so significantly in the last maybe five years that it was being in the right place at the right time. So therefore having some knowledge, being in a school that had the financial opportunity to be able to run with an idea the minute you wanted to run with it and to have already had…to have been in that spotlight within the community as a capable school gave permission for (Jan) to move forward possibly (RNL).

Furthermore,

I think (the school) has been in a position through the groundwork that's been done to continually place itself … it has structures and the organisational structures around it to enable it to be ahead of the pack. So (Jan) is familiar with the groups and organisations that she can interact with to head where she wants to head. Many other schools may not have that link (RNL).

The RNL believes that building leadership capacity and looking beyond the school has been the school's greatest success as well as “being able to market what (Jan) believes is best practice.” She added:

The school has probably influenced many other schools and given many other schools the opportunity to think differently, that without some of the practices that kick started here, other schools may not have taken off with new initiatives that they've taken off with (RNL).
In looking at things that the school could do better or had been unsuccessful, the parent group was very specific. They mentioned more community connections and the need to develop a stronger and more competitive sporting program to meet the needs of all children.

The staff group articulated the angst being felt by staff with the current project to push the new student conferencing process and that it required more time. Workload was voiced as an area of concern by staff and that new ideas were being pushed onto teachers too quickly. However they also stated that the professional culture of the school meant that everyone would give it a go even if they were unhappy, “there’s no staff member that sits back and says no I refuse to do that … (You) give it your best shot, and that’s just how we do it.” There was some difficulty gaining agreement on the areas of future improvement, indicating the segmentation between units and lack of a clear understanding of what happens in all areas of the school by the staff representative group. The leadership team also questioned the pace and timing of changes as an area that was not successful for the school, affirming staff concerns around the current conferencing project. They saw this as a need for greater investigation and understanding of what the change would require (by Jan), as opposed to making presumptions about it.

Obviously she didn’t know how they felt about it either. She really needed to talk to them a lot more about how they felt about it, what it was going to entail … I think people actually believed that they could do it because they misunderstood what it was (Leadership Team).

Jan felt that the key mistakes made were staffing decisions made for the right reasons but with the wrong people and that this was a continuing challenge. Other areas that had not been successful were associated with sustainability of the improvement journey. These were areas that were found to be not embedded as deeply as initially thought or as would need to be for ongoing improvement. This included the integrated use technology into the learning experience and the inquiry curriculum which had been an early success factor but which had lost its focus with new staff and new projects. Jan also reflected on the pace of change at the school, indicating that she was aware of staff anxiety around the conferencing project. She justified this decision as being a shared one, ‘so that wasn’t just my decision, it was everybody’s decision’ and the solution as ‘you just have to be brave and give it time to know that it was worth it.’ Jan explained her thinking early in the interview when we were reflecting on whole school change, saying:
… even though it does make you feel uncomfortable you do have to harness the unrest because it actually tells you that you are pushing the boundaries and that's when you see the next stage of growth and an enormous sense of satisfaction and enjoyment when people see the results (Principal).

The RNL questioned the appropriateness of Jan's leadership style in the school’s current context, which she felt had served it well in developing a whole school practice but which now could “… loosen off those processes … take on the creativity and flexibility … its really well placed to do what it wants, where it wants to go. It’s about … ensuring leadership throughout the school has the opportunity to think beyond quite a directed approach.”

The Principal’s Role in Leading Innovation and Success

What is the principal’s background and personal perspective on her educational leadership?

Jan came into primary education as a mature age teacher, after she had her own family. Finishing secondary school, Jan followed her mother into a day training centre as a teacher’s aide for a year, then completed her special education teacher training. After ten years in special education, Jan converted to primary teaching. With five years as an assistant principal at a large school in the local area, she was asked by the regional director to take up an acting and then substantive position as principal at a smaller but very challenging school, where she stayed for 5 ½ years. Jan’s leadership of this school was highly regarded for its innovative nature and ability to make a significant difference to challenging and underprivileged children, especially boys.

Jan moved to Breezes Primary School, which was a bigger, successful school with the opportunity to develop a new vision in a different culture. This was a change from her previous background of working with the socially or physically disadvantaged. While this was Jan’s second principalship, she had not worked in regular school settings for as long as might be expected. In this time, Jan had been asked to take up other roles outside the school context. Prior to moving to Breezes, she was an acting RNL, however after six months returned to the school context. She explains her decision:

The days that I enjoyed most were the days that I was in schools, so I decided that was telling me something. I thought about a role with the Innovations Branch at one stage, there was an opportunity there but the distance, that was a … lifestyle choice. I live in (local region) and … having my own children … (Principal).
Jan explains the reason why she went into primary schools in the first place as being a personal family choice rather than a professional decision but that, until recently she took up career opportunities as they arose.

I took my own children’s upbringing very seriously in terms of I always wanted the absolute best for (them) ... I actually started to work in primary schools because I wanted to be a part of their education and ... to make sure that they were having everything I could possibly give them. And I guess through that I was lucky enough to always ... I’ve had that thing about always take an opportunity, so maybe I’m getting a bit wiser with that as I get older, but particularly always take an opportunity, if it was there go for it (Principal).

Jan described herself as more of a team player than an autocratic leader.

I try to be careful to surround myself with people such as my AP and leading teachers that we’re kind of all doing it, so it’s not actually about me, there’s lots of us involved in it ... part of my role is to keep myself up with the work that they’re doing and the change that’s happening and making sure it's all still aligned and whatever, because there’s a lot of people out there doing lots of fantastic stuff, it doesn’t all come from me, a lot of it comes from them (Principal).

She explained her leadership and decision making style to be intentional, improvement focused with the team deliberations providing her with the confidence to move forward with decisions. “I make plenty of mistakes ... I talk about it with the (leadership) team ... talk it over but talk it over with the right people ... we pretty well share it all.” She also described herself as a good networker and having a clear vision for Breezes Primary School.

Jan describes her need to be ‘hands on’ as an instructional leader with high visibility around the school,

It actually works best for me to be seen in the classrooms regularly, to be having really clear conversations with teachers around individuals and hence the data conversations ... to be as hands on with curriculum as I can be ... (Principal).

Speaking of her beliefs and what drives her work in schools, Jan spoke at length of the importance of catering for the future needs of the child.

I’ve been very vocal around 21st century learning for a while, around the fact that we have to change ... this generation of learners’ lives are going to look very different to what they currently do now ... we cannot think that we have all the answers anymore ... the only way that we can actually do these children a service is by creating creative, inquisitive, confident (students with) ... strong foundations in literacy and numeracy, strong foundation in digital literacy and numeracy but not at the expense of one and the other. And that they actually have a passion for things like science and maths ... making kids active participants in their learning so that they become lifelong learners ... (this is) the philosophy that ... I hold true to
and something that we talk about continuously around what that might look like, sound like (Principal).

Jan reflected on her approach to her work and ways that experience has taught her to develop leadership resilience:

I don’t think I take things as seriously anymore as I used to … when I was newer in my leadership … and it might be a violent parent or could be a staff member that was unhappy about something and I would go home and I’d just feel sick about it, whereas I don’t do that anymore (Principal).

She also touched on the difference between her approach and that of her inexperienced leadership team and her belief in the need to have a positive rather than a deficit lens on the improvement journey.

They’re terribly passionate, terribly driven, and sometimes I sit there and I feel like saying to them … remember to smell the roses as you’re going through or don’t be too hard on them (teachers), they have come a long way, honour the journey…we’ve still got so far to go … but you’ve still got to celebrate where we’ve come from … But I think that’s where I’m at … before perhaps I could only … see the pathway forward and I want to get there … whereas now I can actually sit up there and think … OK it might not be exactly where we want it to be but gee how much closer are we to it … I don’t think I take it as seriously. But I listen to some of the younger Principals … get to school at 6.30 and still there at 7 o’clock at night, and I’d say why … and I say nah I’m not doing that. If I did that, you know, you wouldn’t survive long term, you have to be a bit realistic about that stuff (Principal).

Jan talked about the pressure that she feels comparing herself to other principals that she worked closely with through the Innovations and Next Practice project, including Tom from Crossroads Primary School. “I get the speed wobbles sometimes and I actually think I’m actually probably way more conservative than maybe people think I am.” She explained this further,

So if we look at student voice and if you look at it the way say (another principal) (does it) … it’s fantastic but it’s also open and student directed and then I get the speed wobbles about how do you really know that you’re giving them (the students) what they need to know and the structure and the assessment … I get quite anxious about that … I still like to set literacy and numeracy blocks … I still feel that maybe I’m a little bit more traditional than some of them (other principals) in that approach (Principal).

Jan affirmed her key role in the school as one of being aware of what is happening in educational best practice and inspiring others to what is possible in the school. She also looked to a possible future role in education that would align with her strengths and passions.

… last year when I watched that conference in Canada and thought “oh that looks so easy”… (I) came back and (said) “this is what I think we should think about and
this is what I think we could try” … the work we did with the Innovations Branch, they used to talk about incubating ideas … I think we probably have done that pretty well (at Breezes Primary School) and been able to look at what others are doing, think about what that might mean in context for us within our school … at one stage we thought we were going to get a new school at (local area) and I had to keep thinking oh that would just be my dream, imagine starting up, designing a new school, employing the staff, putting the pedagogy, could you imagine that, how much fun would that be (Principal).

*How do other stakeholders view the principal and her leadership of the school?*

1. **Personal Attributes and Behaviours**

The following Table A4.1 tallies the 20 words most often used to describe the principal by the interviewees.
Table A4.1: Stakeholder Groups’ Word Analysis for Principal Breezes PS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Attribute</th>
<th>RNL</th>
<th>SCP</th>
<th>LSH</th>
<th>STF</th>
<th>PAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Passionate-shows pass’n</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Supportive-gives supp’t</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Networker-team orient’</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learner - learns</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Visionary-has a vision</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Driven - drives</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Listens</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Innovative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Gains respect- respected</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Fair</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Inclusive</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Motivated</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Consults</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Role Model</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Approachable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Open minded</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Hands On</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Genuine</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Proud</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attribute used by all five stakeholder groups or individuals to describe the principal was passionate. Supportive, a networker or having a team orientation and a learner were the next most commonly used attributes across the most number of groups. Three stakeholder groups strongly agreed that the principal was visionary, driven and...
that she listens. Being supportive, visionary, a networker/having a team orientation and passionate were the commonly used descriptors across all groups and individuals.

The parent group (PAR) held a close affinity with the principal, choosing words demonstrating positive and personal feelings about her character (fair, supportive and inclusive), with high levels of group agreement. The parent group was all female and this may have influenced the way they perceived Jan as a personable and possibly maternal figure. In contrast, the school council president (SCP) used the words passionate, driven and a networker/team oriented with high frequency to describe the principal, indicating the strong leadership role that he perceives Jan holding in leading the school's direction.

The RNL agreed with the SCP that Jan was a strong networker or had a team orientation however the RNL differed from all groups, describing Jan as knowledgeable and motivated. This is not surprising given the RNL possibly had the most distant and formal relationship with the principal. At the time of this research, the RNL had been acting in the role for a short time only with a substantive position as a local principal. Therefore the RNL would have known of Jan’s reputation in the local educational community however may not been directly involved with Jan in developing the school’s work. It is possible that the RNL, as principal of a local school, may have competed with Jan and Breezes Primary School for enrolments and positioning as a school of choice.

The staff team (STF) see the principal as visionary and supportive, acknowledging that Jan sets the school’s direction and supports them to achieve this. However, the leadership team (LSH), who hold the closest formal relationship with Jan do not agree strongly with any groups’ definitions. The leadership team does not use any words with high frequency to describe Jan. This reaffirms an earlier observation, that the leadership team did not include the principal in their team, seeing themselves as having a separate working relationship to Jan and the rest of the staff team. The lack of any strong alignment of descriptors suggests they see their team and their work as central and that Jan may not be a significant factor in their strategic thinking.

The most used word to describe Jan is supportive, reflective of her leadership style and ways of working closely with others to take them with her on the school’s improvement journey. This is followed by her being described as a networker or having a team orientation affirming Jan’s supportive and collaborative style. Being passionate and
visionary are the remaining high frequency words which may indicate Jan's capacity for innovation and drive in leading the school's direction.

2. Leadership Style

The profile being developed of Jan as a strong, strategic and passionate leader is supported by the interviewees. Jan is described as visionary, strong and sometimes authoritarian, tending to control the process of school improvement. However at the same time she is profiled in wellbeing type terms, such as supportive, fair, consultative and empowering of others. It builds a picture of a leader with clarity of vision, high level knowledge of the school improvement process, the ability to motivate, influence and work closely with others, including an extensive professional network to motivate her and to achieve her goals. The RNL outlines this:

(Jan’s) really passionate about what she does and she … believes in her school … She has fairly innovative thinking … So she has her knowledge, she has her understanding, she has her vision in her head for what she wants … it’s not necessarily even what you see, it’s what you hear from her sometimes, so it’s not always what you see. But she can have a conversation with you about people that she’s been involved with who have some broader thinking, so it’s her networking again, her network is very powerful within her role … (RNL).

The clarity of Jan’s vision and her collaborative style is supported by the SC President:

I think she has a very clear vision and view of where she wants the school to go. I would call it probably a consultative cooperative type of leadership … my view is that she takes the time to consult and investigate before just making a decision (SC President).

The parent group profiles the more inclusive, caring side of Jan’s style but emphasize that she knows what is happening and is clearly in control of school direction. They demonstrated high levels of trust in Jan’s leadership.

I think she’s got a handle on everything, she knows, got her fingers in lots of pies in a nice way … She’s inclusive … she just seems to know what’s going on with everybody. I think she’s always looking for opportunities for her staff to better themselves … (Parent Group).

The parent group reiterated that strong maternal link to Jan and her style of leadership:

I think she’s a very good role model, like for parents to actually look at this woman and think gee, you know, you’ve had the kids, you’re a grandma and you’ve actually, you know, you can juggle things, and I think it inspires you just personally. Multitasking women (Parent Group).
The staff team affirms Jan’s supportive and collaborative style that she implements to engage others in the work.

… it’s empowering so that the ideas are presented but it’s sort of passed on for you to take and work with your unit as you want, with the guidance … it’s team based … Staff is one of her number one priorities in terms of supporting us and making sure that we feel comfortable in our position and we know what we’re doing and we’re making professional growth individually as well as the school (Staff Group).

They articulated Jan’s capacity to drive the vision and champion the successes with some possible limitations to actually putting it into place. This latter point picks up an earlier comment by the RNL that what Jan tells you is not always strongly evident in practice.

One thing (Jan’s) really good at is creating a vision, not necessarily creating the structures that go underneath that but creating a vision, and then saying to people ‘how are we going to work towards that, how are we going to achieve that’ and then people are encouraged to be creative and innovative in the way they work and take that and share that. And I know that she is very good at shining the light on things that are happening in the school that she obviously feels are best practice with the intention of those being shared (Staff Group).

The leadership team articulated their frustration with the principal’s style, questioning the speed of Jan’s decision making and implementation.

… coming in new (to the school) she’s different to my last Principal in that they’re both wanting to move forward, and I see (Jan) sees the initiatives but often … wants to get them going with … gusto … whereas my other Principal was the opposite, we would bring in initiatives and then we would crawl towards it, lots of discussion … I found that quite refreshing when I first came, but once again … you realise that sometimes it’s not the best way to go either (Leadership Team).

Furthermore,

… she is constantly thinking about the next step. It doesn’t necessarily suit the three of us because there’s a lot of work that needs to happen with teachers in order to get to that next bit, but she is constantly looking ahead … which is good but at the same time is frustrating because … Often her perception of what’s occurring is not quite what we often see … (Leadership Team).

The leadership team acknowledged Jan’s hands on style but once again questioned the gap between Jan’s perception of the change journey and the reality that they experience when working with teachers. With the RNL and staff group comments this suggests that Jan’s leadership style is overly optimistic and supportive rather than critical and based on hard facts.
I think she does try to get involved and she loves talking to us about curriculum … she’s definitely a curriculum driver, there’s no doubt about it and prides herself on professional learning and being up to date and being innovative. But I guess the challenge for us is there’s often that gap between her perception and what’s really happening (Leadership Team).

While Jan is seen as a leader who listens to the problems, her passion, desire for the change and strong need to gain engagement and presumably agreement from the wider staff group is seen by the leadership team as something which gets in the way of reality and deep improvement.

She listens yeah. I think sometimes she takes it on board but then it sort of sometimes gets lost again because … she has great respect for her staff and builds them up constantly and sometimes I think in doing so is counteracting what we’ve discussed. And we’re trying to get them to rethink and step back and say hang on maybe I don’t know everything and there is opportunity for me to learn more here, but at the other end someone’s telling them that you know everything, you’re doing a great job, so it can contradict it and make it very difficult (Leadership Team).

The leadership team explained that Jan had been absent from the school for a term and they had been in charge of driving the school’s improvement agenda. With her recent return as the school’s leader, the struggle between Jan and the leadership team for control of the strategic direction and pace of implementation is evident.

… it’s been a little bit different because (Jan’s) been off that whole term and so it was sort of like we were the ones then driving it so we were sort of slowing it down a little bit … I personally don’t think (Jan) has a slow button, I really, really don’t think she does, I think that is just the way that she works and … I don’t think she would ever say to … slow down about the work because she’s passionate about the work and she wants to see the changes happen (Leadership Team).

However the leadership team suggested that this tussle would be resolved by Jan with a high level of trust that she would work with them to consider their differing opinions.

I think what’s changed is that she’s hearing the message, I think she needed time to process that and that’s fair enough, but I think now she’s hearing what we’re saying. She’s been very open about what we believe needed to happen… So she’s not putting up blockers and saying … “that’s not right, that’s not the case” … it’s none of that (Leadership Team).

3. Drivers

Jan is portrayed as a passionate leader who takes control of the agenda to provide the best possible opportunities for all students. This may have been influenced by Jan’s early background working in Special Education and in disadvantaged areas, working to
ensure that all children, even those disadvantaged by disability or poverty had the same opportunities that she wanted for own children.

Leadership team agreed that Jan’s background was a strong influence in her leadership.

… she’s got a special ed background, you know, where equality sits I think firmly in her heart that everyone deserves the best of absolutely everything and because of that everyone, you know, can do really, really well. And I don’t think you can be in a position like this and not be shaped by the things that you’ve journeyed through (Leadership Team).

The staff group agreed that Jan was engaging in school improvement to improve student achievement. In response to a direct question on Jan’s drivers they said, “School improvement … whole school, like continuous reflection and improvement. But also I think it’s just that keeping up with society and … The drive to be in the 21st century … Preparing our children for the future … what’s relevant for the kids.”

The SC President saw that Jan was the ‘mover and shaker’ of school direction. He agreed with the staff group, affirming Jan’s push for developing a relevant educational experience for students. “I think she’s extremely passionate about modern education and I think if you look at her history in terms of what she’s done over the last few years in her study trips overseas … obviously she’s very passionate about modern education.”

Jan is also perceived to be driven to work closely with teachers to support them so that they engage in the work and affirm the direction of her leadership and the school. This suggests a need to receive positive affirmation from staff but she is also prepared to ‘tough it out’ to get to the longer term objectives. This drive to be liked by staff sometimes gets in the way of Jan’s ability to assess things critically or to give staff critical feedback.

I keep saying to Jan we need a sense of urgency, we need to give them (staff) a reason for feeling they have to … move forward. It did get us going … But then what happened though, what we did we stopped … I’m finding that quite frustrating. And next thing we had a staff celebration, it’s like, what are we celebrating? (Leadership Team).

Jan is also driven to be innovative and visionary, taking up opportunities to work with and maintain an elite professional network that stimulates her thinking and gains advantages for the school.
4. **Sustainability of Innovation and Success**

The RNL expressed a clear opinion that Breezes Primary School was dependant on Jan for its success.

… if (Jan) wasn’t here giving some of the guidance I don’t know how sustainable what is happening now would be … I think the staff would drop back into focusing on teaching and learning and building their skills in that area, I think they would hold onto some of the structures that have been put in place because they work well. I don’t know where that distributed leadership with innovation is in the school, or who’s been given permission to have that (RNL).

The RNL painted a future view of the school as maintaining the rigour in its approach but building the creativity and flexibility for others to share the leadership direction with Jan.

I think it’s really well placed to … do what it wants to do, where it wants to go. It’s about probably ensuring that the leadership throughout the school has the opportunity to think beyond quite a directed approach possibly, and be able to throw in other scenarios, other ideas and actually have quite a shared voice … it’s quite a structured approach and there may be people … who may see something a different way and given the opportunity to build that into the school, may shoot it off in another direction … So it’s distributing that knowledge a little (RNL).

She emphasised the impact of the work of Jan and Breezes Primary School on other schools and principals.

The school has probably influenced many other schools and given many other schools the opportunity to think differently, that without some of the practices that kick started here other schools may not have taken off with new initiatives that they’ve taken off with. So it’s been a great resource … I think within the network and within the principals there’s an awareness always of what (Jan’s) doing and so it keeps people a little bit curious and a bit more connected to what can be possible, so very subtly she’s been able to do that (RNL).

Finally, the SC President intimated some concern for the sustainability of the school’s work without Jan’s leadership:

So certainly from my point of view with (Jan) I would hate to lose her, and the school would go on, but I think at the end of the day … she’s highly motivated and highly well respected and … she could be destined for bigger and better things. On the other hand if she wants to stay here fantastic for us (SC President)!

However he expressed a belief that Breezes Primary School would ensure that the work of the school was protected as part of the school’s culture.
Without a doubt … I think it is sustainable. I think we’ve gone too far to go back. I also think that there are a number of schools now that … are going this way. And I think that any Principal who came in and wanted to go backwards, I think they’d have a really hard time. I think it would probably cause a lot of dissention within the staff, it would cause a lot of dissention within the school community, and a lot of the students … would be horrified… (SC President).

Other Factors that Have Led to the School’s Innovation and Success

The parent group, leadership team, RNL and staff group all commented on the positive attitude, learning readiness and behavior of the children who attend Breezes Primary School, indicating that this may be both a factor in, and a result of, the school’s success. The staff group sum this up:

… the children that we have, there’s no reason why we can’t take them on any kind of journey where we want them to go because the challenges that some kids face, these kids … come to school and they’re ready to learn and they’re incredible and anything you throw at them they give it a go too. Yeah I think just the kids that we’re working with are amazing (Staff Group).

There was general agreement from all groups, and affirmed by Jan herself that a key success factor has been the engagement of key staff to drive the implementation. Most groups mentioned the strong role of the coaching program in driving the innovation and ensuring success, contributed to by both past and current coaching staff and a supportive leadership team. This is summed up by the School Council President, “a reflection on Jan’s management style I guess is that she has this core group around her that seem to be a fairly cohesive core group that is always involved in consultation.”

Summary

The timing of this research may be a key moment in time for Breezes Primary School and Jan’s leadership, possibly requiring Jan to reassess her style of leadership and the school’s strategic direction. The school is well regarded as a leading school and a successful innovator however it has failed to keep in advance of the strong strategic growth in educational practice and different groups expressed fears that the things it has been well regarded for were becoming mainstream. The dilemma is one of progressing slowly, ensuring everyone is sharing the journey and embedding the new practice deeply with rigor, consistency and a shared agreement around the school’s practice, or continuing to build the school’s strong reputation as a creative and innovative school that is ahead of the game. Jan as a leader with strong knowledge, experience and the courage and passion to be innovative is driven to be a leader in the innovative network of schools, but her leadership team do not share this desire and are
concerned about what is really happening (or not) in the school. Jan’s pace is fast and she has acknowledged that many of the changes have not been as deeply embedded as originally thought or desired. Staff are not fully aligned with Jan with a question of their shared commitment to the vision and the hard work this will involve. With this tension, heightened by Jan’s time out of the school, comes a crisis of confidence from Jan in her leadership, her capacity to be innovative and the school’s innovative status.

Jan is a strong leader who holds the reins of school direction tightly, possibly contributing to the staff team not being fully engaged in the journey. Influenced by her background in low socio-economic schools and special education, Jan is driven by a desire for every child to access a quality education. She wants her school to be harmonious and united in its direction behind her and she works hard to build relationships with people to achieve this.

Staff teams share loyalty to each other and their work but not necessarily to the whole school or its direction. The strong team focus across the school has decentralized much of the strategic direction and may have moved too far in this direction, with staff teams unaware of and uncommitted to whole school vision. Jan appears to be uncertain or unaware of the power struggle occurring between her and her leadership team however she is aware that the school is not united.

… three years of outstanding surveys and then because there is some change happening at the moment, they’ve … and I haven’t got the staff opinion one yet but I imagine just from feedback that I’ve had, the staff opinion survey happened whilst I was on a term’s leave as well, and even though that shouldn’t make a difference people have told me that it has, and also around the change. So you’ve just got to take that in the context of how you see people perceiving and making sure then that people have got the vision (Principal).

However the leadership team has indicated that Jan is very willing to listen and all groups in the school share their pride of the school and its achievements. They have a united desire to continue to be successful, if not necessarily agreement on how this will be achieved.

The perception of the outsider to the school, the RNL provides an insight into the local education community’s sensitivity towards the success and attention given to Jan’s leadership and Breezes Primary School’s success.

Jan engages in an elite, state wide professional network of well regarded, highly successful principals who look to each other and outside Australia to follow educational developments and best practice examples. This provides Jan with stimulation and the
desire to keep moving ahead, deepening the tension of the reality of her school experience.

The school's ongoing success may be determined by what happens next. The leadership team believes this lies in Jan's capacity for honest appraisal of the school's work.

I'd like to see (Jan's) role here, and I think this is vital to the teachers moving forward here or really learning, is an honest communication with them … where they're not built up, and I'm not saying drag them down either, acknowledge their strengths but pass the message on that this is where we need to go (Leadership Team).
Appendix 5: Complete Case Story: Links Secondary College

Features of the School

Links Secondary College is located in a large outer suburban centre of the Victorian capital city of Melbourne, Australia. It caters for approximately 875 students from years 7 to 12 (12 to 18 years of age). The city grew rapidly in the 1950s to accommodate the urban sprawl of the post WW2 population boom and established itself as a lifestyle area for young families. However in recent times the local area has entered a socio-economic decline with poor infrastructure, a predominance of older government housing, an aging population and pockets of very high socio-economic disadvantage compared to other parts of the state. The locality has lost favour with young families and cheaper housing has entrenched the social disadvantage in the area. In 2011, 28.5% of total persons in the school’s neighborhood were aged 55 years and over, 40.8% 25-54 years, 13.5% were 15-24 years and 10.6% were 5-14 years. The area has not attracted new immigrants and remains predominantly Australian born and English speaking. 69.6% of the total population was born in Australia (7.7% born in the UK), over 51% had both parents Australian born (only 32.7% with both parents born overseas) and 82.8% speaking English only at home. The disadvantage is profiled with 16.8% of residents listed as separated or divorced, compared to the 2011 Australian average of 11.4% and 7.1% registered as unemployed, compared to the Australian average at the time of 5.6%. Of those over 15 years of age in employment, 17.6% were listed as technicians and trades workers, 16.4% professionals and 14.1% clerical and administration workers. (Australian Bureau of Statistics - www.censusdata.abs.gov.au)

It is worth noting that the statistics provided are for the wider locality and the area where the school is located is renowned for being particularly impoverished within the locality. Anecdotally, this trend is seen to be entrenched with local sporting clubs having difficulty attracting young members and nearby preschool and primary schools struggling to maintain enrolment numbers. This data is supported by the school’s 2011 Index of Community Social and Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 957 (1000 being the Australian average ICSEA score) and 51% of family backgrounds in the bottom quartile, 20% and 23% in the middle quartiles and only 7% in the top quartile (compared to the Australian distribution of 25% across each quartile).

The school was built in the 1960s as the local high school, relocating from its 1950’s site in the local surf club. However it formed in its current entity in 1997 as a result of a
forced amalgamation of the high school and the local technical school. While the high school always regarded itself as successful and held strong community support, the technical school had a reputation as being good for a trade education but rough and unruly. In 1997, the technical school site closed down and staff had to relocate, moving from a small staff group where they were known, with a few hundred students to a site of over 140 staff and approximately 1800 students. To accommodate the mood of the change, Don was appointed as a new principal but in an attempt to appease both schools, separate assistant principals (two from each school) and twenty four leading teachers were transferred into the newly formed school from the two original schools.

The high school was renamed with part of both the high school and technical school names in its new name. However, any collusion stopped there with staff operating quite separately in the new site and widespread grieving occurring by staff, students and the community, many of whom had attended the original high or technical schools. In discussions, the school culture at that time was invariably referred to by all participants as the “wild, wild west”, “a jungle” and “a war zone”. Staff did not identify with the new school and little agreement was in place around behavior management, curriculum or pedagogy. Adding to the trouble, a larger neighbouring high school (Surf Coast High) developed and actively promoted a strong and broad reputation for academic achievement, offering scholarships for academic success. The newly merged high school went into serious decline, becoming a seriously failing school for students, staff and the local community, a place where you ended up rather than chose to attend.

Ann was appointed by the principal as assistant principal approximately four years after the merger. Don raised the ire of staff and local educators with this appointment as Ann came from a primary school background as an acting assistant principal and had never held a position of any kind in a secondary school. Ann was appointed with a curriculum tag, having led curriculum development at local primary schools and across the region for a few years previously. Ann remained as assistant principal for five years, working closely with Don until he moved schools. Ann then took up the acting principal position for a year before being appointed substantively in 2009.

In 2010 Ann determined that the school needed to reimage itself as it continued to be shackled by the past merger, with remaining wounds evident with staff who had largely not identified with the new high school. An extensive consultation process was led by Ann and as a result a new school name, logo, values and uniform were developed. Links College was born, with a new logo of three universal water symbols profiling the values of Community, Responsibility and Success, derived from what students,
teachers and parents thought underpinned success in life. The values underpin a range of programs and activities that occur across the school. **Community:** engagement, leadership, citizenship, environment, and mentoring; **Responsibility:** integrity, respect, reliability, independence and resilience and **Success:** personalised learning, learning to learn, goal setting, employability and lifelong learning. The school motto is Leaders in Education. The grey and purple uniform exudes a formality more often associated with an independent school with long sleeved white shirts, below knee length dresses, grey trousers and grey socks.

Physically, the school is organised into open plan modules, called MAX (Motivation, Achievement, eXcellence) Learning Centres for students in years 7, 8, 9 and 10. Years 10, 11 and 12 students experience more formal learning structures with individual subject teachers and classes. Core subjects taught in MAX are Literacy, Numeracy, Inquiry and LOTE (Japanese). Core subjects taught out of MAX are Science and Physical Education (Active Health). Rotations per semester include drama, music, art and food technology. While the core remains the same across the levels, the out of MAX and rotations change according the year level. Students learning in MAX centres are grouped in large numbers (e.g. 180 students) with teachers allocated to working in a MAX level each year. Students are team taught by several teachers for part of their MAX lesson, breaking out into smaller groups or individual working areas to pursue their personalised work projects, facilitated by teachers moving around the room, responding to individual needs. Students also choose to follow senior school pathways in the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL), through the Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs or the more standard Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). Alternative programs are offered to students in Hands On Learning and Connect programs, designed to engage students at risk of school refusal or significant failure in formal settings. These programs provide strong links with community organisations and offer alternative pathways to youth employment programs.

As a result of several building programs, including a Building Futures project in 2010, the facilities are mostly new, bright and colorful with modern collaborative furniture. The grounds are extensive and the school has a calm and focused tone, giving an impression that it is well cared for by staff and students. Children are universally in uniform to a consistently high standard and can clearly articulate and accept consequences for being out of uniform e.g. removal from class to supervised learning for wearing the wrong coloured socks. Children and teachers move through buildings,
along corridors and out in the grounds in constant interaction and quiet communication with each other, giving a sense of purposefulness to the learning environment. Technology in the form of computers, interactive whiteboards and laptops is evident as learning tools in classrooms, however this was not overly visible.

The school's leadership team includes Ann and three assistant principals, two with responsibility for junior and senior school management and one leading curriculum design and implementation. Eleven leading teachers hold responsibility for student learning, building relationships and behavior at levels of the school with two leading each of the MAX centres, two with VCAL and three with VCE (Year 10-12). Most of the leadership team has been appointed by Ann and is young, energetic and committed to the school's direction. Several of these staff have primary school backgrounds similar to Ann. The staff profile is very mixed with an older group of staff having been at the school prior to the merger and the development of the Links College identity. However at least half the staff are new to the school in the last three to five years. This younger group demonstrates a strong commitment to the nontraditional ways of working that is part of the Links College profile, advertising itself as 'we do things differently.'

**The Culture of the School**

All respondents emphasised the changed culture of the school. Ann described the early days as 'like something in one of those movies that you see that are showing a worst case scenario.' She details her early impressions of the school:

… it was autonomous teacher practice so one teacher in a classroom in four walls with twenty five students and the tone in the majority of classrooms was confrontational, so it was the teacher against the students. The visuals of it, teacher at the front, rows of desks lined up, on average say five rows of tables and chairs, perhaps the two front rows students somewhat engaged with the teacher, the rest totally engaged with themselves, back to the teacher or variations of the above … So in that environment the teachers who were well respected were the good student managers (Principal).

Ann outlines a traditional secondary school organisational structure of leading teachers in charge of key learning areas, curriculum committees, a whole school welfare group, an operations group and no agreed teacher practice.

… all the conversations in all of those forums were around management and teaching, what the teacher was doing, you didn't hear any conversations at all about learning, about what the students were doing except that the students were disrespectful and badly behaved (Principal).
She describes teachers who were ‘devastated if they were asked to teach something in one year that was new or different that they hadn’t taught before’ because they already had the resources for their current practice.

… so it was about just doing the same old sort of thing. And at the same time a lot of teacher dissatisfaction because who would want to work like that … that confrontational sort of stuff, … students would swear, you’d hear swearing coming out of classrooms, aggressive behaviours from teachers too at times out of absolute frustration. The school looked terrible, looked very run down (Principal).

Over time, Ann formed the view that the merger hadn’t been successful as “teachers didn’t have ownership of it.” Staff still identified themselves as belonging to the technical or the high school and aligned themselves tribally around those connected to the previous schools. All told grieving stories of the merger without any shared sense of what the school was about, other than it wasn’t a great place to work.

A long serving member of the leadership team described the early years of the school as “those horror years.”

It was bringing together two different cultures, both among the student cohort and among the staff cohort … and it took a long time for that to really settle into some manageable place to work and a place to learn. It was very large, it was bordering 1800 (students) … it was very much a jungle … (Leadership Team).

And there existed a mutual lack of respect between students and staff, from the leadership down.

… it was about survival, for the kids and staff … there was a feeling that we weren’t going anywhere, we really weren’t, it was just the same old same old, day in day out, week in week out, and something really drastic needed to occur to make that shift. A lot of comments … about the students, that you can’t do anything with these students … victimization sort of thing that “well what do we do, nothing will work, if we do try and do nice things with them it just gets wrecked” … (Leadership Team).

The staff group interviewed comprised teachers who had all been in the school for many years, pre the merger. They quickly identified which school they had come from as a way of introducing themselves. They grieved for the fact that with so many new staff, the school’s history is largely unknown or it “is ignored a bit or that it’s rewritten to suit whatever the current agenda is …”

While the staff group had much to say about the valued aspects of the school they had lost under Ann’s leadership, such as choosing the areas where they teach, control over student movement and the cohesive nature of the staff, they unanimously agreed that
the school culture is a learning culture and students are happier with less behavioral problems than previously.

I think the students are happier here to learn, I think they're enjoying learning more so that then obviously the high level kind of disruptional behavior … is not occurring as much, so the confrontations are not there, so that's probably why the teaching staff were happier to work here … I think they (students) can express themselves a bit more, the lesson’s less rigid, and the fact (that) … they can go to computers or they can work in groups, it's not just what you achieve and they can control their own growth and I find that works well (Staff Group).

The experienced staff group reflected on the pace of change and the pressure that they feel to keep up, “… at my time in my career I think I’d prefer to go part time than back in the classroom to be honest because there’s just too much work just trying to catch up with the expectations.”

The leadership team described the new culture as having an “overarching sense of calm and tranquility.” Relationships between teachers and staff are key to this, a focus that commenced with Don when the two schools merged. This early direction setting is highlighted by the RNL, “… (Don’s) thing was engagement with kids, he wanted the school to engage with the kids …” However this focus has continued strongly under Ann’s leadership and is an essential element of the new culture.

One of the big things that (Ann) really was pushing at the outset of this journey we’ve been on is “forget about the curriculum stuff with the kids”, in the very early days it was build relationships because there very much was an ‘us and them’ mentality, staff and students and it was just a competition as to who was going to win at the end of the day and often it was the kids that would win … But now, and I think this is just part of the atmosphere and the culture within the school, the teaching, the learning is very much a partnership now compared to how it was then … (There’s) a feeling of mutual respect among the staff and students, and a partnership. I remember very early on, not speaking to kids in the yard or if you did, if you said hello you’d get a really strange look or, you know, “what are you bothering me for”, “who are you to talk to me”, it was very much like that, there was an angry tone out there. And that’s really not present now … my stomach doesn’t knot walking through the yard anymore as it did back in those days and that uneasy feeling in your tummy when you’d pull up in your car; honestly that’s how it was. But that’s gone, it really has gone (Leadership Team).

Ann describes her view of the school’s culture:

The culture is hard to put it in a word or two. The culture is one of positive relationships, that’s the driving force and that’s all relationships whether its student/student, student/teacher, teacher/teacher or parent, whatever it might be, it is about positive respectful relationships (Principal).

And,
In terms of the culture for staff, the culture is one of continuous learning and learning to do your work to better meet the needs of students. … And a strong culture here of responsiveness, so if we feel that something’s not working for the students we respond, we don’t spend a year planning for it … Action, it’s a culture of action, if there’s evidence of a need we’re going to act, and that will have consequences for people, it will put them out of their comfort zone, it will require some different or additional planning from them but … it’s risk taking … (Principal).

Ann outlines the key difference in the school’s past and present culture:

The major difference for me is that all decisions are made based on what’s best for the students, whereas previously all decisions were made based on what’s best for the teachers. That’s a really clear and observable factor for me. It’s really calm, the students are compliant and positive. The relationships between students and teachers are absolutely fantastic, really relaxed, trusting sort of relationships (Principal).

Success of the School

The school was recommended to the researcher as being innovative by senior staff in the Innovations and Excellence Branch of the Victorian Department of Education. In 2010 Links College was identified as ‘punching above its weight’ when measuring its achievement in VCE scores, taking into account its socio-economic status. Ann highlights this:

Of the thirteen schools (in the local area) we’re the second lowest SFO and we got the second highest VCE score only by a few points difference, .2 under (Surf Coast High), and that was a massive indicator of success … (Surf Coast High) actively encourages underperformers away and offers scholarships to high achievers and it’s only been in the last two years that our kids have stopped leaving here to go to (Surf Coast High) (Principal).

This trend has continued with the school achieving higher median study scores than many schools in more affluent areas. In December 2013, the Herald Sun newspaper profiled the school under the heading “RESULTS day hasn't always been a time staff and students at (Links) College look forward to.”

… after years of hard work the … school - ranked as one of Victoria’s most disadvantaged - has gone from battler to big-hitter in the VCE. The college, which has about 115 students graduating Year 12, posted a median study score of just 25.8 seven years ago. The figure was an impressive 30 last year, higher than many schools in more affluent areas … (the principal) said … results day was no longer a day of apprehension. "It was a day of dread - it was something we didn't look forward to … The expectations were not high - of our students, of the staff … of the school community. Now it's totally different" (www.heraldsun.com.au…).

In addition, the school's courage in daring to be different is notable. While the organisation for learning and strong focus on curriculum design and pedagogy was not
new for primary schools, it was also not yet common place and could be seen only in the most innovative, as seen by the primary schools selected for this research. However transferring this successfully to a secondary school setting, dictated by the expectations of final year assessments and exams (VCE), is unique. This success, spread by word of mouth, attracted attention and funding for the 2010 Building Futures program and Leading Schools funding. The school was featured in a 2010 Victorian DEECD publication on the successful development of flexible learning spaces as the secondary school case study.

Additionally, the school responds innovatively to the needs of its students, developing partnerships and creating programs designed to engage and stimulate learners from a range of backgrounds with a variety of social inhibitors on their capacity to attend school, engage and learn. While the school actively seeks out support and endorsements for these programs, it comes at a financial cost to the school. Ann explains this:

… we introduced Hands On Learning and that’s picked up another ten percent of students who just need that family … it’s really social skills, intense social skills in a family environment, and that’s helped them stay connected and to go back into the regular program. And then there was the remaining percentage and the Connect program this year has been developed to try and pick up those students and they’re the really extreme kids who are known to the police and in and out of home … we don’t ignore the reality … basically the reality is the twenty two students in that program are what I call ‘the invisibles’ and they’re in every school but we decided to commit funds to keeping them here instead of just leaving them out there doing whatever they do (Principal).

Ann outlined the gap between the support received and the moral imperative to engage these students:

We had a two and a half thousand dollar grant which didn’t really hit the sides for the hundred and thirty thousand dollar staffing bill. But it doesn’t matter, it’s worth doing (Principal).

The 2013 Herald Sun article highlighted the individualised support students receive to achieve success:

Individual mentors, scholarships to prevent high-risk students dropping out and an out-of-school study space where teachers volunteer to help those who have trouble studying at home have helped (Link's) turnaround. A three-year VCE option and distance education are among other initiatives to help students, many of whom juggle part-time work to support their families and care for younger siblings. "I am really proud of what we do," (the principal) said. "Really we just focus on every kid and helping them. A lot of our kids have got real social issues, all sorts of stuff going on. But we do everything we can to try and level out the playing field for them" (www.heraldsun.com.au...).
The perceptions of success by the various groups and individuals highlight the research based, risk taking culture as a key element of success. The staff group see this as “Thinking outside the box and taking on new kinds of roles and challenges and systems” while the parent group describe this success as “the policies and the ideas are a lot different to traditional schools.” The leadership team highlights the full commitment made by the school and the clear actions taken to ensure success.

… we have different schools come and visit us and … it’s continued to build momentum and evolve, it’s been a seven year journey, it’s not something (that’s just happened) … There are lots of schools that had … Leading Schools funding and built an open learning centre. I reckon what sets us apart is that relentless pursuit and the significant investment … So it was … going in one hundred percent, we’re not tinkering with it, we’re not mucking around and saying ‘oh we’ll give this a go’ … It’s ‘we believe in this strongly’, we get more people on board that believe it, we build the capacity and we continue to challenge the people that don’t believe in it (Leadership Team).

They explained an underpinning factor of success as the strong research base used for decision making.

… I think a lot of it was couched in good research and understanding of what good learning looks like, really trusting and believing in that research, and then … it was like, take the walls away and we have to adapt, you have to do it differently because the walls aren’t there anymore (Leadership Team).

The Principal's Role in Leading Innovation and Success

What is the principal’s background and personal perspective on her educational leadership?

Ann was brought up as the eldest of six children in a strongly Catholic family with a paternal expectation that she would set the example for her siblings. She describes her younger self as a ‘goody two shoes’, with her family background and Catholic girls school contributing to a very conservative and sheltered upbringing. While she did rebel against some family expectations at a relatively early age, Ann says she was not a risk taker and was shocked by the liberal thinking she encountered in her university years.

… having some challenging times around about when I was 17 and decided that the religion was not for me and dad not happy about that because, you know, you’ve got to do all that sort of thing … did well at school, of course I did ‘cause I wouldn’t do anything wrong, I wouldn’t dare, so I was not a risk taker, not by any stretch of the imagination (Principal).
However this changed when life took an unexpected turn for Ann in her career pathway. Ann taught for two or three years after graduating and then left education through necessity to look after children.

I wouldn’t label it as a shift in risk taking but I would label it as a big psychological shift. … I only taught for a couple of years and then left to look after my nephew and niece, they were my husband’s sister’s children. And when I was 24 and my husband was 25 and his sister was 26, she was married with two young children and her husband committed suicide and she lived way over the other side of town and we went to visit one day and she was on the couch asleep just in the depths of depression and the 3 year old and the 5 year old were nowhere to be found and we walked the streets and found them and realised she was in a pretty bad place. So we invited them to come and live with us. You talk about … going from primary to secondary that wasn’t madness, this is madness. We extended our house and they came to live with us and we tried to support (my husband’s) sister and she was able to get work, but in reality things were not great and we ended up kind of inheriting these two children. And then after two years of her being with us, she was killed in a car accident so we ended up with (the two children), so we were these young people with no children of our own and inherited these two kids who were off the wall, in trouble, very life changing experience. So we had fifteen years with them and in the interim had our own family and it was pretty terrible, we couldn’t undo the damage that had happened to them, it was pretty awful (Principal).

Ann was surprised by the link made between this experience and her leadership stating “no one’s asked me that question”. She describes the personal impact:

So I think during that time my own children seemed like angels but it really made me evaluate. I suppose it made me really think about just how important children were … I think I nearly had a nervous breakdown during that time, but it definitely shifted my attitude to life and I just thought every day is really precious and every child deserves something pretty special … that was certainly a milestone time in my life that must have (had an) effect on me one way or the other (Principal).

The residual feelings that Ann has for this deeply personal situation is illustrated when she says, “we really thought that we could salvage something out of it, but we really didn’t unfortunately, and that was really hard to accept. But I don’t know how that really … yeah maybe it’s impacted on my career and what I’ve done.”

When Ann’s three girls started school she returned to primary teaching with an emerging passion for curriculum development, evidenced in a variety of informal curriculum leadership roles. After seven years she successfully gained a leading teacher position but demonstrating courage, the importance of her professional expectations and a need for a match of educational values, she left after a year as ‘the leadership above me was so dysfunctional … there was nothing I could learn from being at that school.’ From there she worked as a regional consultant with the opportunity to travel around regional schools and this ‘cemented my view of myself as
a curriculum leader’ and provided the opportunity to other schools. Next, Ann was head hunted for a leading teacher position as a curriculum leader in a large primary school by a principal who shared her educational philosophy. This position included a year as acting assistant principal and during this time she took on a voluntary role to host regional middle years meetings (years 5-9), exposing her to secondary schools and a different way of thinking and operating.

… my own children were at secondary school and not really loving it particularly much. And for me, my take on it, why they weren’t happy was because it was absolutely ‘one size fits all’ education, and they were highly creative girls, into dance and drama and music and art and they used to tell me they felt as if their talents weren’t valued because they weren’t into physics and science and (chemistry) and all that sort of thing. And that just was bubbling away, and then I was doing this middle years work listening to secondary teachers talking and realized that there was an almighty chasm between where I was in my head in primary and what was actually going on in secondary. And right at that time the job came up here for assistant principal and it had a curriculum tag and I just thought that could be interesting. So (I) ended up doing four years here as assistant principal, then a year and a half as acting prin and then got the substantive role (Principal).

Ann says that she “didn’t really speak to anyone much” about this big decision. However she stated that “My husband strongly encouraged me to apply for the position here.” On questioning, Ann divulges that her husband works in education and had offered her advice however she was concerned that her application would not be considered due to her primary background.

He said “well why wouldn’t you, that’s where your head is and you’ve been thinking about all this and it’s a real opportunity to put it into practice.” And my only hesitation was not the step, but I just thought they won’t even look at me with primary, I’ve never even taught, so that was my only hesitation. No I don’t think I spoke to anyone else about it (Principal).

Interestingly, what Ann doesn’t say is that her husband of 37 years is a secondary school teacher and up until recently before this research took place, had actually worked at Links College.

The RNL describes the reaction to Ann’s appointment in the secondary school fraternity, “… amongst (Don’s) peers there was lots of second guessing of why on earth … isn’t there anyone in secondary good enough? … you’ve taken an opportunity off someone.” Ann also received a shocked response

… lots of feedback afterwards of the ilk of “are you mad?”, “why would you do this?”, “do you really know what you’re getting into?”, and my answer was “no, I don’t” but I had a core belief that what worked … that curriculum was curriculum, what worked in primary would work in secondary, and I really didn’t know what I
was going to find here but I probably didn't care, I just felt that I did have something to offer and the fact that I think the principal here was courageous enough to offer me the job is a bit of synchronicity too because I think many wouldn't be that open minded (Principal).

Reflecting on her early life experiences, Ann describes her educational philosophy as the belief that:

… every student is truly unique and has the capacity to be successful … education is just one small component of life, very small component, we only have them (students) here six hours a day, so I believe that they also deserve for this time to be something really positive and that the measures of success should be diverse (Principal).

She describes a broad view of success:

For me a successful student is one who has the opportunity to identify their strengths and passions and to use their time at school to develop those in meeting a goal that they have identified for themselves. And so we've got work to do in helping a lot of our students sort out the goal because for many of them, they're not in an environment where they sit down over dinner with mum and dad and talk about what the future might look like. For a lot of them the only thing that's in their head coming from home is “you've got to earn some money so whatever you do …find a way to do that as soon as possible so you can support the family.” So actually looking at their own needs and fulfilling that as well … that's not something they grow up with and it's really resulted in us responding to that … (Principal).

Ann highlights her personal strength of living her values, stating that she has made the school a match for her beliefs.

So I guess part of who I am is, I don’t have any fear about being employed, which you hear a lot from a lot of teachers. I actually think the nature of the teaching game is such that if your philosophy doesn't match with the school, you are in the wrong place and it's not good for you emotionally and psychologically, you've got to get that match … it is a match for me and that's critical, I couldn't work if my values didn't match (Principal).

And in the early days she used her intuition and people skills to build a team who shared her values.

… it wasn’t a match, but I guess I identified of the hundred or so staff who were here at the time, there was a small handful who I thought “you guys don't like working this way, you've got the potential to do something different", and again you just pick that up from the way they talk about the students and the way they go about their work. So for me there was the window of opportunity to pick up on that and to work with them. I think if I couldn't have made the changes I've made, I probably wouldn’t have stayed here (Principal).

At the core of Ann’s values based leadership is courage and commitment to action. She describes this,
I don’t think anyone in education would argue that that’s what’s needed, but ask them if they’re prepared to put time and effort into developing that at the expense of the things that we’re held accountable for and most will say no and that is a dilemma, that is a real dilemma and I guess we have to be courageous enough to say not only do we believe that’s what’s best for students in the future, we’re prepared to do it and if there is some fallout, well, our moral purpose is not the thing that’s suffering (Principal).

How do other stakeholders view the principal and her leadership of the school?

1. Personal Attributes and Behaviours

The following Table A5.1 tallies the 20 words most often used to describe the principal by the interviewees.
Table A5.1: Stakeholder Groups’ Word Analysis for Principal Links SC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Attribute</th>
<th>RNL</th>
<th>SCP</th>
<th>LSH</th>
<th>STF</th>
<th>PAR</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leads change (change maker)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Visionary - has a vision</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Team player</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Approachable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Supportive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Expectations</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Risk taker (takes risks)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Values driven/beliefs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Trustworthy-gains trust</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Caring - cares</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
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<td>11. Proud</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>12. Symbolic</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>13. Innovative</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Consistent</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Purpose(ful)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Challenging</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Committed</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Calm</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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The attribute of leading change was used with high frequency across all stakeholder groups, especially those who work the closest to Ann on a daily basis. This word search required difficult judgments to separate the use of the word as a descriptor of Ann’s leadership from the process of change in the school; however its high level usage by all groups indicates that Ann is viewed as a strong change maker. When teamed with the most commonly used attributes agreed on by four of the five stakeholder groups (visionary or has a vision, a team player and approachable), a
picture is painted of a leader with a clear philosophical base for school improvement and the ability to engage and work collaboratively with teams across the school to implement a shared vision. The high frequency words further support this picture with visionary, team player, expectations, trust or trustworthy and approachable all being used to describe Ann’s leadership. The next layer of high frequency descriptors (risk taker, values driven and cares or caring) continues the balance of high level professional expectations and accountability countered with hands on guidance and support.

Not surprisingly the leadership team (LSH) describe Ann with the highest frequency levels, using words indicating strong levels of team work, trust and mutual respect (visionary, team player, trust, supportive, leads change and symbolic). They were also the only group who saw Ann as calm, knowing what happens in the school and using research as a base for strategic direction. This analysis suggests Ann has built the leadership team to be a powerful coalition in the school.

In contrast, the staff group (STF), apart from strong agreement on the leadership of change, did not find agreement on any other characteristic. However the two staff groups (LSH and STF) did find common agreement on Ann being a change agent, approachable, supportive, holding expectations, risk taker, trustworthy, consistent, purposeful and challenging.

The parent group (PAR) seemed to have little shared understanding of Ann’s leadership with extremely low levels of agreement on any descriptor. The SC President (SCP) saw Ann as a visionary change maker, underpinned by a strong value set and high levels of care for the school, its staff and students. Unsurprisingly, while the RNL agreed with the descriptor of Ann as a visionary leader, he was also aware of the high performance expectations Ann held for staff and students.

2. Leadership Style

The picture of Ann’s leadership is one of strength however this was not a word used to describe her leadership by anyone other than the SC President. Instead the RNL described her as resolute “… (she) has a vision and she’s prepared to do the hard yards to get there” and the parent group used the word determined. When coupled with other descriptors such as visionary, holding high expectations, being a risk taker and innovative, the picture of a strong and confident leader emerges. The SC President, somewhat casually, emphasises Ann’s commitment and courage:
(Links College is) saying “look, you know, we’re in boots and all” and if we are, then we want the kids to have the best notebook and be exposed to the best online learning … that courage, from the experience I have … she’s got some balls (SC President).

The SC President articulates the balance Ann achieves in driving significant, sustained school change whilst ensuring she takes people with her on the improvement journey.

She’s very consultative from what I can see … she’s fairly consultative and very strong, so she appears to me as a lady that … always has an outcome that she wants to achieve and it’s the process then of getting everyone else to realise the outcome and get to it. But she’s not overbearing which a lot of people can be when they’re trying to drive an outcome … (SC President).

When the leadership team talked about Ann’s leadership, my observations were that they had difficulty separating her personal leadership from the school’s culture and programs and their strategic team work. This suggests that Ann has intentionally and successfully built a strong and united leadership team to share her investment in leading the school. The leadership team explains this critical relationship:

I think what’s enabled us to progress as rapidly as we have is that (Ann’s) prepared to relinquish some control, she doesn’t have to … she has to be around everything but not on top of everything … when myself and other (leading teachers) … were employed originally four years ago, it was very much a distributed model but very much in practice as well, so there was a lot of input, you had a lot of scope and freedom to be able to design and grow and modify your programs and it came back down to that central point … for the good of the students, it’s all about them (Leadership Team).

Referring to Sergiovanni’s leadership framework, the leadership team describe Ann as “a symbolic leader, she practices what she preaches” and she takes opportunities to model the practice she expects from teachers at opportunities such as staff meetings. They further describe her ‘hands on’ approach, “(Ann’s) sort of always wandering around, ‘how are you going with this?’, ‘what’s happening?’, yeah she just knows, she’s like Santa, she just knows if you’ve been good or not!”

The leadership team describe the impact this has on building trust with staff:

… I’ve been in schools with principals that have that bunker mentality and (Ann’s) definitely not like that, readily takes an opportunity to do a yard duty in the grounds and is very approachable. She’s never in her office, if the door’s closed you know that there’s a meeting going on in there and as soon as the meeting’s gone the doors open … it’s never just shut down so she can have her own time like that. Very approachable. I don’t know of any people in the teams that I work in who haven’t taken the opportunity just to go and see her about an issue … I think that is why there’s a general sense of relaxation amongst the staff as well, it’s a pretty chilled group of people (Leadership Team).
Ann describes herself as a risk-taker and articulates a strong value of this in the culture of the school. This language is repeated by the leadership team.

... it gathers a real momentum and when you’ve got a group of leaders and people in your team ... who are comfortable with being uncomfortable, where it’s OK and you’ve got permission to try, fail, look at it, redo, it’s exciting and every time you see a positive outcome it’s a real win, you know it’s not by chance, it’s not a fluke, it’s not just that cohort of kids, it’s what you’re doing. ... she’s very big on ... it’s not about ... always getting it right, it’s about the having a go and (she) gives permission for staff to get things wrong and to fail miserably but she wants people to try ... it’s the having a go that’s important and not tolerating not having a go and sitting back and not changing (Leadership Team).

Ann takes on a consultative, coaching style role with the leadership team who describe her as “... pretty reflective and skilled at making you reflect. ... I think she has confidence that we have got the answers but sometimes just need guidance in getting there.” This builds trust between Ann and key staff and the leadership team explains how this works:

... I can talk about ... my roles, responsibilities ... she pretty much gives me free reign and trusts that I’m going to do ... a good job, and that’s ... reassuring and I think people do their best work when there is that sort of trust. And I’m not talking about a lack of accountability either ... there’s still a lot of accountability in terms of what we do, but there’s certainly a lot of ... trust and it’s not the looking over the shoulder (Leadership Team).

Ann’s high expectations for the performance of the leadership team are shared and implicitly understood; ensuring team members are intrinsically motivated to do their best.

... even though there is a lot of trust, the expectations are still quite high but in a weird way, like you’re not scared of them but you know that the bar’s set pretty high. So that professionalism ... when you’re asked to do a job ... you want to do it really well and you know that you don’t get away with doing shabby work ... (Leadership Team).

The staff team, all long term members of staff and mostly somewhat jaded with recent system and school trends were cautiously supportive of Ann’s leadership style. Interestingly, Ann nominated this group when there would have been many other teachers with more current opinions who would have been more forthright in their praise of current school direction. However, this group supported the risk taking element of Ann’s leadership,

I quite like it I guess, from the viewpoint that she will step out and have a go, not be tied down necessarily to money or politics ... where other schools have said we’d love to do that but it’s because they don’t take the money and say right we’re
going to do it … you know, she has tried to make that happen … I like that part of her … I certainly feel that she’s pioneering ahead (Staff Group).

The staff group complained about the pace of change and the need for the leadership team to take stock. They conceded that “Perhaps people feel supported but … they’ve not necessarily got much say in what’s going to happen.” They shared a metaphor for the culture of the school, indicating an awareness of their choices in remaining at Links College “… we have the expression here … you get on the … bus … you should be on board, with us or against us … if you’re not really committed to this perhaps you need to find somewhere else.”

When speaking with Ann, there was evidence that she has the confidence to bend the rules to suit her strategic direction when she needs to. She talked about gaining an agreement from DEECD to mark students in the Hands On program present (and receive full funding) when in reality they were only ever going to be at school for three of four periods a day. She also spoke of giving staff an additional pupil free day the previous year as a response to some additional work they had undertaken. She talked about what she does when she doesn’t know what to do, which was to speak with the leadership team and others to ascertain their responses before making up her mind. She also spoke of using her intuition, “When I know what I want to do and I’m not a hundred percent sure, I go with my gut instinct. I don’t know what that means but that’s what I do, it usually doesn’t let me down.”

Ann felt that her leadership style meant that she doesn’t always pay enough attention to the detail and this can frustrate some people. “… that’s been a bit of a recurring theme, don’t let the need to nail the detail get in the way of a good idea … that’s probably one of my mantras … if it’s a good idea, it’s worth pursuing and we’ll find a way to make it work …” She reflected that the leadership team are very similar to her in this approach but sees strength in this.

… we are creative, we don’t let things get in our way, we find a solution to things. And I also laugh because there have been times when we’ve had a bit of criticism from staff about … flying by the seat of the pants and … “this really wasn’t thought through” and “we really should’ve done step three before step four.” And I can just look at them and say “yep and next time we will, thanks for that feedback, you’re dead right, we made it a bit chaotic but, you know, we got it done!” (Principal).

3. Drivers

The RNL alluded to the personal cost that leading a disenchanted and divided staff, a failing school, disconnected students and a disengaged parent community has had on
Ann, ‘It’s taken its toll … and she would tell you that I think, if she was open and honest with you.’ So what drives Ann’s work at Links College? Having come from the primary education system into the secondary, is she still trying to prove herself? Is she influenced by a sense of having failed in her early endeavors to provide opportunities for her nephew and niece? Or is it the thrill of the change journey?

The RNL believes that Ann is driven by a passion for everyone to achieve. He goes on to describe Ann’s perspective of achievement and success as ‘very broad’ and that she is as proud of the school’s VCE achievements as she is of the students who stay at school in an alternative program and of the staff who start enjoying their teaching in the new learning centres. “So I think she’s not one dimensional and I reckon that’s probably (Ann’s) strength is that … she can define achievement in lots of ways.”

The SC President saw Ann being driven by her care for the people in the school, something that underpins the views expressed by the RNL.

… she cares about the kids and about their learning … I think what drives her is just the fact that she wants (Links) College to be known and seen as a bit of a leader in the community and not … a place where people just end up. And she cares about staff (RNL).

The parent group saw Ann as being driven by the potential of the school.

I think she’s helped to build it where it is today, so that just kind of pushes her on to well what else can we do, how else can we make it … she doesn’t want to sit back and just ride what she’s got, she wants to improve it (Parent Group).

Underpinning these comments runs a theme previously expressed; that Ann wants the children at Links College to have opportunities. The parent group says, “…my feeling about it is that she genuinely believes that children deserve a really good education, and so that’s probably the core thing that’s encouraging her to push on.”

The parent group believed that Ann is driven by the challenge of school improvement but for the benefit of students.

I think she relishes the challenge of taking whatever raw material comes in and maximizing the value added … to the child by the time they go out … it’s easy to say ‘well we’ll just try and get rid of the unresponsive children or try and send them somewhere else.’ She speaks of … let’s work with these children and she speaks (of) … finding the approach that works with the modern child … and using that to bring the child along … she relishes that challenge … She wants every child to get … the best, do the best (Parent Group).

They describe the impact of this driver on the wider staff group:
probably same with the staff as well, she feels the same way about her staff, getting the most out of them and helping them grow and learn … And that helps with their pride of the school and their job and work and … Part of a good leader is to collect people on the same wavelength (Parent Group).

The staff group reinforced the impact of Ann’s care of students and staff on the community perception of the school, “We’ve got a very, very strong reputation out in the community of being a caring school and a school where the teachers actually understand the kids and I’m hearing that all the time …”

4. Sustainability of Innovation and Success

The sustainability of the strategic work of the school, beyond her leadership was a strong point of reflection for Ann.

And I don’t know realistically that you would ever get to the point particularly in a largish school where … if you take the principal out of the picture, where the leadership team are so capable and confident that they can do without that person constantly feeding, nurturing, because they do the work on the ground, there’s no doubt, I don’t do the work, I’m not in the classrooms, I’m not sitting down with a team of eight people trying to do the planning, that’s not me, that’s somebody else, but my job is to support them absolutely to do that work. And I don’t know, it’s just a question, does it ever get to the point where you would have the dream team to that extent that you could step away, I don’t know the answer to that (Principal).

She continued this reflection in light of the school’s ongoing improvement momentum and her perception that “you never get there”.

Well this is year eight now, and I think we’ve got the critical mass. And we’re not there yet but then we never will be, ever, ever, because I would actually argue that the more skilled your workforce becomes the more visionary and true leaders that your leadership team becomes, the more you can see that needs to be done and can be done … So while you’re building the capacity, the capacity of the leadership group is growing as well so the potential keeps growing. And that is one of the challenges of managing, actually stopping and reflecting because what’s been achieved is significant but because you’ve always got your eye on something ahead you’re probably never satisfied with what you’ve done. (Principal)

The leadership team, influenced by their collaborative effort, team cohesion and shared sense of purpose, perceived the work of the school to be independent of Ann’s leadership and that they would keep the momentum.

I think she’s definitely developed layers … I just think the size of our leadership team and the people that are on board … I believe if (Ann) left that we could … there’s certainly layers there to keep it going … it’s the building of the capacity of the teachers and the leadership team. (Leadership Team).

However, they acknowledged the different possibilities:
If someone were to come from somewhere else or if one of us were to step up it’s obviously … it’s got to have a different flavour. But I absolutely believe things are sustainable … I read a lot of business books about the charismatic leader where the business then fails when they go. And I don’t think we’ve got that, I think we’ve got … a leader that’s had a lot of influence on research based change and then there’s been some awesome capacity building going on that … makes it sustainable. (Leadership Team)

While the RNL agreed with the leadership team’s assessment, he felt it was not yet independent of Ann’s leadership.

If she left tomorrow no, but I can see the strategy that she's building towards that. And that’s embedding the change of culture so it’s not (Ann’s) way, it’s the (Links) College way. At the moment it’s that transitional period … because it always starts as someone’s vision … no matter how inclusive you are after that, it always starts as someone’s vision and then it becomes our vision for the leadership team, then it becomes the bigger vision and then it becomes the whole school vision. So we’re on the journey and we’re certainly moving forward with it, but at the moment I think it’s still very dependent on (Ann) (RNL).

The SC President agreed with the leadership team, feeling that the school had got “that rolling ball” however he acknowledged that it required the right person to continue with ‘the plan.’ The parent group was not so confident that the school could continue without Ann, finding this difficult to imagine.

… I think it might stall for a little bit, like maybe only a month or so while people found their feet, but I don’t believe she’d take off because I think they’d all hunt her down and bring her back. I don’t think she could stay away anyway (Parent Group).

The parent group agreed with the SC President that the sustainability of the work rested with the vision of the person who replaced her and if this didn’t happen “There’d be chaos!”

Other Factors that Have Led to the School’s Innovation and Success

Several groups, including Ann, referred to the courage of the previous principal in identifying Ann’s qualities and employing her against the tide of historical expectations. The RNL describes the previous principal, Don as “his own man” and that he would have “made that decision on the basis of he wanted someone with teaching and learning and he couldn't find anyone who he thought was of high enough caliber”, so he appointed Ann.

The leadership team supported the RNL’s view of Ann’s appointment being a major foundational event believing it established a pattern of courageous decision making for the school.
... it's about brave decisions. The previous principal appointed a primary school teacher to be a secondary (assistant principal) ... That's a really brave decision and in terms of staffing we continued that after that. The spilling of the ... leadership team I would say is a significant event as you will ever get because that then paved the way, that sent a symbolic message to staff that you know what, we're not accepting what we've always got and that's where the mantra ... began. And then we went out and we did the conscious ... unashamed recruiting and looking for the best that we could to come here (Leadership Team).

Demonstrating a skill in making the most of every opportunity, Ann added that a significant event in her leadership of the school was a funding opportunity that arrived at a perfect time for her to establish her leadership:

...I had this view of what I thought I might do but I had no idea of how it was going to happen and a key event was the Leading Schools fund, the fact that that was there and available and that I developed the submission, and that synchronized with the time when staff morale and the general tone in the place was at its lowest. So that became a major opportunity to do something really different (Principal).

Summary

Ann’s longevity in the school has built a strong foundation of trust in her leadership amongst staff, students and the parent community. Against all odds, the school has transformed itself from a failing school to a highly successful one, seen by a range of measures, both traditional and academic as well as the ethical and nonacademic, giving disadvantaged children skills and opportunities for success. This success has attracted attention and with this has developed increased pride in the school from all stakeholders, reaffirming the improvement journey.

Ann is a ‘hands on’ leader who shares the work closely with her leadership team and all those willing to work with her. This provides the clarity of purpose seen across the school. Ann is also skilled at holding others to account, even more skilled in building this as an intrinsic motivator for individuals and teams. She is a strong leader with a critical balance of the need for care and support of her staff, students and parents in order to lead and drive others to perform to a high level towards a shared vision.

Ann’s leadership is strongly influenced by her background life experiences, acknowledged by her as life changing. She is a leader confident of her abilities and firmly grounded by her personal beliefs and values. She understands the need for her work to be a life match and is not fearful of walking away if this is not the case. She isn’t fearful of hard work, temporary disharmony or of putting an idea or plan into action and she has built a team around her to share the work. She is not afraid of taking risks
to get what she wants and believes to be the best outcome for her school. She is also confident and willing to break the rules if the outcome is justified.

Ann’s leadership driver is embedded in doing whatever it takes to achieve student success. The language is not around innovation or creativity but more of ‘taking action’ or being responsive to a perceived need in whatever way will best get the job done. She is not hamstrung by what is or is not possible, her intuition, emotional and intellectual intelligence gives her the confidence to ‘do whatever it takes.’

Ann doesn’t appear to be a strong networker or systems worker; she is internally focused on her school and her network is her leadership team and her husband with whom she shares the work. While it is a large school and therefore impossible to speak with everyone, there is little doubt of the high levels of loyalty felt towards Ann by staff, students and parents. Ann understands this, demonstrated by the staff group she selected to speak with the researcher who would be representative of the most disloyal group in the school. She weighs every activity up for its potential as a learning experience and adopts a big picture or strategic long term plan to her work. She isn’t afraid of showing it as it is.

Ann has built a team around her to do the work, freeing her up to be actively engaged in the process, to be hands on, responsive and strategic. The team adopts a research based approach, having the shared confidence to implement changes and modify this as they develop the work. This ensures the journey will continue beyond Ann’s leadership however the work will change without the strong convictions and foresight of a confident, knowledgeable and trusted leader.

Links College is a successful and innovative school, led by a strong leader who has developed a shared moral purpose to the work, an agreed way of going about it and a culture of high expectations for what is possible to achieve for everyone in the school.
Appendix 6: Complete Case Story: Parkview Secondary College

Features of the School

Parkview Secondary College is an outer suburban school, approximately 30 km from the centre of the large capital city of Melbourne, Australia. The school caters for a little over 1400 year seven to twelve students (twelve to eighteen years of age) and is a very large, single campus, coeducational secondary school by state and national standards. The local area is an older, middle income area with a trend for families to relocate to nearby newer, leafier suburbs. In recent years, with the availability of older style, cheaper homes, an aging population and the newly opened freeway connecting to the city, a new wave of immigrant families has moved into the traditional Anglo Saxon area.

The school’s 2011 Index of Community Social and Educational Advantage (ICSEA) score of 1039 (1000 being the Australian average ICSEA score), is represented by 24% of family backgrounds in the bottom quartile, 25% and 35% in the middle quartiles and only 16% in the top quartile (compared to the Australian distribution of 25% across each quartile).

This information is supported by 2011 census data with 60.4% registered in fulltime employment, and 5.2% unemployed, below the Australian average of 5.6%. The areas of employment are dominated by middle income workers: professionals (23.6%), clerical or administrative workers (16.8%), technicians and trades workers (14.4%) and managers (11.4%). The average age is 37 years; with 27.6% 55 years or older, 43.2% 25-54 years, 11.8% 15-24 years, 10.6% 5-14 years and 7.0% 4 years or younger. The move away from a traditional Anglo Saxon profile is seen in the fact that 51.9% of both parents were born overseas, with 22.7% of residents speaking two or more languages and 74.8% speaking English only. Overseas birthplaces include 4.2% UK, 3.4% China and 2.8% India. (Australian Bureau of Statistics - www.censusdata.abs.gov.au )

Parkview’s increasing attraction to new immigrant enrolments, profiled in the Language Background Other than English (LBOTE) at 14% in the 2011 MySchool data, is supported by the wide range of subjects and pathways being offered by the school. This has occurred largely due the school’s successful development of a federally funded, onsite Technical and Trade Centre, offering facilities to provide Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) courses in Engineering, Manufacturing and Automotive subjects. The 2011 MySchool data lists 151 students enrolled in Vocational
Education and Training (VET) courses and the 2010 Year 12 student post school destinations as 44% university, 32% TAFE or vocational study and 8% in employment. This intentional diversification of the school’s profile of success, strongly led by Jim, the principal, has not come without some community concern at the branching away from a pure academic stream. This was commented on by the SC President, who demonstrated a very strong personal bias in his opinions, possibly influenced by his professional role as a university academic.

… the one concern (I had) … was that, this facility might have the impact of actually changing the community’s perception of what the school was … I think there’s been a deliberate attempt to ensure that that building doesn’t impact upon the general culture of the school itself, and you’ll probably find a lot of the school students ask themselves why is it there (SC President).

The principal, leadership team, staff, parents and School Council President all supported the notion that Parkview Secondary College has long been regarded as a good school.

… it was and it still is and it’s always been a good school … it’s a school in which education’s valued and it’s a school that teachers like to be in and they demonstrate that in a variety of ways but particularly through their involvement in the extracurricular stuff … (Principal).

Enrolment in the school is highly sought after, drawing from over fifty primary schools, some from out of the local area. Enrolments have steadily increased over the years with strong demand for entry at every year level. Enrolment includes a small number of international fee paying students from China, Korea and Vietnam and refugee students from Burma who are on a bridging program.

The school was built in 1954 and was one of the first high schools to be built in the Light Timber Construction (LTC) style, designed by the Victorian Public Works Department to address a chronic shortage of suburban high schools in the 1950’s. The school’s footprint is a number of permanent and portable buildings around a large quadrangle, oval and playing fields. Many refurbishments have occurred over the years with various building styles evident, including the main administration block which was rebuilt after a fire over twenty years ago. The more recent facility is a modern, expansive Technical and Trades Centre and an open plan building which accommodates Year 9 and 10 students. The school appears well maintained and cared for, although under pressure to provide an adequate space for whole school assemblies and to replace the twenty four run down portable classrooms required as the school increased in size.
Organisationally the school is broken up into three sub schools – Junior, Middle and Senior; each with its own leader who heads up a team of community coordinators and form tutors and each broken down into smaller communities of approximately 80 students. The school website articulates its commitment to the digital education revolution, citing the benefits that mobile learning devices bring to student learning. The use of technology by students as an integrated learning tool is highly visible, as is the provision of computer suites and labs throughout. All year 7 students use a personal I-pad as a key learning tool, having moved to a bookless learning environment in 2011 and the school has provided middle and senior school students with a one to one laptop program for the past nine years.

The school’s website lists its Vision statement as “(Parkview) Secondary College fosters a learning community that caters for the unique academic, social and emotional needs of all our members. It is achieved through: Learning to be yourself, Learning to do, Learning to think and Learning to live together.” The website lists the school Values as Respect, Integrity and Personal Best which “enables individuals to be responsible and productive citizens in a global community." The principal, in the webpage welcome offers his view of the school:

We are a truly dynamic, vibrant and globally engaged school … Our college has a long and successful tradition of academic excellence and innovative learning practices. Our staff take pride in providing a safe and secure learning environment, whilst at the same time providing a full range of dynamic and challenging academic and extracurricular programs (School Website).

Affirming the global perspective taken by the school, it lists sister schools in France, UK, Denmark, Korea, China and Thailand. Partnership visits to and from these schools occur annually with groups of students and teachers involved. The school performs on a global stage with a Performing Arts World Tour every three years, visiting sister schools and participating in worldwide performances and in turn hosting international visits and performances. It also boasts three concert bands, three string ensembles and two choirs and regularly receives state, national and international recognition for its performances. The school supports an Aids orphanage in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Parkview is strongly involved in several local secondary school networks, the strongest being an innovative proposal for a coalition of Parkview and several smaller secondary schools to collaborate to provide an integrated curriculum across campuses with the provision of new facilities and support funding. Jim has been the lead school in this initiative and remains a strong driver and high level networker for the educational and regional opportunities this proposal presents.
There are over one hundred teaching staff and over thirty support staff at Parkview Secondary College. The leadership team consists of Jim, the principal, three long term assistant principals, each with a sub school leadership role and eighteen leading teachers, many of these young teachers, new to leadership roles. The school has an ICT team providing specialist technical and computer support, a student services team with a nurse, youth worker, guidance officer, social worker and chaplain and a strong organisational framework of teaching and learning leaders and curriculum program coordinators.

**The Culture of the School**

Parkview Secondary College is repeatedly described as having a strong and cohesive professional culture by its stakeholders. Jim articulates this,

> I think it’s very strong. We have actually invested a lot of time in re-culturing ... so one of the things we have is what I call a strong performance and development culture and I think that’s largely because we’ve evolved a model that’s been owned by the staff ... The other thing that I reckon works really well to support that is the structure of our staffroom where ... everyone’s in the same work area and it’s really easy to have those informal conversations that you don’t necessarily have the time to do if you were in different buildings and have to walk from one part of the school to the other, so there’s lots of informal conversations that go on ...

(Principal)

Jim goes on in detail to explain the framework for this performance and development culture that has been developed with staff over time.

The performance and development stuff sort of evolved ... (we) use what’s called a ‘balanced scorecard approach’, so we actually try and capture what’s the essential work of a teacher in a school, so obviously high quality teaching ... we ... set the key goals that relate to that, individuals work on that but they also had reference to the school’s annual implementation plan. ... We have used the E5 model as a frame of reference ... but to that we’ve added our own (Parkview) characteristics ... building rapport and the personal relationship stuff ... 21st century teaching skills ... (that) frames the work around highly effective teaching practice. So that’s the first bit of the balanced scorecard. The second one is teaming and leadership and that’s really important because obviously a lot of the work that we do in the school is based on working in teams, and leadership can be delivered at a whole range of levels so all teachers are leaders ... The third element is their own professional growth, professional learning and there’s obviously opportunity to put your own focus there but also considering ... what the school’s doing. And the fourth one is contribution to the wider school or system ... recognising that an important element of your role as a teacher goes beyond your own classroom or your own school ... the discretionary effort that people make in terms of sport and performing arts and all that can be recognised there as well. So that's our model, we've evolved that over a period of time. (Principal)
This ‘balanced scorecard approach’ at Parkview is documented as a case study by Dr Ben Jensen in the Grattan Institute Report, April 18, 2011 ‘Better teacher appraisal and feedback: improving performance’. It is also the subject of an Australian Institute of Teaching and School leadership (AITSL) video link, demonstrating professional best practice.

The RNL, who has worked with Jim for thirty two years, as a neighboring principal and now as his line manager, provides a close up but external perspective which supports the principal’s view:

I think (Jim) expects a lot from his teaching staff … his human leadership capacity is very strong and he is … a follower of ‘recruit hard, manage easy’. He has very high expectations of his staff in terms of performance but also sees an incredible responsibility to ensure … that they have appropriate professional learning to continue to develop … The school’s set up in a way now which has moved away from the traditional model that you would expect in most schools, to very much a team oriented focus and those teams support one another and … there are structures in place which basically come back right through to (Jim) … he holds his staff for long periods of time … it’s highly sought after by the staff to get into (Parkview) as an employee … there is the academic performance of the students, I think it’s been traditionally known as a strong school … at the same time I think word of mouth certainly gets out that it’s a school that is recognised as being on the front foot in terms of innovation, both within digital technologies but also in terms of the way they structure themselves, the way they work together and … there are lots of opportunities … for professional learning and certainly through experience to develop as high quality teachers (RNL).

The staff group describe the school’s culture as a risk taking one, largely due to Jim’s leadership style of pushing staff “into the deep end to see if you will sink or swim.” However, they also describe a great sense of trust in Jim’s leadership and this underpins the school’s culture.

… we sometimes feel like you’ve been pushed off the deep end, you actually haven’t been pushed without a life jacket, you actually do have it and you’re encouraged to try something new. And he’s always so positive that it’s going to work. You sort of can’t fail to try and catch that energy as well … (Staff Group).

Success of the School

Parkview Secondary College was recommended to the researcher as being innovative by senior staff in the Innovations and Excellence Branch of the Department of Education; Jim, the principal having recently been awarded the 2010 Victorian Education Excellence Award for Outstanding School Leadership.

The school’s success is visible across a range of areas and this is intentionally driven by Jim who holds strong beliefs around a broad definition of success for all students.
This is tangible in his pride in the Wall of Fame, located in the front entry, which profiles past students’ achievements across a range of endeavours, including sporting champions, performing artists, television stars, mathematicians and scientists.

The school has a strong, longstanding reputation as a school with high academic results. This reputation extends to its performing arts program with the annual musical production a major highlight of the school and local community calendars, attracting crowds of over 3000 people. The school is also known to hold an enviable record in sporting success, driven by Jim who has an elite sporting background. Jim’s leadership has provided a very strong and public profile of the school as a leader in the use of new and existing technologies to promote student learning. Parkview Secondary College is a Cisco Networking Academy, providing professional learning in IT to a university extension level. It is known as one of the top four IT learning providers in the Asia Pacific. This partnership has positioned the school to be at the forefront of new learning technologies. However, all stakeholders acknowledge that it is Jim’s strategic leadership and high level networking that provide the key underpinning factors in the school’s success. As a highly astute, articulate, politically engaged and well-connected school leader, Jim’s opinion is regularly sought after by the major media agencies. As an avid Twitter follower, his thoughts are both shared and shaped on an international stage. Local and state examples are plentiful of Jim positioned with ministers and local, state and federal members on both sides of the political fence, across a range of activities. Parkview students also engage on this stage when appropriate to their learning context. An example of this occurred on 6 April 2011, when Stephen Conroy, then federal minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, launched the Youth Advisory Group on Cybersafety at Parkview with sixteen of its students participating in providing advice to government. Using technology to engage at an elite level on an international stage is an activity driven and closely managed by Jim and this places the school’s success into the global educational spotlight.

Jim provided his thoughts on the external perspective of the school’s innovation and success.

Firstly, I would say that I would be seen as entrepreneurial, so my leadership would be seen in that way by the Department. I suspect that it would be because of key staff here that actually have played significant leadership roles across some initiatives, e.g. the Innovation and Excellence stuff, the Cell schools initiative, the Early Years, the Ultranet pilot program, and ... just the little small scale projects that happen where they ask for schools to do particular work. And I think in most of those cases, we’ve actually delivered something back to the Department that is seen as innovative and can be shared (Principal).
The principal cites the school’s key success as:

… maintaining that sense of looking forward, the forward looking direction … it’s reflected in the outward looking nature of the school. Whilst we’re a school located in (suburban Melbourne), we are very much a school that’s part of an international stage … building those global links so that we can actually build … a shared conversation around education in terms of how it looks into the future (Principal).

Secondly Jim adds a success factor as increasing the diversity of the school’s population over the past fifteen years, currently with 55 refugee students and a close sister school relationship in Thailand. Thirdly, Jim believes a success to be moving from a 19th century framework of thinking about student learning to 21st century thinking with ‘the much more consistent and appropriate use of technology across the curriculum’. Finally, he cites a strong success in building the professional capacity of the teaching staff in the school and while he acknowledges that the bar continues to be raised and that they still have some way to go, Jim believes that the school now has “all of the key ingredients (and) I think we’re well down the track.”

The RNL shared his knowledge of the school prior to Jim’s leadership:

Pretty conservative school … known to be an academic school of excellence … a strong sporting school, a strong display of all that we know about independent schools with a uniform and students wearing ties and blazers and a lot of traditions that were inbuilt (RNL).

However he describes the school’s current success profile as vastly different to this.

It’s multifaceted; it certainly is endeavoring to provide pathways and a wide range of pathways for all the students that attend that school. And I think it goes beyond that, especially around VET opportunities that are now provided through their technical training facility, and I think that when you look at their CISCO program, their connections with other schools … (it) recognises that a whole range of kids are coming to that school and they all need to be taken care of. But that doesn’t preclude that very strong rigorous VCE program that they do run there (RNL).

The leadership and staff teams articulate the one to one use of technology and the key links with industry as key success factors however they quickly point out that ‘teaching and learning underpins everything that we do, we just use ICT as a tool.’ They explain this within a historical context:

… (ICT) has melded the heritage and the traditions and the success and the diversity of the past so that the inroads brought and the exciting aspects of IT learning have not been without having a secure foundation. I think you would go a long way to find a school that has the diversity of success and the rich base and the involvement of its staff … (Leadership).
The value of the increased diversity of the student population and the breadth of the definition of success provides a consistent message across educational groups. The community groups perceive the school’s success to be located in the cutting edge use of technology and the adoption of new ways of teaching, including reorganizing the school to accommodate student learning needs. This consistency and the trust it engenders is evident in the staff opinion data. The 2011 staff opinion survey was described by the RNL as “strong, unbelievably strong”, with all aspects (except staff induction), sitting in the third and fourth achievement quartiles and the empowerment of staff in the 90th percentile; results most secondary principals could only dream about.

The Principal's Role in Leading Innovation and Success

What is the principal's background and personal perspective on his educational leadership?

Jim has been involved in education for over 35 years, starting teaching in the mid 1970’s. He seems surprised to reflect that he was “actively involved in leadership roles from a very young age”, at the urging of his early principals and mentors. By his second and third years teaching, he held roles such as year level and district sports coordinator and he enjoyed this leadership experience. He also became known in the educational arena as a very young, Year 12 geography exam moderator at a time when these roles most commonly held experience as a pre-requisite and, in the words of the RNL, “(he) was a bit of a young gun at that point, running a moderation group which included some very experienced teachers …”. These early experiences gave him confidence to seek leadership roles early in his career, becoming an Assistant Principal at a small, outer suburban school. It led to his first principal appointment at the same school, located in a semi-rural environment with approximately 650 students and the opportunity to learn on the job, whilst working in a close community. This provided opportunities to lead the physical side of school improvement, working in school design, resourcing and staffing. Jim states that one of his early lessons as school leader was the importance of “hiring hard” and trying to get “the best people in the right jobs” – a mantra that he has lived by ever since. After almost two years in his first principal position, he successfully applied for Parkview, where he has remained as principal for over fifteen years.

At Parkview, Jim followed a principal of six to seven years who had moved into a regional position. The school held a strong academic and performing arts reputation in its community, however he found significant, underlying staff resistance to change
when he first arrived, accompanied by some subtle staff bullying. He provides an example:

... whenever there was a change proposed there was a prevailing view that ... if you had a strong minority view, that you could lobby the principal and the decision would be set aside and ... there'd be no change ... so there was this sort of idea (that) if there was enough rocking of the boat around it then things would continue as they were. And it was particularly evident around what I call the faculty politics ... as opposed to anything really significant and substantial (Principal).

Jim recalls with great clarity the first time he stood against these tactics.

... there was one time where there was a decision around the curriculum structure ... after I'd been here six months ... and there were some recommendations and I basically accepted ... and then there was a bit of pressure went on about changing it and I said 'well no, I'm not changing the decision, I'm happy to accept that recommendation, it's been through appropriate consultation' ... and that caused some interesting reaction including people wearing black arm bands ... But what was really important was that the decision went through ... it was the first step in saying "... where there are changes afoot you can expect that ... where there's been appropriate consultation, that the school principal, the leader in the school will stick with that decision and will persevere with it" ... when I look back on it, (it was) the most critical thing in terms of starting to send a message that ... change is OK ... the experience of that change wasn't catastrophic ... (Principal).

He explains its impact in starting to shape a professional culture with shared leadership responsibilities:

... people that get involved in processes around decision making and planning for change could have some confidence that they could do the work and it would be supported ... (Principal).

And the impact on the school improvement journey:

... so I don’t suppose we’ve looked back since then in lots of ways, there’s been lots of curriculum change, there’s been lots of change around delivery, use of technology, a whole range of stuff, probably at times too much, and if I was thinking about my leadership journey, I’ve actually learned to get better at knowing when to pull the levers and when to go hard ... it’s like riding in a Melbourne Cup sometimes, and so I’ve managed to ... do better on that (Principal).

Jim reflects on the evolving change process at the school and the school Parkview has become today:

... sometimes there were lots of balls in the air and I do understand much more now about the impact of change fatigue ... if I look back on the journey you can actually say, “well, (the) school hasn’t gone backwards, we’ve still maintained a strong academic focus but we’re better now at catering for all kids.” Our programs like performing arts have gone ahead in leaps and bounds, we’ve added other dimensions to it ... I suppose the big area where we’ve obviously made significant strides has been around the 21st century learning skills and use of ICT in education
... spent a lot of time in providing resources to build teacher capacity, and all through no matter what we've done, we have maintained high expectations and we have reduced the number of invitational models around the work … in the late '90s it was very much ‘oh, we'll do a pilot’ or “we'll invite people to do the work” rather than expect people to do it, so I think that's been a major change (Principal).

Jim describes his personal philosophy of education as “a belief that all students can achieve or be successful” and schools need to provide multiple opportunities for success. He cites the school’s VCAL program, built from nothing over the past five years as an example. Jim describes his view of success for students as “multidimensional”.

... one measure is that we can say that all of our students have been able to move onto the next phase of their life with something worthwhile to go to, whether that’s work or whether it’s university or whether it’s TAFE … that’s the aspiration and we get pretty close to that … the second thing is the ability to create young people who actually feel confident about being able to achieve in whatever field of endeavor … that’s why we put a lot of energy into things like performing arts … (Principal).

Sharing his forward thinking perspective, Jim muses:

... we’ve got a challenge to bridge the gap between how kids live and how they learn … when I think about innovation or change, I try and think of it in terms of … will this help do that? … I suspect that … we’re still a little bit unprepared for what’s coming in terms of the experiences of kids that are coming out of primary schools … we actually have to personalise the learning experience more … I suspect that technology actually does enable you to do that more, if we use it properly … by 2019, 50% of high school courses … will be blended … so what do we do to address that, even if that figure’s not right it doesn’t matter, the fact is that that’s the change that’s going to be there (Principal).

When asked about his past leadership influences, Jim responded strongly, showing his pragmatic nature.

... I’m not a great rearview mirror person … someone once said we look in the rearview mirror too much in education and we try and move forward by marching backwards … past experiences can help in terms of understand(ing) the context but I’m not sure that it actually is instructive in terms of thinking about the future … the things that I’ve actually learnt … I think that’s the important part … the willingness to be a learner and to actually inform your thinking by listening to thought leaders, by reading a bit more, by actually trying to understand the landscape. And I think as … a system, I think we’ve got better at that for our school leaders. And so I would imagine I’d be able to engage a totally different conversation with other principals than what I would’ve been able to do say six or seven years ago around broader educational issues. (Principal)

In 1999, three years into Jim's principalship at Parkview, the Victorian government’s self-governing schools initiative was rolled out with government school’s opting in for selection for inclusion on the basis of satisfying a stringent set of guidelines indicating
strong organisational capacity. While most of the approximately 1600 schools adopted a ‘wait and see’ attitude, Jim was with a group of key educational leaders who were early adopters. Parkview was subsequently with a small group of twenty-five schools and lead principals who provided the model for significant whole school and system change, something that has continued to be a critical difference in the success of the Victorian education system and which is currently being looked at as a model for system change by other states, territories and the federal government, albeit some fifteen years later. This early leadership step into high level, system engagement is referred to by Jim and the RNL as a key event. However the RNL sees the most significant aspect of this as the engagement with, and inclusion in, an elite, experienced, very powerful, forward thinking, technologically minded group of male, secondary school leaders, each whom has gone onto key, influential leadership positions in Victoria, Australia and overseas.

… he and (named others) … went self-governance back in those early days … and there was a coterie of people that connected very strongly and he would’ve been by far the youngest of that group but attached himself to that group and then got pulled back into the system. So I think he was willing to be a single player, albeit part of that other group, but still quite different from the rest of the masses that were still wanting to remain within a system (RNL).

The risk taking, open mindedness and self-confidence required in taking this early leadership stance, which sets the school apart and places a spotlight on the principal’s leadership, is a characteristic of Jim's leadership which has endured from his early days. Jim talked openly about his leadership qualities which he believes are significant.

I think having an open mind’s really important, there’s no question of that. But also not being afraid that it’s not going to work … it’s obviously got to be an informed risk, but if we don’t try new things or try different things, how are we going to move forward? And so … often in large organisations there can be a risk averse culture, and sometimes it’s a matter of saying ‘… we need to tweak this, it’s not necessarily a matter of … doing one thing and then saying this hasn’t worked in six months or twelve months and then thrown out the window, you’ve actually got to … (allow) time for things to develop, I think that’s important (Principal).

While Jim acknowledges his self-confidence, “OK, let’s accept that that’s the reality”, as a critical part of his leadership, he is also dismissive, preferring to see the importance of learning from others as the most important aspect of his leadership style.

… being willing to network and to sound out other people whether they’re local or whether they’re global … I’ve had the good fortune of being able to work in a variety of organisations and settings where I’ve been able to work with people like Yong Zhou and others who move around the world, so that’s been helpful (Principal).
Jim acknowledges that a critical part of his leadership success is the strong capacity and varied strengths of his principal team.

… I’m fortunate I can probably get out there and start thinking about some of these other initiatives and know that … the nuts and bolts … it’ll get done well. And so because that’s getting done well, then we’ve got the permission … to be able to keep pushing forward in a reasonable way too. And then I guess having … the confidence of other key leaders in the school being able to lead initiatives and me being able to support that and maybe have the conversations and test the ideas … it’s multilayered … But I guess you’ve still got to have the strength of your own convictions (Principal).

Jim reflects, in a momentary loss of self-confidence, that he needs to get better at listening “more carefully to what people are saying” and being sensitive to the timing of change initiatives, “being able to judge whether this is just stalling” or whether it’s legitimate and responding appropriately.

Jim openly articulated his love of the job that has kept him at Parkview despite other opportunities. He describes the ongoing challenges as what has kept him in the position. Following on from becoming a self-governing school, he cites the “leading schools program where we worked with three other local schools” and the “regeneration which I took a leading role in”, the federal government’s Australian Technical College initiative which “redefined policy at the State level” and “most of the (DEECD) initiatives that actually created time and resources” as key challenges which have enabled him to step “outside the traditional role of Principal in a school”. He laughingly shares how others in the school would see his need to be engaged in this way, “they say … has (Jim) got a challenge at the moment, if he hasn’t, well, you know, better find one for him!”

How do other stakeholders view the principal and his leadership of the school?

1. Personal Attributes and Behaviours

The following Table A6.1 tallies the 20 words most often used to describe the principal by the interviewed stakeholder groups.
Jim’s leadership drew high levels of descriptor agreement from the interviewed stakeholders. While no one descriptor was used by all groups, the school based groups, who work the most closely with Jim, had very high levels of agreement. The descriptors used by four stakeholder groups were supportive, knowledgeable or knows, innovative, gains trust, driven or drives, involved and a team player. Supportive, strong and knowledgeable or knows were the most frequently used descriptors across all groups, the inclusion of ‘strong’ largely due to the high level use of this word by the SC President (SCP) and RNL. Apart from the word strong, three stakeholder groups
agreed that the principal was visionary, a decision maker, networker, someone who listens and leads change, committed, futuristic and approachable, with a sense of humour.

Across all groups the most frequently used words were supportive, strong, knowledgeable, visionary, innovative, trustworthy, a decision maker, involved and a networker who listens.

The words used to describe the principal are reflected in the type of relationship each has with the principal. The parent group had the least agreement, seeing the principal as supportive. Apart from the image of the principal as strong and to a lesser degree, knowledgeable, the SC President appears to have a more distant relationship with Jim’s leadership, with less opinion of his day to day leadership.

The highest levels of agreed perception come from the leadership team (LSH) and RNL, both groups having known the principal for a long time, providing clarity of perception. They use supportive, knowledgeable, trustworthy, visionary, networker and someone who listens to describe Jim. It is interesting that the leadership team did not use the words strong or involved for Jim’s leadership, possibly a statement on the role that they play in the school in Jim’s absence. The staff group (STF) see Jim has highly supportive and this is agreed to by the leadership team. The staff group also use the words decision maker and system worker. The educator groups (STF, LSH and RNL) agree that Jim is visionary, a networker who engenders trust and works to shape the education system. They also commented on his sense of humour, indicating the less formal relationship he has with staff. The school groups (LSP and STF) see that Jim makes the decisions and leads the change.

The words chosen profile Jim as a self-confident, knowledgeable leader who works with people to achieve his vision for the school and as a key shaper in the Victorian system of education. He has the trust of the people in the school who feel highly supported by him and who believe he has the capacity to make the decisions and changes required to lead the school. The parent group enjoys the profile he has across the school as an involved and committed school leader. The SC President respects Jim for his leadership strength, futuristic thinking and knowledge.

2. Leadership Style

The leadership team and RNL both spoke of how Jim is able to be out of the school for significant periods of time and still hold a strong presence as leader of the school. The
leadership team, who continues the work in his absence, call him ‘Machiavellian’ in that he can “adapt and adopt different roles” at any time. They describe him with high levels of likeability and informality.

... he’s got ... an ambitious vision, a healthy sense of being a larrikin, an astute thinker, he can cut through the gobbledygook and the edu-speak with which we drown. He values the individual, he enjoys the heart and humour of a place and he can read upside down (Leadership Team).

This last statement opened up a running joke with the team. More seriously, they describe Jim as “all knowing, all seeing” and that he always knows what’s going on. They openly talk about the fact that he has not been in the staffroom ‘for months’ and no longer publicly shares the dates that he is going to be away as this occurs so often. They outline how this works. He is very accessible and very approachable, using technology to facilitate communication when he is away from the school. He ensures there is constant contact with staff, even emailing all staff so that “when he’s away, he’s still present in a sense.” They describe him as ‘a sticky beak’:

... he has to know and he needs to know and he should know, so that constantly all staff email ... him ... He will Skype ... we email or he phones, we put him on hold, he’ll touch base with one of us. And I think because the school is well oiled and the design and the nature of the people who are here and the commitment and loyalty of people irrespective of their talents, he can go with a degree of trust (Leadership Team).

The staff group see Jim’s international forays into educational best practice and his autonomy as what sustains his leadership. “If he was in a school and it was a traditional program and he went to the weekly network meeting and came back he’d go mad. He’d suffocate!”

The leadership team explains the risk taking culture that is supported by Jim when they make a mistake.

... it’s not the end of the world. I think we’re allowed to mess up ... It depends on the nature of the mess up too ... and how you deal with that ... it’s never felt to me like the kind of place where you do something, it doesn’t work, you have to pretend it never happened ... there’s lots of support ... (Leadership Team)

They related a recent incident in Thailand where a visiting Parkview group of staff and students was shot at, wounding a staff member. Being school holidays, the leadership team was spread around Australia and Jim was in Boston when the news became national headlines. With some pride, they explain their response under Jim’s clear direction.
He was just constantly in contact … He sent (an assistant principal) … overseas … the dilemma was that we were all in different areas … so it was negotiating the phone calls … on a Sunday trying to work out what had actually happened and making the decision, well someone needs to go … once I arrived in Thailand … I rang (Jim) and so I was still able to have the conversations that I’d have with him here, it was just done differently … technology allowed us to do that. (Leadership Team)

The RNL believes this incident was closely managed by Jim in a way that other principals could not have done. The incident died down quickly as Jim responded confidently and “he was all over that in terms of making sure that the staff member was safe. He had his prints all over it."

The RNL explains that Jim has a strong intuition around when to provide support and when to trust people and let them do their job. He has also assembled a very talented and loyal team around him, possibly the result of his “hire hard, manage easy” mantra.

… he’s got a great team, they’re very experienced, his APs are unbelievably experienced people and they’re quite varied, quite different … he has enormous trust in them but he connects really well with them, they’re a very strong team … I think he’s highly regarded by all the teachers and staff at the school. I think a lot of that comes through the fact that he knows and that he’s there and that, albeit he’s out travelling the world and building and fostering his own knowledge and skills and connecting on a worldwide stage and bringing back wonderful ideas which he can apply in his school, he makes sure that he still has a strong connect with what’s happening on the ground in his own school and he’s able to balance that and get the balance right (RNL).

Despite his willingness to be at the forefront of educational innovation, the leadership team describe Jim as a humble leader, “… he doesn’t have an ego trip about it, there’s nothing egotistical in the way in which he works.” Furthermore, “when you’ve known a lot of principals and you see him in our little closeted environment … and then you see him on the big stage. But there’s still … shyness, he’s not presumptuous and he’s not pushy.”

However they agree that some staff may see this differently,

… I’m sure there are people in the staffroom who don’t spend as much time with him, who think everything that he chooses to do or makes us do or chooses for the school, is because he wants to better his name and he wants to look good. I’m not saying that’s my opinion but I reckon it’s got to be out there … he’s probably the most approachable principal that I’ve ever worked with and his door is literally always open when he’s here and if he’s not here, he’ll always respond to emails every time you send them (Leadership Team).
They also noted that he is sometimes misconstrued by people, including staff, who can feel he is disinterested, when in reality it is shyness and sometimes a lack of eye contact as he listens.

I think I’ve been getting used to … dealing with him when he doesn’t answer, it’s not because he’s not listening, it’s because he’s thinking. But … you have to realise that and I didn’t to start with, I just thought … I wasn’t saying anything of importance (Leadership Team).

The leadership team describe his personal qualities as very open and genuine, “He’s very caring and I think his home life really grounds him and he’s aware of the complexities of life and things come to trip us up when we least expect it and he … shows great empathy.” The RNL sums up Jim simply:

He’s a listener, he’s a thinker, he’s a networker, listener, thinker, networker. He’s knowledgeable and he has a strong thirst for knowledge around education. He’s inquisitive and he has an underlying sense of humour which I think is a great balance to have when you’re talking about serious work. Has a sense of fun about him too … And he’s strategic in his thinking, he’s strategic in his connecting with people (RNL).

The breadth of this networking is extensive:

… he’s just spent a week with Yong Zhou over in Oregon and travelling to Harvard and … a conference … in Toronto. He also visited Singapore at a conference earlier … he’s certainly got his eyes open all the time and … he’s listening and he’s taking it on board and he’s seeing how things might be able to apply to his own school (RNL).

However, the RNL explains that Jim has little time or attention for the more administrative tasks, describing him as “a pain in the neck” in compliance processes such as principal performance reviews and while he usually gets the job done eventually “he’s sort of off on a tangent.” The RNL offers a different perspective to Jim’s leadership, gained when Jim was a new principal to Parkview and the RNL was principal at a neighbouring secondary school.

… he was not highly regarded because we felt that the competition was enormous and that (Jim) gave all indications that he was not a team player, not a system player but more of an individual operator and we used to wait for the cast offs (enrolments) … I guess not knowing him … not really understanding what was driving him but by the actions that he was taking on behalf of the school … (RNL).

The RNL describes Jim’s current leadership style as highly distributed, allowing him to move in and out of the school. He states that Jim is at an interesting stage of his career with a system leadership perspective gained through experience.
he takes the view that all the schools come together to provide every opportunity for everyone that lives within that community and beyond ... he sees himself as a lead player plus being a part of that provision ... I think it's slow for him, but he would like to have moved a lot more quickly but that's what you've got to deal with ... he still has a view that he's the principal of (Parkview) Secondary College ... but also there's another responsibility that he feels as a leader that he has to lead wider community. And I'm not quite sure that all the other principals are at that level of thinking because they're at different stages of their career and I think that maybe ... he's looking at it from an entirely different point of view (RNL).

The RNL uses similar words to the leadership team to describe Jim's ability to balance his high level networking and time out of the school with fulfilling his principal responsibilities, "what he brings back and the way he would share that with the rest of the staff, it would be almost as though they were part of it."

A strong factor in Jim's leadership is his relationship building with students, something commented on by parents, staff, leadership team and RNL. The RNL provides an example:

... the kids love him ... evidence that I've seen, kids absolutely have the highest regard for this person, and he knows them. And (Jim) will dress ... in his pinstripe suit ... but at the same time he'll wear a windcheater with the kids' names or the school's name on it ... (RNL).

The parents, staff and leadership team all tell this story of the shared joy of Jim's surprise presence at the recent production, Skyped from Toronto and provide this as an example of his engagement with students.

School production every year is a huge effort by a large number of staff and ... up to two hundred students, and on the last night of production (Jim) will always get up to thank everybody but he will do it in that he will take on the persona of someone ... in the production, so he will sing a song or he will come on in a wheelchair dressed up as an old woman or ... he always does something and the kids would just eat out of his hands, they love it. So this year he was overseas when we had the last night of production so he Skyped in and he sang a song over Skype and the kids just ... lapped it up ... they know that he values what they do and he's not afraid to ... put himself up for ridicule ... (Leadership Team).

Staff describe Jim as visionary, dynamic, a big picture thinker, leading the way in innovation. They talk about his ability to employ quality staff, his ability to get the right balance of giving support, empowerment and the responsibility to get the job done and his acknowledgment of the effort. They outline the trust they have in Jim's decision making, "He's not just jumping in ... because it's a fun thing to do ... we all know that ... It's actually been thought through ... he tells us where he's coming from."
They also demonstrate an understanding of his role in the school with a surprising absence of cynicism.

He's in a privileged position where he doesn't have to worry about the naughty year 9 boys, their lockers ... the structures are all there and they (leadership) only call on him when necessary ... he trusts the people to do their job. So he's fortunate in that way that he's not locked in the day to day mundane stuff you get caught up in ... (Staff Group).

Staff also speak of Jim's confidence to “bend the rules” on their behalf e.g. providing leave in ways not supported by other schools and they see that he bends the rules to get what he wants from the system to benefit the school. “...he's not for sweating the small stuff and the small rules. He sees what's important …” Several groups mentioned Jim's family as being a key part of his role in the school. His children were students at the school, finishing in recent years, his family works on the annual production team and his son worked in the performing arts area of the school.

After speaking quite openly about Jim’s leadership and the school's culture, both the staff and leadership teams spoke hesitantly and with obvious discomfort about Jim’s capacity to hold people to account.

I don’t know that anyone wants to say it ... He has been known to lose it ... But rarely ... in a situation highly deserving, not vindictive and not personal ... it is momentary and in a way perhaps semi deliberate, strategic ... There’s room for improvement though ... I think it comes from such a strong staff morale and such reliance on goodwill that you don’t want to break that by singling people out saying ‘you’re not doing your job’ ... that’s both his strength and perhaps a slight weakness because what he tries to do is to let people ... have the reins and give them the flexibility ... Well you have to yank occasionally ... that's not easy, that's the tough part about being a leader. (Leadership Team).

Staff supported this assessment, believing that Jim does make the hard decisions but that his style is more supportive than confrontational and they couldn’t say how he would challenge staff or hold them to account but that “there’d be a support team put in place to work through an issue.”

In agreement with the staff summation, the SC President saw Jim as “leading from the front foot” although, he was less inclined to believe that the school's reputation could be attributed to Jim's leadership as it had always been a good school and Jim had simply added to this. Suggesting some tension between the two, the SC President describes Jim as very persuasive and a “bit of an autocrat and I think that probably rubs a few people up the wrong way.” When queried on this description, he explains...
“I’ve never seen anything … I haven’t got any hard evidence, no it’s just things people say occasionally.” He describes his perception of decision making with Jim:

… if (Jim) wants to go somewhere (Jim) will go there and it doesn’t matter what a lot of other people say … (he) leads on the front foot … he certainly knows what he wants and he’ll certainly go out to get it, but he does try to take people along with him. And if there is a lot of criticism, he certainly takes note of that criticism, might try to turn it to his advantage … So he’s inclusive … (SC President).

The parent group saw Jim as very involved and committed to the school. They expressed feelings of pride in the way he and the staff know and care about their children. They felt that he was very friendly and approachable and they strongly supported his leadership decisions. They were extremely proud of the school and its achievements and recognised the quality of the professional team that Jim had built around him. They enjoy the fact that his family is involved in the school and his wife to well known to many parents, providing that personal connection.

3. Drivers

The staff group see the principal as driven by his desire for all students to benefit from a quality education, “the bottom line is what’s in it for (Parkview), what’s in it for the kids … which is hopefully better learning, better outcomes for their future, that sounds a bit cliché but I think that’s the bottom line.”

The SC President sees this differently to other groups, possibly reflecting a more competitive and combative relationship with the principal. He “certainly wants the school to remain a high achieving school … but I also think … and I know this is a very personal view … but I also think (Jim) sees the school as a lasting memento to him.” He explains what he means by this, “to leave the school in a better position than he came to it … and to leave the school in such a position that the facilities there were much, much better than when he arrived.”

The RNL, who has known Jim for the many years, sees him as always having had “a strong leadership drive.” He explains that in the past Jim umpired AFL football to a very high level, “so he was the elite even in that field, so there was an ‘eliteness’ around him doing other things.” And “maybe that’s an expression of the persona that makes him what he is and wanting to be out in front and leading is just inbuilt and that drives him.”

Agreeing with the staff group, the RNL believes that Jim’s leadership is sustained by his high level networking and the impact this has on the education system.
... the thrill, the challenges around education, the possibilities around being innovative, wanting to be ahead of the pack ... he's a forward thinker and is constantly looking for opportunities and then to see those opportunities in place. He enjoys the networking, not only at the principal level but ... at a higher level ... there are lots of good things that have flowed through his willingness and ability to connect with a whole range of different players ... in partnerships that are supportive of the school (RNL).

He provided an example of a benefit to the system:

(Jim) has a large number of refugees that have come into the school and ... the funding that they get ... did not acknowledge them the way that he felt that they should have, so he negotiated ... to have that changed so it was changed, and so there is a different calculation for those (ESL) kids (across all Victorian schools) ... (RNL).

One assistant principal noted Jim’s networking behavior at conferences, “He is ... fascinating to watch ... His maneuverability. He can work a room. His alacrity, his ability to sift the dredge from the dross ... But he will move around all the time.” The RNL adds to this but also provides a potential driver aligned with the SC President’s view of Jim’s enjoyment of the personal attention.

He's an interesting character ... For many years I've been ... watching (Jim) in various forums and ... no matter what meeting he went to, he always asked at least one question, and it was always there to say I'm here, look around, I'm here ... the questions have always been challenging and extending the person that he was asking the question of, but it was always something that you could virtually guarantee (RNL).

However, the RNL sums up Jim’s drivers, agreeing with the staff group’s assessment:

He’s able to constantly bring it back to how kids are learning and trying to accommodate their needs. And he has a wonderful vision for what future education might look like and it’s built around digital technologies (RNL).

The leadership team shared a reflection on Jim’s leadership which came up when the team completed a Herrmann Brain Dominance profile for each member. “(Jim’s) results were interesting ... because they were all about innovation for the sake of it and change for the sake of it.” They added with surprise, that Jim had agreed with this assessment.

4. Sustainability of Innovation and Success

While all groups believed that the school’s culture was strong and they could articulate the elements that were in place for the school’s successful programs to continue, most were unclear of the school’s direction with different principal leadership. They spoke of needing someone to fit the vision and values of the school and the potential impact it
would have on the school. The parent group was very aware of the importance of Jim’s leadership in their satisfaction with the school, stating “any school lives or dies on the strength of its Principal” and the enormity of this task, “Big shoes to fill”.

... he’s got ... some really strong team members and there’s a really strong school culture and ... it isn’t just about one person’s vision, it’s about how that vision’s been communicated. But at the same time that’s a really big change so it’s hard to just give a really glib answer to it ... I don't think that's a very good question to end on, it’s made me feel a bit sad. (Leadership Team)

The RNL speculates:

Who knows what the future is for (Jim) ... it depends a lot on how much time he believes that he'll remain in the workplace doing what he’s doing at the moment, and who knows what that (might be) ... I’m not quite sure whether he’d even contemplate going into the (DEECD central offices) anymore (RNL).

Other Factors that Have Led to the School’s Innovation and Success

While the principal’s leadership was clear, especially in developing partnerships to advantage the school and setting strategic direction, all groups referred to the strength of the leadership team that Jim had developed. Without doubt, the experience, skills and loyalty of the team to Jim and his direction for the school was a key factor in the school’s model of success.

All groups mentioned the place of Jim’s family in the school and the strong support he receives from his family who had a long and personal history with the school. This reflects well on Jim, making him seem personable and approachable to parents and staff.

Summary

Over time, Jim has built a unique leadership role at Parkview Secondary College. He has used his self-confidence, strong networking and interpersonal skills, capacity for risk taking and IT savvy to lead a highly successful school. Jim’s leadership and the school’s success were universally agreed to by all stakeholder groups.

Jim was a young leader with control and influence from his early career days. Over the years he has fine-tuned these strategies to lead schools through the work of others, using his own skills to develop knowledge and connections for the benefit of the school. While he maintains a larrikin persona, there is little doubt he is the change driver and manipulator of the schools key directions.
By remaining a principal for the past seventeen or more years, Jim has forgone some of the choices for high level system leadership made by those he would consider his equals. However he is afforded a role as a distant principal, high level knowledge worker and powerful system shaper by the trust and skill of his leadership team. He is highly skilled and intuitive at knowing what to pay attention to and when to exert his leadership presence for major impact. Jim uses technology to stay connected and remotely in control of his school and he actively uses situational context to maintain and increase his influence.

While Jim can sometimes appear shy and ‘standoffish’ his apparent confidence and relaxed, ‘good guy’ approach, sustains his networking. He has built strong relationships with his leadership team and across the staff group, who are very protective of him. Jim may have challenged people more openly in the past, however he now has difficulty confronting people and holding them to account, preferring to be the likable ‘good guy’. The school is such a well-oiled machine that there are people and processes in place who now manage this, allowing Jim to maintain his persona.

There was evidence that some people felt he was driven by personal glory and self-interest; in fact Jim may have agreed with this assessment. However there was also a sense that Jim’s drivers had matured over time and the competitive nature of his leadership was replaced by a system responsibility to provide real life opportunities for all students, within his school and wider community.

The sustainability of Jim’s leadership is highly questionable. His very experienced leadership team has difficulty even talking about his departure and would be unlikely to remain as the current team in his absence. While Jim operates from a distance and he is not required to be the implementer, he maintains firm control over the direction and events of his school. Without Jim’s strategic direction, futures focus and connections, the school would need to recreate a new vision for itself. When he leaves Parkview Secondary College, Jim’s leadership will be difficult to sustain and impossible to replicate. The leadership and Jim are possibly all too aware of this.
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