NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP SOCIETY

School leaders in England transition through change: Insider and outsider perspectives

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Abstract

Schools in the 21st century have grown increasingly complex and government mandates have compounded this complexity as principals have looked beyond their school to embrace stakeholders and authorities who view education from myriad perspectives. This qualitative case study examined the personal perspectives of leaders, reflecting upon their transition from organisational governance change through the formation of a multi-academy trust. Findings revealed that while the creation of a new school system offered school leaders opportunities for interorganisational transfers and promotions, the internal transition experienced was unexpected and often unaddressed. Leaders expressed their difficulty in reconciling their desire to address the needs of the schools and community through consolidation while maintaining their own health as an individual leader. Findings from this study offer lessons in the importance of examining change both within the organisation through a personal lens as well as an external lens.

Keywords: *Leadership transition; educational leadership; organisational change; internal change; educational administration*

Introduction

Schools in the 21st century have grown increasingly complex. Government mandates have compounded this complexity as principals must look beyond their school to embrace stakeholders and authorities who view education from myriad perspectives. As a result, school leaders of today must consider new ways of thinking and new models which address this complexity, a change which requires school leaders to re-examine their previous ways of leading, their "authority", as well as their place and voice within a globalised educational system (Klein, 2015). This neoliberal view of education, that is, according to Ball, Dworkin, and Vryonides (2010) "the marketisation and commodification of the social [which] turned many social goods into commodities and opened up the education systems to the private sector" (p. 524), was influential in the move to academies and multi-academy trusts in England.

England began its neo-liberal education movement with the Education Reform Act of 1988 which has evolved into a move to privatise public education through academies, much like charter schools in the US and free schools in Sweden (Salokangas & Chapman, 2014). Academies, as

Salokangas and Chapman (2014) explain, are "chains of schools under the control of a strategic management executive comprising, for example, private sponsors or parental groups, or they may be participants in any one of a range of collaborative options between these two extremes" (p. 372). Furthermore, as school organisations and governance have changed in academies, so too has the practice of leadership. Rather than instructional leaders, principals or headteachers (used interchangeably for the purposes of the article) must act as corporate executive officers (CEOs) to a system of schools.

This study examines alternative forms of school governance from the personal perspectives of leaders, reflecting upon their personal transition through the organisational governance change. The effects of moving from a local governance authority to a five school multi-academy trust was both thrust upon the leaders who participated in this study as they, in turn, thrust the change upon others. This new vision of schooling rippled throughout the schools involved, the community in which the schools are located, and the greater local authority that did not embrace this change.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the ways in which change personally impacts leaders as they transition into a new organisational structure as well as the respondents' views of the organisational challenges and successes related to the transition. To drive this purpose, one overarching research question served as a guide; that is, how do school leaders describe their personal transition and their views of the organisation's transition through the change?

Literature review

Rise of the academy

Klees (2017) pointed out that in this era of educational neoliberalism there were two common ideas repeatedly heard; that is, that schools are failing and the responsibility for the failure lay with teachers. As a result, a new model of schooling was needed. From the call for school choice, competition for students, and a move from government control to local control, academies were born.

The advent of academies came about as Britain's national conversation regarding education became dominated by the neoliberalist agenda. The "corporatisation" of schooling is focused on "primarily the private-sector appropriation of public assets...the goals, practices, motivations, and instincts of the private sector" (Courtney, 2015, pp. 214–215). This view of education is rooted in the idea that parent choice of school should be primary, that headteachers take on the role of public marketing of their product, and that schools should be operated as businesses. Headteachers should take the mantle of chief executives, leading as corporate managers (Courtney, 2015).

The original purpose of academies in the UK was to "provide improved education for students from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds" (Gorard, 2005, p. 269), allowing state-

funded schools to be independently governed. Schools which failed to meet accountability targets were encouraged to become academies, which were then financially supported by "an outside sponsor (usually a charity, business, faith group, university, or philanthropic entrepreneur) who would run the school subject to the approval of the Secretary of State" (Wilkins, 2012, p. 12). Academies have been criticised throughout England for producing inequality through admissions, the ability to set their own pay scales and siphoning funding from the local authority as publicly funded independent schools (Wilkins, 2012).

Woods and Simkins (2014) noted that these publicly-funded, independent schools had the potential to be "the most radical systemic change since 'local management of schools' was instituted by the Education Reform Act 1988" (p. 324). Set up as independent from the control of the local education authority (LEA), academies are classified as independent schools, rather than public schools (Gorard, 2005). Thus, academies are autonomous and self-governing (Wilkins, 2012). Academies were afforded additional freedoms such as varying teacher pay and conditions, adjusting the length of the school day to meet the needs of each school's students, following a self-set curriculum, rather than the national one, and controlling their own finances, appointments, and decisions made by the school's governing body (West & Wolfe, 2018; Woods & Simkins, 2014).

Contracts between the academies and the Secretary of State are an essential component to their operation. The contract, or funding agreement, outlined the school governance as well as the management of the school. The contract required that the academies

> offer a"broad and balanced" curriculum , but with special emphasis in at least one area of the curriculum (e.g., science and technology, languages, the arts or sport). They were "all ability" schools, with admissions policies agreed upon with the Secretary of State for Education and were permitted to select up to 10 per cent of pupils on the basis of aptitude for the specialism. (West & Wolfe, 2018, p. 10)

The Academies Act of 2010 eliminated the requirement that academies must specialise.

Academy chains and trusts

Chapman and Salokangas (2012) define academy chains as "a group of schools working together under a common brand and governance structure" (p. 480). According to Meyland-Smith and Evans (2009), and confirmed by Chapman and Salokangas (2012), research has found that leaders in academy chains, also called multi-academy trusts, with responsibility over two or more schools, have greater impact on student outcomes than headteachers in the traditional sense. Chains are more often led by schools rather than sponsors such as charitable organisations, operating locally (Woods & Simkins, 2014). With most academies in chains, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) now run 73% of all academy schools. Schools within these trusts do not have the freedom to leave since the individual schools are not a legal entity. The MAT organisation contracts with the Secretary of State and thus, the MAT is the legal entity "speaking" for the schools within the MAT. The Chief

Executive Officer (CEO) leads the operations of the MAT and the individual schools within the MAT, charging each school a management fee for doing so (West & Wolfe, 2018). West and Wolfe (2018) articulate the features of a MAT as:

- the Board of Directors has ultimate responsibility for running each academy and will deal with the strategic running of the MAT;
- the Board then typically delegates day-to-day running of each academy to a local governing body (LGB). The level of delegation can be different for each academy;
- funding is allocated on an individual academy basis;
- single employer, shared buying and sharing resources within the group. (p. 10)

In their comparative case study of academy chains, Salokangas and Chapman (2014) found that membership in a chain of academies offered opportunities for cross-school activities and collaboration as well as building relationships across schools. However, interviews indicated that staff loyalties lay with colleagues, not to the corporate chain. Moreover, chains tended to be hierarchical with centralised policies. These researchers concluded that the benefits to belonging to a chain were minimal for academies.

Current state of academies

The last twenty years in England have seen a revolutionary change in schooling. Academies and academy chains have grown exponentially while, at the same time, the power and influence of local authorities have diminished. Competition, deregulation, and private sector involvement have surged (Chapman & Salokangas, 2012). The increase in number of academies, however, has not reduced the critiques of academy schools. As of 2018, 22% of primary and 68% of secondary schools are now academies, rather than under local control (West & Wolfe, 2018).

While the original articulated purpose of academies was to improve education for marginalised children, not all parties have demonstrated support for this sector of schooling. Wilkins (2012) noted that through academies, the government has "undercut the power of central authority [through] a new mixed economy of welfare consisting of private, voluntary and informal sectors in which state subsidised private sector is fused with a semi-privitised state sector" (p. 13). Furthermore, a strong anti-academy sentiment is found among parents, teachers, teacher unions, and school governors. Criticism also includes the idea that academies "circumvent local democratic processes" (Wilkins, 2012, p. 14) raising caution about fairness, access, and "the potential to operate as inequity producing mechanisms" in providing schooling to young people (p. 19).

Despite these criticisms of the academy educational system, Meyland-Smith and Evans (2009) note that student achievement in academies is increasing. These researchers report that

> the number of students achieving 5 A*-C GCSEs at these academies is increasing, on average, at 8% a year, is *four* times as fast as the average rate of improvement for English schools and twice as fast as schools with a similar profile. There has

also been an average annual increase of 5% in the number of students achieving 5 A*-C including English and Maths, the Government's preferred measurement. This is *five* times faster than the national average and over twice as fast as schools with a similar profile. Figures for results at Key Stage 3 (14 year olds) show similar rates of improvement. Academies have also proved much more popular with parents than their predecessor schools and are now nearly all oversubscribed. (p. 11)

Transitions in leadership

Educational leaders commonly move from one school or university to another, and as with any change of leadership, multiple constituencies are directly affected, bringing unexpected challenges for the new leader of the school, college, or university. The transition process presents challenges as new leaders attempt to adjust to a new culture, new employees, and a new work environment (Von Villas, 1994; Wheeler, 2010). Extensive research about succession planning and change in the leadership of the corporate and non-profit sectors can be found throughout the literature (Buller, 2014; Calareso, 2013; Carucci & Hansen, 2014; Fink & Brayman, 2004; Hinden & Tebbe, 2003; Rothwell, 2010; Tichy, 2014; Watkins, 2013). Furthermore, numerous studies posit the practicalities of assuming new duties, the introductions that often accompany a high-level hire, the stages of headship, preparation, experience, and strategies for building new relationships (Bradt, Check & Pedraza, 2011; Carucci & Hansen, 2014; Keller & Meaney, 2017; Kelly & Saunders, 2010; Sarros & Sarros, 2007; Watkins, 2013; Weindling & Dimmock, 2006). Little attention, however, is given to the internal process of transition as experienced by the individual as they approach their transition (Allison, 2002; Martin & Samels, 2004; Nortier, 1995; Spillane & Lee, 2014). As Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) note, "At no time are leaders more vulnerable to failure as when they are in transition" (p. 390). Moreover, "one's ability to successfully navigate a career transition depends more on one's ability to manage 'being new' than on being technically competent" (Mandersheid & Davidson, 2016, p. 95). Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) cite a need for investigating this phenomenon by stating that "despite the importance of understanding and correctly managing leadership transitions, research into dynamics of such transitions and the developmental and training activities aimed at facilitating such transitions and managing polarities is still scarce" (p. 405).

Some of the same challenges that occur in the corporate setting occur in the transition of educational leaders as they move from one school to another and assume their role as president or principal. Governing boards, consultants and search firms address the practical implications associated with integrating a new leader into the school and in the process of socialisation. Succession planning strategies within schools and universities include opportunities to build networks with others in similar positions and support socialisation beyond the induction programs (Fusarelli, Fusarelli & Riddick, 2018; Hart, 1991; Normore, 2004; Parkay, Currie & Rhodes,

1992). Research on the transition of leadership has been conducted in fields other than in education and while some studies have been conducted in education, based on an extensive review of the literature, no studies have been found that address the internal process of transition among the leadership of schools and universities. Orr (2006) found that school leadership needs support to address "challenging problems, to make a better, more successful transition and to improve their leader's efficacy" (p. 328). Parkay, Currie and Rhodes (1992) call for further research to determine how the shared experiences of principals and patterns of professional socialisation can "contribute to higher long-term quality in principalship" (p. 72). Research is necessary to better understand the experience of presidents and principals and the patterns of professional socialisation and transition (Manderscheid & Harrower, 2016). Planning and preparing for the transition of leadership can lead an organisation through a time of renewal and growth that ultimately strengthens the organisation and offer insight to search committees, boards, leadership teams of independent schools and universities. Even more crucial, though, is a better understanding of the transition process that individuals experience to enable individuals to experience greater success in new roles and address the increasingly high turnover rate of educational leaders. A successful transition is in large part dependent on how well the leader is able to work through the personal transition process and begin to establish the social, cultural and interpersonal relationships that are essential elements in moving from one school environment to another.

Conceptual frame

This study is framed in the work of Bridges' (1980) conceptual model of transition. Bridges posits that organisations, seeking to survive, must implement changes that require innovation and adaptation dictated by the needs and demands of the current environment. Transition, the way in which people come to terms with the change, is the key to change success (Bridges & Mitchell, 2000). Each transition begins with the ending of a familiar process, a relationship, or a place of comfort and requires a deliberate decision to move forward. Following the acceptance of the end and before moving to the new position or the new way of practice, is labeled the neutral zone as illustrated in Figure 1 (Bridges, 2016), the "in-between" place, filled with uncertainty and confusion. However, this is also a time that individuals need to regain control or balance to stabilise the emotional impacts of change and allow for a period of transformation. The new beginning that coincides with the change includes a purpose, picture, plan, and role for the individual (Bridges, 2016). Working through the transition as a process is essential to the success of the change and an integral part of all that is involved in the change (Bridges, 1980; 2016). Bridges (2016) emphasised that the phases do not have clear or distinct boundaries but that they overlap with greater emphasis on one phase while still experiencing elements of another. An individual moves through the process of transition by acknowledging, experiencing, and addressing the elements associated with each phase as the reorientation, relearning, and renewal. This model illustrates

that while changes are external (that is, the policy, practice, or structure of an organisation), the transition is an internal process or reorientation for those facing a change.

Figure 1: Bridge's transition model
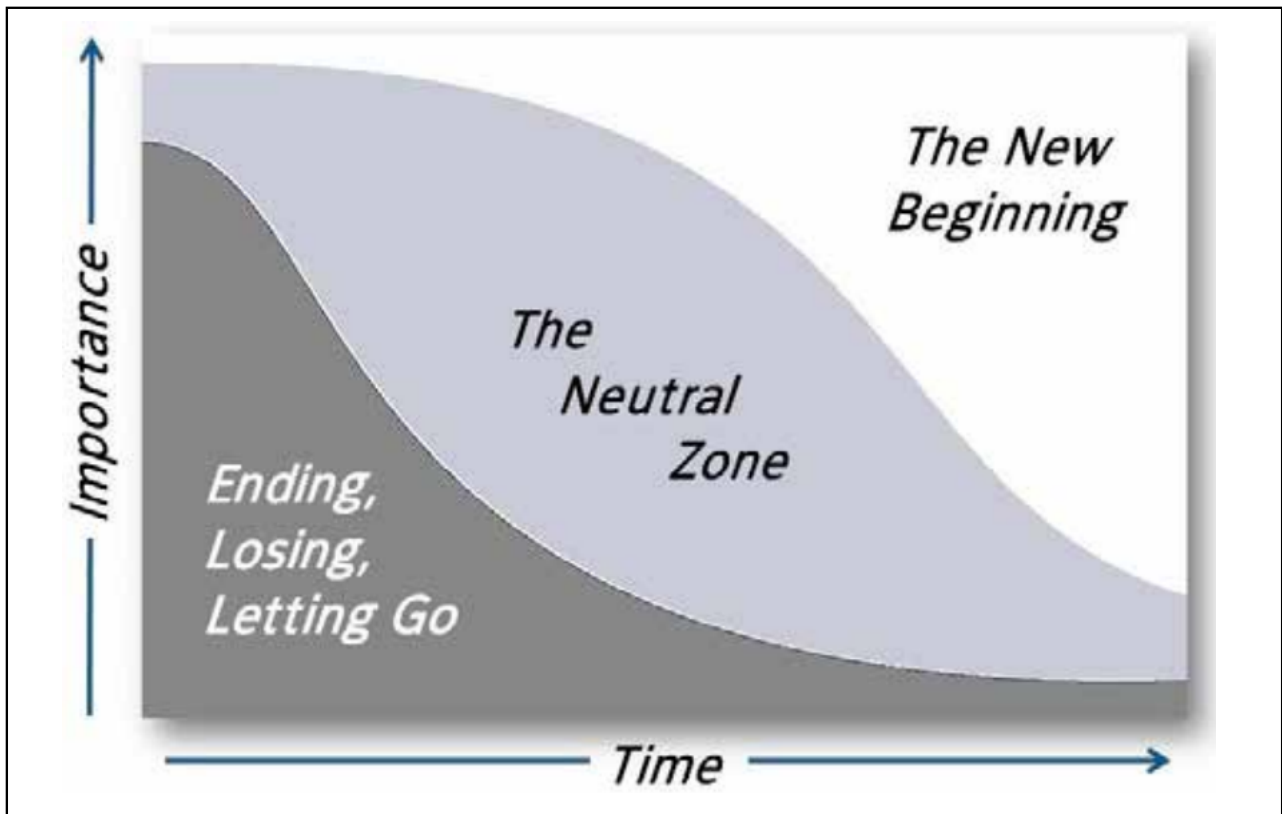
Methods

This study examines a recently formed multi-academy trust in the UK. This trust is made up of two secondary schools (ages 11–18), two junior schools (ages 7–11), and one special school (ages 11–16). Specifically examined were the effects of this governance transition on the leadership of four of the five schools and the chief executive of the trust; that is, the cost to the leadership, the barriers faced by the leaders, the relationship to the larger community and the local authority, and the successes encountered throughout this change. The special school is new to the system and was under new leadership and therefore was not included in the study. As non-participants in the school system, two American researchers interviewed stakeholders and observed one multi-academy trust in England over a two week period. Interviews were conducted with school headteachers, deputy headteachers, leadership team members, teachers, governance board members, surrounding community members, and representatives of the local education authority. Observations included shadowing leaders, attending school and trust governance board meetings, classroom observations, leadership team meetings, meetings of concern with parents and with students. An overview of the participants can be found in Table 1.

Analysis began with examination of the interview data source (Creswell, 2014), first to obtain a general sense of the information. A coding process was implemented to organise the questions and responses. A code map was constructed where initial codes were collapsed into pattern variables, which were then collapsed into themes. A discussion of themes follows. Likewise, field notes from the observations were coded and examined for concordance with the interview data.

Table 1: Respondent codes

Code	Description
CEO	Formerly a headteacher of a high performing secondary school
EHTP	Executive headteacher of junior school
HTP	Headteacher of primary school
HTSH	Headteacher of high performing secondary school.
HTHL	Headteacher of low performing secondary school
BTL	Member of Board of Trustees

Findings

Findings from this study centered on three themes; that is, the personal transition of the leadership, the relationships with the local authority and the community, and the barriers and successes the organisation faced throughout the transition. Because the multi-academy model incorporated a "successful" school with a "failing" school in close geographical proximity, leaders were faced with challenges both operationally and from the perceptions of students, staff and the community members. Leaders reported that while the collaboration offered opportunities for internal transfers and promotions, leaders described an internal transition that was unexpected and often unaddressed. Leaders expressed their difficulty in reconciling their desire to address the needs of the schools and community through a consolidation of schools while maintaining their own health as an individual leader.

Personal transition of the leadership

With the formation of the multi-academy trust, the leadership adopted a new structure for the overall system of schools and a change in the organisational structure of each school within the trust. As with any change, leaders face transitions within the organisation as well as in their positions. The change to organise as a multi-academy trust was comprehensive, uncharted, and unfamiliar to the school leadership, and each leader experienced a personal transition as they adapted to changes in their roles and responsibilities as part of the new school system. EHTP stated that being "a headteacher was about ownership and it's not about position or authority for me. It's not about any of that. Actually, it was about trying to bring about greater change and greater opportunity for our community." The vision of the trust focused on bringing education to all students in a local community through the collaboration and cooperation of a network of teachers, leaders and their schools.

The new layer of positions and a shift in responsibilities provided opportunities for growth for principals within the new structure. With the previous headteacher of the high performing secondary school moving to the role of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the MAT, HTSH stated that "it [the headteacher's move] felt like a dramatic change, [his] announcement about the change of his role to the staff will have a big impact on the staff here."

The HTSH expressed that there was a "feeling of abandonment or lack of focus or fervor was a discourse" among the teachers and school leaders with the change of leadership.

HTSL reported that there is "going to be a little bit of a fear of us holding on to him still ... and there's going to be him trying to transition away from it" (his former school).

There was a consensus from headteachers that there was a lack of formal leadership preparation and described the training as "on the job," primarily based on prior experiences and unofficial mentors. HTSH reported that "training that you get, the NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) training is a joke, that didn't prepare me to be a headteacher in any way, shape, or form." HTSH went on to say that "having a stable, strong senior leadership team is the thing I found - because we'd lost a few colleagues for other schools" and "the experience wasn't there, so at the start of the year, I think I felt the pressure of that because I was new to that as well, and I was thinking, 'I just better not cock this up' ." With the formation of the MAT, headteachers were able to rely on each other for support and the network of schools allowed for additional opportunities through formal structures across the schools to provide feedback. The trust worked to develop the idea that all leaders were part of the headship, a collective body, that provided line management training, evaluation, and lateral support to peers.

Headteachers not only changed roles within the leadership team, but some changed schools within the trust which revealed some elements of personal transition. HTSL who recently changed schools explained that the academy had had a series of headteachers over a short period of time and the HTSL recognised that "this school need[ed] some kind of security." As a result of her change, she quickly became committed to the school and commented that "I think I've sort of fallen in love with [the school] here." EHTP reflected on her transition to the role of executive headteacher over primary schools and said,

> *I think I was, perhaps, a bit overwhelmed by workload ... and if I had I stayed as the headteacher of [former school], my work schedule would be so much easier. And actually, I'm not quite sure what I would have done with all of my free time.*

After six months in the position, HTP expressed his satisfaction in his establishment of his new position and stated,

> *To be honest, I'm probably more the person that when there's a problem, when there's a lesson that's gone horribly wrong, or there is an angry parent at the door, or whatever they need, it's probably my phone they ring.*

With significant external changes in the environment and school culture, each faced a personal and internal transition of growth and transformation.

The CEO faced his own period of transition through the development of the multi-academy trust. In the first two years, the CEO continued to serve in dual roles as an executive headteacher and the executive of the trust and reflected on his move to a position of greater responsibility as "the first time in my career that I've made such a significant move in the same geography." He said after fifteen years of experience as a headteacher in a higher performing secondary school, he started to think about how he could make a difference across the system and suggested that "one of the reasons that you progress in the system is that you want to influence a greater number." As a headteacher, he had learned that he had an extroverted personality and "a sort of competitiveness about the desire to influence people, I call it a passion" to make something better. With that passion and the opportunity, he worked to create a school system where "schools [were] no longer competing, but schools are collaborating, working together in order to have a joint responsibility for all youngsters in an area. …because you believe in something, and you want to do that for more people." The CEO went on to say that he is still learning where

> *I need to trim the sails, change the rudder, or whatever particulars the waves beneath me are taking me in a different direction to the way I want the same boat to go… you always want more from that point of view…and I'm not seeking affirmation, but more what [I] need to do differently if there are things [I] do need to do differently.*

EHTP, HTSH, and HTSL described the growth they experienced by expanding their role as a result of the autonomy allowed to them by the trust. After moving into a new position of leadership, an EHTP said, "I think I recognise how I've grown as a leader, that I don't have to be as controlling as I was in the beginning because of systems procedures [now] in place". In "letting go" of the position she had as a primary headteacher, she went on to say "I had to accept sometimes that in my absence things might be done in a way that I [would not have] done it, but if it doesn't cause any kind of legal issue or no one's hurt or harmed or having a problem, then that's just the way it is." After two years, EHTP said "now I'm really excited about emerging school leaders who are developing their own strategy and bringing ideas." HTP stated, "I have the accountability for what happens in this school, but work alongside [the executive headteacher] to secure the future of this school." Within an environment of leaders with the same vision, and similar values and motivations, a "trust" within the trust began to develop.

Participating in the interviews for this research, according to participants, prompted self-examination, learning, and discussion among the leadership. The CEO commented that the experience was "really very valuable, it's very much a two-way process of thoughtful reflection so in the fact that that's been happening to me, I just think that clearly would have been happening for my colleagues." He went on to say that it was helpful to articulate "the journey that I'm

professionally going on and getting to … at a time in the last phase or the last month of that transition in facilitating others, leading others, supporting others." He described the time of reflection of his transition through Bridges' neutral zone, to a new leadership position as a process he felt gave him "greater clarity in how I'm going to get there and what I need to do."

Relationships with the local authority and the community

Because the leadership of the schools within the multi-academy trust had functioned as school leaders under the local authority prior to the formation of the multi-academy trust, the change presented new challenges in the relationships with the local authority and with the surrounding community as a whole. HTP said that,

> *When we first voted to academise, we, at that point, weren't saying [we would definitely] join the [name] Multi-Academy Trust, but what we were saying was we no longer wanted to be a local authority school.*

She went on to say that as a school under local authority,

> *We were going to struggle long term with local authority's placement of pupils into our school, so we were receiving a lot of children that have been permanently excluded from other settings, and we are going to struggle financially going forward because of numbers on roll, but also the demographic that we serve, and so much of us relying on pupil premium funding ....*

HTP explained that "what has happened through the process in joining the MAT hasn't been a change in ideology or expectations for us as a school, but actually, it's been the empowerment to achieve what hadn't occurred under the local authority." EHTP recognised that different schools have different needs based on their community and

> *...what we've found actually is there's a stronger commonality about our understanding of pedagogy and about expectations for communities, and whilst it will look different [from school to school] ...our intention is exactly the same, we want the same things for our communities.*

HTP said that being a part of the trust has given them

> *greater autonomy in regards to aspects of admission into our school, in terms of the curriculum and the diet of learning that we can offer to our children. There's not been an aspect that we haven't had autonomy over.*

When asked about potential expansion of the multi-academy trust, the EHTP said that bringing an "infant school into the trust would be brilliant, that it would be an obvious model", but followed with "that's not going to happen anytime soon because the leaders of those schools would not endorse that." There is a constant struggle in building relationships and knowing how to inform the

community of what the trust is and how to convince leaders of other schools of the value of being a part of a system of collaborative schools with a shared vision. In an effort to even collaborate on a local project that would serve the community, the local authority, if approached, would most likely turn down the opportunity because according to the EHTP, "it's about the ownership." When asked about increasing efforts of branding, publicity, or marketing the trust, there was an expressed concern from the CEO about the benefit of raising interest around the multi-academy trust at the cost of creating a perception of competition between the trust and the local authority. He said,

> *The problem is, when you're working in a local context, the politics locally is different from when you're working in a city context .... you're not trying to get all the schools in a particular area of the city ..... you are trying to appeal to a few schools. The intention, though, is to attempt to raise awareness without irritating anybody along the line.*

The EHTP added that,

> *I look at a lot of my local colleagues who are cocooned into their [local] schools… they] will say they work to collaborate. They do to a point but ultimately they are in competition with each other because that's the system that's being created.… That is different in [our MAT], that barrier is not here and some people are still on the journey with us to understand that, but from our perspective, we have a greater sense of community across all.*

Headteachers and teachers worked to provide the best possible education for their students but under the local authority, the mandates imposed certain restrictions that limited the ability of headteachers to provide the desired level of education and support for students. The move to the multi-academy trust system provided the financial support as well as the autonomy to both headteachers and teachers in selecting the practice and curriculum that best meet the needs of the students. Realising that schools did not have to compete with each other for students, funding, or evaluative ratings, enabled headteachers and teachers to work collaboratively in an environment that focused on the students by supporting learning and allowing educators to provide a good education to all students.

Barriers and successes

Once the multi-academy trust was established through the partnership of the five local academies, the structure of the new organisational governance was put into place and began operating under one governing board of trustees. School leadership faced the successes and barriers that any new organisation faced with change experiences, but a common vision allowed the leadership to address those barriers and celebrate their successes as they continued to develop the model for a multi-academy trust within the local community. A BTL stated, "It is a change of culture that takes a long time. It's not just a quick fix change."

The multi-academy trust allows for greater autonomy, flexibility, and financial support to be entrusted to headteachers enabling them to make decisions that create the learning environment appropriate for their particular students. Because the local authority was not able to support schools with the resources necessary to meet the needs of their school community and the vision had become unclear under the local authority and the HTP explained that,

We had become about supporting children's emotional and mental health development. We had not forgotten about learning because we're a school, but lines had become very blurred and we needed to fix [students] as people and not carry on with the learning at the same time.

Now, the HTP explained, they have the ability to take those children into a special learning center, that protects the learning process for others and allows children that need extra support to be in a different environment called the "hive." HTP goes on to say,

We had expectations for good behavior, but now we enforce it and rigorously enforce it because we're saying all of our children deserve to be able to learn. The hive at the school would have hopefully happened anyway, but would have taken longer to happen because we weren't empowered to be able to make a creative solution.

The EHTP explained that,

The parent support service that we offered via all of our facilitator's sessions was in place [under the local authority] but wasn't [effective], so now we link through the impact of learning, which we haven't done previously. The autonomy and the support to make decisions and develop learning environments based on the needs of the students were given to the headteachers and were unique to the structure offered by the trust.

One of the greatest challenges for the MAT has been trying to create a localised system of education while continuing to function as a system of schools undergoing change. "It's the complexity and the challenge of building the plane while you're flying it" explained the CEO. He went on to suggest the opportunity to

... release me [the CEO] from all that [I'm] doing now, land the plane, get all the passengers off, maybe put them on another plane for a bit to circle around while we just plan what the new plane is going to be before we put them back in.

He goes on to say,

People don't always appreciate how much tougher the journey is because ... you haven't been able to architect time to be able to design the plane. You're designing and remodeling it as you're making it, which is probably very unwise.

Discussion and conclusions

Literature has indicated that leadership plays a critical role in change (Buller, 2014; Normore, 2004; Rothwell, 2010; Sarros & Sarros, 2007; Watkins, 2013) which was confirmed by this study. However, this study also clearly indicated that the personal transition of the leaders and their relationships with those external to themselves, offered critical insight in understanding how successful the change was, as well as how the change impacted the community. As the schools transitioned to governance under a MAT, principals not only faced organisational change but also a change in key leadership roles. Those in the more successful school left a place of comfort and familiarity and moved to a new school culture while others transitioned from the school classified as inadequate to a new, thriving environment. Furthermore, principals who were promoted from within faced significant challenges as they processed their new role while also developing into a system built of new alliances. Leaders experienced an unanticipated transition of closure in one position and a period of rediscovery and reidentification before moving externally to a new position, saturated with new beginnings (Bridges, 2016). The degree to which the needs of the individual leaders were addressed as they transitioned through the multiple changes has had substantial impact on the success of the multi-academy trust. Each principal had the knowledge, expertise, and a set of experiences that led to their appointment but the willingness to go a step beyond their former practices and relearn what strategies and approaches proved to be most effective in leading a school with a specific historical, cultural, and educational context. When principals used the process of their personal transition to understand what they were experiencing as they left one position for another, they discovered that they were more effective in their new leadership roles. Principals that recognised the value of unlearning or separating from former practices as they moved through their neutral zone, said that they were able to address the new school environment with a fresh perspective.

Furthermore, this study highlights how external organisational changes influence an internal perspective change in the leaders who work to implement this change. As schools operating under the local education authority the headteachers were responsible for the operation of a single school under a single Board of Governors. As one headteacher among five in the MAT, each school leader was part of a larger leadership team, working to bring about the success of all. The perspective change from "my school" to "our schools" was not an easy one. However, as each headteacher transitioned internally to a leader representing the MAT, the idea of school effectiveness and school improvement became a larger issue as success changed to the whole, to a group of schools, rather than the singular school. The same holds true for school governance, where each school was overseen by the school's board of governors as well as the MAT board. While initially challenging, headteachers came to appreciate the sharing of ideas, the perspectives of leadership at all levels, and the reassurance that group support brings to the otherwise lonely job of leading. This, in turn, is not only the external organisational change but the internal personal transition.

This research provides an empirical lens through which to examine Bridges (2016) conceptual model of change, a lens previously used to examine business organisations but rarely used to examine school governance change. This study offers lessons in the importance of examining change both within the organisation through the personal lens as well as the outside lens. The transition through change often comes at a personal cost to those leading the change and the perspectives of that personal cost, along with the barriers faced, are essential considerations when looking at the success of the change. Moreover, attention must be paid to the community stakeholders outside of the organisation whose support or opposition to the organisational change also bears witness to success. As multi-academy trusts are rapidly expanding in England, further reciprocal research of transition through change and the response to that transition might illuminate the level of success of these developing MATs.

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