WESTERN AUSTRALIAN NETWORK PRINCIPALS:
AN INVESTIGATION OF THEIR ROLE WITHIN GOVERNMENT SCHOOL NETWORKS

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Abstract

School networks became the primary unit of school leadership support and collaboration when the Western Australian Department of Education introduced empowerment reforms. Principal colleagues chose network principals to facilitate their respective school network. It is assumed that the way in which network principals perceive their role influences how they perform the role. The extant literature indicated that there is a lack of empirical research on network leadership despite the substantive scholarly writing devoted to school networks. Accordingly, the focus of the study was to generate substantive theory on how public school network principals, within the Perth metropolitan area, perceived their role.

This study was located within the paradigm of interpretivism guided by the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Data were collected by means of focus groups, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and document analysis. In addition, supplementary interviews with senior Department of Education policy officers enabled insights into the context of the role of the network principal. Throughout the study, the perspective of the researcher was constantly examined as he was a network principal.

Three propositions were generated from the data. First, that network principals perceived the Western Australian Department of Education’s empowerment reforms influenced their management of the multiple expectations of their role; secondly, that their prime intention was to share network leadership with members; and thirdly, that they employed a deliberate form of influence. Four groups of strategies consisting of priming, locating, shaping and adapting supported this influence-based leadership. Collectively, these propositions offer a new perspective and conceptual tools regarding the leadership of Western Australian government school networks, which has important implications for policy and practice in connection with the role of network principals, as well as for further research.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The Western Australian Department of Education’s establishment of school networks has not been surprising because networks promise many benefits. As a result, they have become central to government policy (Chapman, 2008). Much of the research regarding school networks has extolled the virtues of principals collaborating within networks to encourage system-wide transformation (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000), in particular in the implementation of specific programs designed to build the capacity of teachers (Hopkins, 2001). The promise is of schools working flexibly together despite structural (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; O’Hair & Veugelers, 2005) and conceptual variations (Castells, 2000a, 2000b, 2001). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2000) has claimed that creating collaborative structures around schools can deepen organisational learning as a collective and for each organisation. Indeed, the OECD (2003) painted an optimistic picture by affirming and extending the image of educational networks as places that emphasise quality knowledge transfer and professional learning when they stated the following:

Networks are purposeful social entities characterised by a commitment to quality, rigour and a focus on outcomes. They are also an effective means of supporting innovation in times of change. In education, networks promote the dissemination of good practice, enhance the professional development of teachers, support capacity building in schools, mediate between centralised and decentralised structures, and assist in the process of re-structuring and re-culturing educational organisations and systems. (van Aalst, 2003, p. 154)

The normative literature also contends that school networks enable members to generate and disseminate good practice rather than relying on centralised administrations. For instance, Senge et al. (2000) have claimed that the power of collaborative learning between schools has the potential to redesign local educational systems and the forms of collaborative structures.
The strength of these claims regarding school networks and their leadership has been researched. Muijs, Ainscow, Chapman, and West (2011) have concluded there are some strengths associated with networks and evidence of the conditions required for collaboration in networking. Evans and Stone-Johnson (2010) have noted that research has indicated that properly constructed networks have the potential to overcome issues associated with the contextualisation of school reforms at the local level. Indeed, networks are complex, collaborative organisations that require some form of leadership to create deliberative decision-making and appropriate network conditions. As such, networks need substantial amounts of relationship building to achieve the balance between accountabilities and the ability to solve problems (Alford & O’Flynn, 2012). Lima (2010) also argued that networks are significantly influenced by their genesis, composition, structure, substance, effectiveness, and dynamics. On network leadership, Chapman and Allen (2005) have contended that leaders have significant roles as facilitators and managers; they can sustain network membership and agency related to network member commitment (Hargreaves & Fink, 2005). For instance, network leaders can promote collaborative agency towards network direction because members tend to drift away when networks fail to maintain attentiveness towards purposeful local and practical issues (Hopkins, 2003). What is not clear, however, is the kind of leadership needed to deal with the interactional life within, and the paradoxically elusive nature of, school networks.

The rest of this chapter describes the background of school networks, the context of the role of the network principal in Western Australian, and the rationale and aim of the study repeated later in the thesis.

1.2 Background

There has been a trend in Western education jurisdictions towards decentralised decision-making (Gammage, 2008; OECD, 2004; Willis, 2007). This devolution of decision-making has been focused on empowering schools to build a sense of community and teacher empowerment (Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Pennell & Firestone, 1998), so that change-efforts can be concentrated on local
needs of communities. Networks of schools have the appeal of collaboratively supporting the particular needs of their members in an autonomous environment. This evolving paradigm of collective professionalism amongst schools potentially redefines the relationships between increasingly self-managed schools as they strive to improve student results that were monitored by centralised mechanisms.

The pattern of increasing networking and collaboration has become familiar in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. For example, Blacher and Adams (2007) have noted that governments in the United Kingdom have moved away from the ‘command and control’ approach towards interdependence, personalisation of teaching and shared narratives among schools. An example of this approach was the large scale United Kingdom Networked Learning Communities program (2002-2006) that contained 137 networks of 1,500 schools (Jackson & Temperley, 2007). The program generated evidence of networks improving student achievement, developing leadership for school-to-school collaboration, and engaging local authorities with school networks.

Networks were viewed as a conduit to solve many problems. One of the proclaimed advantages of networks was the co-construction of programs that suited the needs of individual schools rather than pursuing the imposition of central initiatives (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002), while at the same time helping schools to address an imposed standards-driven national educational agenda (Day & Hadfield, 2005). Indeed, a significant amount of empirical research has focused on the influence of the co-leadership of English headteachers and local authority officers. This research has examined how networks have enhanced cross-boundary strategic activities and coalitions with other agencies (Atkinson, Springate, Johnson, & Halsey, 2007; Katz, Earl, & Jaafar, 2009). It concluded that the co-leaders of networks encouraged others to participate, set the agenda, share leadership and build capacity (Earl & Katz, 2007).

Despite efforts to enhance network capacity and cohesion in school in England, a confusing picture of broad families of collaborations has developed, as networks have tended to be fluid in nature (Hannon, 2005). These partnerships have attempted to target the improvement of student results, mainly in challenging
circumstances, with a variety of school networking programs. For instance, the work of Chapman (2008) has revealed that the English Networked Learning Communities program aimed at supporting schools through a collaborative enquiry process. Many of these networks adopted an action research approach to develop teaching practices, with the core promises of knowledge creation and the sharing of social and intellectual capital. The author claimed that while these network approaches had supported schools, the tailored models have not been cost-effective. In addition, evidence of constructing quality knowledge is inconclusive, despite optimism on the matter.

In the United States, teacher networks have operated since the mid–1970s. An example of school networks is the Coalition of Essential Schools that was set up in 1984. This coalition has attempted to implement localised secondary school reform based on redefining the relationship between the teacher, the student and the subject matter (Coalition of Essential Schools, 2015; McQuillan & Muncey, 1994). Similarly, the League of Professional Schools, established in 1984, has encouraged school collaboration in implementing incremental change and facilitators lead schools by generating a democratic learning community (The League of Professional Schools, 2014). As another example, networks function as the support mechanisms for schools in New York, and school principals have collaborated with each other in one of 60 school networks that best match the contexts of their schools. Network leaders manage the networks and receive support from 15 team members that guided schools to develop effective instruction, management, and leadership (New York Department of Education, 2012a, 2012b, 2014). More recently, some countries have established similar networks (Stott, Jopling, & Kilcher, 2006).

In Australia, several education state jurisdictions have organised their schools into regions with mid-tier management structures. These regions contain school networks and reinforce traditional bureaucratic arrangements and the implementation of systemic initiatives. For instance, in Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory networks have been utilised to promote deep collective learning between schools. The Tasmanian Department of Education in the 2014–17 Learners First Strategy: Connected and Inspired (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2014)
plan outlined that networks are one of the key drivers to create positive school environments. Regional network leaders visit each of their schools every three weeks to ensure the enactment of quality school improvement and data-driven accountability that is linked to each principal’s performance management plan (email, personal communication, 7 December 2014).

An alternative to systemically established school networks was the Australian National Schools Network, launched in 1991, which involved over 100 schools. This not-for-profit organisation developed systems of influence to create communities of practice (Network, 2014). Previously, Western Australian primary school leaders established informal collegiate groups based predominantly on the sharing of practical knowledge and learning between leaders. The Western Australian (WA) Department of Education also encouraged secondary schools to organise curriculum collaborations to develop jointly held subject courses in which students could travel from one school to another to gain access to specialist teachers.

In conclusion, there has been a trend in Western educational jurisdictions of encouraging schools to work together because they can help each other to interpret and respond to the needs of their local communities and to implement systemic priorities. There seems to be a deal of optimism in jurisdictions regarding the potential of school networks to build the capacity of schools in order to support the improvement of student learning. They have been established to address variously defined purposes and have been guided by facilitators while some have been under the direct leadership of managers. Nevertheless, despite good intentions, leading the generation of collaborative school networks has been complicated, particularly where the enabling conditions of leadership and responsibility of network leaders have been opaque. On this, the Western Australian State Government has followed the decentralisation path by dismantling the centralised school support mechanisms resulting in the devolution of greater decision-making to networks. The next section now considers the context in which Western Australian network principals operate.
1.3 The Context of the Role of the Network Principal in Western Australia

Internationally, there has been a broad trend towards increased networking that has influenced the development of society (Castells, 2000a, 2000b, 2004, 2005). This change and the fluid world of networking influenced the context in which school networks and the role of the network principal operate. In interpreting this networking ‘zeitgeist’, Skidmore (2004) argued that networks challenge the conventional leadership concepts as they have questioned what leadership means in a networked society. Leading the facilitation of networks means that the traditional relationships of power between leaders and followers do not apply as network members collaboratively determine the direction of their network.

Network leaders, then, depended on their ability to negotiate with members when defining the purpose and agency of their network. On this, Howes and Ainscow (2006) have claimed skilful negotiation is needed to build interdependent relationships between network members in order to establish the essential conditions of collaboration. In creating interdependencies between network members, leaders may be aware that their role is more facilitative, one in which negotiation processes govern discussion, rather than involving the enactment of the direct leadership of school networks. Therefore, leadership within networks in generating interdependencies between members might be challenging in certain cases, particularly as each school network has an individual identity based on member inclinations that reflects their different contexts and influences on the role of the network principal.

The role of the Western Australian network principal concentrates on influencing members to achieve the expectations of the WA Department of Education and network members. The role is challenging as network principals have no authority nor governance structures within which to exert their influence. This limitation could have a negative impact on their ability to facilitate networks achieving “improved student outcomes, greater school effectiveness, and more effective use of physical, financial and human resources” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c, p. 2).
Network principals rely on members’ goodwill and reciprocity, which can influence the building of social capital within networks. Additionally, nurturing relationships and connections between themselves and network members is critical as each network usually contains neighbouring primary, secondary and education support (students with disability) schools. Anticipating and interpreting demands are important because network members, as principals of schools, can determine the extent of their engagement based on whether their school network meets their needs.

Arguably, marshalling the collective interests of disparate network members is necessary as there is no charter that requires school networks to implement a particular systemic change agenda. Therefore, by employing their negotiation skills, network principals can draw on their ability to combine member interests to generate progress towards a common network direction. Negotiating a resonant direction with members could be a significant consideration as networks are empowered to determine their ‘demand-driven’ agenda in meeting the diverse needs of primary and secondary schools. (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b). Moreover, members appoint network principals “as colleagues who work alongside their peers to support their professional needs and to support collaborative opportunities for the network as a whole” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 1). In meeting the ‘demand-driven’ agenda, network principals and members work together to try to understand what each requires and how they should be engaged in collaboration towards a shared direction.

While there is a growing literature base regarding school leaders, there is also a relative scarcity of empirical research on leadership in supporting school networks (Hadfield & Jopling, 2012a). On this, the study reported in this thesis examined the social interaction in defining the role of the network principal. These social interactions are the exchanges between members of school networks and include how network principals interpret those interactions. This approach enabled a critical analysis of network principals’ perspectives of their role within Western Australian school networks to be conducted.
1.4 Aim and Rationale of the Study

This section examines the aim and rationale of the study. Steady centralised control of schools has been a characteristic of the Western Australian public school system since the 1890s (Mossenson, 1972). This situation has ensured the compliance of schools to the needs of the central bureaucracy, namely, the state Department of Education. The Department of Education delivered support services and provided professional learning to schools. This helped to ensure the appropriate interpretation of systemic initiatives. However, since the mid–1970s Australian governments have progressively become interested in the decentralisation of schooling (Gammage, 2008). The structural decentralisation and devolution of school decision-making in Australia began in 1973 with the commissioning of the Interim Report of the Australian Schools Commission (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973) by the Australian federal government. This report advocated a more localised approach to decision-making, according to which schools were entrusted to make judgements and choices that closely affected their communities (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973).

In Western Australia, devolution reforms gathered momentum when the Department of Education launched the 2009 Independent Public Schools Initiative (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011d). This initiative promised a significant shift in the Department of Education’s organisational culture that was intended to empower school communities and increase school autonomy (Western Australian Department of Education, 2008, 2012a). Shortly after the introduction of more autonomous and distinctive schools came the establishment of school networks that purported to have, at their heart, school collaboration and reciprocity. The Department of Education established “school-based networks that provide professional support for teachers and school leaders” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2012a, p. 6).

The WA Department of Education’s empowerment logic when introducing school networks claimed that as teaching and learning expertise resided in schools, the open sharing of knowledge amongst schools might improve the education at the local level. This logic assumed that schools were willing to enter into a reciprocal
process that enabled the sharing of their accumulated knowledge and that this knowledge was prized by all networked schools. The reliance on sharing understandings and strategies in school networks became pivotal as many of the centrally-based school support programs were either decentralised or curtailed.

As the WA Department of Education established the role of the network principal to support principals it seems reasonable to assume that some form of leadership was going to be employed by network principals. What kind of leadership might be appropriate and the way in which that leadership might be employed were not clear. In this connection, Hadfield (2007) has pointed out that network leadership may need a new, or innovative, exercise of current leadership models. Similarly, Stoll et al. (2010) have indicated that the facilitative work of network leaders has an “interesting and unusual blend of qualities” (p. 12). Kubiak and Bertram (2010) have also suggested that a different set of leadership skills between facilitation and leadership has operated within school networks. The question then arises as to what network principals consider would be their role given they had no authority, given few resources and were required to facilitate a network of potentially cynical members. The study reported in this thesis responded to this question. The aim of the study was to generate substantive theory regarding the perspectives of WA school network principals on their role within government school networks.

1.5 Central Research Question

Western Australian school networks contain leaders of schools, who are customarily school principals, and one of those principals is chosen to be the network principal. While any member of a school network can generate leadership, few empirical studies have examined the role of single network leaders appointed by network members. Consequently, this research was based around the following central question:

What are the perspectives of Western Australian school network principals on their role within government school networks?
The following two sections describe the elements of the research approach and design and their relationship to the central research question.

1.6 Research Approach

The study reported in this thesis aimed at generating theory regarding network principals’ perspectives on their role. To investigate the meaning of the role for them, the interpretivist paradigm was applied because it focused the study on examining the meaning of the social interactions and the contextualisation embedded in school networks that related to the role. This study examined network principals’ perspectives on the interpretations of social interaction between themselves and those network members who influenced their role.

Perspectives are frameworks by which people view the world and are “an angle on reality...[that] acts as a filter through which everything around us is perceived and interpreted” (Charon, 2001, p. 3). Social interaction in this context is “the on-going, back-and-forth action that participants take towards one another” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 30). In relation to this, the field of leadership research has increasingly come to recognise the significance of context (Liden & Antonakis, 2009) in influencing leadership. Examining the significance of the context of school networks is salient because it constitutes a component of the way in which network principals manage the expectations of stakeholders. Leaders also actively produce contexts as a resource (Endrissat & von Arx, 2013), so the way in which network principals structure networks was also examined.

The study assumed that network principals, as a collective, have a unique perspective of how social interactions influence their role. These social interactions include the way in which network principals interpret, and manage, the impact of the expectations of significant stakeholders. There are potentially three reasons why network principals perceive their role in certain ways. The first reason is that they interpret stakeholders’ expectations of their role in a way that depends on how they view their role in leading their colleagues without authority. Secondly, network principals may need to determine how they facilitate the internal network processes. This raises issues of management and leadership, communication and trust (Lima,
2010). Thirdly, is the consideration of how leadership is distributed or shared in school networks (Lima, 2010). These three reasons may accent network principals’ interpretations of the expectations of stakeholders and the impact of their influence. These reasons all call for the investigation of participants’ perspectives. Consequently, the study applied the qualitative paradigm of interpretivism and the theoretical position of symbolic interactionism to create substantive theory regarding the role of the network principal.

1.7 Research Design

The study employed focus group (Freeman, 2006; McLafferty, 2004) and individual semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2007) to generate theory regarding network principals’ perspectives on their role. The purpose of using focus groups was to create an environment in which participants could talk freely about their perspectives on the role of the network principal. The participants also stimulated responses from each other in a supportive environment, which provided a reason to contribute to the research effort. Individual interviews were linked to focus group interviews to enable further exploration (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Analysis of network documentation, in the form of policy and school network planning documents, revealed the context of the role of the network principal.

Interviewing the regional executive directors assisted understanding and the interpretation of the extent to which regional mechanisms support the role of the network principal. Supplementary interviews were undertaken to ascertain expectations of the role with two former government senior officers in influencing the role. These public servants co-authored Western Australian State Government policy documents and corporate advice papers that related to the Department’s policy of empowerment and the role of the network principal.
1.8 Definition of Terms

**Empowerment.** To empower is to give (someone) the authority or power to do something (‘Empower’, 2015). Empowerment is the process of giving (someone) the authority or power to do something (‘Empowerment’, 2015). According to Leach, Wall and Jackson (2003) there are two aspects to empowerment. The first aspect is the relational transfer of power from the leader to the follower and the reducing of dependencies (Forrester, 2000). This relates to the WA Department of Education reforms promising to reduce school dependency on the educational bureaucracy. The second aspect is the psychological individual empowerment traits of meaning, self-determination, competence and impact (Chen, Kirkman, Kanfer, Allen, & Rosen, 2007; Leach et al., 2003; Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011; Spreitzer, 1996).

**School Network.** A network as a sociological phenomenon is a “set of interconnected nodes” (Castells, 2000b, p. 695). More precisely, a network is a set of actors or nodes connected with a set of ties of a particular type, which can be more or less formal in nature (Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). The decentralisation of the WA Department of Education school support structures has prompted the establishment of formal school networks. Each education region was structured to incorporate networks “as the primary units of leadership support and school collaboration and innovation” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c, p. 1). Typically, a Western Australian public school network is a group of up to 20 schools working together to support each other. Network members typically refer to school principals within the network.

**Perspectives.** Perspectives refer to the “frameworks through which people make sense of the world” (Woods, 1983, p. 7). Charon (2001) expressed the notion of perspectives precisely when he asserted:

> A perspective is an angle on reality, a place where the individual stands as he or she looks at it and tries to understand reality [. . .] a perspective is an absolute basic part of everyone’s existence, and it acts as a filter through which everything around us is perceived and interpreted. There is no possible way that the individual can encounter reality ‘in the raw’, directly, as it really is, for whatever is seen can only be part of the real situation (p. 3).
The examination of network principals’ perspectives is important in order to understand the way in which they interpret the meaning of their role.

1.9 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to school network theoretical discourse concerning the social construction of the role of network leaders. Muijs, West and Ainscow (2010) have pointed out that a theoretical base has existed in the inquiry fields of business, psychology and sociology, namely network theory. However, these authors have argued that there has been a lack of networking theory in the applied field of educational enquiry. An examination of social interactions influencing the role of the network principal generated a new multidimensional perspective of network leadership. This was because leadership has been frequently referred to in the context of binary relationships. These binary relationships have been well researched, yet leadership in clusters has received little attention (Sydow, Lerch, Huxham, & Hibbert, 2011).

Researchers have argued that network theory has been under-theorised (Hadfield, 2007; Kubiak & Bertram, 2010). More specifically, Kubiak and Bertram (2010) have argued that further research might reveal the nature of the leadership challenge in networks. In this vein, Hadfield and Jopling (2012a) have called for better network theories to support leadership research. The study being reported here contributes to the theoretical discourse of networks in that it suggests that the strength of network leadership depends on the quality of the social interaction between network leaders and members that, in turn, influences the role of the network leader.

The results of the study reported here support previous empirical research concerning school network leadership. For instance, in England formal school leaders and district leaders co-led school networked learning communities (Ainscow, Muijs, & West, 2006; 2009). The roles of these leaders resembled network principals’ responsibilities in negotiating network logistics and consulting members to construct agendas. The work of Hadfield and Chapman (2009) has indicated that English network leadership is different from traditional, vertically structured leadership from
one leader. The study in this thesis corroborated their findings of tailored leadership. Indeed, network principals shape networks in a form that shows striking similarities to the Hadfield and Chapman’s (2009) design flow for a network. This model attempts to encapsulate the complex processes within networks into a simple design flow. Also, research by Townsend (2015) has suggested that network leadership has grown out of networked inquiry between schools. He also argues that this type of network leadership has the potential to be a case of Gronn’s (2009, 2011) category of hybrid leadership in action. Furthermore, the study reported here expanded on Stoll, Halbert and Kaser’s (2010) research that asserted that network leadership required a facilitative style that incorporated a blend of unusual qualities.

The study reported in this thesis provides insight into the network leadership discourse by revealing the deliberate way in which network leaders employ their influence over network members. It carefully outlines the challenges network principals face and the strategies they employ to establish and support networks. It reveals how network principals manage the ‘dark side’ of networks (Lima, 2010) such as managing reluctant network members. Network principals also balance their expectations with those who fund school networks, namely the WA Department of Education through regional offices. This insight relies on recognising the on-going development of the multidimensional relationships that influence the role of the network leader. Furthermore, the study examined the strategies that network leaders apply to mobilise members because these indicate how network leaders structure their influence. Overall, revealing the attributes of network principals’ approach to leadership together with supporting strategies potentially contributes to network leadership theory.

The examination of the leadership generated as a result of the social interaction between the role of the Western Australian network principal and network members is the point of difference with earlier empirical research. The study reported in the thesis offers a perspective on the role of a single network leader nominated by their colleagues who were school network members. Furthermore, Western Australian network principals facilitate networks as the primary support mechanism for schools, without systemic reform imperative to bind
members in working towards a particular network direction. In this connection, centralised control of their role has been subdued because they have a significant degree of freedom in constructing their role, in consultation with network members. Finally, the study contributes to the knowledge base by investigating the emergent leadership role of the network principal in supporting schools in which the demand for network agency predominantly emanates from members.

### 1.10 Structure of the Thesis

The study reported in the thesis generated theory regarding the role of the network principal from their own point of view. This, the first of the eight chapters of the thesis, is the introductory chapter. It has established the background and purpose to the study, along with the rationale, the aim of the research, the central research question, the research approach and design, and the study's contribution to existing knowledge. Chapter 2 examines the context of the study regarding the establishment of Western Australian public school networks and the link with the role of the network principal. Chapter 3 presents the literature review and aims to identify associated concepts, recognises competing theory and places the presented substantive theory in the context of existing theory. Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology employed in this study starting with the research questions and theoretical approach, the process of selecting participants, data collection methods and the position of the researcher. It then moves on to detail the data collection cycle and methods, data analysis tools and ethical considerations.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 explicate the three propositions generated from the study. These are that network principals perceive the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms influenced their management of the multiple expectations of their role, their prime intention was to share network leadership with members, and that they employed a deliberate form of influence to mobilise network members.

Chapter 8 recaps the research design and methodology. The findings are summarised. The implications of the research findings for theory and research are examined, the implications for policy, practice and the contribution to knowledge, and the limitations of the study are considered.
CHAPTER TWO: CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

2.1 Introduction

It is necessary to examine the context in which the role of the Western Australian network principal emerged to understand the meaning that network principals attribute to the role. The WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms significantly framed the role of the network principal to facilitate the establishment of school networks as the prime support mechanism for principals and school collaboration in response to common interests. The Department of Education defined the role of the network principal as “working alongside their peers to support their professional needs and support collaborative opportunities for the network as a whole” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 2). Embedded within the Department of Education’s network principal statements was the assumption that principals would engage to benefit their schools. The expectation from the Department of Education was that principals would determine their level of commitment to school networks and, in that way, would influence the role of the network principal.

This chapter now provides the background to the study reported in this thesis concerning the role of the network principal in Western Australia. The four sections of this chapter present the demographic profile of Australia, Australian government influence in Western Australian government schools, structural decentralisation and the devolution of decision-making, and the demand-driven role of the network principal.

2.2 Demographic Profile of Western Australia

Australia is the world’s smallest continent and the largest island. At the time of the study reported here, the population was nearly 23 million, and 68.7 per cent of the population resided in the major cities of the six states and two territories. As an Australian state, Western Australia occupies 2.5 million square kilometres, which is approximately one-third of the Australian continent and is home to 2,430,000
people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Western Australia’s capital city of Perth is over 2,000 kilometres from the capital city of South Australia, Adelaide.

The WA State Government’s Department of Education included 782 government public schools (Melbourne University, 2013, p. 22) at the time the study reported in this thesis was conducted. There were 268,129 students enrolled in government schools representing 65.7 per cent of all WA students. The rest of the school population is catered for by the private school sector. A wide variation of schools became members of school networks. Networks included primary schools that accommodate kindergarten students aged 4½ years old up to year 7 with students aged 12½ years of age. Secondary schools included year 8 students aged 12½ years old up to year 12 students, most of whom had turned 18 years of age (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011a).

2.3 Government Influence on Schooling

Constitutionally, Australian public school education is the responsibility of state governments. However, public school funding is a blend of federal government, state government grants and targeted initiatives. Federally, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), consists of state, territory, Australian government and New Zealand government ministers. The council steers Australian government school education along with the Independent and Catholic school sectors following public consultation (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008). The most recent federal and state government ministerial council education agreement was the 2008 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008). The declaration included an outline of the priorities of equity and excellence, in the hope that all young Australians would become confident, successful and informed learners (MCEETYA, 2008). The meetings of the ministerial council were followed by the publication of the Melbourne Declaration (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008). Subsequently, a four-year plan outlined key strategies and initiatives that the federal government intended to undertake to support the achievement of educational goals (MCEETYA, 2009). The plan “provides a framework” and each “jurisdiction is responsible for
detailed planning aligned with existing programs and activities” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). Additionally, the ministerial council is charged with monitoring each jurisdiction’s responsibilities that relate to their commitments (MCEETYA, 2009). The ministerial council guides the curriculum development work of the new national *Australian Curriculum* through the auspices of the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority* (ACARA).

In 2008, the Federal Parliament announced the setting up of the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act* (2008), which established ACARA. ACARA’s responsibilities include the development of the *Australian Curriculum* from Foundation to Year 12. This was guided by the *Melbourne Declaration* on educational goals for young Australians (ACARA, 2011). The implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum* rests with State and Territory school authorities, for which ACARA provides support. ACARA developed and administered assessments of student performance in the form of the *National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) assessments. The work involved collecting and analysing student assessment data, and publishing information that relates to comparative school performance (Australian Federal Government, 2008). Information concerning Australian school results is frequently reported in the mass media as the regular national testing of literacy and numeracy is one of the most prominent measures of a school’s performance. Published aggregate student results have also appeared on the Australian federal government’s *My School* website where the public can compare the performance of schools.

Furthermore, in WA, school principals’ performance management is linked inextricably to students’ test results in national testing and to various measures of secondary student performance. This exposure of school performance to public scrutiny and principals’ performance management is a powerful incentive for school networks to focus on the implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum*. It has resulted in firmly focusing school principals on the interests of their schools, rather than on them helping other schools within their network. Each network in 2011 received funding on a teacher per capita basis to support the implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum*. 

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In conclusion, Australian state governments manage the financing of education within their states. The Australian federal government’s allocation of funding is contingent on each state’s compliance and collaboration with their education priorities. For instance, the federal government influenced the direction of the WA Department of Education, which provided the initial funding for the implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum*. In due course, school networks received funds to support the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum* from the Department of Education. This allocation influenced the role of the network principal because the funding amount determined the level of support to be offered to networked schools, after network principals negotiated with members.

### 2.4 Decentralisation and Devolution

Decentralisation and devolution of educational decision-making have gained momentum over time in addressing the increasingly diverse needs of local communities. For much of the history of government schooling in WA, the WA Department of Education has managerially operated as a centralised bureaucracy. This arrangement involved either educational regions or districts that contained officers responsible for the delivery of professional learning to schools. This management structure ensured the conformity of schools to centralised decisions that catered for the administrative size of Western Australia (Mossenson, 1972). Consequently, efforts were made to guide schools in the implementation of system imperatives and achieve consistency of curriculum delivery and assessment. However, centralised decision-making contrasted with the prevailing societal transformation towards individualisation.

Barber (2003) has suggested that the shift in decision-making towards the local level has been an acknowledgement of the rising expectation of individualised government responses by the public. Personalisation of government responses to the education needs of its citizens has moved many school organisations away from the industrial models of education towards models more suited to the 21st century (Istance & Kobayashi, 2003). Therefore, over time, choice and school self-
management have increasingly become the drivers of school leadership autonomy designed to meet the diverse needs of school communities.

The Western global movement towards increased decentralisation within OECD countries has increased school-based governance through school empowerment, shared decision-making, and community control (van Aalst, 2003). Advocates of devolved decision-making to schools have argued that the virtues of being democratic, accountable and responsive to the community, where local needs are addressed by the empowerment of teachers and parents, can improve the quality of schools (Wößmann, Lüdemann, Schütz, & West, 2007; Zajda & Gamage, 2009). The same forces of sensitivity to local needs, accountability, professionalism, and participative management have been evident in Australia (Caldwell, 2012).

Decentralisation of education decision-making in Australia began with the commissioning of the 1973 Interim Report of the Australian Schools Commission (Karmel Report), which advocated the devolution of responsibilities to schools:

The Committee favours less rather than more centralised control over the operation of schools. Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of the students whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves. Its belief in this grass-roots approach to the control of schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be more effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making the decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them, and in a position to profit from their experience (Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, 1973, p. 10).

The thrust of the Karmel Report potentially eroded the monopoly of state governments’ educational decision-making at the local level by adopting decentralisation (Dimmock & O’Donoghue, 1997). The Report marked a significant shift in educational leadership. Accordingly, schools began to have greater control over decision-making aligned with the needs of local communities. In WA, the process started to take effect in 1986 with the advent of the state Labor government’s reform of the public sector. The following sub-sections now examine the changes that influenced the role of the network principal.
2.4.1 Decentralisation and Devolution of Education in Western Australia

Decentralisation of many of the WA Department of Education’s structures and the devolution of decision-making to schools had a significant impact on the role of the network principal. Three indicators marked the process. The first indicator was the release of the 1987 Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement (Western Australian Ministry of Education, 1987) report. This report was aligned with the whole of government system change in 1986, steered by the Western Australian State Government’s Managing Change in the Public Sector report (Government of Western Australia, 1986). This report outlined the problems of balancing increasing community demands with budgetary constraints, accountability and public service decentralisation.

The Better Schools in Western Australia report recommended the devolution of decision-making from the central bureaucracy to schools and their communities (Western Australian Ministry of Education, 1987). It provided a blueprint for restructuring the public education system with an emphasis on self-determining schools, devolving power to school councils and accountability to the communities. The report claimed that the “Education Department has been involved in the gradual devolution of responsibility and this process needs to be completed” (Western Australian Ministry of Education, 1987, p. 5). Despite this, Dimmock and O’Donoghue (1997) have argued that state-set goals ensured the system remained managerially centralised.

The second indicator of devolution was the 1999 Local Management of Schools Pilot Project (Western Australian Department of Education, 1999). It attempted to introduce self-management to schools. The report aligned with the 1994 report entitled Devolution of Decision-Making Authority in the Government School System of Western Australia (Hoffman, 1994) that also encouraged the greater devolution of decision-making to schools. It also recommended giving increased powers to newly-formed school boards and greater school-based financial control (Hoffman, 1994). The reforms of a Pilot Project based on the report spluttered to a halt after two years due to a change in state government.
The third indicator of devolution was the establishment of the WA state government’s ‘empowerment’ reforms. This signpost aligned with the 2009 State Government’s election promise of “empowering school communities”. The first plank of the “empowering communities” education reform, namely the *Independent Public Schools Initiative* (Western Australian Department of Education, 2009b), claimed that schools that achieved the status of being independent government schools would be empowered. This initiative promised to place many of the WA Department of Education’s bureaucratic assumptions and structures under scrutiny as principals became more autonomous in the wake of the empowerment reforms.

The cumulative effect of the WA Department of Education’s decentralisation reforms was that schools were empowered to assume greater school autonomy than previously in decision-making to address local issues. Achieving the status of being an independent public school, the likelihood that the school in question might address local conditions was increased. Consequently, the hope was that each school might become distinctive (Western Australian Department of Education, 2012a).

The process of empowerment encouraged Western Australian school principals to be more independent and decisive than they had been previously. Empowerment of this type closely aligned to being concerned with the gaining of power (Cattaneo & Chapman, 2010; Masterson, 2006). In other words, empowerment can also be viewed both as a process and an outcome (Hur, 2006). On this, the WA Department of Education’s encouragement of principals and networks to self-manage their schools can be linked to the concept of team empowerment. This type of empowerment, it is claimed, can strengthen one’s traits of meaning, self-determination, competence and impact (Seibert et al., 2011). These traits, it is held, also enhance the perceived notion of control (Kirkman & Benson, 1999; Menon, 2001). Individual empowerment is represented in how an individual feels when empowered, whereas team empowerment concerns the shared perception of collective empowerment (Chen et al., 2007). The underlying argument of those advocating empowerment in the workplace is that employees’ performance, well-being and positive attitudes may be enhanced when they experience it (Maynard, Gilson, & Mathieu, 2012).
The WA Department of Education created three decentralised structures, namely, independent public schools, regionalisation and school networks, to accentuate the empowerment of school communities and principals. These organisational structures promised to bring school support structures closer to schools.

2.4.2 Independent Public Schools

The first structure instituted through the WA Department of Education’s decentralisation process was that of independent public schools. Public schools are Western Australian state government schools. The Independent Public Schools Initiative, announced in 2009, began in 2010 with the selection of 34 schools (Melbourne University, 2013). The initiative was designed to “signify a new era in education in WA [. . .] and give schools greater control, and to reduce the bureaucracy in the state public education system” (Melbourne University, 2013, p. 11). Despite the promise of greater school autonomy, independent public schools were required still to comply with State legislation and education regulations. These included the School Education Act 1999, the Public Sector Management Act 1994, the Financial Management Act 2006, the School Curriculum and Authority Act 1997, the Curriculum Council Amendment Bill 2011 and School Regulations 2000. However, they were able to opt out of conforming to Department of Education policies and guidelines that restricted a school’s ability to improve the learning of its students.

At the time the study reported here was conducted, of the 782 government schools located in Western Australia, the cumulative independent public school count was 171 (Melbourne University, 2013). The Evaluation of the Independent Public Schools Initiative (Melbourne University, 2013) report found that independent public school principals felt more empowered than previously and were motivated by the freedom and the perception that they were autonomous. Their perception of being more self-managed encouraged “self-belief, the belief in autonomy, feeling of support and their skills of adopting suitable flexibilities” (Melbourne University, 2013, p. 7). Indeed, the Independent Public Schools Initiative provided a framework
for empowered principal decision-making that seemed to encourage an enhanced sense of autonomy for network principals.

2.4.3 Regionalisation and Empowerment of School Networks

The WA Department of Education’s second structure instituted through the decentralisation process was the re-establishment of education regions. The Department’s *Education Networks and Regions: New Ways of Supporting Schools* policy (Western Australian Department of Education, 2010) outlined the aim and rationale of regionalisation. This emphasised the state government’s focus on “delivering a public school system that empowers school communities” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). The latter was seen as entailing the relocation of support services from the former district offices to schools, or as close to schools as possible. The intent was that schools should have greater control over the previous support services.

Even though greater control of support services did pass to schools, regional executive directors were accountable for supporting the effective operation of networks (Western Australian Department of Education, 2009a). Network principals reported to the metropolitan regional executive directors who each assumed responsibility for approximately 250 schools (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b). The *Education Networks and Regions: New Ways of Supporting Schools* policy outlined that each school network was the premier school support structure that would “result in better education services” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). The policy also defined and explained the support mechanisms for school networks. The ensuing *School Networks* (Appendix 5) and *Network Principals* (Appendix 6) statements attempted to clarify the Department of Education’s expectations of the role of the network principal in delivering the state government’s election promise of empowering school communities.

The WA Department of Education promoted the perspective that its bureaucratic power was dampened by the process of reducing the power of central and regional offices. Indeed, the process of empowering communities reforms promised “greater autonomy, enhancing school leadership, reducing bureaucratic
restriction, and locating support services within or as close to schools as possible.” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). This power shift represented a movement in the division of authority to the “point of delivery” where school principals gained greater independence than previously. The reforms also stimulated the dismantling of systemic support and school networks became the prime leadership support mechanism, generating an expectation that network principals support the demands of principals, who were network members.

2.4.4 School Networks

The third structure instituted through the decentralisation process was the establishment of school networks. The WA Department of Education’s Education Networks and Regions: New Ways of Supporting Schools policy outlined the roles of networks and the network principal. The policy was aligned with the Department’s Excellence and Equity: Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2012, which provided an overview of the decentralisation process. The plan specified that collaboration and partnerships would continue among schools and networks to support the empowerment reform. This plan promised an “enabling organisation where schools are the focus and networks support the endeavours, innovations and improvement strategies of schools” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2012a, p. 3).

In promoting an enabling organisation, the establishment of school regions reduced the layers of systemic management and support to schools. The WA Department of Education clarified their expectations of a network in the School Networks policy (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c). This stated that network efforts “must result in improved student outcomes; greater school effectiveness; and more efficient use of physical, financial and human resources” (p. 2). The Department of Education gave assistance to networks in achieving these outcomes by providing funding for network principals in 75 school networks containing a maximum of 20 schools to “work together to support each other” (p. 1). It also provided funds for contingencies.

School networks were also encouraged to be flexible in how they formed. However, network membership tended to be based on the geographical location of
each network. Some networks contained a single secondary school which the
majority of primary school students later attended. Other networks contained two-
to-four secondary schools and colleges, together with primary schools. This level of
operational discretion was designed to encourage further networks to make
autonomous decisions and to assume greater responsibility for the support of
schools. Networks were, to all intents and purposes, autonomous. However, regional
education directors controlled the amount of funding each network received, which
could potentially influence the role of the network principal.

The WA Department of Education’s empowerment reform rhetoric focused
on changing culture from a position in which it was responsible for delivering
professional learning to one where schools generated professional learning.
Subsequently, there was a significant reduction in the brokerage role of the WA
Department of Education. The underlying argument for reducing systemic support of
schools and in empowering networks was that contextualised teaching and learning
expertise resides within schools. Therefore, the argument went, schools should
ideally collaborate with one another by sharing their knowledge.

The Department of Education assumed that it was feasible that network
members would willingly help one another in generating collective understandings.
The role of the network principal was, therefore, designed to facilitate and support
the newly empowered and self-managed networks in structuring member
collaboration to generate new knowledge. The establishment of the role engendered
an expectation of contextualised support for schools and self-management of
networks that might subsequently influence the role of the network principal.

The formation of school networks promised to empower school professionals
when they work together. This claim has been upheld by an increasing body of
knowledge that indicates that professional learning and knowledge are best acquired
when teachers work together (Goodson & Hargreaves, 2005; Hargreaves & Fullan,
2012). Furthermore, teachers working together in networks, as a new way of gaining
access to knowledge and ideas, has gained increased attention (Evans & Stone-
Johnson, 2010; O’Hair & Veugelers, 2005). Ainscow, Muijs and West (2006) have
indicated that evidence has suggested that collaboration between schools can
generate context-specific knowledge as well as transfer existing knowledge when working together in building productive relationships. Moreover, the work of Barber, Whelan and Clark (2007) has pointed out that teachers valued, more than other interventions, the opportunity to learn from one another through networks.

Some Australian state government schools have utilised networks to encourage school collaboration to drive improvement in student results. The Victorian state government expected principals to contribute to their network efforts in implementing government policy initiatives and lifting student participation and outcomes (Black, 2008; Griffen et al., 2012). Each network met under the direction of a regional network leader, who monitored the performance of approximately 30 schools (Matthews, Hunter, & Nusche, 2007; Office of policy, 2008). Member schools worked together to develop knowledge, financial resources and human resources. Each regional network leader supported the self-evaluation of each school and created a strategic, a provisional and an implementation plan, culminating in an annual report (Chrispeels & Harris, 2005). Networks remained after the restructuring of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood; however, the regional network leaders’ position, which also aimed at developing school leadership and capacity, ceased in 2012. Recently, each network has been encouraged to have a nominated point of contact and a commitment to a collaboratively developed action plan.

Australian Capital Territory (ACT) principals have been members of school networks that were led by network leaders. The work of networks aligned with the ACT Department of Education Strategic Plan. In network meetings, leaders and principals purportedly engaged in open and honest discussion concerning the individual and about the collective performance of their schools (ACT Department of Education and Training, 2010). These networks aimed at establishing collaborative learning cultures and used such specific strategies as instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009), with administrators visiting classrooms within the school network. These processes supposedly increase principals’ capacity to lead the provision of high-quality education and to improve student outcomes in other schools. In contrast, Western Australian school networks were charged with offering
leadership support to principals, and network principals managed the multiple expectations of the role of the network principal.

By network members gaining access to knowledge in other schools within their network, the WA Department of Education assumed that a common sense approach to reciprocity would prevail among members that might potentially encourage a collaborative effort. Through these arrangements, the Department of Education seemed to hope that the autonomy of networks and flexible use of funding might generate and enhance avenues for professional collegiality to achieve the Department’s aims for school networks. The role of the network principal, according to the Department of Education, was to facilitate the process of collaborative endeavours to improve student learning, enhance school effectiveness and ensure the effective use of resources.

2.5 The Demand-Driven Role

Network membership included a network principal whose WA Department of Education’s defined role was to establish and develop networks that offer “direct support to colleagues as needed” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c, p. 1). Network principals are chosen from the membership of each school network and accordingly might be either primary, secondary or education support principals. In this arrangement, the role of the network principal was predominant in facilitating the process of network members gaining access to knowledge and expertise in every school within their network. The notion seems to have been that the sharing of knowledge amongst network members would depend on the generosity of principals and a strong sense of altruism because network principals cannot compel members to collaborate. The open discussion of innovation and changes that might occur in each school would require a significant degree of trust between members. The notion of building confidence in trusting relationships incorporated the expectation of reciprocity in the form of the equal sharing of ideas facilitated by the role of the network principal. Network principal facilitation, therefore, was seen to rely on the willingness of each member to engage in deliberations about what was occurring in schools. These deliberations potentially
would involve members making a judgement about the effectiveness of strategies and the degree of any project’s fit to other schools. An in-built safety mechanism for network members was that they could choose which network to join and determine their level of engagement. Therefore, the combination of responding to the diverse demands of members and being accountable to establish the conditions for collaboration without authority meant that the role of the network principal was complex.

The empowerment of the role of the network principal was moderated by the officers within the education regions because the level of funding and distribution mechanisms were at the behest of the regional executive directors. By these mechanisms, regional executive directors could conceivably influence how networks could utilise resources. For instance, in the financial year 2012–2013, the North Metropolitan Education Region gave the region’s network contingency budget of $1,084,000 to networks based on the percentage of teaching staff within each school network. The largest network of 18 schools, with 1,138 teaching staff, received a contingency budget of $78,100. The smallest network of four schools, with 293 teaching staff, received $26,900. All but the smallest of networks received a salary component of one day per week to release network principals from their schools (North Metropolitan Education Region, 2011). As networks were self-managing, on receiving the funds from the regional office network principals were able to facilitate the process of decision-making as to how resources were expended. For example, they did not need to support the provision of release time for themselves. Conversely, the South Metropolitan Education Region networks received $27,100 for releasing network principals from their principal duties, which equates to one day per week. Each South Metropolitan network received a base amount of funding while the remaining funding remained with the regional office. Networks then applied for additional funds from the pool of surplus retained by the regional office.

The framing of the role of the network principal constructed by the WA Department of Education appeared to be variable. Clearly, the Department thought that the role of the network principal was important as school networks were to be “led by a network principal [. . .] so that the best principals will be able to extend
their influence and knowledge” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2010, p. 2). On the other hand, the subsequent *Network Principals* (2011b) statement revealed that each “network will be supported by a Network Principal headed by a Regional Executive Director” and in “most cases, a Network Principal will be a highly regarded and effective school principal.” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2010, p. 1). In comparing the two perspectives, it appears that the Department of Education’s interpretation of the role moved from one that the best principals adapt to lead networks and extend their influence, to that of network principals supporting networks. What advantage or ends these school principals might adopt for the role was unclear. However, the Department of Education indicated that there would be an “intrinsic value” in assuming the role. The evolving definition of the role was later clarified by the Western Australian Director-General of Education. She defined the role as “oiling the wheels of the network” and that network principals would work for the network (O’Neill, 2011). She further outlined that networks were not intended to be bureaucratic systems, or a replication of the Department of Education’s former district offices.

According to the WA Department’s *Network Principals* statement, the role was “demand-driven, support-orientated role that does not require intensive, ongoing involvement in all schools in the network” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 1). Network principals were expected to concentrate on supporting “the conditions for collaboration within the network and build relationships that support leadership” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 3). The stated expectation was that when networks would engage in collaborative efforts network activities “must result in improved student outcomes; greater school effectiveness; and more efficient use of physical, financial and human resources” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c, p. 2). In developing and sustaining school support-orientated networks, network principals had a designated list of duties to perform, which can be described as Department of Education demands. These are that network principals would:

- support innovation, efficiency and collaboration so students have access to a broad, high quality curriculum
- provide professional support to principals
• support schools undergoing system intervention for underperformance  
• support the efficient management of physical, financial and human resources  
• help develop planning for crisis and emergency management  
• advocate for schools in the network  
• support network approaches in implementing relevant Department policies and directions  
• support communication between schools within a network.  
  (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 1)

This potent mix of high-order management expectations of the role was layered onto developing collaborative arrangements in networks, which might be bewildering for network principals. These unclear demands from the WA Department of Education also created a complicated mix of advocacy and support. For example, advocating for networked schools meant promoting the direction of networks in various forums. On the other hand, influencing principals whose schools had undergone an assessment process in which a team of Department of Education officers had identified key problem areas and outlined mandatory school improvements would require a high level of skill. There were no direct accountabilities by the WA Department of Education for network principals because networks are loosely accountable for “improved student outcomes, greater school effectiveness, more efficient use of physical, financial and human resources” . . . “where networks engage in a collaborative manner.” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c, p. 2).

Principals, as network members, also had expectations about the role of the network principal. In understanding their requirements, network principals were required to appreciate the complexities of the schools within their network. This assessment began with the development of an awareness of the types of schools that network principals influenced. For instance, at the time of the study participating network principals’ networks contained between four and twenty schools of varying student composition along the following lines:

• Senior high schools enrolled up to 1,214 year 8 to 12 students.  
• District high schools enrolled up to 228 kindergarten to year 12 students.  
• Primary schools enrolled up to 703 kindergarten to year 7 students
Education support schools up to enrolled 112 students with disabilities. (Western Australian Department of Education, 2012b)

Recognition of the multiple of types of schools in networks has the potential to generate a complicated mix of member demands. Amalgamating those numerous expectations might need high-level facilitation skills to establish points of commonality and construct a resonant network direction that would satisfy network members. In concentrating on what network members would indicate as worthwhile pursuits, it might be desirable that network principals would balance the ambiguous values of members. For instance, one network member might value schools cooperating with each other in analysing student data while another might prefer professional development as a means to compete against other schools for student enrolment. Indeed, if members perceive their network would not meet their individual demands, they might resist the influence of the role of the network principal.

On this connection between values and network activities, Hadfield (2007) has argued that the generation of consensus among network members can be a crucial aspect in the initial establishment stages of building networks. Thus, network leadership may be needed to bring about effective collaboration. In English school networks, for example, strong leadership from participating head teachers engaging in collaboration, was a significant indicator of successful networks (Howes & Ainscow, 2006; Muijs et al., 2010).

Strong leadership has a different meaning for each person. Ainscow and West (2006) have pointed out that “powerful people”, who understand the differing perspectives of network principals, can reduce ambiguity and influence network direction and operations. Powerful people can further draw attention to providing professional learning opportunities to move networks forward in a collaborative manner. From another perspective, Howes and Ainscow (2006) have also argued that the capacity of cultivating meaningful network collaboration between diverse school demands has led to a balanced appreciation of context and time to build trust. Strong network leadership might also involve influencing how leadership is shared. On this, Ainscow and West (2006) have stated on their research on English school
networks that shared leadership with a local authority can provide co-leadership at the network level. By contrast, the Western Australian Metropolitan Regional Education Offices provided limited support to school networks; the South Metropolitan Regional Education Office provided support through the coordinators of regional services, whereas, the North Metropolitan Regional Education Office provided advice when requested by network principals. In both cases, network principals were the facilitators of school networks who apparently negotiated the balance of worthwhile support mechanisms and what network members valued.

Network principals were required to meet the expectations of the WA Department of Education. However, network members significantly influenced the role by choosing their network principal and, in turn, the network principal needed to satisfy the demands of members. These members, who advocated for their schools’ unique needs were therefore placed in the powerful position of influencing the role of the network principal. Moreover, the expectation was that the “nature and extent of engagement with a Network Principal will be negotiated by the individual schools involved” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 2). Balancing the Department of Education and network member demands, therefore, became a role of the network principal.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the context and background to the study reported later in this thesis of how network principals in Western Australia perceived their role. The chapter has described the evolving milieu of structural decentralisation and the devolution of decision-making power that influences the role of the network principal in WA government school networks. The three indicators that framed the evolution of empowerment policy were included the 1987 Better Schools in Western Australia: A Programme for Improvement report (Western Australian Ministry of Education, 1987), the 1999 Local Management of Schools Pilot Project (Western Australian Department of Education, 1999), and the establishment of the 2009 Independent Public Schools Initiative (Western Australian Department of Education,
All of these initiatives incrementally increased the expectation that principals would be progressively empowered and accountable.

Some Australian state education systems have designed school networks to strengthen the focus on collective school leadership to improve school performance utilising student data. By contrast, WA school networks have provided a structure in which network principals have responded to the Department of Education’s and the network members’ expectations. The Department of Education’s *School Networks* (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c) and *Network Principal* (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b) statements emphasised the voluntary school involvement in network collaboration. School networks that choose to engage in collaborative endeavours had to show positive improvements in student outcomes, greater school effectiveness and efficient use of resources when they collaborate. It was not clear in the Department of Education’s policy statements about what type of network principal leadership approach could be useful and the way in which it should be implemented.

Chapter 3 now turns to the empirical literature concerning the role of network leaders. It provides an understanding of the nature of networks and the role of network leadership.
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the role of the network leader by considering scholarly contributions to the pertinent literature base. There were two factors identified in the literature that created an opaque picture of network leadership. First, the delineation of specific leadership approaches and associated strategies has proved difficult to grasp because often co-leaders or multiple leaders share the leadership of school networks, particularly in English networks. Consequently, the application of specific leadership approaches and tailored strategies is difficult to establish. As such, the description of the role of network leaders often results in a list of leader facilitation skills (Atkinson et al., 2007; Church et al., 2002; Kerr, Aiston, White, Holland, & Grayson, 2003). In moving to a richer and more sophisticated understanding of network leadership, school network researchers have struggled with multiple network metaphors and models because networks function with organisational patterns that differ from what is embedded within institutional management.

The second factor that compounds the problem of achieving clarity in the understandings of network leadership is that evidence regarding the impact of networks on student learning is not conclusive. For instance, while school networks have been energising for participants, their impact on student achievement has not been convincing when networks are not focused (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Also, networks can get bogged down in bureaucracy (Schutz, 2000). More significantly, the suggestion that networks can encourage greater collaboration has ignored the apparent contradictions in high stakes testing and collaboration between schools (Chrispeels & Harris, 2005).

The following four sections of this chapter deal with the notions that social capital is generated by the interactions within networks, that network leaders structure social capital, that network leaders employ influence in their role, and that network leaders apply strategies that support their influence to mobilise members.
3.2 Social Capital Generated by Interactions within Networks

Investigating and generating network theories requires a tailored inquiry approach because the roles and relationships within networks have been defined by the highly contextualised nature of individual networks (Berry, 2004). Muijs, West and Ainscow (2010) have identified four major theoretical perspectives of networks and collaboration. The first is the constructivist organisational perspective. This view contends that people construct meaning and knowledge from the shared perspectives and interpretations of reality rather than acting individually. This perspective can be applied to networked schools in the construction of knowledge; however, the research here is focused on understanding the social context of leadership within school networks. The second application of localised theory is social capital, where the knowledge that individual members acquire from others serves the collective good of the network through reciprocity. Collaboration between members can attend to their self-interest in knowledge transfer and harnesses the collective resources of network members through interactions. The third application is the “New Social Movements” theory. This theory describes such forms of social action as the environmental movement, in which actors may have different values, yet have a common goal relating to the movements. The fourth application of localised theory is social network theory. This perspective has been significant in organisational research by providing the analytical tools to examine nodes and ties in the structure of social relationships.

Muijs, West and Ainscow (2010) recognise that there are overlaps in these theories, and that none fully explains collaboration and networking in education. The theory of social capital was drawn upon for the purpose of the study reported in this thesis. The theory was useful in examining how network principals can generate obligations and reciprocity to influence the engagement of members’ efforts towards network direction.

Social capital is concerned with how people gain an advantage through connections with people (Burt, 2005). It is the sum of the resources that are accumulated by groups (Coleman, 1988) that results from the social structure
Broader sociological theories describe networking as the “bringing together” of people in a “networked society” (Castells, 2001). In this connection, networks have become a dominant mode of organisation in industry, communications and culture, that has symbolic meaning (Castells, 2000a) and constitute the new social morphology of our societies (Castells, 2000b). The basis of this argument is that the change in logic concerning how people interact together in organisations has modified decision-making power. Indeed, the appeal of collaboratively constructed responses can be viewed as the catalyst for organisations to establish formal networks so that their responses to changing situations are more carefully targeted to the specific needs of people, rather than organisations.

These formal networks go beyond cliquish sub-networks that interact extensively by connecting distant members (Granovetter, 1973). The examination of networks revealed that social capital was generated when resources were mobilised for the individual or collective agency (Lin, 2001). The mobilising of collective agency assumed that there was a degree of leadership in which network members influenced and managed the interactions between members. In this light, van Aalst (2003) referred to formal networking as a “systematic establishment and use (management) of internal and external links (communication, interaction and co-ordination) between people, teams or organisations (‘nodes’) in order to improve performance” (p. 34). What is helpful here is that this definition delineates the management functions and connections to facilitate interactions within formal networks. Describing the relationships within formal networks helps in understanding the complex connections between members and hints that the purpose of network leadership is to influence network direction.

Employing influence to promote the generation of social capital, based on interactions in networks, has an appeal because it can provide the opportunity to generate new knowledge that develops teacher practice. A case in point is Darling-Hammond, Ancess and Faulk’s (1995) study of the Centre for Collaborative Education. In this study secondary and primary school networks contributed to the development of authentic assessment tools in improving student results. The authors moved on to assert that networks were a vehicle for the reconsideration of teacher
practice around a core of shared values. They suggested that networks made connections between like-minded practitioners that supported learner-centred practice that ensured all children have an education characterised by quality and excellence. Relationships between network members were at the heart of developing constructive dialogue and implementing change. Even so, in achieving such an idealised vision of networks, participants do need to be like-minded. This seemed not to have occurred as a natural consequence of practitioners agreeing to be a member of a network. What also is required in networks is a form of leadership to influence the construction of knowledge. How network leaders may structure the construction of knowledge as a resource in networks is now discussed.

3.3 Network Leaders Structuring Social Capital

Network leaders can influence members by structuring social capital that concentrates agency on achieving network direction. Much of the research on networks has focused on the benefits of participation, structural variations and relationships (Castells, 2001; Evans & Stone-Johnson, 2010; Hargreaves & Fink, 2005; O’Hair & Veugelers, 2005; OECD, 2003; Phelps, Heidl, & Wadhwa, 2012; Watts, Strogatz, & Steven, 1998). However, relationships within networks have been highly contextualised and continually developing (Benson, 1977). More specifically, Hadfield and Jopling (2006) have noted that English headteachers differed in their views on the scope and purpose of networking in their case study of four research network projects. They noted that members often over-identified with their school’s success and this had a destabilising effect on collaboration within the network.

Some form of network leadership in structuring social capital has been needed to encourage network members to act as a collective. Such leadership can create a clear direction and generate the benefits of networking as members have different perspectives of networking and, consequently, often disparate needs. For example, Chapman and Allen’s (2005) research with the Specialist Schools Trust found that successful school networks primarily required a clear focus and the management of relationships. The authors found that networks required managers who facilitated partnerships and relationships so that networks could achieve their
purpose. McGuire and Agranoff (2007) have also argued that even in the absence of
clear authority someone has to guide the collaborative process, particularly when
there is a heavy reliance on reciprocal action to create agreements for work to be
carried out. These reciprocal relationships could develop social capital, facilitate a
clear network focus, and add impetus to network agency.

3.3.1 Generating Social Capital

Creating a strong culture of collaborative and individual advantage in school
networks could likely encourage a deep adherence to obligations. The goodwill of
network members can play a significant role in the relationship between
collaborative advantage and obligations. Goodwill is the substance of, and what
guides, social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Coleman, 1988; Putman, 1993). It has
been described as an ingredient of informal, voluntary social networks applied in and
beyond businesses to public life (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998). Hargreaves and Fullan’s
(2012) definition of social capital in education is instructive as it highlights the
relative properties of interactions between network members. They argued that
social capital refers to:

how the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among
people affect their access to knowledge and information; their senses of
expectations, obligation, and trust; and how far they are likely to adhere to
the same norms or codes of behaviour (p. 90).

Examining how the exchange of social interactions in networks can configure
networks raises the question of how they can influence the generation of social
capital. Social capital may be developed by organising the use of reciprocity between
network members through three forms: obligations, norms, and informational
channels (Koput, 2010). Obligations can be formed in networks when one member
helps another member. This can produce an implicit agreement to reciprocate. As
one of the strongest and pervasive social forces, obligations can create an
expectation for us to repay others for what we have received from them. Gouldner
(1960) has argued that the creation of commitments and obligations between
members is based on reciprocity. Koput (2010) has further argued that norms are the
codes of conduct that make clear the expectations of group member behaviour, and
that information channels can be the grapevines or channels of information. To generate obligations and network norms, network leaders can build interdependent relationships, which are conducive to network members creating commitments to network direction.

Muijs, Ainscow, Chapman and West (2011) have commented that the most successful networks increase social capital by concentrating on the individual and the collective good. When mutual good is the purpose of the network, that is, meeting the individual needs of network members, this can inspire members to develop network closure. Network closure stresses the relational, cohesive ties (Coleman, 1988) that build social capital, leading in turn, to member cohesion (Coleman, 1990; Lin, 2001). The generation of social capital could be viewed as a significant component of network leaders’ efforts to influence members to collaborate in achieving network direction. The sustaining of social capital by network leaders can affect the strength of the quality and quantity of collaborations created through generalised trust and norms of reciprocity (Häuberer, 2010) in social relationships. One of those decision-making cultures that has promoted reciprocity has been the planned development of professional learning communities.

### 3.3.2 Professional Learning Communities

The generation of professional learning communities can represent a deliberative form of the structuring of social capital in school networks. These communities have represented a shift from a hierarchical to a lateral provision of capacity building (Katz & Dack, 2013). These communities are usually school-based and designed by school leaders to cultivate collaborative inquiry to improve student outcomes (Hopkins, 2007; Leithwood, Leonard, & Sharratt, 1998; Resnick, 2010; Stoll, 2011). Professional learning communities have spread through education systems where the norms of collaboration, a focus on students’ academic learning, and gaining access to a broad range of resources with mutual accountability occur (Talbert, 2009). One of the challenges to the establishment of these communities is the tradition of professional autonomy, in which classroom teaching is considered to be a private practice for teachers (Lortie, 1975). The deprivatisation of teaching has been a
complex process. In the case of school networks, it has applied to teachers and school principals alike. Talbert (2009) has argued that for an education system to change, principals also need to share their practice and learn about the development of professional learning communities with each other.

The definition of these communities has been broadened to include multiple sites. For instance, Harris & Jones (2010) have argued that a “professional learning community is a group of connected and engaged professionals who are responsible for driving change and improvement within, between and across schools that will directly benefit learners” (p. 173) Establishing a network of principals and then generating sustainable connections to engage members in enhancing learning can be an intention of network leaders. For instance, a network focus might be on improving the performance of students through curriculum and pedagogical change within each member school. An example of the development of professional learning communities in the context of networks is incorporated into Harris and Jones’s (2010) research. They have indicated that professional learning communities in Wales drew heavily on the theoretical work of Wenger, McDermott and Snyder’s (2002) communities of practice model. They argued that the professional learning communities were established as a whole system initiative, which underpinned the success of networks. Furthermore, non-negotiable elements of action inquiry, assessment and curriculum were also imposed. This underlined the power of a systemic change effort.

Professional learning communities may also focus on the delivery and then the evaluation of professional learning programs to school networks. Guskey’s (2000, 2002) model of evaluating professional learning programs is useful to consider in this regard. The author’s model has proposed four levels of evaluating these programs. At the first level, participants’ reaction, one assesses the response of members to their level of satisfaction with professional learning. At the second level, participants’ learning, the extent to which professional learning has changed the attitudes and improved the skills of participants is assessed. At the third level, organisation support and change, the shift to the efficacy of the professional learning in assisting change is assessed. At the fourth level, participants’ use of new knowledge, the degree to
which they applied their new knowledge as a result of the professional learning is assessed. At the fifth level, student learning outcomes regarded the extent to which student results improved because professional learning is assessed.

### 3.3.3 Network Design

Establishing a school network and a professional learning community culture invites discussion about how network principals intend to influence the design of a network structure that manages the operation of school networks. The work of Hadfield and Chapman (2009), whose research examined English school networks, has revealed that effective networks have standard features, which include structures, interactions, agency and processes. The authors acknowledge that networks contained iterative, complex dynamics. Their research yielded a relatively simple, yet effective diagram, represented in Figure 1, which constitutes the design flow of a network.

**Figure 1. The Design Flow for a Network**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Processes</th>
<th>Structuring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are our purposes?</td>
<td>What kind of individual and collective agency needs to be developed and expended?</td>
<td>What processes need to be implemented to develop and focus this agency?</td>
<td>What structures must be in place to underpin the implementation of these processes?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Hadfield & Chapman, 2009, p. 24)

In the design flow for a network, the “purpose” phase occurs when network members critically and honestly engage in developing a network purpose that guides schools’ activities. Co-leaders prompt the collective engagement of network members in defining the network purpose and then support one another in solving common problems. Defining a realistic purpose raises the question of the capacity of network members that relates to network effectiveness. At this stage of the design...
flow, leaders have developed sufficient trust and sensitivity between schools to generate agency.

The “agency” phase involves members creating degrees of collective action that can be represented as a continuum. The sharing of practice is at one end of the continuum while at the other end reside robustly constructed shared actions that can change school practice. Three prominent issues can exert influence on networks placement on the continuum, particularly in the early stages of generating an active network. First, school leaders may be nervous about their perspectives of ceding their school decision-making power to other network members, especially as student success is a measure of school performance, not network success. Secondly, members may be concerned about introducing network-initiated change not tailored to the unique direction of their school. Network members may also be concerned about school management adjustments created because of implementing network actions. Thirdly, the authors have argued that members may meet for various purposes with different aspirations and intents. These issues can influence the intensity and scope of network processes. Alleviation of these three issues could occur in the early interaction between the purpose and agency stages with insightful network leadership. Hadfield and Chapman (2009) have warned that in creating a collective agency and supporting the network in working collectively towards a common goal requires the astute selection of coherence-making skills by leaders within networks. Once network leaders and members negotiate forms of collective agency, the next step for network leaders is to develop processes that concentrate on network agency.

The “processes phase” of the network design flow involves establishing coordination processes that are either underdeveloped or absent. These processes synchronise people and agency in the early stages of network construction. Hadfield and Jopling (2006) have identified three processes of network effectiveness from their meta-analysis of 17 English school networks operating in challenging and complex circumstances exist in these initial stages. These processes are articulating shared values and focus; building trust and mutual knowledge, and implementing professional development. Furthermore, leaders identify the barriers to effective
school networks, which include an irrelevant focus, poor communication, shortage of principal commitment and external policies.

Returning to Hadfield and Chapman’s (2009) design flow for a network, in the “structuring phase”, network members are internal drivers or organisers within networks that forge the nature and scope of network structures. This phase evolves from the patterns of communications that contributes to designing the structure of school networks. The phases of the design model relate to the role of network co-leaders and the collective action of network members.

Kerr et al. (2003), have argued that classical network designs have been identified, but that there has been little agreement on the “right” structure for networked learning communities. Widespread agreement on an appropriate structure for networks is difficult to achieve because networks are dynamic and adaptable due to the nature of collaboration. Striking the most appropriate balance between network structure and member autonomy can be challenging, as leaders need an awareness of the expectations of internal and external stakeholders who have an interest in school networks. These structures assume that network principals will influence network members and, in particular, be able to share the leadership with them.

3.3.4 Shared Leadership

The culture of networks has assumed a degree of shared leadership that aims to generate member ownership and strengthen the collective power of school networks. The increasing reliance on shared leadership is because of the reduction in systemic support and decentralisation. One way of sharing network leadership might be through the process of distributed leadership. Its value has been described in the literature (Harris, 2008; Harris, Leithwood, Day, Sammons, & Hopkins, 2007). Spillane (2005, 2006) has developed the elements of distributed leadership within schools, where the concern is with the practice of leadership rather than structures, functions and routines. Spillane, Halverson and Diamond (2004) argue that in their perspective of distributed leadership is “best understood as a practice distributed over leaders, followers and their situation” (Spillane et al., 2004, p. 11). There is some variance in
the definition of distributed leadership (Mayrowetz, 2008), which has tended to be applied to schools in which there are leader-follower relationships.

In relation to school networks, the attempt to distribute roles is aimed at encouraging interdependence between the network leader’s actions and jointly planned, purposeful action to pool information and practices with network members. Establishing and sustaining interdependency can be hard to achieve, as it requires on-going negotiation and an awareness of the evolving needs of network members. Planned interdependence in schools is strikingly similar to what could eventuate in school networks, yet there are difficulties in applying the framework of distributed leadership. For instance, the leader-follower dyad may be appropriate in distributing leadership in schools; however, the application of this form of leadership to school networks is problematic, as network members have an egalitarian relationship with network principals. Therefore, in the context of the role of the network leader, the application of the leader-follower dyad of distributed leadership seems to be inappropriate.

In conclusion, networks are appealing as they have the potential to create an environment for generating social capital and collective school action, which adds more benefit than the individual efforts of network members. However, harnessing the collaborative efforts of members is problematic due to the complexity and the flexibility of school networks. For social capital to be realised, network leaders may structure networks that are similar to the Hadfield and Chapman (2009) design flow of a network that includes a purpose, agency, processes and structures. Designing networks in this format is appropriate as network leadership is different from traditional, vertically structured leadership from one leader and depends on a degree of shared leadership. However, what is not clear is the way in which network leaders practise their leadership to influence and persuade network members to structure school networks.
3.4 Network Leaders Employ Influence in their Role

The culture of the equitable power within the collaborative nature of school networks suggests the existence of a different form of the division of labour rather than the leader-follower relationship. Co-leadership is widespread in networks located in England (Ainscow & West, 2006; Hadfield & Chapman, 2009). This may indicate that there can be different forms of leadership operating in school networks. Moreover, Hadfield (2007) concluded from his research of English co-leaders that if this is not so then “the novel application of existing models will be required” (p. 281). This particular style of leadership that relates to school networks can be seen as a form of hybrid leadership.

3.4.1 Hybrid Leadership

It is assumed that network members would readily engage in network deliberations. However, assuming that power has been granted to networks is a different matter than the establishment of a supportive environment that enables people to be involved in the self-management of school networks. Conger and Kanungo (1988) have argued that empowerment is a process. Moreover, in researching how leaders empower followers, Konczak, Stelly and Trusty (2000) have concluded there are six dimensions of leader behaviour in conferring empowerment and authority to employees. These dimensions are the formal delegation of authority, accountability for outcomes, self-directed decision-making, information sharing, skill development, and coaching for innovation.

As network leaders do not have any authority over network members, they rely on employing their influence. In this connection, Gronn’s (2009, 2011) theoretical work is useful as it suggests that a different type of leadership configuration is a combination of solo and distributed leadership. Even though this configuration resides in the leader-follower relationship, the essence of collegial and interpersonal influence is instructive. A component of Gronn’s theoretical work is influence-based relationships that may be related to a leader-leader dyad because leadership depends on relationships within networks as a point of influence. Furthermore, the work of Townsend (2015) examined the co-leadership of English
school networks. He argued that network leadership could be seen as a particular interpretation of hybrid leadership as networks seek to combine models of leadership. Townsend’s analysis of leader-to-leader relationship is complex because the research focus is on leadership that is generated within networks by English co-leaders, rather than on single leaders of networks. In comparison, it is the aspect of influence-based relationship, pointed out by Gronn (2009, 2011), that is of the most interest in the study reported later in this thesis because network principals influence exert pressure on members to achieve network direction.

3.4.2 The Sources of Social Power

The quality of relationships is significant to the employment of influence by network leaders because individuals are empowered by members of groups as power belongs to the group, not to the individual (Arendt, 1970). Moreover, Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2010) have argued that the success of leadership depends on the context and the relationship between people within the group. In this way, network leaders can configure their influence and strategies in the context of being socially empowered by network members in the egalitarian culture of networks.

Social power can be defined as the potential or ability of an influencing agent to bring about a change in attitudes and beliefs in the target of influence (Raven, 1990, 2008). For the study being reported in this thesis, leadership refers to the actual use of social power to affect behaviour or attitude (Raven, 1993). French and Raven (1959) and Raven (1965) distinguished between six sources of power that can be applied in the leader-follower relationship. An examination of this relationship is instructive even though this relationship differs from the network leader-network member relationship.

The six sources of social power are defined as follows.

(a) Coercive power refers to the use of power to ensure compliance.

(b) Reward power is based on the ability to grant another person something they desire.
(c) Legitimate power is based on social norms where a person has a superior position in a formal or informal structure.

(d) Expert power is the ability to administer information, knowledge and expertise.

(e) Informational power regards persuading others.

(f) Referent power is based on the target of influence identification with the influencing agent to alter the behaviour of followers.

Situational, normative, or personal factors can determine the choice of power bases employed by leaders.

Hunt (1984) has argued that French and Raven’s personal power bases of referent and expertise relates to different types of leaders. The positional power bases, such as reward, coercion, and legitimacy are usually identified with supervisors. Developing this dichotomy further, Pierro, Raven, Ameto and Belanger (2012) have referred to “harsh” and “soft” bases of social power. The use of harsh power constrains individuals’ freedom, as they comply with the leaders’ demands. The use of this power might involve coercion, reward and the legitimacy of a person’s position. Conversely, soft power bestows “organizational members with more freedom and autonomy in accepting the demands from the influencing agent” (Pierro et al., 2012, p. 3). Influencing agents employed soft social power bases that include the expert, referent and informational, which are socially dependent and did not require the supervision of followers. These soft power bases seem to be more appropriate to the context of school networks as they enable network members to use the freedom of autonomy in accepting, modifying, and resisting network leaders’ agency.

The ability of network leaders to influence others and employ expert, referent and informational soft social power bases depends on the way in which network leaders interpret and respond to network members. The employment of the soft power of influence as a relational concept is concerned with the persuasion of members to exert effort towards new values, attitudes, and goals (Hogg, 2001; Uhl-Bien, 2006). Moving towards a new network direction relies on the trust that
members place on the influence of network leaders. Trust is central to the
development of influence because it promotes collaboration and knowledge creation
(Abrams, Cross, Lesser, & Levin, 2003). Indeed, Karlan, Mobuis, Rosenblat and Szeidl
(2009) argue that networks create trust when members use connections to facilitate
transactions. Social leadership, according to Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2010), is
concerned with the identity of leadership in “shaping beliefs, desires, and priorities.
It is about achieving influence, not securing compliance” (2010, p. xix), The use of
social power is significant because network leaders often do not have positional
power. Members can withdraw from the network if it does not suit their needs or
that they do not identify with the leader. In this relational context, network leaders
need to configure their influence carefully so that it seems that they are leading, but
not dominating.

3.4.3 The Configuration of Network Leadership

The configuration of influence within networks differs from that in traditional
management. Networks challenge the conventional concepts of hierarchical
leadership because networks have a distinctive organising logic (Skidmore, 2004).
Furthermore, leaders need to understand the effect of personal identity and political
influence of members (Granovetter, 1985) within networks. Encouraging network
members to collaborate with each other might include employing an approach to
network facilitation that promotes members’ momentum towards a purposeful
direction. City, Elmore, Fiarman, Teitel (2009) has argued that some approaches to
school networks can be purposeful; however, school networks are often the labels
for shallow, dysfunctional meetings that are disconnected from school improvement.
An appropriate approach and configuration to network leadership, and the degree to
which it is applied, can support the productive work of school networks. Stoll,
Halbert and Kaser’s (2010) research has described a network leadership approach in
which groups of schools plan, implement, and monitor a range of coordinated
activities in the United Kingdom and Canada. The authors have argued that for the
leadership of networks to be purposeful in improving instruction it requires:
a facilitative style with an interesting and unusual blend of qualities. Leaders work well in networked communities when they are authoritative and open, when they understand power and can give it up for the sake of a larger community, and when they are curious but defined by purpose. (p. 12)

In respect to the role of network leaders, Church et al. (2002) have argued that their research has identified a tension between coordinators adopting a leadership role in guiding network direction and giving members a sense of collaboratively generating network direction themselves. Huxham and Vangen (2005) have also argued that network leadership needs an adjustment to traditional leadership styles that incorporates “the need to lead even when you are not in charge” (Huxham & Vangen, 2005, p. 225). However, Hadfield’s (2007) research regarding three programme-wide networked learning communities revealed some confusion in separating the role of network co-leaders, and the development of networks and head teachers. Hadfield went on to suggest that the nature of network leadership in England is highly contextualised and temporal. This creates a challenge in defining network leadership. A significant issue, then, is the strategies that network leaders exercise leadership, without resorting to the direct leadership of their colleagues.

### 3.5 Leadership Strategies that Support Network Leaders’ Influence

Complicating the employment of social power can be the multidimensional nature of network leadership that necessitates the building, and on-going maintenance of relationships to nurture partnerships (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Vangen and Huxham (2003) reasoned that leadership occurs where leaders understood the values and opinions of network members and the positioning of their role in the group. Facilitating collaboration and persuading members to generate agency towards network direction may seem multifaceted, but mobilising members may require applying particular strategies.

#### 3.5.1 Collaboration and Thuggery

Collaborative theory and, in particular, Vangen and Huxham’s (2003) research provides a useful tool for understanding the tension between the ideological views of
collaboration and the pragmatism of encouraging network agency. The authors’ ethnographic study examined the collaboration-building activities of partnership managers of 13 public and community sector partnerships. They found that two opposing perspectives of leadership: leadership “from the spirit of collaboration” and pragmatic leadership that moved “towards collaborative thuggery”. Figure 2 outlines the spirit of collaboration.

Figure 2. The Spirit of Collaboration

According to Vangen and Huxham’s (2003) work, the ideological leadership agency within the “from the spirit of collaboration” perspective is supportive and contains such facilitative relationship skills as patience, deference and empathy. This encouraging management style includes a flow of four closely related supportive activities. “Embracing activity” is the aspect in which managers include those who would like to be involved and those who are needed, even though some participants may be reluctant to collaborate in aspects of network activities. “Empowering member activity” involves creating structures that encourage the development of agency within the partnerships through communication and member support. In the “involving activity” aspect, the role of the partnership manager is to manage the power inequality between members, which encourage the development of trust. The “mobilising member activity” aspect concerns energising members and making
things happen to ensure there is an incentive for agency towards the achievement of goals.

The other side of creating cooperation among network members is the pragmatic concept of “towards collaborative thuggery” perspective. This perspective includes two aspects, namely “manipulating the agenda activity” and “playing politics”, that encourage the development of network agency. These aspects aim to deal with members who have varying commitment levels and needs. The “manipulating the agenda activity” aspect is where managers address inertia through manipulating the collaborative agenda of network meetings via stealthy behaviour. This activity includes pushing the agenda forward through direct leadership rather than facilitation. The “playing the politics” aspect includes political manoeuvring to address competing for resources, territorial issues and finding out who are worth the bother. Revealing the ideological “spirit of collaboration” and the pragmatic leadership “towards collaborative thuggery” perspectives throw into relief the ideological debates surrounding the pragmatic work of network leaders. Facilitating networks with committed members may be relatively easy as they would diligently construct a network direction, processes and agency from the spirit of collaboration. However, leaders may need to deal with cynical and uncommitted network members who resist the direction of their networks by applying collaborative thuggery.

Church et al. (2002) have described ten broad ways, in which coordinators might influence network members participating in school networks. These strategies are:

1. knowing the territory,
2. recognising that people do not necessarily want to make connections outside their regions or areas of expertise,
3. making connections,
4. catching the opportunities,
5. being inventive and applying fresh ideas,
6. being clear and transparent,
7. assisting members in their environments,
8. keeping people engaged,
9. delivering on expectations, and
10. mediating and building consensus.
Furthermore, two school-based literature reviews have been instructive in understanding the attributes of network leaders when performing collaborative work within networks. Atkinson, Springate, Johnson and Halsey (2007) conducted a literature review of 39 inter-school collaborations in Northern Ireland. Their study highlighted that network leaders focused on distributed leadership, the encouragement of participating schools to take ownership, and the generation of negotiated flexible, shared aims. Additionally, Kerr et al. (2003) in a literature review of international networked learning communities, constructed a detailed list of nine core attributes of successful networks. While these lists of general attributes may be useful, the significant question is the way in which network leaders apply particular strategies to support their influence.

3.5.2 Creating Connections within Networks

The success of networks hinges on the purposeful relationship between members who generate and sustain relationships, particularly when members have different interests. In terms of social network theory, Lin (2001) has developed the interaction postulate where relations among actors follow the homophily principle. The principle advances the notion that “the greater the similarity of resource characteristics, the less effort required in interaction” (p. 75). Applying Lin’s (2001) interaction postulate to school networks, members may have similar interests, such as implementing a curriculum or student transition from primary to secondary schools, which bind them together. However, complications may occur in developing links between different levels of schooling, such as primary and secondary schools. Accordingly, members may have differing philosophies of education or pedagogical perspectives, which network leaders need considerable effort to consolidate into a network direction that resonates with network members.

Connolly and James (2006) also have indicated that the levels of collaboration can be influenced by the capability and motivation of network members, together with the network-generated opportunities perceived by participants. Thus, the management of relationships to create connections between members can be a central aspect of the network leaders’ role in sustaining a commitment towards a
network direction. Network leaders can help members understand the connections between themselves and other members to forge commitment. Developing these relationships may be crucial, as individuals prioritise and legitimise knowledge in their “thought world” (Wei, Zheng, & Zhang, 2011). Indeed, these connections could link member ideas and build alliances, which in turn, could encourage the creation of new intellectual capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Connections may also build relationships between members. This requires significant amounts of on-going commitment and skill in nurturing collaboration (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Therefore, if networks are to be productive and sustainable, network leaders should understand how to connect diverse members in ways that encourage an awareness of mutual benefit.

Generating relationship connections would appear to be more complex in networks than linking ideas for mutual benefit. Building linkages between members may mean that network leaders have chosen to understand how to persuade members to view the connections as creating value for their school, which encourages between-school collaboration. Church et al. (2002) have suggested the metaphor of a net (Figure 3) that represents effective networks in which there are threads, knots and nets, that depict the descriptive complexity of networks.

Figure 3. Threads, Knots and Nets

(Church et al., 2002, p. 16)
According to Church et al., (2002) when networks engage in “creation” they participate in relational processes which influence the formation of network structure. Church et al. (2002) described the network dynamic as:

the activity (beyond the communication, information-sharing, relationships) that gives the network its meaning. It also gives the network a living feel, one dependent on the commitment and input of its participants. It [the network image] enables us to capture the sense of a dynamic, responsive, emerging form, using the messy power of complexity, and autonomy in the whole (p. 22).

In their model, the imagery of triangles represents network members. The threads represent the voluntary relationships, communication and trust, which may develop creativity. The knots represent the content and the joint activities that make the most of the network members’ contributions, commitment, and skills. The network structure formed by the threads and knots strengthens relationships and encourages participation. The ties between members lightly bind members and do not constrict their self-development. Two aspects of ties stand out for network leaders referring to this metaphor. The first aspect is that network leaders need to facilitate the discovery of common ground and generate synergies found in connections between members at the establishment phase of school networks. The second aspect is that leaders need to sustain the common ground for network members, as the creation of synergies is impermanent and requires on-going repair and maintenance (Church et al., 2002).

3.5.3 Forms of School Networks

In pursuit of understanding how network leaders influence members, it is instructive to relate network leadership to the forms of school networks. Persuading network members to develop a cohesive school network structure can be significant as this can generate a culture of reciprocity. The degree to which leaders can influence their networks in achieving network direction relates to the type of networks that form. van Aalst (2003) has outlined three types of networks where regional and local networks exchange tacit knowledge and solve mutual problems.
These forms are described as follows:

1. “Communities of practice” is where the need for members to solve practical problems drives the work. The created knowledge may or may not be codified. The exchange is based on the shaping and reshaping of experience and who has the knowledge to address the issue. Many educational networks are of this type.

2. “Networked organisation” is where there is cooperation between autonomous organisations, and knowledge gained is utilised to achieve outcomes through synergies. An example of this is networking between petrol stations and grocery stores.

3. “Virtual community” is where the networking activity is web-based (van Aalst, 2003, pp. 36-37).

According to Wenger (2014) communities of practice “are groups of people who share a concern or passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better, as they interact regularly” (p. 1). Knowledge creation within communities of practice is explicit and tacit, yet not tightly managed. The generation of tacit knowledge fosters emerging relationships and concerns “rules of thumb” and intuition (von Krogh, Ichijo, & Nonaka, 2000). Dimmock and O’Donoghue (1997) have also pointed out that socially constructed tacit knowledge can be relation-specific and contextual. Network leaders would need to be aware of the power of network members in developing this contextualised knowledge, yet influence them to move in a negotiated direction.

3.5.4 Catering for the Influence of Network Members

Network leaders can be influenced by members as they are powerful gatekeepers to the entry of schools who might decide to unlock the capital within their schools (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009). Understanding the role of gatekeepers is pertinent to a study conducted by Evans and Stone-Johnson (2010). They noted in their study of United Kingdom principals that network members faced three challenges when attempting to integrate the work of networks into their work in schools. The first challenge for members was constructing an appropriate awareness of the contextual nature of network connections. The second challenge was the awareness of internal school support for networking and the capacity of network members for participation. The third challenge was balancing other reforms with
contributing to network activities. Consequently, network members selectively exercised the degree to which they participated in network agency, which influenced the role of network leaders. Awareness of these three challenges helped network leaders to self-monitor and to adjust their strategies, so their work complemented the direction of networks.

Continually adjusting their behaviour might ensure that network leaders recognise what members need. This adapting would mean people regulating their forethought and anticipating the needs of others, which could lead to adjusting their behaviour to meet these needs (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934). Regular adjustments might be necessary as the challenge of facilitating networks is to ensure the cooperation of people over whom no one has hierarchical control (Williams, 2007) in creating knowledge (Abrams et al., 2003).

The self-monitoring theory has proved to be useful in analysing the theoretical concepts behind network leaders’ ability to adapt their influence and strategies to the reactions of network members. The theory is informed by research that explains the impact of the way in which people cultivate their public appearances (Day, Schleicher, Unckless, & Hiller, 2002; Gangestad & Snyder, 2000). From this perspective, for network leaders to be seen as credible they need to be aware that they should demonstrate that they work for the collective purpose of their network rather than for their school. Day et al., (2002) have suggested that leaders’ ability to implement strategies and to build their credibility depends on the accuracy of how relationships, social capital and structure are perceived by others. The high self-monitors scrutinise and control images of themselves to fit better the social contexts and are more likely to occupy central positions of organisations than would low self-monitors. This type of monitoring and behaviour adaptation could ensure that network leaders employ strategies that align with locating themselves as colleagues of members. The process of adapting network leaders’ application of strategies to the members’ responses resonates with Zimmerman’s (2006) cyclical phases of self-regulation, as depicted in Figure 4 below:
In combining Zimmerman’s (2006) phases and sub-phases of self-regulation with the strategies applied by network leaders, the cyclical phase of forethought may involve task analysis, self-motivational beliefs, and goal setting. In this phase, network leaders have intentions or goals in relation to networks and these leaders can strategically influence the purpose and agency towards those intentions. In the second performance phase, the self-control processes are the focus of the performers, which include self-instruction, imagery, attention focusing, and task strategies. In the final cyclical phase, self-reflection, self-judgement and self-reaction occur as the basis of the efficacy of performance. The cycle begins again with forethought as network leaders moderate and adapt their influence to the practicalities of network direction and relationships.
3.6 Conclusion

The chapter has identified pertinent concepts and their relationship to network principals’ use of their influence. Associated theories were recognised, compared and placed in the context of the deliberate employment of influence and aligned with four strands of literature relevant to the central research question of the study.

The first strand highlights the associated concepts of social capital and that interactions within networks can generate social capital (Muijs et al., 2011), which is built on relationships (Coleman, 1990). The melding of relationships and the constructing of network purpose relies on the goodwill and commitment of members (Church et al., 2002; Kerr et al., 2003; Kubiak & Bertram, 2010).

The second strand indicates research that network leaders structure social capital to concentrate network members’ efforts on achieving network direction. Complementary theories, such as that of van Aalst (2003) and Lin (2001) define networks and how social capital can be used to mobilise collective agency. Obligations and reciprocity within networks can build the collective agency and social capital (Coleman, 1988; Häüberer, 2010; Putman, 1993). In examining collective network agency, Hadfield and Chapman (2009) have argued that network leaders attempt to capture network engagement through linkages between network purpose, agency, processes and structuring.

The third strand introduces the employment of influence by network leaders, in particular the aspect of influence-based relationships (Gronn, 2009; Townsend, 2015). The configuration of the influence-based leadership of network principals can also be placed in the context of the sources of social power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965, 1993). This form of network leadership relates to the bases of leadership power as network leaders typically employ “soft” forms of leadership (Pierro et al., 2012). However, as Agranoff (2007) argued, that individuals in networks can be empowered by group members.

The fourth strand of the literature demonstrates that network leaders can apply strategies to mobilise network members. Vangen and Huxham (2003) found
that the collaborative process in networks needs to be guided, particularly when there is a reliance on reciprocity and “making things happen” (p. S74). There are lists available of broad strategies generated from the research of Church et al. (2002), Atkinson, Springate, Johnson and Halsey (2007) and Kerr et al. (2003), yet these do not seem to be aligned with a particular approach to network leadership.

Chapter 4 now turns to the research methodology used to portray the role of the WA network principal. It also provides an examination of the nature of the context of the role.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The aim of the study being reported here was to develop substantive theory on how Western Australian school network principals perceive their role within state government school networks. This chapter presents the design and methodology utilised to capture the essence of network leadership and the context in which it was embedded. The six sections of this chapter present the research question and the theoretical approach of interpretivism, the selection of study participants, the data collection methods, the position of the researcher, data analysis and ethical considerations that were made.

4.2 Research Questions and Theoretical Approach

The literature review has indicated that despite an evolving research base relating to leadership within networks, few empirical studies have been concerned with the way in which a collection of nominated single network leaders approach their role. This was the point of departure from the existing literature for engaging in the study being reported here. On this, there seems to be a paucity of research studies on the way context influences the role of the Western Australian network principal. Consequently, the aim of the study was to generate substantive theory regarding the perspectives of WA school network principals on their role within government school networks.

4.2.1 Central Research Question

The central research question that was formulated in relation to the overall aim of generating theory on the role of the network principal to reveal their perspectives was as follows:

What are the perspectives of Western Australian school network principals regarding their role within government school networks?
This question provided the genesis of four guiding questions that were designed to inform the collection of data. While the guiding questions supported the research aim, they were crafted to reveal in detail various aspects of network principals’ perspectives on their role.

### 4.2.2 Guiding Questions

1. What are the intentions of network principals with regard to their role in school networks? What reasons do they offer for having these intentions?

2. What strategies do network principals have for realising their intentions? What reasons do they give for selecting those strategies?

3. What do network principals see as the significance of their intentions and their strategies? What reasons do they give for the significance, which they attribute to these intentions and strategies?

4. What outcomes do network principals expect from pursuing their role intentions and strategies? What reasons do they give for having these expected outcomes?

### 4.2.3 Piloting Exercise

An interview piloting exercise was conducted in early 2012 with two network principals. This exercise aimed at testing the likelihood of the investigation being successful. The assumption was that the responses of these two network principals to the study would indicate the likely types of responses of the study participants and minimise potential problems in the investigation. This pilot exercise tested out the adequacy of the research design and the effectiveness of conversation questions based on the guiding questions in probing the participants’ perspectives. It also examined whether network principals perceived that the research questions would be of interest to them.

The pilot exercise resulted in the development of an effective aide-mémoire (Appendix 1) so that the central question remained the prime focus rather than the network principals recollecting the way in which their network had accomplished its
direction. The researcher also honed probing questions to examine the conceptual link between concrete examples and tentative themes. Network documents were also analysed. Overall, the piloting exercise improved the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher. It sharpened his investigative tools, refined his interpretations and captured the contextual information regarding the role of the network principal. The development of theoretical sensitivity also meant testing the appropriateness of the theoretical framework utilised to investigate the role of the network principal.

4.2.4 The Interpretivist Research Paradigm

A theoretical framework is “the philosophical stance lying behind a methodology” (Crotty, 2003, p. 66). As such, the choice of a framework influences the design and agenda of the research. A quantitative study allows the researcher to control the variables and conditions when searching for the cause and effect of the studied phenomenon. A study of this type would aim for generalisability by describing the extent to which the findings could be applied to other settings.

Hadfield and Jopling (2012b), have argued for an expansive, nuanced theory of the agency of network leadership. They have indicated that network leadership should go beyond individualistic leaders being rational manipulators of a narrow range of network features. To do this, Hadfield and Jopling (2012b) promoted the theoretical framework of structural-pluralism as an approach recognising the “multiplexity” of networks that might uncover complete and subtle structural characteristics of networked agency. However, Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) have argued that structuralism has neglected the normative commitments of actors and the intentional human agency, which, in turn, has led to a failure to grasp a description of social reality. They held that pluralism could address the excessive theoretical compartmentalisation; on the other hand, the view that all things are open-ended and diverse has been problematic (McLennan, 1995).

The study reported here delved into the social reality of the construction of leadership and the way in which it was negotiated between four groups of stakeholders. These influences encapsulated a broad range of expectations, intentions, leadership approaches and strategies that influence the construction of
the role of the network principal. Indeed, the paradigm of interpretivism offered a theoretical position that best suited the investigation into how the participants constructed their world and the meaning they attributed to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). It assumes that network principals construction of their role would be influenced by how they interpret reality as “people defined events or reality and how they acted in reaction to their beliefs” (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 4). Their interpretation of the reality of constructing the role of the network principal includes the way in which they were influenced by the WA Department of Education, regional directors and members. This interpretation was also influenced by their intentions and prior experiences as principals.

The interpretation of the role created between the researcher and network principal participants was circular. The hermeneutic circularity of the interpretation of the participants’ responses by the researcher created knowledge of role formation. This kind of circularity “takes place against a background of assumptions and prepositions, beliefs and practices” (Usher, 1996, p. 19). In this process, both the researcher and the study participants consider their assumptions and beliefs of the role together by continually questioning how the role was constructed. This iterative interaction can create an integration of knowledge, which Gadamer (1992) has characterised as a fusion of horizons within the hermeneutic circle.

The conscious fusion of perspectives, or horizons, is located in the dialogue between the participants and the researcher that generates a combined knowledge of the construction of the role. This circular interpretation includes a synthesis of early meanings and the new meanings constructed as the interviews unfold. In the case of this study, the resultant fusion of the network principals and the researcher’s perspectives on the role generated three propositions of a substantive theory relating to the role of the network principal.

The theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism complements the use of interpretivism in revealing how participants perceived their role. Symbolic interactionism provides a framework with which to analyse the meaning that
network principals attach to their role and the way in which they acted according to that meaning. In Blumer’s (1969) words:

The term “symbolic interaction” refers, of course, to the peculiar and distinctive character of interaction as it takes place between human beings. The peculiarity consists in the fact human beings interpret or “define” each other’s actions. Their “response” is not made directly to the actions of one another but instead is based on the meaning which they attach to such actions. Thus, human interaction is mediated by the use of symbols, by interpretation, or by ascertaining the meaning of one another’s actions. This mediation is equivalent to inserting a process of interpretation between stimulus and response in the case of human behaviour (Blumer, 1969, p. 79).

Symbolic interactionism helps to unveil the interpretation of the defining interactions that influence the construction of the role of the network principal.

The defining of others’ actions in the context of this study reported here meant that network principals interpreted the response of network members to their influence and the strategies they applied. The interpretation of members’ responses was significant as they determined the degree to which they were influenced by network principals. Adopting this view was to take cognisance of the point that when people act on their interpretations of others, they become aware of the accuracy of feedback from others. This, then, can influence whether subsequent action should be revised or continued (Klunklin & Greenwood, 2006). This continual re-interpretation of the role, when network principals receive feedback from network members, also highlights that the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism is an appropriate perspective to reveal network principals’ perspectives of their role.

Blumer (1969) argued that symbolic interactionism is based on three principles. The first of the principles is that “human beings act towards things in their environment on the basis of the meanings that these things have for them” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). This viewpoint portrays that individuals attach their own meanings to things and act towards them based on their interpretation. These individual meanings focus on a phenomenon rather than societal forces or the product of psychological drives (Woods, 1992). Put differently, in understanding how individuals define their world and then process their interpretations, we gain a better
understanding of society (Bogdan, 1974). In the context of the study being reported here, network principals act towards the meaning of their role by the way they interpret the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms, network members’ and their own expectations.

The second principle of symbolic interactionism asserts that “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction between and among individuals” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). People see the world through the interpretation of the reactions of others. In the case of network principals, the deliberate use of their influence and supportive strategies can be viewed as a result of the social interaction between network principals and members.

The third principle asserts “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an on-going interpretive process” (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). The author identified aspects of this assertion. The first is that individuals determine things which have meaning. Constant adjustment implies that, as a social product, meaning grows “out of the ways in which other persons act toward the person with regard to the thing” (Blumer, 1969, p. 4) developing through an interpretative and adaptive process. Social interaction within school networks can generate a constant amendment to network leaders’ approach as they make re-adjustments based on their interpretation of network members’ responses to their influence. Overall, this was aimed at providing a “sense of what it would be like to be in a similar situation” (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 85).

4.3 Selection of Study Participants

At the time the study reported here was conducted, there were 782 public schools located within 75 school networks based within eight Western Australian education regions (Melbourne University, 2013). The selection of participants was conducted in three phases. The first phase of the selection process limited the study to the two large metropolitan regional areas in the city of Perth, which contained a similar number of school networks. These network principals were experienced principals. The researcher assumed that the relative inexperience of many network principals in rural areas might overly complicate the study. Furthermore, some rural-
based regional executive directors had appointed network principals rather than encouraging school network members to conduct the selection process. Overall, this initial stage of the selection process narrowed the choice to 38 network principals in the Perth metropolitan area.

In the second phase of the selection process, network principal participants were purposively selected (Morse, 1991; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). The choice of participants was based on them being at least 18 months into their tenure. The selection considered the balancing of gender representation together with a blend of primary, secondary and education support (students with disabilities) participants that would ensure maximum variation. The focus groups initially had included five network principals from each of the metropolitan education regions. One South Metropolitan based network principal did not attend a focus group interview due to work commitments. Geographical proximity determined membership of the two focus groups as this improved the chances of interview participation. Chosen at random were the semi-structured interviewed participants who also had attended the WA Department of Education’s professional development sessions concerning school networks.

The collection of data ceased when theoretical saturation occurred, in other words, the point at which there were no more significant insights generated. In total, 20 network principals were interviewed including 11 North Metropolitan Education Region and 9 South Metropolitan Education Region network principals with the data contributing to theory generation. At the same time, participant selection continued to test any negative case in relation to the three propositions. Amongst the North Metropolitan Education Region’s network principals was a co-author of the School Network and Network Principal statements and how school networks related to the systemic re-structure of the WA Department of Education. After four network principals mentioned them, two regional education directors were also interviewed, together with a ministerial advisor.

Table 1 lists the focus group and semi-structured interview participants’ pseudonyms that were used to protect their anonymity.
Table 1 *Interview Participants*

North Metropolitan School Networks - Focus group participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Network Pseudonym</th>
<th>Network size</th>
<th>Host school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela (An)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Hills</td>
<td>4 schools</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob (Ro)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Allendale</td>
<td>11 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David (Da)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Samson</td>
<td>9 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donna (Do)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Barossa</td>
<td>17 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keith (Ke)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Pankhurst</td>
<td>8 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

North Metropolitan School Networks - Semi-structured interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Network Pseudonym</th>
<th>Network size</th>
<th>Host school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenny (Je)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Forrest</td>
<td>16 schools</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke (Lu)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Coastal</td>
<td>8 schools</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn (Ma)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Road End</td>
<td>18 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John (Jo)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vine</td>
<td>18 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim (ji)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Sand Hills</td>
<td>9 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eileen (Ei)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Maidenhead Springs</td>
<td>6 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Steven (St) Regional executive director

South Metropolitan School Networks - Focus group participants

<table>
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<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Network Pseudonym</th>
<th>Network size</th>
<th>Host school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara (Ba)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bandy</td>
<td>7 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian (Br)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Hampton Creek</td>
<td>13 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ned (Ne)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Halifax Hill</td>
<td>18 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver (Ol)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Saddle Beach</td>
<td>16 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

South Metropolitan School Networks - Semi-structured interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Network Pseudonym</th>
<th>Network size</th>
<th>Host school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam (Ad)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Deakin Cove</td>
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<td>Secondary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah (Sa)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Point Casey</td>
<td>8 schools</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue (Su)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Cape David</td>
<td>8 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard (Ri)</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bag End</td>
<td>16 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather (He)</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Perch Pond</td>
<td>12 schools</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Daphne (Da) Regional executive director

Margaret (Ma) Minister of education advisor
4.4 Data Collection Methods

In keeping with symbolic interactionism, qualitative data gathering methods were used to identify the meanings, beliefs and values of the participants (Bogdan & Knopp Bilklen, 1992). These methods enabled the researcher to assume the perspective of the participants through their eyes (Potter, 1996). Three main techniques were utilised to collect information, namely, document study, focus group interviews and individual semi-structured interviews. In the focus group and individual semi-structured interviews, probing questions evolved during the conversations. This sensitivity to data collection refers to the attribute “of having insight, the ability to give meaning to the data, the capacity to understand, and the capacity to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the three data collection techniques and the ways in which they were interrelated.
The investigative process unfurled in three stages. In stage 1, the investigation began with examining the relevant policy documents generated by the WA Department of Education. These documents provided information that contextualised the role of the network principal that relate to the systemic reforms of school empowerment and regionalisation. In stage 2, network specific documents were analysed that provided contextual information for the focus group interviews. Examples of the key aspects of the role were collected and tested for resonance with the group members during the interviews. The coded transcripts of the focus group interviews helped to generate pertinent emerging themes that were tested in the data collection. In stage 3, after the examination of school network generated documents and individual semi-structured interviews positive and negative cases of the emerging concepts were scrutinised. The researcher coded the interview transcripts on an interview-by-interview basis, regularly referring to the central
research question. The constant comparison of revealed themes throughout the analysis of focus group and individual semi-structured interviews confirmed, modified or rejected emerging propositions. This iterative data analysis constituted a reflective process to understand the researcher’s interpretation and the perspectives of network principals concerning their role.

4.4.1 Policy Documents

Data collection entailed analysing the policy documents generated by the WA Department of Education. Such reports included the system direction setting *Excellence and Equity: Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2012-2015* (2012a), *School Networks* (2011c) and *Network Principals* (2011b) documents. These documents provided a rich source of evidence as to how the role had been framed and initially defined. Furthermore, the examination of regional office records concerning school networks provided indications of the influence of regional education directors and financial management practices supporting school networks.

4.4.2 School Network Documents

As a precursor to the focus group and individual interviews, documents relating to the specific participants’ school networks were analysed that provided insights concerning their network. The analysis of the texts focused on contextual settings, meanings, styles and nuances (Krippendorff, 2004) as the documents contained signs that could be interpreted (Lee, 2012). These signs included the planning phase of the implementation of network outcomes and the strategies that were employed. The data contained within documents were examined to ascertain the link between the WA Department of Education and network expectations and how this link was interpreted by network principals. While the Department of Education did not expect the production of formal school network plans, overall eleven participants were able to supply documented plans to the researcher.

Examining plans enabled an immersion in to how the network principal captured the proposed agency of networks. Concurrently, a particular sensitivity was adopted to the understanding of multiple meanings and assumptions behind words
and phrases (Brown, Steven Jr, Troiano, & Schneider, 2002). The analysis of documents generated comparisons and enabled verification of the claims that network principals made during interviews. This analysis also helped the researcher to understand the operational parameters and perspectives that could surface in subsequent interviews with network principals. Hence, document analysis provided an avenue of validation and corroboration of converging lines of inquiry (Yin, 2009).

4.4.3 Focus Group Interviews

Focus group interviews were adopted to promote purposeful interaction and dialogue among the participants (Freeman, 2006; McLafferty, 2004) to generate emerging themes (Kreuger, 1994). As a result, statements regarding counter-points made by participants promoted the generation of the topics of interest to participants. These themes related to how network principals influenced members without appearing to lead them, the location of their role within networks, the role of regional executive directors, and the merit of adopting the role. In particular, the differences of view between two secondary-based and three primary-based network principals revealed different assumptions in adopting the role.

The aim of the effective and efficient gathering of data meant that the interaction between participants required careful management as many of them had not worked together previously. Before the participants attended, they received an overview of the study and the interview questions from the researcher in a telephone call. The participants then received questions before interviews by email. A pre-interview 30-minute luncheon encouraged each participant to feel comfortable with each other, seated in a ballroom table configuration. This arrangement helped them in examining the central research question and guiding questions written in plain English on a whiteboard. Additionally, the conversations at the beginning of the interviews provided useful contextual information regarding the role of the network principal.

The formalities moved to an 80 to 90-minute open discussion as interactions between participants were intended to build a consensus to produce ideas (Somekh & Lewin, 2004). An initial emphasis in the focus groups was on the participants’
generation of ‘broad brush’ statements about their perspective of their role. Participants initially discussed how they had adopted the role of the network principal in a round-robin format. This process revealed the background to the establishment of each school network as well as a discussion regarding the current activities. The researcher carefully monitored the tone of the interactions by being mindful of Kandola’s (2012) assertion that there should be a balance between the crispness of pace and “walking the fine line between conveying expertise and bragging” (p. 262). The researcher also ensured that one or two participants did not dominate the discussion by redirecting questions to other participants. The aide-mémoire guided the researcher in ensuring the identification of common themes about the role rather than the work of the school network. These strategies ensured that the research purpose and questions were clear in their intent, and that the investigation constructed a realistic understanding of the role of the network principal.

Encouraging the exploration of the differences of views helped the researcher to identify how and why ideas were embraced or had been rejected. Participants were also encouraged to validate, modify, or dismiss the statements and themes that the researcher constructed. Indeed, the interviews became a “construction site of knowledge” (Kvale, 1996, p. 42) This process of confirmation verified the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ perspectives. The time that was given to affirming or questioning this evidence proved to be valuable and helped moderate the pace of interview sessions. The researcher collected participant feedback at the conclusion of each interview for reflection that improved the interview process.

4.4.4 Semi-Structured Individual Interviews

Participants received an overview of the interview questions from the researcher in a telephone call. Emailed details by the researcher confirmed the purpose of individual semi-structured interviews and reminded participants to send any pertinent documentation to the researcher. Preparation for the semi-structured interviews included an examination of the received documentation that aided the development of an understanding of the context and agency of network principals.
Consequently, interviews were nuanced to enhance the flow of the discussion determined by the participants. Therefore, interviews were focused on the issues for participants, rather than the mind of the researcher (Dunn, 2005; O’Donoghue, 2007).

At appropriate junctures during interviews, probing questions, discussion redirection and requests for reasons for interpretations unveiled an appreciation of categories constructed by network principals and the researcher. The enquiries, in the main, concentrated on the ‘who’ interpreted the role ‘when’ the interpretation happened, ‘how’ the interpretation occurred and ‘why’ the interpretation occurred. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was digitally recorded.

4.4.5 Linking Focus Group and Semi-Structured Interviews

The focus group interviews further orientated the research (Morgan, 1997) and guided the exploration of individual experiences (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). When focus group participants explained the way in which they had constructed their role, the validity of their answers was tested by the researcher seeking confirmation from other participants. Validation of ideas occurred mainly by asking ‘Is this right?’ and ‘How do we know this?’ These questions prompted some debate, which yielded informative responses from several perspectives held by network principals. For validation, these enquiries were also posed in individual interviews when pertinent ideas from focus groups were proposed in semi-structured interviews. The questioning and confirmation of ideas facilitated triangulation of data that enriched the investigation.

An example of a thematic link between the focus groups and individual interviews occurred when network principals reported their interpretation of how the North and South Regional Education Offices supported the role. In comparing the participants’ responses, it became evident that they managed their interpretation of the expectations of regional education directors. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews ensued with two regional executive directors regarding their perspectives on the role of the network principal. Throughout the study’s progress, data from each interview were iteratively analysed and crosschecked through the employment
of document study together with the analysis of focus group interviews and semi-structured interviews.

4.4.6 Interview Data Collection Cycle

There were two data collection cycles involving two focus groups and semi-structured interviews.

1. The first cycle of data, collected from network principals within the North Metropolitan Education Region, began with a focus group interview with five network principals. One participant was chosen as she was involved in the initial WA Department of Education planning stages of networks and the role of the network principal. Following the focus group interview, a semi-structured interview probed the expectations of the North Metropolitan regional education director. The researcher then conducted individual semi-structured interviews with six network principals.

2. The second cycle of data was collected from school networks within the South Metropolitan Education Region. Focus group interviews began with four network principals as one of the invited participants withdrew on the day because she was needed to resolve a school issue. After the analysis of the focus group interview data, a semi-structured interview probed the expectations of the South Metropolitan regional education director. Individual semi-structured interviews followed with five network principals.

Focus group interviews were conducted at Education Regional Offices as a meeting space in a quiet environment was available. Individual interviews were undertaken at participants’ schools in line with their preference. Consequently, at the time of theoretical saturation, the study included 55 per cent of school network principals in the Perth metropolitan area of Western Australia.
4.4.7 Data Management

The electronic and paper records were stored in accordance with The University of Western Australia guidelines. Saving encrypted data on a password-protected drive ensured that digital interview recordings were protected. An encrypted hard drive that contained backed-up data was securely stored in a locked cabinet. Signed consent forms, contact information, raw data and interview transcripts to de-identify participants were stored in a separate location. As the researcher was a network principal, attention now turns to an explanation of the investigator’s perspective in this study.

4.5 The Position of the Researcher

Tietze (2012) has observed the emergence of professional doctorates in which the researcher’s organisation of employment is the location of the researched phenomenon. The study reported in this thesis was one such study in which the researcher was a network principal at the time of the investigation. There were advantages to the researcher in being a network principal. One advantage was that he had an understanding of what could be relevant to participants and how their beliefs shaped their actions (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). The disadvantage was that the researcher has ‘insider’ knowledge that could be taken for granted (Stoll et al., 2010). It was recognised that these understandings could have an impact on the interpretation of participants’ responses because interviews were not neutral tools as two people engage in creating and constructing data (Burgess, 1984; Fontana & Frey, 2003; Kvale, 2007; O’Donoghue, 2007). Consequently, the researcher examined his perspective on the role of the network principal, being mindful of using his judgement as a research tool of the research study. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) have advised that professional or personal information about the researcher relevant to the phenomenon being investigated should be reported in managing researcher subjectivity. In considering the potential impact of the researcher effects reported above on the study, the following paragraphs are written in the first person point of view to reveal any researcher bias that required attention.
For 18 months, I was working as a network principal for an extensive network of 21 schools, which was a similar tenure as the study participants. To immerse myself in how network principals perceived their role, I initiated and chaired the North Metropolitan Education Region Network Principals’ Group of 21 members. The group represented the interests of 232 Western Australian public schools. Together with four members of the group, I constructed the draft vision and strategic direction, which the network principals’ group debated and then adopted. This interaction helped in refining the writing process of the thesis, which entailed re-writing and checking interpretations of participants with groups of network principals. Two meetings of the peak body of the Western Australian Primary Principals’ Association and one group of regional education managers took place after the data were collected and confirmed many of the study’s findings. This process enabled me to check for the connections in the data. Further refinement of the propositions, which led to greater abstraction (Charmaz, 2006). Additionally, I have had 32 years’ experience in the following positions: teacher, curriculum consultant, principal consultant for leadership development, primary school principal and district high school principal. Consequently, I understood that I needed to be aware of my preconceptions of how a school network should be led and managed.

To increase the rigour of the study, I employed a method of ‘bracketing’ that safeguarded any unrecognised biases (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Gearing (2004) has identified three phases of bracketing: (a) abstract formulation, (b) research praxis, and (c) reintegration. For (a), the abstract formulation, it involved the selection of symbolic interactionism in investigating the interpretation of network principals’ interactions employed to construct the role. The research methodology section in this thesis presents the argument for applying symbolic interactionism. Adopting this approach also included reviewing and defining my beliefs regarding the leadership and the positioning of network principals. I found this process to be a multi-layered one as described by Tufford and Newman (2012). For (b), the research praxis, began with the document study and continued during the interviews. For instance, a double interpretive process occurred where I attempted to understand how participants were making sense of their world (Gadamer, 1992; Smith & Osborn, 2008).
Turning to (c), the reintegration, to aid my reflexivity in interpreting the participants’ interpretation of their world, I employed two tools: a research diary and a network principal journal. The first tool I utilised was the research diary. This contained my reflections on the efficacy of the research process in answering the central research question. The research diary was a tool to “engage in explicit self-aware meta-analysis” (Finlay, 2002, p. 209). The diary was utilised to respond to such subjective elements as the sense of frustration reported by network principals at the non-responsive members of network members. I also indicated my response to my perspective. It contained memos that linked field notes, the research process and theoretical underpinnings conducted over time to strengthen credibility (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001). I also used a tool in my network principal journal that helped me understand my evolving thinking, my role as a network principal, and the impact the study being reported here had on my practice. These tools assisted the third phase of bracketing, as I constructed the meaning of the perceived role of the network principal.

An example of bracketing in research praxis noted in my research diary demonstrates the process and result of using bracketing when a participant discussed his antipathy to the establishment of school networks by stating:

> We are an IPS [independent public school] and as such we didn’t need to be part of the network. From my own personal perspective, I could not see a great deal of point in networks as such, because I wasn’t going to get anything out of it. But, I could see that my staff could. (John, June 2012)

These thoughts led to such statements regarding the school network as follows:

> We were drifting. There was no response. People came along to the meeting expecting to be told what to do. I wasn’t telling anyone what to do. I refuse to do that because I did not have the power. We virtually were drifting. (John, June 2012)

John was clear in that he had thought about adopting the role of the network principal to control the agenda to suit his school. He argued that the role should benefit his school if he worked hard; however, he reported that he gained little benefit from adopting the role. As he saw it, there was no pay increase or authority
for a fulfilling role. His view that he “could not see a great deal of benefit in networks” was echoed in many network principals’ interviews. These types of comments were an indication that the role might be attractive to a limited number of people. From my perspective, he did not seem to understand that his role was to support effective network decision-making, rather than just wait for the unfolding of events. He also later delegated convening network meetings and constructing agendas to an executive officer. He stated in the interview that:

I really think that the whole concept of the network principal, the Department had in its mind that it was one of those leadership development sorts of positions. (John, June 2012)

I initially felt his comments challenged me as a researcher as his observations brought to the surface my sub-conscious bias regarding my own interpretation of the leadership approach I expected from an experienced school principal. My initial thoughts, when I connected his three statements, were that he restricted the potential for the network to create a positive direction. If he acted on his beliefs, I felt, he could have coached someone who might have benefited from the adoption of the role. I recognised that my response was that of an evaluator and problem-solver rather than a researcher, so I moved back to being an investigator in asking probing questions to analyse his perspective.

Fortunately, the above related to a discussion that occurred in the first semi-structured interview phase and heightened my awareness that I needed to be vigilant and to clearly bracket my bias as a former principal consultant who has advised school principals on leadership strategies. The participants’ detailed responses to supplementary probing questions indicated that I was successful in heightening my sensitivity to pre-judgements and changing my thoughts regarding network leadership. Indeed, reflexivity in abstract formulation bracketing encouraged a review of my assumptions and the consistent application of a research paradigm. The analysis of bracketing in both the research diary and network principal journal aided in critically understanding my evolving ontological position and analytical decisions. Bracketing helped the research process as it reinforced that research is a social phenomenon that influences interpretations (Nadin & Cassell,
Bracketing also supported me to accomplish analytic distance, which I applied in the process of data analysis.

4.6 Data Analysis

The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism guided the use of the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in the depiction and analysis of the social phenomenon of the role of the network principal. Grounded theory is both an approach to research and a strategy to analyse data (Punch, 2009). In strengthening the link between symbolic interactionism and grounded theory, Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills and Usher (2013) have argued that symbolic representation, meanings and action in symbolic interactionism link with Corbin and Strauss’ (2008) constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling and coding. Klunkin and Greenwood (2006) have additionally argued that grounded research tools have related well to symbolic interactionism such as open and axial coding.

Some grounded theory tools of analysis were utilised in the study for the purpose of generating propositions that represented the perspectives of network principals regarding their role. The data for this analysis were located in the transcripts of focus groups and semi-structured interviews. The use of grounded theory tools of analysis and symbolic interactionism were also appropriate for the analysis of phenomena like that investigated in which there has been little theory development (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

The two fundamental data analysis processes that underpinned the formulation of themes were asking questions and making comparisons (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These processes were treated as iterative and inductive cycles (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Smith, 2007). The process of data analysis began with the cautious formation of preliminary themes as the focus group and individual interviews progressed. Data analysis initially became a process of questioning and clarifying the perspectives of participants and jointly confirming the analysis of connections. Provisional patterns of answers and connections were confirmed, modified or rejected as the researcher paraphrased the participants’ insights during interviews. The researcher recorded insightful participant perspectives as the interviews...
progressed using the aide-mémoire, which helped manage the continual development of a realistic portrayal of the role of the network principal throughout coding. These procedures are neither strictly sequential nor discrete processes. Rather, they are flexible tools of analysis to inform the investigation of the research question (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Comparing the sets of data in and between the focus group and individual interviews also revealed confirmation of themes and juxtapositions that helped in the construction of the three propositions. In addition, questioning and generating comparisons lent greater theoretical rigour to the examination of the social construction of the role.

4.6.1 Document Study

Analysis of WA Department of Education and school network documents proved to be a valuable tool in understanding the connections between the Department of Education, regional offices views and networks that influenced the role of the network principal. The work of Prior (2008) has demonstrated that not only do documents contain content, they actively influence action. The documents that were of interest to this study included indications of the intentions and aspirations of the Department of Education and the school networks. Overall, the school network documents were a reflection of the way in which network principals influence members.

4.6.2 Open Coding

The study employed two phases of grounded theory coding: open coding and axial coding. These phases began after reading the entire interview transcript and many notations in the researcher diary to ensure that a holistic perspective of the meaning of the role of the network principal ensued. Open coding began after the collation of the analysed documents and the first two transcribed interviews and diary entries. Table 2 illustrates a portion of the transcribed data from Marilyn’s semi-structured interview, divided into the interview statement and open coding columns. At this stage of coding, her ideas and resultant actions were analysed. This
led to the generation of the tentative category of ‘influence’. Marilyn answers were in response to the probing question of how she reacted to the non-engagement of network members.

Table 2 *Line-by-Line Open Coding of Marilyn’s Initial Interview Transcript*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview statement</th>
<th>Coding</th>
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<tr>
<td>My confidence level has increased, now, because I work on relationships with people.</td>
<td>confidence;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So in taking the network principal’s role on, I have had this journey - I guess it is leadership - of how do I get this thing to work. It is about engaging the people. So I went like you did, as I had the problem with the big network and we were really faced with the network splitting into two. I have a group who was really keen and a group that was not engaging. I decided that I would go personally and have real conversations with them. And so I went to, and it was pretty scary, as I am a primary principal and I have senior high school principals and senior college principals who run huge organisations. I am in there, cap in hand, trying to sell the network and saying to them, “I really want you on board, because it is not what you can get. It is what you can give to us.” I think I had varying successes, but it was a big move for me to have those real conversations.</td>
<td>relationship orientated; journey of leadership development; engagement challenge intrapersonal intelligence; strategic; intrapersonal intelligence; negotiation – direct sense of positioning interpersonal intelligence; contextual awareness; moral purpose; influence (persuasion) negotiation; motives; evaluation of strategy.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Illustrated in this example is the early development of the category of ‘influence’ that represents a repetitive pattern that occurred throughout the coding of other transcripts. Analysis of this pattern began the formation of a proposition that the role of the network principal employed a deliberate form of influence.

After the transcription of all the interviews, a second cycle of open coding occurred that further revealed links between the employment of influence and strategies. The coding became more refined in addressing to describe what network principals meant by influence and their interpretation of network members of their influence. This process also led to abandoning the initial code ‘results’ that represented the way in which participants persuaded members to take action that
may lead to an improvement in student outcomes. This initial code was unsupported by further evidence in many interviews. The researcher also contacted three participants after their interviews for further clarification as to what they meant by ‘persuading members’. This clarified that the category of ‘influence’ that was a more complex concept than persuading members to take a direction or involve them in a course of action that blended intentions.

An example of how memos indicated tentative properties of intentions and adaption is captured in Figure 6, which is an excerpt from a memo, constructed 10 minutes after Marilyn’s semi-structured interview.

Figure 6. Handwritten Memo Extract of an Interview with Marilyn - Intent/Adaptation

The researcher’s diary memos were essential tools in data collection, analysis and thesis writing. The above extract of a two-page A5 memo indicates the researcher’s reflection on the efficacy of interview management and synthesis of information from data during the interview. In this instance, Marilyn indicated that the researcher’s paraphrasing of her responses was initially imprecise. This observation led to a further conversation about the evolution of her leadership role as she had been tracking her development as a network principal. Her journey related to the sense of beginning as a ‘servant leader’ and her growing confidence in the role. The code ‘dispositions’ began to surface. However, this code changed to
‘approach’ following further analysis because it more precisely described the role of the network principal and not the psychology of individual principals, who became network principals.

After coding the fourth semi-structured North Metropolitan network principals’ interview, the researcher again re-coded aspects of the previous interviews as the concepts of influence and strategies became apparent. The following memos in Figure 7 illustrates the development of the way in which network principals promoted the engagement of members and their leadership approach that occurred through the processes of open and axial coding.

Figure 7. An Example of a Series of Memos: Positioning and Influencing

| 27 June 2012 |
| Network principals’ leadership approach seemed to be more important because they had found it difficult to locate and define the approach that they should take in relation to their colleagues. Marilyn talked about having “scary” real conversations with principals of large schools. |
| Network principals need to be ‘somewhere’ in their network, even though they do not want to be termed as ‘leaders’. How do they influence members, yet not be termed leaders? What are the properties of this ‘positioning’ and network leadership? Marilyn described her approach: “I likened it [my leadership] to servant leadership”. Is it servant leadership or a unique approach? Who influences the leadership approach of network principals? |

| 23 August 2012 |
| A composite of network leadership components is emerging in the last three interviews, yet the concept properties remain elusive. They are reluctant to classify themselves as network leaders, as this implies accountability for outcomes. They are comfortable with the term ‘influence’. Network principals perceived they used strategies or tactics to influence their colleagues. “Shaping” was raised and partially defined by Ned in a focus group interview, which was supported by the four other network principals. Brian gave the concept greater explanatory depth by defining - ‘shaping’ as a “much higher order strategic type of thinking.” The focus group also lists some ‘strategies’. What are the strategies used by network principals in attempting to influence their colleagues? |

| 3 September 2012 |
| The ‘influence’ and ‘shaping’ constructs are becoming clearer as the main themes that guide an approach (?) to network leadership, rather than direct leading. Strategies support the employment of influence. Creating decision-making processes through the creation of management structures was a strategy. For Sue, appointing a network coordinator was a strategy, as well as |
taking all decisions back to the network leadership group. Network principals ‘shape’ or mould school networks aligned with strategies to engage network members.

This reflection was a catalyst to identifying such emerging links between sets of data as ‘influence’ and ‘shaping’, particularly during the second stage of axial coding. Open coding of interview transcripts generated initial descriptive concepts that led to multi-dimensional categories by the grouping of phrases and words (Brown et al., 2002; Hoepfi, 1997) in the axial coding state.

4.6.3 Axial Coding

Axial coding was used as a more advanced stage of open coding that became more selective in determining what information was useful. Four analytical processes occurred during axial coding. These were “(a) continually relating subcategories to a category, (b) comparing categories with the collected data, (c) expanding the density of the categories by detailing their properties and dimensions, and (d) exploring variations in the phenomena” (Brown et al., 2002, p. 177).

For (a), the continual relating of subcategories to a category, the re-coding of some components of interviews revealed that codes could be amalgamated and refined. For example, Brian’s identification of ‘shaping’ became the name of a component of network principals’ group of strategies, and its meaning was honed in successive interviews by the response of participants to probing questions. Shaping became a category that emerged from the sub-categories, for example, ‘guiding’ was generated to focus efforts on network direction.

Below, in Figure 8, is an excerpt of an earlier model of combined open and axial code notes that contributed to the development of network principals’ deliberate employment of influence. The aim was to begin to create and revise connections between data that further developed as more connections apparent in the data were examined.
Turning to (b), by the comparing of categories with the collected data, different variations of leadership were identified by network principals because they experimented with leadership approaches. The comparison of the categories of servant leadership to facilitation and a deliberate form of influence occurred at this juncture. For (c), by expanding of the density of the categories, the participants associated school principal empowerment to their role. This was the focus of axial coding in developing the density of the category. Empowerment meant that network principals perceived that decision-making power was given to them; however, they did not want to lead networks directly. This analysis resulted in the category of
empowerment becoming a component of the first proposition, as network principals perceived that the WA Department of Education had empowered school networks and, subsequently, themselves. Turning to (d), the exploration of variations in the phenomena, the way in which network principals deliberately employed their influence through cultivating social power bases of expert, informational, referent and an unfamiliar form of positional power became apparent.

Gradually, the researcher tested the formulated categories in interviews, which led to the further development and refinement of axial coding. This process of theoretical sorting and re-sorting of themes and properties prompted the researcher to engage in the comparison of categories, moving the analysis of the phenomenon to an increasingly abstract level (Charmaz, 2006). The ties or connections between network principal strategies became evident through this process. This course of action led to a realistic and tangible portrayal of the role of the network principal. The conceptualisation of the role was aided by the result of axial coding as indicated in Figure 9.
In terms of causal conditions, network principals perceived that the linking of the management of expectations and their school leadership style affected the way in which they initially approached their role. Their level of commitment to the role had tempered their expectations. The interrelationship between these causal conditions then shaped the phenomenon of ‘influence’. The generation of a deliberate form of influence illustrated the refinement of network principal leadership into a conceptual platform. The researcher re-examined these abstract concepts against data from on-going interviews, memos, and diary entries, which revealed that within the groups of strategies, were aspects and elements.

The revised axial coding prompted the researcher to reconsider the open coding concerned with the application of the aspects of network principal strategies,
which led to the grouping of strategies. The improved precision of axial coding generated an understanding of the perceived causal conditions, strategies of influence and the elements that resulted in a realistic portrayal of the perceived role in the form of three propositions.

4.6.4 Emergence of Three Propositions

Propositions describe the relationships between identified aspects or categories. Chenitz and Swanson (1986) have argued that theory and propositions function to explain, organise, clarify and understand the phenomenon in the data. The literature review helped form the labelling of aspects and placing the theoretical propositions in the context of existing theory. However, care was taken in that the analysis was not ‘captive’ to concepts identified in the literature (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This was further aided by the examination of the phenomenon of the deliberate use of influence by participants through the data analysis in document study and in open and axial coding. The generation of the propositions required significant cross checking of the axial coding and relationships with open coding because of the complexity of how network principals perceived they interacted with members and the conceptual untidiness of school networks. Trends in the data became apparent with regular examination of the axial coding and its relationships with open coding.

Three propositions were generated from the data. First, that network principals perceived the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms influenced their management of the multiple expectations of their role. Secondly, that their prime intention was to share leadership with members. Thirdly, that they employed a deliberate form of influence to mobilise network members. Each of these propositions is examined in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of this thesis.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The study reported here complied with the ethical guidelines of The University of Western Australia and the WA Department of Education. This involved different compliance and confidentiality provisions. To ensure clarity as to what
participation in the study involved for network principals, the researcher discussed the central research question, together with confidentiality and sensitivity issues, with participants in a telephone call prior to the interviews taking place. Participants received a letter of invitation, which provided an outline of proposed general questions (Appendix 2 for semi-structured interviews and Appendix 3 for focus group interviews) and a consent form (Appendix 4). Participation in the study, it was explained, was entirely voluntary and considered to be “research with people, rather than on people” (Rowan, 2000, p. 5). Accordingly, exploration of the perspectives of network principals with participants generated realistic descriptions in the co-construction of knowledge.

As the knowledge produced by interview participation potentially affects the researcher and the participants, this raised moral and ethical issues (Kvale, 2007). One issue was that focus group participants were encouraged to involve themselves in a degree of ‘snowballing’. This had an effect whereby participants joined with other interviewees in the development of ideas. This created synergies resulting in a greater range of insight and ideas (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). To safeguard participant anonymity, the researcher assigned a two-letter code to participants’ responses when the transcription of interviews occurred that did not relate to their initials. Participants were also offered digitally recorded data and transcripts of their interview.

4.7.1 Trustworthiness in Data Quality

The methods used to promote the trustworthiness of the study were based on Guba’s (1981) four aspects of trustworthiness and Shenton’s (2004) strategies for ensuring trustworthiness. These methods are outlined in Table 3.
Table 3 Aspects of Study Trustworthiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect (naturalistic term)</th>
<th>Study Strategies</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Truth value (credibility)</td>
<td>The interpretive research paradigm linked to symbolic interactionism and grounded theory data analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The investigation employed a purposeful selection of participants.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants were encouraged to be frank in their responses regarding their perspectives on their role as network principals.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Iterative and probing questions created transparency and encouraged discarding of suspect information. These refined the investigation and considered negative case analysis (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985; Miles &amp; Huberman, 1994).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participant feedback was checked for researcher effects, and surprising results were followed up (Punch, 2009). Post-interview telephone conversations and emails checked participant perspectives.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Researcher conclusions were checked and explored during interviews by referring these to appropriate participants to restate and summarise to encourage verification (Willis, 2007).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The location of the researcher was a point of reflection throughout the study.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Peer scrutiny of data analysis by two other doctoral students was conducted.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Research diary and network principal journal involved reflective commentary.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Congruence of participant responses with existing school networks and network leaders’ literature was investigated.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequent debriefing sessions with doctoral supervisor ensured wide investigative scope.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applicability (transferability)</td>
<td>While the study provides a rich contextual description of the phenomenon with an enduring sense of the generalisations, there were no assumptions that generalisations will hold in another context. Any transferability is dependent upon the “degree of ‘fit’ between the contexts” (Guba, 1981, p. 81).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clear boundaries and limitations of the study were discussed in the thesis.</td>
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</table>
Gibbs (2007) has suggested reliability procedures include checking transcripts and ensuring no drift in coding definitions. Research design and implementation were described. Focus group and semi-structured interviews were linked.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consistency (dependability)</th>
<th>Neutrality (confirmability)</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Gibbs (2007) has suggested reliability procedures include checking transcripts and ensuring no drift in coding definitions. Research design and implementation were described. Focus group and semi-structured interviews were linked.</td>
<td>Researcher predispositions and the extent to which interpretations were created and described by the researcher (Lincoln &amp; Guba, 1985; Miles &amp; Huberman, 1994).</td>
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</table>

The study reported here employed an audit trail that provided a representation of the processes, which added validity. The audit trail ensured that trustworthiness, transparency, and accountability were enhanced throughout data collection and analysis (Finlay, 2002).

4.7.2 Audit Trail

An audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Punch, 2009) documents a verifiable investigative path (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Wolf, 2003). The trail enables the tracing of the analysis process that ensures the coherence and plausibility of the interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated (Smith, 2007; Wolf, 2003). The data investigative trail (Figure 10) represents the flow of the research. It includes all data, including the network principal journal, the research diary, and the process of analysis.
The audit trail depicts a linear process of elements for ease of reference. However, iterative analysis of data and thesis drafting facilitated the interlinking of the elements. Member checking was also employed to improve credibility, accuracy and validity (Carlson, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the interviews the researcher regularly summarised or re-stated participant information and asked if the interpretation drawn was correct. Participants were encouraged to agree, disagree or modify the summaries of the researcher’s interpretation of what the participants perceived. This process sharpened the aspects and elements contained within the three propositions. Furthermore, two members of the researcher’s 2010 Doctor of Education cohort engaged in collaborative reflexivity (Finlay, 2002) by engaging with the coding of some components of selected interviews.
4.8 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical approach adopted in the study reported in this thesis, which aimed to generate substantive theory regarding the perspectives of WA school network principals on their role within government school networks. The chapter explained the positioning of the investigation within the paradigm of interpretivism, and established the connection with symbolic interactionism and the selected grounded theory methods. These methods helped to construct a realistic portrayal of network principals’ perspectives on their role, namely, what are the perspectives of the Western Australian school network principals regarding their role within government school networks?

The chapter has also described the data collection techniques that were undertaken in accordance with the theoretical underpinnings. The data collection of participants’ responses to the central research question occurred in the three stages of document study, focus groups and semi-structured interviews. Purposeful selection of participants ensured an appropriate representation of gender, primary, secondary, and education support network principal participants. The three propositions generated from the analysis of the data will now be considered.
CHAPTER FIVE: MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

5.1 Preface

The following chapters present the three propositions that were generated by the findings of the study. This chapter details the first proposition, namely, that network principals perceived that the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms influenced their management of the multiple expectations of their role. On this, all of the groups of stakeholders expected that networks self-managed their operations; however, there were disparities amongst the expectations of the stakeholders regarding the role of the network principal. There are four aspects linked to this proposition.

1. Network principals managed the expectations of the Department of Education.
2. Network principals managed the expectations of the regional executive directors.
3. Network principals managed the expectations of the network members.
4. Network principals managed their own expectations.

Chapter 6 outlines the second proposition, namely, that network principals perceived that their prime intention was to share network leadership with members. Network principals intended to moderate the members’ reliance on them by structuring their participation in the leadership of networks. Three aspects represent how they did this listed as follows:

1. By generating member ownership of networks.
2. By locating network principal leadership.
3. By fostering shared leadership by structuring processes.

Arising from the intentions of network principals in meeting the expectations of four groups of stakeholders and the intentions of network principals was a deliberate form of influence.
Chapter 7 details the third proposition, namely, that network principals perceived they deliberately employed their influence to mobilise network members. This influence was supported by the following four groups of strategies.

1. The priming group of strategies.
2. The locating group of strategies.
3. The shaping group of strategies.
4. The adapting group of strategies.

Network principal deliberate employment of influence and groups of strategies guided the overall direction of networks that was deemed acceptable to members and related to network principals’ interpretation of the WA Department of Education’s expectations.

Finally, chapter 8 draws together the three propositions. At the core of these propositions was a recognition that the role was a social construction that arose from the intersection of network principals’ and members’ interpretations of network leadership, which was framed by the WA Department of Education.

5.2 Introduction

The aim of the study reported here was to generate substantive theory regarding the perspectives of WA school network principals on their role within government school networks. The central research question, which guided theory generation, was as follows: What are the perspectives of Western Australian school network principals regarding their role within government school networks? The central research question concentrated on examining the perspectives of network principals within school networks in the Perth metropolitan area. Quotes from network principals were extrapolated from focus groups and semi-structured interviews by the coding descriptions of the findings.

Network principals perceived that they managed the role of the network principal in response to the expectations of four groups of stakeholders, namely, the WA Department of Education, regional executive directors, network members, and themselves. These expectations have also been described as ‘aspects’ of the
proposition. Figure 11 summarises the way in which network principals perceived their management of stakeholders’ expectations of their role.

Figure 11. Aspects of Network Principals’ Management of Expectations

These four aspects of the proposition and the elements that represent the way in which network principals managed the multiple expectations of their role are now explained in the following sections.

5.3 Network Principals Management of the Department of Education’s Expectations

Structures of collaborations are often imposed externally (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). In the case of network principals, the WA Department of Education expected them to support school networks in collaboratively endeavouring to improve student outcomes, to achieve greater school effectiveness, and to achieve a more efficient
use of resources (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c). Network principals, however, argued that they managed their role by selectively interpreting four documents that contained the articulation of the Department of Education’s high expectations of school network principals and school networks. Those documents were the *Excellence and Equity: Strategic Plan for WA Public Schools 2012-2015*, which was the Department of Education’s overall plan for government schools, and touched on the expectations of school networks. Another policy document, *Education Networks and Regions: New Ways of Supporting Schools* (2010) introduced the role of the network principal and the ways that networks were expected to support schools and education regions. Finally, two documents, namely, *School Networks* (2011c) and *Network Principals* (2011b) explained the role in greater depth.

The *School Networks* statement outlined the anticipated outcomes of the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms regarding school networks. To achieve the empowerment of communities, networks were created so that schools could support each other in areas of mutual interest. The process of empowerment promised to sweep away the layers of bureaucracy and the rules that constrained the work of schools, principals and teachers. However, the Department of Education maintained that school staff members needed advice and support from expert staff who worked in schools (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c, p. 1). This support appeared in the form of school networks as a structure for school staff to gain access to this assistance. Networks were also a way of promoting the notion that the Department of Education was an “enabling organisation where schools are the focus - and networks and others support the endeavours, innovations and improvement strategies of schools” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2012a, p. 3). The *Network Principals* document outlined the network principals’ role.

Granting empowerment to school networks was based on the supposition that when organisations allocate authority to employees this can increase their motivation (Konczak et al., 2000). This empowerment was related to ‘meaning’, ‘self-determination’, ‘competence’ and ‘impact’ (Chen et al., 2007; Leach et al., 2003; Seibert et al., 2011; Spreitzer, 1996). The WA Department of Education structurally
empowered network principals by creating policies and the position of the network principal and by supplying funding to school networks. The 2013 *Evaluation Report of the Independent Public Schools Initiative* concluded that principals of independent public schools felt empowered as they had greater control over employment and resourcing (Melbourne University, 2013). Network principals similarly reported that they felt psychologically empowered to make more autonomous decisions. However, the Department of Education did not delegate authority to network principals. Rather, they relied on the power of their influence in networks. Indeed, the Department of Education expected that network principals would facilitate networks so that members would be able to work alongside their peers in professional and collegiate relationships rather than in management structures (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, 2011c).

This type of psychological empowerment was superficial and fickle as it depended on the degree of goodwill shown by network members. One network principal, who co-constructed a concept paper that examined the formation of networks for the WA Department of Education’s corporate executive, outlined how her interpretation of the changing culture highlighted the promise of empowering school principals. She stated emphatically this in the following comment:

> The relationships with the people in central office were about to change. There was a paternalistic, or maternalistic, relationship that would have existed with non-IPS (Independent Public Schools) schools and it still is to some extent, but everybody has been weaned off with this new structure. Our intent [Corporate Executive] in setting this up was to create and improve leadership. Decisive, improved, autonomous, empowered. (Eileen, November 2012)

Eileen optimistically reported that the empowerment reforms had transformed the traditional culture of the WA Department of Education, which included how school networks conducted their operations. However, she thought that the implementation of school networks and regionalisation was rushed and this had influenced how network principals viewed the Department of Education’s expectations. Indeed, the interpretation of the concept of empowerment by network
principals and its effects on their role, rather than the detail of policy statements, influenced their expectations on the role.

The comment of another network principal, Sarah, further illustrated that network principals either lacked the WA Department of Education’s information regarding the role or disregarded the Department of Education’s expectations. Her perspective of the Department of Education’s expectations demonstrated that those statements were not noticed, particularly when they considered their local schools’ context. Ultimately, Sarah questioned the value of the Department’s implementation of school network policy by commenting:

What are these targets? They have bypassed me. I thought the networks were formed to support initiatives like transition, and implementation of Australian Curriculum and I built those into our [network] objectives. (Sarah, September 2012)

The targets that Sarah alluded to were contained within the School Network statement. This statement outlined that school network collaborative endeavours “must result in improved student outcomes; greater school effectiveness; and more efficient use of physical, financial and human resources” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c, p. 2). Being clear about accountability for results can be linked to psychological empowerment (Breaux, Munyon, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2009; Wallace, Johnson, Mathe, & Paul, 2011).

On the connection between accountability and psychological empowerment, Conger (1989) and Forrester (2000) have argued that employers should adjust their systems so that employees feel accountable for their new responsibilities. By contrast, network principals in the study reported here viewed that the WA Department of Education had not involved itself in the implementation role of the network principal. Indeed, there were no performance management processes or a sense of accountability, even though network principals reported to the regional education director.

Network principals managed the expectations of the WA Department of Education by perceiving that school and principal empowerment was connected to school networks so that networks could determine their course. This perspective
implied that network principals perceived that each network and, subsequently, their role, were relatively independent of the Department’s bureaucracy and regional offices. This interpretation of empowerment meant that network principals concentrated on creating decisions that benefited network members’ needs, rather than on the literal interpretation of the Department of Education’s documented role expectations.

A representative case as to how some network principals recognised an opportunity for network autonomy was John who commented:

Here’s a void. This is the way the Government and Department see that we need to develop. So we can either wait to be told what to do, whether we like it or not. Maybe if we get on the front foot, we can say, “No, this is how we are doing things.” I want to retain that autonomy the way we want to do it, within parameters. Let’s get on the front foot. Let’s do it our way rather than being dragged, screaming and kicking and reluctantly doing it. (John, June 2012)

John likened the implementation of the WA Department of Education’s *Network Principal* statement to what occurred with the forming of policy at his school. To explain his perspective of the *Network Principal* document and its relationship to the formation of school policy he commented:

That’s a formative document. It’s just like when you go to a staff meeting and ask them what you think of this [policy]? That’s what the department’s done. It was just a starting position, an ambit claim. (John, June 2012)

Network principals envisaged that there was an opportunity to establish empowered networks that served the needs of schools and filled a leadership void, whereas, the WA Department of Education viewed that a wide-ranging statement of responsibilities encouraged a collaborative model to address common needs in concert with Department’s expectations. The Department of Education’s Director-General illustrated this perspective by using the metaphor “oiling the wheels” as a representation of the role of the network principal. This representation of network principal facilitation highlighted that the Department of Education thought that network principals might readily collaborate with each other with a little encouragement or “oiling” from network principals. However, in practice, network
principals reported that this belied the complexity of the role. They claimed that meagre policy information and the inadequate level of support from the Department of Education for network principals encouraged cynicism, which hampered the development of their role.

Sarah provided a representative example of network principals’ interpretations of the WA Department of Education’s expectations when she attended the initial regional office meeting with other principals. She commented:

When the networks came, they came with some confusion, a lack of clarity. Some promise of additional resources. The [Regional Education Office] forum covered the whole spectrum of [school principal] responses one would expect. On one extreme end, cynicism and absolutely questioning the integrity and the purpose of the exercise - another problem to deal with. At the other end was let’s see if I can make this work meet our needs. (Sarah, September 2012)

Network principals reported that network members exhibited a broad range of adverse reactions to the policy of school networks. Indeed, the search for positive reactions was limited to those who perceived an opportunity for autonomy, as illustrated by John’s earlier comment. Sarah’s comment also exemplified the divided nature of principal responses, yet network principals claimed there had been an underlying belief that school networks may benefit network members in gaining access to reasonable funding.

In summary, network principals reported that they paid little attention to, or ignored, the detail within the WA Department of Education’s statements concerning their role. This pessimistic tone of policy deliberation by network principals led to their selective and liberal interpretation of network statements. Indeed, they viewed the Department of Education’s network statements as malleable guidelines aimed at meeting the needs of empowered networks and members. Regional education directors did not establish role clarity because the empowerment reforms that, according to network principals, had encouraged principals to make their autonomous decisions. This situation is now considered in more detail.
5.4 Network Principals Management of the Regional Executive Directors’ Expectations

Network principals perceived that regional executive directors expected that school networks would be self-managing organisations, so they were reluctant to be involved directly in the role. The perspective of the role of the network principal by regional executive directors is discussed first, followed by the interpretation of their perspective reported by network principals.

Regional executive director, Steven, provided an illustration of the way in which regional executive directors viewed the WA Department of Education’s policy implementation, which was similar to the view of network principals. On this he argued:

Philosophically, those (Department) messages had been there in the system, but the translation of the philosophy into the new structure all happened in a very short time. I think it was a little rushed. If you go back and read the documentation, there were gaps in that. We were left to join the dots. (Steven, September 2012).

Network principals perceived that the messages from the regional executive directors strengthened their perspective of the role’s autonomy. For instance, Regional executive director Daphne’s viewpoint of network policy illustrated how she perceived that network principals might interpret the WA Department of Education’s network statements. In this connection, Daphne claimed:

It’s a broad statement around networks. Find your place in there. That is why networks are doing different things. They [network principals] have found their place. (Daphne, October 2012)

Regional executive directors who, subsequently, influenced the perspectives of network principals explained this somewhat selective interpretation of the WA Department of Education’s expectations of network principals to principals in regional meetings.

Regional executive directors seemed to have comparable philosophical viewpoints with each other regarding the autonomy of network principals. For instance, Steven commented as follows:
Both regional education directors met to discuss school networks. When we initially had meetings with principals in regard to school networks, we were very, very careful not to tell people this is what you have to do. This is what it should look like. I tried very much to respect the autonomy. (Steven, September 2012)

Regional education directors indicated that they were mindful of the WA Department of Education’s change in the organisational culture towards empowerment. However, their expectations of the role of the network principal, in practical terms, differed. Daphne, a regional executive director, held the view that network principals were flexible agents. She had developed an awareness of the facilitative leadership style that network principals should employ towards members as indicated by the following comment:

To me, it is an important role in terms of harnessing the energy and the creativity of the network. Not to be generating [the energy] themselves, but to be able to work the people in the network together to get the best from the network. It is that sort of leadership. To me, that is the best network principal. (Daphne, October 2012)

This comment demonstrates that the location of the role was unsettled as ‘harnessing the energy’ could be construed as being a facilitative role; yet, ‘working the people’ seems to be more intense, perhaps bordering on a direct leadership role.

Steven described his expectation of the desired leadership disposition of network principals in the following terms:

I really like the idea of an educational leader as a network principal. I favour that model as I think for the network to achieve its full potentiality I think it needs that. You need someone to step outside and be a risk taker one leader that encourages risk taking, one that pushes the bureaucracy to allow the network to do something. (Steven, September 2012)

This comment confirms that the expectations of the role of the network principal were more leadership orientated than “oiling the wheels” facilitation.

The influence that bound these regional education directors’ expectations together was that network principals would inspire members to work together to create an effective school network. The presumption was that network principals might be creative thinkers who enabled network members to collaborate in
generating educational leadership. Regional education directors indicated that they realised that this could be a different role for school principals, but the role should have conceivably utilised their school principals’ current skills. Both regional executive directors suggested that the role of the network principal was aligned with their principals’ style of leadership. Yet, they argued that network principals should adopt a leadership approach to their role that predominantly serviced the needs of members.

The network principals’ stance corresponded to regional education directors in that they perceived their role should facilitate forums for network members and not take a position of direct leadership. For instance, Brian articulated how network principals had perceived the role of the regional executive directors (REDs) and assistant regional executive directors (A/RED) had helped in framing the role of the network principal. He commented on this as follows:

We were lucky in the South Metro that our RED and A/RED said sort yourselves out. Here is a couple of rules. It has to be K-12 and about 20 schools. Go and organise yourselves. I thought we probably owe them the respect and go and do that. (Brian, August 2012)

Network principals indicated they were aware of the reluctance of regional executive directors to be directly involved with the role. This interpretation helped Brian to recognise that the network principal selection processes had changed. The WA Department of Education’s expectations were that “Network Principals would be selected on merit through a process initiated by the Regional Executive Director. All positions would be based on a common set of expectations” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 1). In practice, network principals realised that regional executive directors expected that each school network would determine expectations of the role and selection processes as illustrated by the following observation made again by Brian:

It was pretty smart of the REDs (regional education directors) not going through what was in the policy, the original statement that said it is a merit selection process by the REDs. They showed great wisdom to allow it to grow from the ground upwards. It took more time, but in the end they got a better product out of it. (Brian, August 2012)
In summary, network principals perceived that regional executive directors were reluctant to be involved directly with network principals. They conveyed that they managed regional executive directors’ expectations by accepting the autonomous nature of school networks. They reported that their role had mainly focussed on the intentions of members who were encouraged by regional executive directors, which is now discussed.

5.5 Network Principals Management of the Members’ Expectations

Network principals claimed that members expected that network principals would lead the collaborative effort of networks given that they are self-managing, rather than be instruments of the WA Department of Education. They indicated there had been different levels of network member enthusiasm that often related to the history of association with former principal networks, or groups, and the attitudes of members towards the notion of school networks. In the main, network principals believed that members held a cynical view towards the usefulness of school networks. They also reported that members were apprehensive about relinquishing any of their decision-making power to the network and introducing change not aligned with the school’s unique direction. These findings are similar to those of Hadfield and Chapman’s (2009) research concerning the mobilisation of members in the agency phase of their network design flow. They reported that member disparagement of networks resulted in a general shortage of commitment and enthusiasm to networks as collaborative entities.

Network principals indicated that they managed two groups of members’ expectations. The first group of expectations, established in former principal collegiate groups, were managed by referring to past work. The second group of expectations was generated in new school networks, which required further management when addressing member apathy towards the role. This is now explained.
5.5.1 Expectations Established in Former Principal Collegiate Groups

Some network principals claimed that they utilised the expectations honed by stable-member relationships established in former principal clusters. An illustration of the most enthusiastic member support for networks perceived by network principals was Rob’s experience. His previous group of principals was transformed into a school network with the addition of two more schools. As the chair of his former group, he revealed that he had felt confident in managing the expectations of principals before the advent of school networks, as his collegiate group had enacted a common direction. On this, he explained:

We are the Allendale Education Community. We have one high school, Allendale Valley, and ten primary schools. Ours is a little bit different because historically we have always had the Allendale Association, the principals’ association. The association has been going since the 1920s. So we have worked together fairly collaboratively over time. I was the chairperson of the Allendale Association, at that particular time. We did not have anyone that was dissenting or anything like that. (Rob, May 2012)

Rob reported that members had readily committed to a network direction due to the strong relationships between members built over time.

Network principals claimed that members of established groups of principals were enthusiastic because they had already developed a sense of empowerment as they valued their collaborative activities enough to fund the groups themselves. This ease of conversion to school networks enabled network principals to manage the expectations of established members in a sustainable manner. They reported that from this foundation they built further teacher networking opportunities and developed stronger links between schools because of the extra funds available from the regional offices. In addition, even though some networks had grown from past coalitions, network principals perceived that there had often been the expectation from members that network principals would implement decisions as part of their leadership role.

In another example of the power of past allegiances, Donna explained her motivation to continue her leadership of her former principal group on experiencing
the transformation to a school network. She speculated as to why she had adopted the role of the network principal, in the following comment:

I got the role because I was part of the Swan Valley cell, and there were four schools. I just seemed to be the one most likely to be the one to send out an agenda. I was the one who was the most likely to start it. I was happy to do it, but I was happy for someone else if someone desperately wanted to do it. But it came down to nobody really wanted it. (Donna, May 2012)

As with similar network principals, Donna found that a common interest among members sustained her, yet she procrastinated about adopting the role of network principal. One reason for her delaying her decision was that she found that in expanding the size of the network the new members had a more cynical view of the benefit networks than the established members had. Also, network principals claimed that increasing the size of their former collegiate group role was hastened by the WA Department of Education’s promise of network funding for the implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum*.

5.5.2 Expectations Revealed in New Networks

Network principals pointed out that members of new school networks struggled to recognise a compelling reason for networks to meet because they had difficulty conceptualising the immediate benefits to their school. This perspective developed into a feeling of member apathy towards the worth of school networks in improving student results. The degree of scepticism related to the lack of information sharing about what networks may deliver to schools. Network members wanted network principals to focus on what they found most useful to them that did not create extra responsibilities and work for them. Consequently, members of networks wanted a focus on the provision of professional development and practical knowledge. This relates closely to Wenger’s (1998, 2014) communities of practice. In this form of a community people regularly meet to share information about a concern or interest and try to deepen their knowledge. The interactions in these types of school communities are less organised than attempts at professional learning communities because members are often not interested in expanding network agency past providing cost-effective professional development. In addition,
the tendency of not sharing information about student learning can restrict the
development of social capital, which may rely on the quality of interactions that
generate expectations, obligation, and trust (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Koput, 2010;
Lin, 2001).

Barbara’s interpretation of her role illustrated a response to one of the most
negative of network members’ perspectives that influenced the role of the network
principal. She described the difficulties she faced with the members of her school
network by commenting as follows:

I have struggled for them to come up with, to even meet to talk about, a
purpose. They would not buy into that. They say they do not need that. “I am
not coming to a half-day facilitation session.” Ann [The regional office
facilitator] has been virtually banned from coming. “We are not coming if that
person comes.” It was about how much money have we got. How much can I
have? Let’s divide the money up. That’s the sort of thing I have been dealing
with. I think having the sessions have given me some skills. (Barbara, August
2012)

Barbara interpreted member resistance as a challenge to overcome, provided an
example of a network principal’s response to this resistance. Her role included
attempting to persuade members of the reasons to act in a collaborative manner.
However, at times she reported that she was decisive, particularly when two
members proposed that network funds should be divided between schools within
the network. Dividing the resources meant that any decision-making within her
network would effectively cease through the lack of resourcing. This decision was a
pivotal point in her network leadership as it underscored the ability of network
principals to use their power of influence in the decision-making process.
Furthermore, network principals’ authoritativeness, and their promised
empowerment, had been diminished as those in the South Metropolitan Region had
to rely on submitting requests for additional regional office funding of their network
activities.

One common issue, identified by network principals as a source of member
cynicism, was the lack of systemic provision of curriculum-based professional
learning for schools. They reported that many network members believed that the
delivery of professional learning regarding any whole system change was the
responsibility of the WA Department of Education, rather than of school networks. Network principals perceived that the shift in responsibilities for the provision of professional learning to networks correlated with the degree of cynicism demonstrated by members. Furthermore, network principals argued that the Department of Education’s assumption that members would work together with some facilitation is erroneous. Consequently, network principals asserted that the empowerment reforms, designed to provide choice to networks, also generate inappropriate levels of obligation on network principals.

John’s interview encapsulated the difficulties network principals deal with in managing the adverse network members’ expectations when he attempted to facilitate the generation of a network direction. He reported that he waited for network members to engage in the decision-making process after facilitating direction-building activities. His comments were illustrative of the tentativeness that many network principals felt in managing member expectations in the initial stages of school networks. On this, he explained as follows:

It has been like pulling teeth to get the network going. Initially, I have taken leadership of the group. I have not taken the leadership in saying this is how we are going to do it and doing it my way, especially with my original intention of not being in this job for the long haul. You see it in schools, the pet project that dies when the teacher who leads it goes. I did not want it for this network. So there is no point in the network being me. So I have been pretty low-key. (John, June, 2012)

Many network principals started the process of leading the formation of their network by a using a rallying call. They observed that silence and evasion greeted this strategy in many cases, which was another indication that network members’ expectations of the usefulness of networks was low. Network principals subsequently adopted a tentative stance in forging a meaningful network direction. Faced with the scepticism of members and their lack of goodwill, it became apparent that members did not have a clear understanding of the role. Indeed, network principals reported that the broad and imprecise role description provided by the WA Department of Education hampered the clarity in the expectations of their role. The challenge of managing the responses of network members, fuelled by member apathy, seemed to overwhelm many network principals in the early stages of network development.
Network principals claimed that a specific challenge in their role was how to engage all primary and secondary principal members. Network members understood that the WA Department of Education and regional executive directors had insisted that networks contain year K-12 schools; however, network principals claimed there was antagonism from many secondary-based members towards this expectation. One of the few secondary-based network principals who tackled this issue in her network was Angela, who outlined an example of how she managed member negativity towards the expectation of networks accommodating the K-12 spread of teachers. She believed that principals, particularly secondary school principals, needed a different frame of thinking that encouraged primary and secondary schools to work closely with each other in generating network programs. On this, Angela commented:

I was concerned at the time that there appeared to be, certainly in the secondary sector, very negative attitudes towards the networks and the concept of networks. I think, for me personally, it was the belief that I just cannot see and reason why we are not working, all of us as a K-12 environment. It is ridiculous nonsense that secondary schools go on with half the time. That’s bizarre. (Angela, May 2012)

Network principals also indicated that there were two sources of secondary-based network members’ cynicism. First, there were exclusively secondary groups that offered the same service as school networks that focused on secondary curriculum issues. Secondly, many secondary school members argued that they expected that implementation of the new national Australian Curriculum was different from that in primary schools. Network principals recounted they had managed the two drivers of cynicism by continually searching for ways that integrated the work of primary and secondary-based members. Developing transition programs to help primary school students move into secondary schools helped; however, this was not a significant activity for school networks. Also, finding new ways that encouraged all network members to engage in network agency was described by network principals as a constant struggle. According to network principals, often members exhibited low expectations and consequently did not treat
the network as a collaborative group, in which case they would work productively towards the direction of the network.

In summary, network principals perceived that members expected involvement in deciding the type and range of network activities that were feasible for their network. Network members also expected network principals to lead the implementation of those endeavours. Also, the role of the network principal acted in proximity to, and derived empowerment, from the members’ interests. This sense of empowerment related to being psychologically empowered (Seibert et al., 2011; Silver, Randolph, & Seibert, 2006). Network principals claimed that the WA Department of Education’s expectation that members would enthusiastically meet and collaborate in school networks proved erroneous. In networks that contained members who had worked together in former principal groups, network principals observed that member expectations seemed reasonably straightforward. Network principals noticed that these members, who felt inspired by the empowerment reforms and associated funding, extended their collaboration to reluctant new members. Networks formed by the catalyst of policy were reportedly more challenging to facilitate because productive relationships needed to be established. A central expectation of members was that networks would not significantly add value to their school and, consequently, they waited for network principals to demonstrate leadership in their network. Network principals claimed that their role in managing member expectations also led to network principals managing their own expectations.

5.6 Network Principals Management of Their Own Expectations

The way in which network principals perceived the management of their expectations was by adopting the stance of being either reluctant or committed to the role, making a judgement on the adequacy of resource allocation to school networks, and evaluating the level of adequacy of professional learning regarding their role offered by the WA Department of Education. The Department of Education’s “oiling the wheels” metaphor represented to network principals the expectation that the negotiation process at the intersection of network principal and
member expectations was powered by the influence of network principals. This negotiation process yielded ideas that benefited members, which settled primarily on the provision of cost-effective professional learning. In employing influence in “oiling the wheels”, network principals expected to employ a leadership approach that expressed egalitarian traits (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). This type of leadership was termed as being a type of “light touch” leadership (Kubiak & Bertram, 2010) that mobilised network members. The way in which this egalitarian form of leadership was employed was regularly tested in school networks. This reflected Church et al.,’s (2002) finding that there can be a continuous tension between how much a coordinator can lead and build network capacity to self-direct.

5.6.1 Adopting the Stance of Being Reluctant or Committed

Network principals reported that in managing their expectations of their role, the foremost issue that influenced their approach was that members were sceptical about the usefulness of the network to their school’s efforts in improving student learning. Consequently, this attitude reflected on members’ perceived value of the role. This was illustrated by Eileen (November 2012) who conveyed that the role was met with derision by network members who she claimed thought “Oh, we will leave that to the wet noses and waggy tails. Yeah, knock yourself out sunshine.” Network principals claimed that this view tainted how they viewed their role and influenced the way in which they decided to approach it. Network principals also considered that they were dubious about what they could accomplish given their uncertainty about the value of networks.

Consequently, nearly all network principals emphasised that they had not sought, and were reluctant to assume, the role. Two clusters of network principals were evident in the data. The first cluster, namely the ‘reluctant’, formed the larger number of network principals. The second cluster, namely the ‘committed’, contained few network principals. The management of each of these cluster’s expectations is now described in turn.

Eileen, in the first cluster of reluctant network principals, exemplified the most negative perspective of the role. She was particularly concerned about the
disjuncture between the way in which network principals and members perceived the role and the contrasting viewpoint of the WA Department of Education. She discussed this disjuncture as follows:

From expectation to reality is a yawning gap. There were different messages given. Had the message been positive, had it been a consistent message I think we would have had people scrambling over themselves to take that position. If anything, you were probably sneered at by your colleagues for wanting to put your hand up. That was not expected or intended. Early talk of the network principal in the central office at the highest levels, the director general, was that, well this should be seen as a coveted position. But indeed, if anything, it was the opposite. (Eileen, November 2012)

Eileen noted that while the WA Department of Education had promoted the empowerment of school networks, they had not advocated strongly the benefits of the role or offered persuasive reasons for principals to adopt it. Indeed, network principals perceived that the Department of Education relied on a having high expectation of network principals to motivate them to expend effort in meeting expectations. Network principals claimed that members waited for the eager to please principals to step forward and adopt the role of the network principal. The central concern was that many principals were reluctant to nominate for the role because they perceived that the likely required workload would detract from their prime role as principals. Also, it was claimed that the workload involved in the role, as they saw it, would not be counterbalanced by the benefits to their school.

Jenny’s indicative comment captured the views of the ‘reluctant’ who reported that the role was difficult due to the workload involved in initiating and sustaining the school network. Jenny described her acceptance of the role as follows:

I said that I would take it on. I don’t mind doing it, but it is finding the time to do it. I think the role was hard to do and to start off because you weren’t sure where you were going to begin, how it was going to work, and what people wanted. (Jenny, July 2012)

The reluctant network principals understood that networks might be useful to schools, particularly as networks received funding. They believed in the principle that schools should collaborate with each other to achieve what they could not do individually. This sustained their commitment to school networks. They concluded
that it was challenging to establish workable networks from such disparate schools.
Also, as they saw it, the role would be subject to what members wanted, rather than
follow a clear indication from the WA Department of Education.

Another representative view of the expectations of the most reluctant
network principals’ expectations is to be found in Heather’s assertion when she reported:

There was no clarity on what would be the position of the network principal.
No-one really still did want to do it. We are doing it as a collaborative from
now on. My name is on the paperwork, and I will coordinate [the network]. I
just make sure the meetings run and the minutes get out. We don’t use the
funding to release a network principal from their school. (Heather, December 2012)

Heather observed that she managed her expectations so that they matched
those of members. That is, she indicated that she felt cynical about her role because
she realised that anything that required effort might well be met with member
derision. She also reported that her determination to coordinate activities generated
the “lukewarm” interest of only two members towards specific projects.

Ned’s perspective on the role portrayed the most positive one of the first
cluster that of ‘reluctant’ network principals. He maintained that he did not want the
role; however, he was concerned that other members might perfunctorily adopt the
role. He indicated that he came to this conclusion as network members were
complaining about the relative worth of school networks. Yet, members realised that
they needed to be involved with networks to access network funding. He managed
his concern by promoting the positive benefits that could develop in the interaction
with primary and secondary schools. This he noted as follows:

To be honest, I came into the role because I stood still, and everyone stepped
back. At the time, there was a robust discussion about what the role was, but
no definition was provided. The reason why I became the network principal
was because I saw potential in the group based on the work that I had done
with the transition programs and sharing expertise across our high schools
and feeder primary schools. Someone needed to do it. There seemed to be an
opportunity for me to build on those strengths. I did not want to be the one
complaining, so I thought that I would become part of the solution. (Ned,
August 2012)
Ned also reported that the members chose him as the network principal as he advocated the benefits of school networks and what could be accomplished.

Luke’s altruistic sentiment in managing his expectations exemplified the perspective of network principals who questioned why others did not step forward to adopt the role. He described his perspective in this way:

I’m a level 6 (school principal). I’m not going anywhere. Here is an opportunity and it was disappointing that no one took it up. Even a primary school deputy with a bit of oomph could say that I am interested in a principal’s job. I could have a nice half page on being the network principal of seven schools. That surely would bump me up against other applicants. To my disappointment, no takers at all. (Luke, June 2012)

Usually, the ‘reluctant’ network principals embarked on developing networks only after they unenthusiastically adopted the role of the network principal.

In the second, namely, the ‘committed’ network principals’ cluster it was recognised that their dedication to collaboration between principals was the source of their role empowerment. To ensure the fostering of collaboration, they shared their enthusiasm and often matched their expectations with those members who had been committed to network collaboration. Sue provided an appreciation of why network principals adopted the role, as follows:

There is the collaboration that is happening. That is a driving force for me because you have a wealth of experience sitting in our schools. There is a drift away from the curriculum in central office and regional office you really are reliant upon the expertise, to some extent, within your network. There is a wealth of expertise, and it is a matter of tapping into it and giving the teachers confidence. (Sue, September 2012)

Even though these network principals conveyed that they were enthusiastic about schools working with each other, they were also aware that they generated their own high expectations of what should occur in networks. For example, three network principals reported that they often assertively persuaded members to adopt specific network programs based on their previous experience of a study tour. The participants on this study tour had examined school networks in the Australian state of New South Wales. Rob illustrated the influence that the study tour had on his role
expectations and commitment, particularly regarding the power of professional learning communities and professional learning when he commented:

A couple of years ago, I was fortunate to go on a study tour to New South Wales to look at what were known as professional learning communities, in other words, the networks. I saw how powerful they had been in terms of professional learning. (Rob, May 2012)

Another committed network principal argued that he had adopted the role so that he could control the network agenda, particularly in favour of secondary schools with a focus on the implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum*.

Overall, network principals chose to be either reluctant or committed to their role. Committed network principals based their motivation on their feeling of empowerment or their enthusiasm for teamwork between members. Reluctant network principals, however, perceived they were deeply influenced by the response of cynical network members who were unconvinced about the effectiveness of school networks in meeting their school’s needs. Network principals explained that the attitude of network members linked to their judgement regarding the adequacy of resource allocation to school networks.

5.6.2 Judging the Adequacy of Resource Allocation

Network principals expected a reasonable level of resources to be given to school networks. When funds were eventually allocated to school networks they made a judgement on the adequacy of the resource level. This, in turn, influenced them in the management of their role. Luke provided an example of this outlook. He became a network principal as the role initially showed promise in supporting schools in implementing the national *Australian Curriculum*. His comment below indicates that he had misread the situation:

I became the network principal because we were waiting for information about how we were going to implement the *Australian Curriculum*, what resourcing there might be available for training staff. Later, I heard the message that any money that would be available would be meagre and via the networks. (Luke, June 2012)
Like many network principals, he had calculated the amount per capita his network received in comparison to his annual school budget of around $16 million. With this calculation in mind, he claimed that he had spent far more school-based money on professional learning than what was on offer in school networks. This estimate made him reflect on the value of school networks to his school.

Another network principal, Jim, responded with a comment concerning the inadequacy of network funding. He described his feelings in having to lower his high expectations and to restrict his role when he became aware of the level of network funding. He illustrated his point by commenting:

I guess I was a little cynical early on as networks were under-resourced. It was just an ineffective way of getting it done on the cheap. (Jim, June 2012)

Network principals claimed that the inadequacy and the late allocation of resources influenced their perspective of what they expected to accomplish in their role. The lack of funding for adequate release time and the additional workload weighed heavily on the way in which network principals managed their expectations of the role. As Jenny observed:

It is a shame that the Department didn’t do what some countries have done with network leadership where the principal comes out of their school. They might do a year outside their school, working for the network, solely doing things for the network. (Jenny, July 2012)

Network principals conveyed that they lowered their expectations of the role because they claimed that the funds available to networks were limited.

5.6.3 Evaluating the Adequacy of Professional Learning

Network principals also managed the expectations of the role by evaluating the quality of professional learning they had received from the WA Department of Education concerning their role. They were promised “access to role-specific and high quality professional learning” (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b, p. 2). On this sort of development, Silver et al., (2006) argued that extensive training needs to occur to ensure that employees have the right skills to understand the goals, processes and clear boundaries to create a culture of empowerment. They
also argued that coaches can provide personal feedback and further growth to help develop leaders and empowerment. Coaching by people who experienced the workings of networks may well have been problematic as working in formal networks was new to Department of Education principals. However, some network principals regularly worked with groups of principals in the past while others had visited networks in New South Wales. The latter network principals mentioned that they could have helped network principals in facilitating network direction, establishing processes and structuring school networks.

Despite networks operating as the primary leadership support mechanism for school principals, they realised that the WA Department of Education had proffered only conventional change management training that was tenuously linked to their role. Indeed, only one network principal discussed the benefits of one of the two seminars offered by the Department of Education. Overall, network principals viewed these seminars were inadequate because they contained little specific information regarding how to influence network members and manage networks.

Network principals asserted that this insufficiency of professional learning affected how they managed their expectations of their role. They had concluded that the WA Department of Education expected that network principals needed no more skills than they utilised in their role as principals. Network principals, however, assumed that their leadership approach as principals would need modification as they were working with colleagues with no positional power in which to manage network members. Consequently, they believed they needed a distinct understanding of their role that training might have provided. Illustrative of the difference between the role of the network principal and of the principal was Richard’s perspective. As the chair of a large group of a secondary and primary schools for two years, Richard believed that he had made the transition by modifying his expectations of the role of a network principal. In describing his role, he stated:

You need someone who has that big picture, strategic skills, and financial management mindset. I had to have that very strategic plus visionary mind in working with many schools. You’re also thinking of the school nuances. You need a direction and recalling what was in New South Wales and our plan, given the resourcing, helped me. (Richard, October 2012)
The “big picture” Richard alluded to was an appropriate interpretation of the context of each school network and mobilising members towards a collectively defined network direction. Professional development in facilitating the engagement of members may have given network principals confidence in dealing with these issues.

Network principals viewed that the level of professional learning offered by the WA Department of Education lacked sufficient relevance to their role because it focused on general change management. They indicated that this professional learning did not specifically enable them to feel empowered and they expected to have contextualised and ongoing professional learning that related more closely to their role.

5.7 Conclusion

The central research question, which guided theory generation in this study here, was “what are the perspectives of Western Australian school network principals regarding their role within government school networks?” This chapter examined the first proposition that network principals perceived that the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms influenced their management of the multiple expectations of their role.

Network principals indicated that they managed the role expectations of four groups of stakeholders. They managed the WA Department of Education’s expectations by selectively interpreting the empowerment reforms, understood the reluctance of the regional education directors having direct involvement in networks, worked with expectations of reluctant and committed members, and adopted a stance of either being reluctant or committed to the role. Network principals felt psychologically empowered, yet there was a considerable disparity between the Department of Education’s expectations and those of network members. The Department of Education’s projection of high expectations onto the role was not enough to empower network principals. Indeed, only limited aspects of Konczak, Stelly and Trusty’s (2000) six dimensions of employee empowerment were implemented. These dimensions are the delegation of authority, accountability for
outcomes, self-directed decision-making, information sharing, skill development, and coaching for innovation.

The following chapter now examines what network principals perceived were their intentions towards the role given the expectation of the four groups of stakeholders.
CHAPTER SIX: INTENTIONS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the first proposition generated by the findings of the study that network principals perceived that the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms influenced their management of the multiple expectations of their role. This chapter presents the second proposition, namely, that network principals perceived that their prime intention was to share network leadership with members.

In the study being reported here network principals described their intentions when they adopted the role but had not begun working with the members. The responses of members to network principals’ forays in implementing their intentions in the first two network meetings are also examined. Three aspects represent the way in which they structured the sharing of network leadership. These aspects are their intentions to, first, generate member ownership of networks, secondly, locate network principal leadership and, thirdly, foster shared leadership by structuring network processes. Figure 12 summarises the way in which network principals perceived that their intentions applied to school networks.
The three aspects of the proposition and the elements that represent how network principals perceived their intention was to share network leadership with members are now explained.

6.2 Generating Member Ownership of Networks

The first aspect of the proposition represents the way in which network principals perceived how they would accomplish their prime intention to share network leadership. This was to generate member ownership of school networks. Four elements describe how they indicated they set the conditions for shared leadership. These elements are ‘creating a resonant network direction’, ‘negotiating the focus of professional learning’, ‘forming school networks as professional learning communities’, and ‘providing cost-effective professional learning’.
communities’, and ‘providing cost-effective professional learning’ usually by using expertise in the network. Each of these four elements relating to generating ownership of networks will now be explained in turn.

6.2.1 Creating a Resonant Direction

Network principals claimed that achieving resonance in network direction was a significant intention because it aimed at developing shared ownership of networks. Network principals reported that they had planned to create a coherent network direction on appreciating the diverse needs of schools. Network principals facilitating the aggregation of member ideas to efficiently addressing those proposals could create clarity. The fulfilment of member needs was of paramount importance because network principals explained that they planned that networks would attend to local issues. Their intention in achieving a resonant direction was more central to the role of the network principal than to the WA Department of Education’s generic network outcomes. Indeed, network principals rarely mentioned system-defined network outcomes in comparison to network-inspired outcomes. To achieve this intention of a creating a resonant direction, they described how they listened to members’ ideas of what could be accomplished in the initial meetings. The intention was to generate an impression that they understood and took heed of members’ intentions as a first step in their role of facilitating school networks.

Their intention to produce a network direction seemed to network principals to be a reasonably effective way to bind the needs of members together. The direction could then be segmented to apportion the ownership to what interested each network member, thus sharing leadership. However, they reported that they had encountered an immediate difficulty with their intention to define the purpose of school networks and their role. Ned exemplified the struggle that network principals experienced with members in their intention to facilitate the construction of network direction. On this, he commented:

They [network members] felt a bit confronted in the first place. They wanted a bit of a framework. My intention was to have a set of purpose statements that would drive all our planning and allocation of funds. I am having trouble
getting a full engagement from all 18 schools. To some extent, the visioning and mission statements worked. We did a lot of visioning in October, and there wasn’t the buy-in that I expected. (Ned, August 2012)

Indeed, nine network principals claimed it usually took at least two meetings to achieve clarity in constructing a resonant direction. They indicated that members understood the facilitation processes, which yielded broad declarations of intent.

Network principals also claimed that members readily agreed with the resultant statements and their role in sharing leadership, yet when they attempted to create specific actions regarding how these broad statements might be implemented, they observed that network members were less forthcoming. Furthermore, network principals reported that they had difficulty securing members’ understanding that their role was in facilitating decision-making, rather than directly leading the direction of school networks. They indicated that their intention was to adopt the facilitation tactic of convening meetings and waiting for members to contribute to network agency.

Jim alluded to the struggle of network principals to engage members in acknowledging their role in network development in initial meetings when he commented:

We were drifting. There was no response. People came along to the meeting expecting to be told what to do. I wasn’t telling anyone what to do. I refuse to do that. We virtually were drifting. (John, June 2012)

Despite network principals reporting that their intention was to construct a resonant network direction, they conveyed that the “drift” in the initial focus of network meetings resulted in feeling a level of frustration. They argued that their feelings of frustration had been the result of two factors. First, in early network conversations, network principals discerned that members were cynical towards the notion of school networks as being the prime support mechanism for schools. Secondly, network principals indicated that they concluded that some members did not understand the relevance of networks to their own school’s direction. Brian illustrated the network principals’ disappointment at the non-engagement of
members when discussing his intention to negotiate a resonant network direction. He explained that as follows:

I only wanted to be part of a group that could see that their purpose was my purpose. A common purpose made sense to me. We had some rip-roaring discussions about our common purpose. If you do not have a common purpose, then your group is going to dissipate and fall apart. (Brian, August 2012)

Similar to many network principals, Brian portrayed his intention as wanting to achieve a clear statement of direction for his network. He planned to be assertive in arguing for a cohesive network direction in initial forums. This led to his nomination as a network principal. At the end of facilitating the negotiations with members in initial meetings, Brian believed he had steered the network to agree to eight purpose statements that were embedded in a school network plan. He reported that his intention was that the purpose statements would cover the needs of members, his own school’s needs and the WA Department of Education. However, Brian was the only network principal who intended that network purpose statements, and the resultant plan, should closely relate to the Department of Education’s expectations.

Network principals conveyed that they intended to generate a clear verbal or written statement that focused networks on developing the capacity of school staff to work together. Adam explained that the primary responsibility for student outcomes rested with the principals when he remarked:

As a school principal, you are trying to think about what is best for kids in your school. As a network principal, you think about how we are going to work as a team and get schools to work together. That is a big difference. A school principal is wearing a different hat, and I think the job of the network principal is about staff. It is not about getting kids working together. It is about how we can get everyone to work together. It is about getting staff to work together. School principals should focus on kids. (Adam, September 2012)

Eight network principals reported that their intention was to facilitate the construction of a simple documented plan. For example, Sue expressed her goal to create a strategic plan to influence the direction of her network, as illustrated in the
following description of what immediately followed her intention to lead her network:

I am happy to do it [the role] for the first 12 months just to get the strategic plan all in place. In a principal meeting, there was a lot of talking and not a lot of action. I remember getting a big planning sheet and saying, “Let’s go through and get this on paper.” I was at that point that I was happy to do this just to get it established. I wanted to see teaching and learning as a focus. (Sue, September 2012)

Many network principals expressed their frustration at the regular floundering of initial meetings when creating a network direction because of indeterminate meeting purposes and the reluctance to engage on the part of network members. As a result, network principals believed that their tenure might be short-lived and would concentrate on guiding their network in the right direction. In engaging members, another intention was the sharing and optimising of resources. Rob indicated that if his network focused on developing cost-effective resourcing, this might resonate with members. On this, he stated:

The combining of the resources and using that power of the network. We went along and looked for things that you cannot deliver on your own, but you can benefit by as a group. (Rob, May 2012)

Some network principals discussed their intention of developing purchasing agreements for such resources as computer equipment across their network as a component of their role. However, their second intention was their goal to focus their role on facilitating the provision of professional learning. They considered that the tailoring of professional learning might strengthen the possibility of developing a sense of member ownership of networks and build the capacity of staff.

6.2.2 Negotiating the Focus of Professional Learning

Many network principals perceived that their intention was to negotiate the focus of their network to generate professional learning that met the needs of network members, particularly concerning the implementation of the national Australian Curriculum. Their intention was to engage members in the negotiation of the format and content of professional learning to generate member ownership of
network activities. Phase one of the national *Australian Curriculum* contained the key learning goals for English, mathematics, science, and history learning areas across primary and secondary schools. Supporting this intention was the use of a seeding grant supplied to school networks by the WA Department of Education, through the funding processes controlled by regional education directors.

Network principals argued that this method of multi-school curriculum change represented a significant shift in the responsibility of providing support for a systemic curriculum change. They reported that members welcomed their intention to organise general professional learning, yet this goal challenged network principals. Some network principals like Adam characterised the role of the network principal as curriculum problem-solvers who respond to the shift in the WA Department of Education’s approach to professional learning. He explained this situation as follows:

> For me, it is about having a vehicle to tackle problems. For example, if it’s *Australian Curriculum*, there are people working together on problems and helping one another. The outcomes are that they cannot go to the central office or the regional office because that won’t do anything, but I will go to someone else in the network. (Adam, September 2012)

Indeed, network principals explained that their intention was to link the work of secondary and primary schools through the national *Australian Curriculum*-focused conferences, as an efficient way of meeting the diverse needs of schools.

Network principals also argued that their role in achieving efficiency in delivering professional learning meant creating various conference plenary sessions that would cater for a comprehensive range of staff members’ interests. Furthermore, on planning to accommodate a broad range of school interests, they stated they believed that this might bring primary and secondary teachers together to address the specific learning area needs of teachers. Despite network principals developing this argument, they emphasised that they realised that they might well face the challenge of convincing all network members to engage in combined professional learning. For instance, Angela, a secondary-school based network principal, who was the strongest advocate of primary and secondary schools working together, noticed that the strong secondary school principal culture often highlighted differences in secondary and primary school education. As she explained below:
The *Australian Curriculum* is certainly a driver. I think, for me personally, it was the belief that I just cannot see and reason why we are not working all of us, as a K-12 environment. Because it is how we should be operating and this ridiculous nonsense that secondary principals go on with half the time, that’s bizarre. (Angela, May 2012)

Network principals attempted, therefore, to address the differences between secondary and primary education to create common interests. Luke, a secondary-school based network principal, who had also been a primary school principal, described his intention to facilitate the network’s national *Australian Curriculum* professional learning to develop stronger relationships and leadership in and between schools. However, in practice, he realised that network resources were limited. This, he claimed, affected his capacity to generate effectively member ownership of networks. He believed that he had modified his intention to focus his efforts on helping to build the capacity of primary school teachers in implementing the national *Australian Curriculum* because of the perceived lack of resources. He wryly described the difference in curriculum support between primary and secondary schools, when he stated:

> We took the money, and I thought that the senior high school would get very little out of this in terms of the *Australian Curriculum* development when you divide the money up in between who needs it. In general, primary schools get very, very little curriculum support. So effectively all the network money goes to the primary schools anyway. So for this new network my intention was to keep the collegiate links to the other primary schools and spend any money we got wisely in terms of up-skilling staff in the *Australian Curriculum* implementation. I have to make sure they do not go after the left-handed basket-weaving course. (Luke, June 2012)

Oliver’s comment also referred to the common network principal intention of utilising the implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum* to induce change in schools that catered for students with disabilities:

> The *Australian Curriculum* is one of the drivers. It was clear that the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum* was going to rest with us. We were finding that the capacity within our schools was diminishing. We don’t get a masters in special Ed. We usually get Mrs. Smith, who really likes working with kids who have special needs. (Oliver, August 2012)
Network principals reported that their intention was to organise three types of professional learning events in their role to cater for the needs of members’ schools, which might generate member ownership of networks. The first type was a network conference planned on a common student-free school development day. To cope with the demand for conference presenters, network principals described how they envisaged utilising the services of professional presenters and staff members from teacher development schools. They enticed classroom teachers within their network schools to deliver workshops with the promise that presenting workshops would develop their leadership skills. Only two network principals reported that their intention was to organise network workshops that followed on from conferences to sustain change that was of interest to teachers.

The second type of professional learning was organising ad hoc workshops based on the interests of network members. The third type entailed regular meetings of specialist network groups such as early childhood, music and English as a second language or dialect. These meetings were to be led by teacher-leaders or deputy principals. The intention of network principals in organising professional learning was based on the belief that teacher-led seminars were pragmatic in nature and would be focused, therefore, on incorporating new knowledge into classroom practices.

Attention will now be turned to the way in which network principals perceived their intention to create professional learning communities.

6.2.3 Forming Networks as Professional Learning Communities

Network principals claimed that one of their intentions was to form school networks as professional learning communities. There were three reported reasons for this intention, which are now described in turn. The first reason was to generate a cohesive community of members that generates ownership. They reasoned that a cohesive community would be supportive of the opportunity for all members to lead network projects that aligned with network direction. Four network principals referred to visiting well-organised professional learning communities in New South Wales. Rob explained his intention of creating a professional learning community
based on what he experienced when he visited the New South Wales networks by commenting as follows:

A couple of years ago, I was fortunate to join the Education District and go on a study tour to New South Wales to look at, what was known as professional learning communities, in other words the networks. We saw how powerful they could be, and these have been operating over six to eight years. Seeing how powerful they had been in terms of professional learning. There is power in and bringing that back to our network and basing (our work on) some of the models we had seen. (Rob, May 2012)

The second reason for forming school networks as professional learning communities was to foster the collaborative engagement of staff members from networked schools in improving the performance of students. This was an attempt at what Lortie (1975) described as ‘deprivising’ teaching. For instance, a former WA Department of Education senior officer and network principal conveyed that she believed that the Department of Education had intended that the concept of professional learning communities, as advocated by DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008), was to form the basis of school networks. DuFour, DuFour and Eaker’s (2008) work, based on school-based collaborative teamwork and interdependence, encouraged the timely response to evidential feedback on the performance of students that aimed at ensuring high levels of student learning.

While network principals described their intention to utilise the concept of professional learning communities, clarity in establishing a common definition and the use of this concept had been difficult to find. They also had difficulty in expressing how they intended to create opportunities for teachers to analyse and reflect on student performance over time. As such, no network principal discussed an intention to generate a joint analysis of student data across network member schools. Indeed, the intention to form school networks as professional learning communities that might engage the leadership of network members was aligned more with communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) rather than Harris and Jones’ (2010) research. This suggests that network members were more comfortable with developing tacit knowledge than in-depth analysis of student achievement. Only one network principal, Sue, described a concrete example of her intention to
influence the direction of her school network towards increasing student learning. She commented on her perspective of this as follows:

We have to provide a name of a person who was going to be the network principal. I said I am happy to do it for the first 12 months just to get the strategic plan all in place. Number one, it has to benefit my own students in my school but also the whole of this cluster [network], and then I am more than happy to do the work. It was to do with a primary academic class that we set up here for the network. (Sue, September 2012)

Network principals emphasised that their role and actions needed, first, to benefit their school and, secondly, the requirements of other members’ schools. Indeed, nearly all network principals commented that the impact of their intentions was primarily concerned with the building of the capacity, and the leadership, of teaching staff. Adam illustrated this network principals’ view in his comment below:

I think the network principal is about staff. It is not about getting kids working together. It is about getting staff to work together. It is not about principals, but about all staff. School principals should focus on kids. (Adam, September 2012)

The third reason to form professional learning communities conveyed by network principals was the desire to utilise their role to capitalise on prior initiatives that were led by network members. For example, some secondary schools offered students jointly-organised student courses. While network principals perceived that their intention was to construct professional learning communities in which network members led particular aspects, the organisation of cost-effective professional development appeared to be paramount.

6.2.4 Providing Cost-Effective Professional Learning

Network principals reported that their intention was to facilitate the provision of cost-effective professional learning that met the demands of members because it might encourage the feeling of member ownership of network direction. Cost-effective professional learning meant that organising these events is efficient in the work-effort for members and is low-cost. Network principals argued that the reduction of the WA Department of Education’s professional learning offerings and
mounting costs to schools had played a significant part in the shaping of their intentions. These offerings to schools and their leaders were coordinated and sometimes delivered by the Department of Education’s Institute for Professional Learning. Yet, network principals claimed that the user-pay system adopted by the Institute for Professional Learning had become increasingly expensive. They explained that the cost of teacher relief time from classroom duties added to the expense of the delivery of the Institute’s professional learning offerings. Unfortunately, greater cost meant that fewer teachers could be sent to seminars. The example that network principals emphasised was that the 2012 relief teacher rate, charged by the Department of Education to each school, was $525 per day, plus the cost of the nominated workshop. They considered that this has markedly increased in recent years. In comparison, one network principal reported that his intention was to design cost-effective professional development. That meant that he could offer $41.20 per person conference rate for each teacher on a common school development day (David, May 2012).

Network principals indicated that their intention to offer cost-effective professional learning depended on the negotiation of the school network’s use of student-free professional development days to create network conferences. It was planned that these conferences might develop links between schools and teacher networking. On this, David reasoned that:

I could see that in the past opportunities for professional learning offered from the district office was varied and frequent. Now it has become more semi-privatised and we pay an exorbitant amount of money. I saw this as a great opportunity to combine all our schools together and run professional learning, as we wanted to run a whole-day conference plus build small networks within our networks. (David, May 2012)

In conclusion, network principals perceived that their intention was to facilitate ownership, which it was hoped would lead to the sharing of network leadership with members. Within this aspect of generating member ownership of networks were four elements, namely, creating a resonant direction, negotiating the focus of professional learning, forming networks as professional learning communities, and providing cost-effective professional learning.
6.3 Locating Network Principal Leadership

Network principals perceived their intention to share network leadership would require them to locate their leadership specifically within networks. However, network principals claimed that they, as well as members, seemed confused about the leadership role of the network principal. Network principals emphasised that their intention was to encourage colleagues to lead network projects; however, they perceived that members expected them to take a leadership role in implementing professional learning activities.

In this connection, network principals claimed they faced a leadership paradox. They reported that their role required them to assert themselves to mobilise network members. On the other hand, they conveyed that if they employed a disproportionate amount of leadership assertiveness this might well foster a dependency on their leadership by members. They reported that their intention was that members would share network leadership. Two elements describe the way in which network principals perceived their intention to locate their leadership that addressed this leadership paradox. These elements relate to, first, ‘adopting the role of strategic facilitators’ and, secondly, ‘assuming the role of servant leaders’. These two elements are now examined in turn.

6.3.1 Adopting the Role of Strategic Facilitators

Network principals reported that their intention was to operate as strategic facilitators that shared the leadership of networks, rather than engaging in the direct leadership of networks. This type of non-hierarchical and fluid leadership could be viewed as being located in the interface of facilitation and leadership (Kubiak & Bertram, 2010). Strategic facilitation to network principals meant that they envisioned their role as working at a conceptual level, while negotiating with members, and facilitating the overall network strategy. They considered that a strategic facilitation role might include building reciprocal connections of interest and commonality between members. They intended that members might lead the
implementation of resultant projects generated by the intersection of these connections.

Network principals gave four reasons for their preference of being strategic facilitators in a collegiate networking culture. First, they reported that they understood that the WA Department of Education’s expectation was that network principals should support the needs of network members. Secondly, network principals cited that the Director General of the Department of Education had reinforced the facilitative role of network principals in a seminar (O’Neill, 2011). Thirdly, network principals were adamant that they did not want to increase their workload and responsibilities that a direct leadership approach would be likely to place on them, particularly as the role was supplementary to their school principal’s role. Fourthly, network principals indicated that they did not line manage principals, who were network members. For these four reasons they focused their intention on strategically facilitating networks and generating the shared leadership of networks.

To clarify what network principals understood by strategic facilitation and shared leadership, they compared the role of a network principal with that of a principal. Facilitating school network operations with members as colleagues was a familiar refrain in network principals’ stated intentions. As such, working with colleagues was the most significant defining difference between the role of the principal and that of the network principal. In defining these role differences, Jenny claimed that network principals worked at a higher conceptual level than did school principals. On this, she noted:

As the network principal, you are working at a higher strategic level all the time. You are not dealing with the minutiae of the principal’s job such as the trawling through your emails and answering them or dealing with a grumpy staff member, or a parent or a deputy. I think it might even be a good strategy to take the day a week and shut the door and say, “No, I am on the network principal day I am doing all the network stuff.” It is more of a facilitation role, I think. You are facilitating things for people in the network. I find that quite rewarding. It would be a good development for a principal to get away from the desk in the school and get some experience at almost like a CEO without the day-to-day drudgery of the principal’s job. (Jenny, July 2012)
Many network principals reported that their intention was to be strategic facilitators of school networks that might encourage shared leadership within school networks. This intention was more pro-active than the passive orientation of a servant leader.

### 6.3.2 Assuming the Role of Servant Leaders

Three network principals described their intention to adopt the role of ‘servant leaders’ and, therefore, to generate shared leadership with network members. This style of leadership emphasises a need to serve and lead by expressing humility, authenticity and interpersonal acceptance (van Dierendonck, 2011) and interdependence (Cox, Pearce, & Perry, 2003).

These network principals indicated that their intention was to adopt a flexible approach that provided support when members contributed and implemented their ideas. They hoped that the members might demonstrate enough ownership and excitement in implementing their ideas. Indicative of this servant leadership approach were two network principals’ comments. Marilyn’s perspective of servant leadership focused on harnessing network member expertise and then encouraging them to lead network projects. Jim’s view of servant leadership concerned a form of influence, rather than positional power. They both explained their interpretation of a servant leadership approach by commenting as follows:

I likened it [the role] to servant leadership. So, I really was keen about servant leadership. This is where I listen to what my colleagues want and try to help them. The educational minds in the 18 schools are around me. How I help those minds to really contribute with me as part of that. That’s what we have got to do. (Marilyn, May 2012)

We [teachers] have always been told to listen to the principal. You don’t get that with the network principal’s role. You get the courtesy of listening because we are polite people, but you do not get the authority with the badge because it is a brand-new badge with nothing behind it. You do not have that implied authority. I reckon it is more of a servant, a support role for colleagues who, by and large, want similar things. That’s taking into account buy-in and buy-out idea. (Jim, June 2012)
The network principals, who intended to exercise the role of a ‘servant leader’, confided that they planned to acquiesce to the ideas of the network members. According to this dynamic, network principals planned to listen to members and offer their support after meetings. Marilyn also described her intention to structure her network communication system, which mainly relied on a closed website because she believed that members’ ideas should flourish. She hoped that generating a sense of obligation might demonstrate her support of member leadership.

In proposing to generate network member ownership of networks and locating their leadership, network principals intended to foster the sharing of leadership by structuring network processes.

6.4 Fostering Shared Leadership by Structuring Network Processes

Network principals claimed that their intention was to foster shared leadership by structuring processes that would promote a habitual pattern of implementing decisions. They perceived the way in which they promoted shared leadership was by the three elements. These elements of ‘designing processes to distribute leadership through meetings’, ‘establishing the role of executive officers’ and ‘offering network funds to support members’ ideas’ are now discussed in turn.

6.4.1 Designing Processes to Distribute Leadership through Meetings

Network principals argued that their intention was to distribute leadership through network meetings. They planned that the first leadership level of school networks would be an overarching leadership or governance committee. A committee usually included principals and an executive officer. A second leadership level of network committees might also include staff members from schools, other than school principals.

Illustrative of a plan to distribute leadership through a network leadership group was the direction of Sue. Sue’s comment revealed her intentions to distribute
leadership through the structuring of the organisation of her network. On this, she commented:

The leadership group is the eight principals plus a representative from each of the schools, for example, a deputy or teacher. There are 16 people. I just make sure that everyone has an opportunity to have input into the meetings. All decisions are brought back to the leadership group. (Sue, September 2012)

The main purpose of engaging members in decision-making processes was to blend their intentions with network principals’ interpretation of the direction of the school network. They indicated that their intention was that members should lead resultant projects by either involving themselves in a process of decision-making or by leading projects. Furthermore, bringing back any decision formulated during the development of the project to the leadership group was a means of network principals validating ideas and creating a degree of obligation in implementing the idea.

An example of such a two-tiered network was Richard’s network where his intention was to construct a highly structured school network that distributed decision-making. He explained that his vision of a network leadership structure would encourage network members to stay true to the direction of the network. The following comment is indicative of other network principals’ perspectives on two tiered networks:

We needed structure and organisation for the school network. We needed a system. A structure was set up to fit with the strategic plan. Let’s have committees for each of the strategic agendas. You come to the governance meeting to report what you’ve decided and recommended. The governance team says yeah or nay, no go back and think about it. It is like a district office where you have committee structures. There are four teams: governance; marketing and partnerships; teaching and learning; and professional learning. (Richard, October 2012)

Richard asserted that his intention was to create shared leadership and to do this one avenue was to maintain tight management processes. He claimed that structuring committees might possibly lead to members implementing aspects of network programs. Richard also indicated that he had intended to supervise the processes of sub-committees to ensure consensus was reached among members. He
described his intention of helping network members to remain focused on sharing leadership by the following comment:

I was able to assist each one of the principals who chaired one of the teams. We set up terms and conditions. So they know what to achieve, nominate, elect; they know how to make decisions, which focus on consensus. (Richard, October 2012)

As with other network principals, Richard reported that his goal was to establish layers of leadership that included the documentation of decisions so that action followed network decisions.

While leadership and management processes were important when networks had two tiers, 16 other network principals reported that they proposed to construct a flat, or one-tiered, network structure. One of those network principals was Marilyn, who remarked that her intention was for her school network’s structure to remain flexible to encourage the development of network member leadership. As she explained:

The structure of the network needs to remain fluid. We need to rely on innovative ways and technology. That is what I believe. I don’t want to create any structure. I want to keep it as fluid and flexible as I can. (Marilyn, May 2012)

Another example of planning to distribute leadership was the adoption of a portfolio approach in which members led a group of programs, such as in a curriculum portfolio. A characteristic example of this intention was Angela’s portfolio approach in which she described a plan to distribute leadership in the following comment:

We set directions for eight initiatives and then the deputies have portfolios to forward that initiative. In some instances, they have delegated roles out to teachers. (Angela, May 2012)

Sarah indicated that her intention had been to utilise a ‘Board’ structure for encouraging the sharing of leadership to network members. She explained how she would encourage network members by the following comment:
I wanted to encourage the participation of my colleagues to take parts of the agenda they were interested in. So if someone volunteers to be involved in the planning or the fine-tuning, then fantastic. There are a number of projects that the network has allocated funds to. It is distributing the leadership in a very flattened structure. (Sarah, September 2012)

Network principals assumed that this type of leadership distribution might enable members to share project leadership. However, only one network principal indicated an intention to design a process in which she and members would evaluate the progress of the leadership of network projects. It could be argued that this evaluation was at the lowest level of four levels within Guskey’s (2000, 2002) model of evaluating professional learning programs. This is by means of understanding participants’ reaction that assesses their level of satisfaction with professional learning.

Some network principals conveyed that their intention was to distribute leadership to network members other than school principals. Three network principals reported that teachers should be involved with leading meetings of network groups of teachers. Indicative of these intentions was the example given by Ned, who served the needs of network group leaders according to his explanation below:

My school hosted a network meeting of the early childhood team. They are focused on developing their own agenda and leading their own professional learning. Now their leader is funnelling [information] back to me. (Ned, August 2012)

Network principals perceived their intention was to distribute leadership through network meetings. Sharing leadership in these forums was believed to encourage network members to show initiative in leading the implementation of ideas. They also planned to employ network executive officers to implement network projects and to deal with the management of network activity.

6.4.2 Establishing the Role of Network Executive Officers

Nine network principals described their intentions to establish the role of executive officers to foster the sharing of leadership and to manage the
organisational aspects of school networks. Indeed, four of these network principals claimed their intention was to demand the employment of an executive officer as a condition of adopting the role of the network principal. They proposed the employment of executive officers because they wanted their role to focus on the strategic facilitation of school networks. Consequently, the executive officer’s role would be to manage the organisational aspects of implementing school network business.

As an illustration of the role of the executive officer, Sue described the process of, and reasons, for her intention to create an executive officer position. She commented on this as follows:

We were going to appoint a network coordinator, a teacher, which had to be advertised. It went to a secondary teacher, and he is the one who does the legwork. Each of the primary schools put in $4,000, and high schools put in a little bit more. It was my intention to have that, definitely. As a network principal, I do not have the time to implement the strategies that we wanted. His role is to coordinate all the schools. The coordinator constructs the [school network] agenda. (Sue September 2012)

Network principals reported that giving executive officers the role of managing aspects of network operations was often linked to the creation of large-scale network events. David’s comment exemplified this intention:

I was happy to be a network principal, as we had an executive officer who was a keen deputy, had a background in curriculum and a background in leading this stuff. Between the two of us, he can do the (conference) day; I could do the overview stuff. We could meet and chat. He does most of the legwork, and it would not burn me out by trying to get it done. Having that network executive officer has worked well for us, as we have just run a conference with 500 people. (David, May 2012)

Network principals also indicated that their intention was to play a significant role in generating the executive officers’ role description. In comparing the resultant five executive officer job descriptions, one description contained 13 management outcomes, and the smallest number of outcomes was three. They observed that job advertisements received between zero and two applicants. As a result, they noticed the inverse correlation of applicants to the number and complexity of the described outcomes attributed to the role of executive officers. They assessed that the low
number of applicants for the position of executive officers caused them to reconsider the complexity of the role of the network principal.

The common intention conveyed by network principals for employing an executive officer was to avoid “burning out”. They assumed that their role in leading the facilitation of school networks might be time-consuming, particularly if they were to go beyond the basic role of facilitating professional learning. For instance, Donna’s network included 17 schools and did not initially have an executive officer. She commented as follows:

I do that [the role] on Sundays. I give my school officer an extra day every month to just to get me over the hurdle. Our resourcing has always been about teachers, but in my network’s defence, they have said the money is in your school, and you spend it as you see fit. I have to think about that seriously, so it is not Sunday. (Donna, May 2012)

The intention of network principals that they need not to overwhelm themselves with their role was hardly surprising as all network principals participating in this study were practising principals. Consequently, these network principals reported that their intention to chair network leadership meetings aimed at employing strategic facilitation while executive officers led processes and manage network activities. Brian clarified his intention towards the role of the network principals in network meetings in the following explanation:

All I do is chair the meetings. The important person now in terms of making it actually happen is the executive officer. Their job is to work with the teacher network coordinators. And that is evolving. We are about 18 months before we have this down pat. (Brian, August 2012)

Network principals held that it was their intention for executive officers to assume a powerful role in managing school network change that seemed, at times, to be bordering on leading. Luke explained how he planned to use the expertise of an executive officer by the following observation:

I have used our network executive officer as the triage. If someone says, “I’ve got a good way to assess year threes on such,” it is minuted. The network officer will now nag that person to get a copy. The network officer will then distribute that to all the schools. We have moved from ad hoc to more a formalised sharing of information. (Luke, June 2012)
Network principals perceived that their main intention was to promote shared leadership by managing network processes, particularly by establishing the role of the executive officer. They reported that their intention in employing executive officers was to allocate their time to strategic facilitation and to negotiate with members while executive officers managed network operations. Another support mechanism encouraging the sharing of leadership was planning to offer network funds to entice members to lead projects, which is discussed in the following section.

6.4.3 Offering Network Funds to Support Members’ Ideas

Five network principals conveyed that their intention was to fund network members’ ideas and delay their leadership activity so that members might choose to share in the leadership of networks. They indicated that their intention was to rely on individual members who might show sporadic interest in leading a particular topic at a time that suited them. However, Heather indicated that her intention to wait resulted in a relatively inactive school network in early meetings. As she commented:

We were at rock bottom. Now we are sharing ideas. I am sometimes surprised that I see another network group pop up and I fund those groups. They just feedback to the network. We are going only to work on a few areas and maintain what we have got. (Heather, December 2012)

Heather’s comment was indicative of the view of network principals who reported that there seemed to be little appetite for members to adopt leading projects, so network principals attempted to offer inducements in the form of network funds.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the second proposition of the study being reported here that network principals perceived their prime intention was to share the leadership of school networks with members. Their intention was not to engage in the direct leadership of school networks. However, they observed that members initially seemed to attribute network leadership to their role. Three aspects of the
second proposition include generating member ownership of networks, locating network principal leadership, and fostering shared leadership by structuring processes.

The next chapter now introduces the third proposition of the study reported here that network principals perceived they deliberately employed their influence to mobilise network members.
CHAPTER SEVEN: INFLUENCE AND STRATEGIES

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has described the second proposition generated by the findings of this study, namely that network principals perceived that their prime intention was to share network leadership with members. This chapter now presents the third proposition, namely, that network principals perceived they deliberately employed their influence to mobilise network members. The following four groups of strategies supported this influence.

1. The priming group of strategies.
2. The locating group of strategies.
3. The shaping group of strategies.
4. The adapting group of strategies.

The deliberate employment of influence and the four supporting groups of strategies were the response of network principals to mobilising network members, yet not striving to be perceived as the direct leaders of networks. Network principals focused on developing their influence of network members to cater for gratifying both needs. Figure 13 summarises the deliberate employment of influence and the four groups of strategies that network principals applied to networks.
The way in which network principals deliberately employed their influence to mobilise network members and the four groups of strategies will now be explicated.

### 7.2 Deliberately Employing Influence

The deliberate employment of influence was a particular form of network leadership in accord with Pierro et al., (2012) “soft” social power bases founded on a leader-to-leader configuration in a collegiate environment. At the core of this configuration was the degree of goodwill exhibited by network members towards the influence employed by network principals. The level of member goodwill was an acknowledgement of network principals’ expert, legitimate, referent and informational power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965, 2008). Additionally, the legitimate power invested in the role can be viewed as a distinct form of positional power as it was founded on the basis that few principals had volunteered to adopt the role. Network principals deliberately employed their influence as a form of
understated leadership because they did not expect to be identified as the direct leaders of networks. Rather they shaped networks in an attempt to share network leadership with members. The application of the four groups of network principal strategies is now discussed in more detail.

**7.3 Priming Group of Strategies**

This group of strategies is entitled the ‘priming group of strategies’ because it relates to the application of two strategies at the commencement phase of networks that primed potential members to meet as a collective. Jenny’s (July 2012) comment, “It wasn’t my intention to get myself elected”, characterised the general viewpoint of network principals. Yet, by applying the priming group of strategies they unintentionally positioned themselves as network principal aspirants. There are two strategies in the priming group of strategies. These strategies are ‘initiating inaugural meetings’ and ‘facilitating the foundation meetings’ which are now described.

**7.3.1 Initiating Inaugural Meetings**

The first two meetings of networks have been labelled the ‘inaugural meetings’ because they represent the way in which network principals gathered potential network members. Network principals reported that their reason for initiating network meetings was to influence the direction of school networks. To network principals, initiating the first meeting meant that they identify prospective members who might desire to meet as a network group and request that they attend a meeting. A component of the initiating meetings strategy was similar to the so-called courting strategies conceptualised by Kubiak and Bertram (2010) in which potential network partners were approached. The initial meetings of school networks discussed the rationale for principals to convene as a network. However, many network principals claimed that they, at this stage, were not actively seeking their nomination for the role. Indeed, out of the 20 network principals participating in the study reported here, only two claimed that they openly broadcast to members that they coveted the role of the network principal.
John’s experience was representative of the view of network principals at the beginning phase of establishing a network. He explained his strategy of gathering prospective network members in the following comment:

I sent out an email to everybody in what was originally our cell last year. I then thought that rather than having a few schools, it might be opportune to have a larger number. So I started emailing everybody because I did not get too many replies. Then I rang principals. There were not a lot of discussions backwards and forwards. When it got to crunch time, we had a couple of meetings. (John, June 2012).

John had gauged prospective member interest in forming a network by the number of principals who had responded to his emails, and he observed that he felt frustrated at the lack of response. This reaction of principals in not returning emails indicated that potential members did not appreciate the role of network principal and school networks. His frustration prompted him to adapt his tactics and he moved from impersonal emails to personally negotiating with prospective network members on the telephone. He reported that during this process no other member indicated a desire to adopt the role of the network principal. Nonetheless, members persuaded him to accept the role, citing that he had initiated the first network meeting.

Overall, the first strategy in the priming group represents the way in which network principals perceived they initiated the inaugural network meetings. The strategy of starting the first meeting of networks had mainly been an effort to obtain funding and to satisfy regional office demands for names of network contacts.

7.3.2 Facilitating the Foundation Meetings

The gatherings of network members following the inaugural meetings have been labelled the ‘foundation meetings’ because they represent the way in which network principals began the process of generating resonant school network direction intentions with network members. Network principals perceived they had applied two methods of facilitating the foundation network meetings in which they guided broad discussions aimed at engaging the interests of members. Both methods involved external facilitators, yet their choice of process was an indication of the
confidence network principals had in facilitating networks. These methods are now discussed.

Sue’s approach exemplified the first method. She remarked that she felt confident that the initial discussions would be amicable, so she facilitated the first meeting that created a general focus of what network members wanted for their network. She then employed a South Metropolitan Education Region Office facilitator to hone the school network direction. She explained this process in the following comment:

I did facilitate the first one [meeting]. Then Helen from South Metropolitan Region did a planning day with us. Then she took us through our draft strategic plan. I wanted her to do that because we needed a focus. I wanted everybody’s desires, not just those who had been east [to New South Wales].
(Sue, September 2012)

The second method of facilitating foundation meetings, indicated by network principals, involved in the first instance the contracting of an external facilitator. Marilyn’s approach was an example of this method. Marilyn indicated that she had contracted an external facilitator as she anticipated the possibility of “difficult conversations” arising that concern network direction; she foresaw that only a few members were convinced of the value of the school network to their school. She commented on this as follows:

I was the person right at the beginning who said, “We do not know what this is about. Let’s use a process to actually unpack what we are comprised of.” We brought appreciative enquiry facilitators in. I brought all the principals and deputies in. There was quite a bit of negativity there that day. She [the facilitator] pushed them over the hump. We ended up with our beliefs.
(Marilyn, May 2012)

At the end of the facilitation process, she had succeeded in generating a set of tentative network belief statements.

In sum, the second strategy in the priming group represents the way in which network principals perceived that they facilitated the foundational network meetings. Confident network principals used the first method. It involved facilitating the initial meeting and then employing an external facilitator. The second method of
employing a facilitator at the outset was applied on the occasions when some network principals perceived the likelihood of discord between network members.

### 7.4 Locating Group of Strategies

The next group of network principal strategies has been labelled the ‘locating group of strategies’ because they represent the way in which network principals perceived they located their role of leadership in networks. This group includes the two strategies of ‘conceptualising an appropriate leadership role’ and ‘transforming the role to deliberately employing their influence’. This transformation refers to the way in which network principals perceived that they interpreted members’ response to their employment of influence. These two strategies are now examined.

#### 7.4.1 Conceptualising an Appropriate Leadership Role

Network principals were tentative in describing their role as one of direct leadership despite claiming that member colleagues attributed the leadership of networks to them. In the strategy of conceptualising an appropriate leadership role, they formed an ‘educated guess’ as to what style would conceivably engage the members. It may be contended that the act of approximating a particular leadership approach employed by network principals was an attempt at what Huxham and Vangen (2005) have argued is nurturing connections that encourage members to view network principals as leaders who are not in charge.

Network principals reported that their initial attempt at employing their influence aligned with that of their school leadership role, yet they also knew that this approach might not be appropriate because of the different context of networks. They offered four reasons for their tentativeness in forming a leadership approach. The first reason relates to their perspective that being ‘the leader’ might require them to be accountable for network outcomes, a type of accountability that they did not want to assume. Secondly, they argued that they were working with colleagues without reference to a form positional power. Indeed, the locus of decision-making power for the role was located within the strength of the social influence founded on what leadership value they could offer to the network. Thirdly, network principals
considered that student learning within their schools was their first allegiance and, consequently, should be the priority of their efforts. Fourthly, network principals argued that members had expressed that the potential usefulness of school networks for their schools would be minimal, so the role of the network principal was not highly valued.

Some network principals followed through on their intention to employ a servant leadership approach (van Dierendonck, 2011) in the process of conceptualising the extent of their influence. However, these network principals explained that in attempting to meet the individual needs of members, the cohesiveness of network direction became elusive. They expressed frustration as they also noted that members still relied on their leadership to implement projects. This reduced the effectiveness of their servant leadership approach. Other network principals claimed they initially adopted a type of discussion-based approach, which was similar to the WA Department of Education’s “oiling the wheels” metaphor. According to the interpretation of network principals, this figurative language described the negotiation process at the intersection of their own and members’ expectations, powered by the facilitation of network principals. Jim illustrated this approach by commenting on his perspective on the role in establishing connections within his network. His comment on this is as follows:

It is the engineering, the oiling of the wheels. It is about noticing the connections and promoting those connections as they come up. It means negotiating with principals. One of our participants is an ed. support principal [which caters for students with disabilities] in the high school. By having that feeling of we are all looking to share she offered some information about education support and I can help [her as a network principal]. (Jim, June 2012)

As Jim attempted to find an effective approach to influence his network, he indicated that he had negotiated with members to reveal issues that schools could address together. He reported that the progress towards a network direction had been slow as he waited for members to initiate projects based on addressing common issues. The “oiling the wheels” metaphor was being applied diligently; however, network members were not willing to proffer any network ideas to be
lubricated. Many network principals claimed that members understood that issues could be addressed by collaboration within networks, yet they did not often volunteer to share their practices because there was a lack of practicable reasons to reciprocate.

Jim also observed that he favoured the same low-key leadership approach that he employed to develop the interests of staff in his school. However, he confided that he did not enjoy the same positional authority in his network that he did in his school. This was in accord with Raven’s (1965) definition of legitimate power.

Brian’s comment illustrated how network principals perceived their relationship with members in comparison to their role as principals. He commented on this matter in the following way:

There is a difference, and that is about the style of leadership [that] has to be changed slightly because you are actually working with your colleagues. You need them to buy-in when there is not any real imperative, particularly for IPS [independent public school] principals. You hear lots about leadership styles. My view of it is that you really actually have to understand the qualities of leaders. (Brian, August 2012)

Sue’s comment, however, emphasised that similar management techniques used by a network principal can correspond to that of a principal. On this, she remarked:

The similarities are implementing a plan, building relationships, promoting a community rather than a school, [and] ensuring that we stay true to the plan. It is the same process but in a very different space. You need to be easy going and flexible. (Sue, September 2012)

She acknowledged, therefore, that the context of networks occupied a “different space” and required network principals to be more circumspect in a leadership effort to accommodate the needs of network members. Indeed, the power of the influence of network principals related to the employment of social influence on members, rather than on positional power.

The first strategy in the locating group of strategies represents the way in which network principals perceived they had estimated an appropriate leadership
approach to influence members. This was significantly affected by their view that they were working with their colleagues, in an equitable relationship and, consequently, that they should employ their power differently from what they did as a principal. The evolution of this initial understanding from an ‘oiling the wheels’ network facilitation role to a more assertive role will now be examined.

7.4.2 Transforming the Role to Deliberately Employing Influence

Network principals often described a process of changing their role of facilitation to a role of steering or influencing members. The strategy of transforming the role was created at the point at which network principals became aware that their intentions towards the role did not meet the reality of sharing the leadership of networks with network members. They realised that they had become frustrated at the procrastination of members and at that point they reported that they consciously turned from conceptualising an appropriate leadership approach towards forming a distinctive approach based on increasing their influence. Indeed, the ‘oiling the wheels’ metaphor began to seem indecisive and ineffectual to network principals. In this regard, McGuire and Agranoff (2007) have noted that network leadership is distinctive in being a type of equitable leadership that is distributed or involves network members. Yet, it seems that network principals began to re-interpret their initial conceptualisation of the role in favour of being more assertive in their role.

The nature of the deliberate employment of influence was important to network principals. In relation to this sort of experience, Huxham and Vangen (2000) have noted that the single-mindedness of leaders appears to be pivotal to collaborative success. The degree to which network principals assumed greater leadership determination related to the extent of their frustration at the indecision of members. Network principals also wanted to be viewed as being credible and authoritative in the eyes of members.

Richard, who described the evolution of his role as a more practical self-assured approach, offered a representation of the thoughtful transformation to the deliberate employment of influence in the following way:
I think the role has moved from facilitation to leadership because we did not know where we were going. There was a need to have some direction and run a vision-setting process. Leadership has come through setting up the decision-making structure. That has been a challenge to keep running and develop. It has been a bit of guess work. (Richard, October 2012)

Richard went onto claim that his frustration was alleviated because members responded more positively to him in becoming increasingly assertive in indicating what would be effective. This helped to generate a strategic network outlook that focused on developing network programs.

Another network principal, David, favoured an authoritative leadership approach that encouraged members to stay true to the negotiated direction. He wanted member engagement, but focused on a more certain course. He commented on his approach as follows:

Principals are very good at their job, and they always have an opinion. We are going to have six different opinions. You want your network principal to say this is the line that we are following. Yeah, thanks for your opinion, but we are going down this track. The executive officer, you need a really strong person, who is competent. (David, May 2012)

Some network principals reported they were more circumspect about changing their initially tentative approach to school networks. For example, Marilyn had established a steering committee to lead the implementation of network direction and distribute leadership within her large school network. She confided that in the initial stages of the development of her role, she had adopted a cautious approach and abided by what the members wanted, without overtly questioning how strategies could have an impact on the implementation of the network direction. Marilyn disclosed that one of the members had encouraged her to become more authoritative rather than waiting for members to engage in network activities after a few meetings of experimenting with a servant leadership approach. She explained her leadership transition as follows:

Certainly, I’ve got colleagues who have taken on their role in the steering group as advisors. They even pushed me and Robert said, “Marilyn, you need to lead this thing.” I had to get over that hump. But until I had enough background, I wasn’t confident enough to. He gave me permission. He has been helping me. (Marilyn, May 2012)
The “hump” Marilyn alluded to was her lack of confidence in being among those she believed constituted a powerful group of school principals. Her lack of certainty was also based on being faithful to the ‘oiling the wheels’ approach and she felt intimidated by some of the members’ negative responses to the value of school networks. Marilyn expressed that she had developed more clarity around the role because she began to feel greater assurance when she cultivated a more assertive approach.

Richard’s thinking exemplified the movement to a deliberate influence-based approach. He illustrated the point in which he developed a more authoritative approach over time, in the following comment:

I have moved along that continuum of not being sure of being a leader. I was not given any advice. I was not given any at all. Now I have this history and knowledge. I can now handle any problem that may come up. I know the people. I know the context of the schools. I lead the network now (Richard, October 2012)

In another example, Eileen suggested that her role had initially reinforced service to network members. Over time, however, Eileen reported that she became a more assertive leader, where she determined that the situation or circumstance warranted a more authoritative leadership approach. On this she commented:

I see my role as a network principal and principal as one of service, not of position, but the position comes in when it hits the fan. [As a network principal . . .] you have to put a leadership hat on as “I am the leader” when you have to. For example, education support is lacking in the area. We got a consortium of non-public schools I pulled them all in and got the regional office project people to come in. We co-wrote a paper to go to [corporate executive]. You stand, and you lead that. (Eileen, November 2012)

Network principals selected a deliberate employment of influence as it enabled member freedom and autonomy, yet it was also complex and fickle. The approach depended on the skill of network principals in employing their power and the response of network members. The way in which they deployed their influence was aligned with the form of four types of power: legitimate, expert, information and referent power (French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1965). Legitimate power refers to the social norms where a person has a superior position in a formal or informal structure.
Indeed, in terms of the influence of the role, there was a particular form of legitimate power. Expert power refers to the power derived from managing and administering information, knowledge and expertise. Informational power refers to the power derived from persuading members and referent power refers to network members’ identification with network principals. These forms of social power and representative quotes regarding network principals are presented within Table 4. The perspectives of network principals in group interviews were further investigated in individual interviews.
### Table 4: Network Principal Perspectives of their Influence - Representative Quotations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North Metropolitan Focus Group interviews</th>
<th>North Metropolitan Individual interviews</th>
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| I talked about some models and shared the models that I have seen. Taking half a day talking about what I had seen and sharing those ideas. (Rob, May 2012). **Expert power**

To persuade principals there were a thousand emails that just said this has been a majority decision. So we moved a small group, and the rest kind of came along because they thought that we best know what to do. (Donna, May 2012) **Informational power**

For me, it is the K-12 agenda, which is driving it and the *Australian Curriculum*. We had funding for *Australian Curriculum*. And again, I probably get about 95% of my kids from the three feeder schools. (Angela, May 2012). **Referent power**

| I worked with IPL (Institute for Professional Learning). I looked at examples of best practice. I researched what was happening around the world. I like the idea of a professional learning community. I was dissatisfied with my network and when I presented information they said, “Do it”. (David May 2012) **Expert power**

They will give me feedback. They will say shut up. You have to form relationships with them. It has taken them a year to understand where I am coming from. (Eileen, November 2012) **Informational power**

I have to rely heavily on influence and motivation through meetings by persuading them to do year 6 to 8 transition. I hope that they will return to their site and put enough energy into the agreed outcome. (Luke, June 2012) **Informational power**

I got a contacts list of all the principals and now deputies so that not everything was going through the principals. The next stage is knocking on the principal’s door saying that I want to do this. (Marilyn, May 2012) **Informational power**

I have found that there were some agitators, particularly secondary principals, just to get their cut of the network money per capita and use that in their clusters. I reversed that decision as I persuaded them that one school would take a significant amount of funding. (Jenny, July 2012) **Informational power**

| | |
We have to move from this collegiate model to a business model. I chair meetings very tightly. They need to be focused and specific outcomes and actions listed, particularly linking primary and secondary. It is the executive officer ringing up principals and nags them to follow through. (Luke, June 2012) **Legitimate power**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>South Metropolitan Focus Group interviews</th>
<th>South Metropolitan Individual interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The secondary [schools] in particular said, “Where is our share?” “Well, you don’t get any”, I said. You have to buy in now. Because that way you will get your share of the dough. (Brian, August 2012) **Legitimate power**  
Before a meeting, I’ll make a few calls as that is just the game. It is about influencing and connecting people. I will have the simple telephone conversation to the ones that have the bigger picture thinking the ones you talk to because they have also got the influence. I bounce the ideas before I go in. Never go in unprepared. (Brian, August 2012). **Informational power**  
I am quite a strong person, I think. I have persisted. What I have thought about is where the common denominator is. How can I get them to buy in? (Barbara, August 2012) **Informational power** | There has always been that competing force between what I wanted and what the network wanted. I influenced people purely through regular chairing of the governance meetings. I use to let them ramble, and now it is very business-like as I [quickly] ask them what decision do they want to make. (Richard, October 2012) **Informational and legitimate power**  
The thing that I was most excited about was the literacy thing was great the cross-sectorial thing was great, a 6-8 transition. I put it on the table and I say that the final decision is [argued at] the network executive. (Adam, September 2012) **Expert and legitimate power**  
I am the initiator of cross-school moderation. I organise all of the school development day for that to take place. Sent out the tasks to do and the marking guides. There is a strategic plan that everyone has contributed to and I drive that. We have to go constantly back to it. (Sue, September 2012) **Expert power** |
Legitimate power, in regard to network principals’ influence, was mainly founded on the basis that few principals had coveted the role of the network principal. In persuading a principal to adopt the role, network members gave a degree of legitimacy to what network principals could achieve with the role. Keith’s comment represents how other network members persuaded principals to adopt the role of the network principal and the granting of legitimacy. On this matter, Keith remarked:

I inherited the role. It wasn’t a role I wanted. I turned up at my new school and the unwritten rule of the network was that whoever took over that school with the money became the network principal. I did not want the role. It just occurred. Having said that, I have not minded it, as they let me do the activities that I believe will benefit us. (Keith, May 2012)

Indeed, network principals reported that members often felt relieved because someone had volunteered to accept the role. Supporting the employment of this form of legitimate power was expert power that was represented by the application of network principals’ organisational skills and their regular reporting of the progress of the network activities to members. However, network principals claimed that they still relied on persuading members to engage in generating activities that aligned with the network direction.

In conclusion, transforming their facilitation role to the deliberate employment of influence depended on how network principals interpreted the responses of members to their initial leadership approach. The ‘tipping point’ at which network principals decided to transform their role tended to be the point at which they made a conscious decision to purposefully end their frustration at the lack of movement towards network direction or, to a lesser extent, because of prompting by others. Consequently, network principals reported they felt a growing confidence in their ability to employ their influence in meeting the needs of network members.
7.5 Shaping Group of Strategies

‘Shaping’ is an *in-vivo* code that refers to the way in which network principals used management strategies to structure their influence, so these have been categorised as the ‘shaping group of strategies’. Network principals perceived that it was their responsibility to align member suggestions with a resonant network direction. When creating a resonant direction and shaping the network, they reported that they considered the ‘bigger picture’, to be a more overall viewpoint, by judging what was acceptable to members and their interpretation of the direction of the WA Department of Education. Brian described his influence in shaping the network in commenting as follows:

You are actually shaping the network, which is a much higher order, a strategic bit of thinking and a way of operating rather than just oiling the wheels of collaboration. (Brian, August 2012)

Ned’s perspective exemplified the on-going nature of the process of shaping the network and it relates to his shaping of the role.

I feel that I am growing the network and redefining the role a bit further. But, I still see low levels of collaboration through the principalship and the leadership teams. It sometimes is more than that [facilitation], but I still see my core work is more than oiling the wheels. I’m shaping the role further within the Halifax Hill school network. (Ned, August 2012)

Indeed, network principals argued that as they shaped networks they were simultaneously transforming their role. The aim of employing this deliberate influence and the implementation of shaping strategies represents the way in which network principals guided the design of school networks.

How network principals designed school networks often corresponded with Hadfield and Chapman’s (2009) network design flow in which the establishment of effective networks contain firstly the purpose, secondly the agency, thirdly the processes and finally the structuring phases of establishing school networks. The four shaping strategies that network principals applied were ‘facilitating the generation of ideas’, ‘approaching planning’, ‘strengthening their influence by configuring networks’ and, finally, ‘structuring the sharing of leadership’. Each of
these four strategies within the shaping group of strategies will now be examined in turn.

7.5.1 Facilitating the Generation of Ideas

Network principals indicated that they had applied their facilitation skills to identify member ideas, usually by a process of brainstorming opinions within school network meetings. Aspects of this strategy were in accord with Hadfield and Chapman’s (2009) purpose phase. Network principals argued that they developed an understanding of member aspirations for collaboration that resulted in cautiously framing network direction. The process of forming connections between ideas then began. This progression of negotiations reportedly built trust as network principals had established common ground by lobbying members. They considered the generation of trust between members and in their influence to be an important component of their role.

Network principals argued that they acknowledged the needs of members and made links between those needs and their intentions throughout negotiations. Richard’s attempt to engage members in understanding their frame of reference was an illustration of generating meaningful ideas and trust between members. On this, he described how he built relationships to persuade members to generate ideas by commenting:

You’re thinking of the school nuances so that you can attract them to a certain project. There is more risk, and you have to spend more time massaging ideas and winning people over. Over time, it has become easier as people know me. There is trust and regard, as I have a track-record. (Richard, October 2012)

Richard also indicated that to strengthen trust in his capacity to influence the network, he had diplomatically reduced the impact of ideas that added little value to the network purpose. He claimed that his strengthening negotiation skills had ensured the backing of influential members to worthwhile ideas. He illustrated his use of negotiating tactics by which he had interpreted members’ response to change in the following comment:
I have found that they have to own the idea, especially the secondary [school members] as they have a lot of power. I listen to them and I try to see some merit if there is not. I will say, “I don’t think we are going to be able to do that because of...” I have found in the reverse way, if I have had an idea, I sound out someone in the network. It is about lobbying. (Richard, October 2012)

A negotiation tactic that network principals reported they favoured was according to ‘massaging ideas’, which meant they were able to finesse members’ ideas through a negotiation processes. Massaging ideas tended to occur in the network meetings or when negotiating possible modifications to ideas privately with members. This process appears to be similar to imposing an understanding of issues in ‘manipulating the agenda’ (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Another tactic that network principals reported they applied was ‘winning members over’. This tactic involved network principals employing such persuasive techniques, such as privately lobbying members to ensure the generation of ideas. This tactic resonates with playing politics in making things happen (Vangen & Huxham, 2003).

Facilitating the generation of ideas strategy represents the way in which network principals facilitated the generation of ideas aimed at encouraging ownership of the network direction. This strategy is comparable to the aligning and connecting strategies noted by Kubiak and Bertram (2010) in which leadership is used to entice ‘buy-in’ of members and to structure opportunities. While most of the work of network principals in this group of strategies seems also to be aligned with that of Vangen and Huxham’s (2003) ‘from the spirit of collaboration’ perspective, there were aspects of manipulating the agenda and employing the politics applied by network principals. Network principals considered that the building of trust within school networks was vital for generating member ideas. Yet, in playing the politics, network principals reported that they were able to win the backing of influential members to support worthwhile ideas and to modify or reject ideas that did not support network direction outside network meetings. After the articulation of network ideas, the role of the network principal was to facilitate the formation of a network plan.
7.5.2 Approaching Planning

The process of ‘approaching planning’ reported by network principals, involved synthesising the different opinions and solidifying options into points of action. Planning outlined network members expected involvement and the actions that would occur in collaborative endeavours. It may be argued that these actions are underpinned by the development of social capital generated by obligations and norms (Koput, 2010). In the study reported here, according to network principals, the resultant planning statements were often broad in intent. There were two distinct groups of network principals, representing the differing approaches to network planning, namely, the ‘straightforward’ and the ‘struggling’. They are now discussed in more detail.

The ‘straightforward’ group of six network principals reported that they found it relatively easy to create network plans since they had harvested the goodwill generated by their past alliances. For instance, in the case of Rob’s facilitation role, founded on his work in his former administrator’s group, he used the advent of networks as an opportunity to re-focus his group. He commented on this as follows:

We built a strategic plan for the next three years because I thought we were doing policy on the run at one stage. We know we are doing different things, but we are looking at the enhancement of staff knowledge and skills, interaction and support agencies, the participation of parents and the community. That was one that went down really well; that was really powerful with parents. (Rob, May 2012)

Rob’s role was to facilitate the re-structuring of a former planning document under the headings of collective knowledge building, enhanced curriculum provision, and leadership development. The plan outlined common professional learning days and network groups of specialists to support schools. The key planning difference between it and the eight other network plans was that the plan stated:

Schools are linking their School Plans to the [Allendale] Education Community Strategic Plan. (Allendale Education Community Strategic Plan 2012, p. 1)
Even within this group of network principals, some reported that their network plans typically explained network direction and associated professional learning activities, whereas Rob asserted that the trust that members afforded to him helped to implement links amongst network member schools.

Documented school network plans typically contained a purpose statement, goals and strategies, which network principals had claimed motivated members to achieve a network vision. The Cape David and Barossa School Networks’ broad vision statements offered an example of network directions:

The Cape David Learning Community is a dynamic learning community of schools reflecting educational excellence, collaboration, and enriched opportunities that lead to quality outcomes for a new generation. (Cape David Learning Community, 2012)

The Barossa School Network engages in the collective inquiry into current reality and best school practices. (Barossa School Network, 2011)

Some network principals declared that they had firm intentions towards their network’s direction and that these ideas came to fruition by manipulating the agenda. This approach compares with a strategy apparent in Vangen and Huxham’s research (2003). Oliver’s perspective represented this view when he commented in the following way:

If I were honest, I had the plan written down at the school, and amazingly, it [the plan] end up like that because we are about the same sort of thing. (Oliver, August 2012)

In all of these plans the role of the network principal features prominently in leading key processes and helping network members in the implementation of network ideas.

In contrast, the larger ‘struggling’ group of network principals laboured to formulate precise network direction statements with the members. They indicated that they eventually relied on verbal agreements and statements of intent from members. Consequently, there was little planning detail describing how members would collaborate to ensure the achievement of network direction, and network
principals indicated that there was a reliance on them to implement network agency.

In summary, the second strategy in the shaping group is represented by the role of the network principal in facilitating network planning. Planning enabled network principals to structure their influence and the activities of networks. The ‘straightforward’ group of network principals created network direction statements and more succinct written plans than did the ‘struggling’ group of network principals, who expected members’ commitment on verbal declarations of intent. Many planning documents and verbal agreements relied upon network principals or a few member activists to implement the agreed professional development activities. Network principals also perceived that their role was to reinforce their influence by configuring the organisation of school networks.

7.5.3 Strengthening Their Influence by Configuring Networks

Network principals acknowledged that they had applied a strategy to strengthen their influence through configuring network operations and meetings. Likewise, the work of Kubiak (2010) found that network leaders configured networks to create structured opportunities for teachers to work together to achieve the purpose of the network. Three tactics refer to the way in which network principals managerially reinforced their influence in networks. These tactics were first, the structuring of decision-making, secondly, the monitoring of decision-making and, thirdly, creating productive meeting agendas. These three tactics of generating network principal influence are now examined.

The first tactic reported by network principals was structuring of school network decision-making processes. Network principals explained that facilitating the organisation of networks had encouraged the implementation of network activities. Richard’s network was indicative of those structured networks in which the orderly management of member contributions reinforced plans and agency. He also reported that members wanted a flexible network structure that did not involve them in endless meetings. Richard focused the agenda and explained his
rationale for configuring his network’s decision-making process by describing what occurred in this way:

I could sense that some of the 16 principals were trying to contribute ideas, so we needed structure and organisation to the school network. I was aware of the rules that we were given that you were not allowed to become a mini [education] district. There was an appetite for more involvement in decision-making, and I’ve been told to keep it loose by principals. We needed a system. A management structure was set up to fit with the strategic plan. (Richard, October, 2012)

Systematic decision-making, according to network principals, meant well-managed groups and committee operations, which enabled them to influence the flow of network operations and key outcomes.

The second tactic was monitoring network decision-making to strengthen managerially their influence. For instance, Sue explained that she had structured network committees that were organised by the network executive officer. She commented as follows:

I just make sure that everyone has an opportunity to have input into the meetings. I meet with Joe [executive officer] to ensure that all decisions are brought back to the leadership committee. Sometimes his committee has gone off in a direction and I have said that, “No, that has got to come back to the leadership committee, as principals do not know what is happening.” One time I had to say, “No, and you have to cancel those arrangements.” A recommendation has to go up to the leadership committee for approval. (Sue, September, 2012)

Sue chaired the powerful network leadership committee that had ultimate control of the network’s decision-making processes and outcomes.

The third tactic of network principals was creating productive meeting agendas that strengthened their influence. The rationale for the use of this tactic seems to align with Huxham and Vangen’s (2000) argument that a large component of leadership activity is finding ways to control the collaborative agendas. An example of this tactic was the way in which Luke had structured meeting agendas that enabled him to influence the network focus on curriculum implementation projects, rather than on the management of school sporting fixtures and low-level change. Luke’s reasoning for this was captured in the following comment:
I thought we would have to figure out how to work together in the most effective way so spending the little resources we had. If anything, we had to be more productive in our meetings. I did not mind getting to the point of being the chairman of the group. We have moved to that quite intellectual level of forward planning. So what is it we think we want? How much money have we got? What’s the selection process to get people? There’s a lot more business stuff involved in that. (Luke, June 2012)

Luke explained that he had established selective agenda items as the chair of the school network, and he considered that the network has become more business-like with his influence.

This third strategy in the shaping group is represented by the way in which network principals perceived they had strengthened their influence by configuring the organisation of networks. In the connections of structuring decision-making processes, monitoring decision-making, and creating productive meeting agendas members were also encouraged to lead aspects of network activity.

### 7.5.4 Structuring the Sharing of Leadership

Network principals reasoned that the structuring of networks to encourage members to engage with network operations inspired members to show leadership by implementing their ideas. Network principals claimed they applied two tactics that encouraged members to share the leadership of networks. These tactics comprised of promising members access to network funds when they implemented network projects and encouraging ‘talented’ members to contribute to network activities.

The first tactic network principals noted that they applied was to promise member access to network funds when they implemented projects, particularly in the implementation of the national *Australian Curriculum*. However, network principals indicated that only a few members accessed these funds.

The second, more potent tactic network principals purported they applied was to encourage the positive force of ‘talented’ members to counter the prevailing cynical mood of many network members. Network principals confided that the ‘talented’ members they identified referred to those who actively helped
implement ideas and who openly supported their role as the network principal. For
instance, in the following comments, Marilyn describes her philosophy regarding
how she encouraged members. Eileen explained why she identified talented
people:

I can identify, certainly identify talent. That’s how I work. It is a sustainable
model. You are growing people. That’s my thing. My whole thing in life is to
help people grow. (Marilyn, May 2012)

My intention was to identify where the expertise lies in each school, to be
able to tap into each school’s skill sets in order to validate practice and
moderate judgements, what you have internally in your school across the
network. Sharing expertise so we actually start to behave like a professional
learning community and then we will believe it. (Eileen, November 2012)

In conclusion, the fourth strategy in the shaping group represents the way in
which network principals structured the sharing of network leadership by using the
tactics of promising funding to bring ideas to fruition and encouraging ‘talented’
network members.

7.6 Adapting Group of Strategies

This group has been entitled the ‘adapting group of strategies’ because
network principals perceived they had adjusted their influence and strategies to
ensure a more targeted process of the mobilisation of network members occurred.
There are four strategies within the adapting group of strategies. First, ‘interpreting
initial member responses to the role’, secondly, ‘adjusting influence’, thirdly,
‘adjusting shaping strategies’ and, fourth, ‘overlooking resistant members’. Each of
these four strategies within the adapting group of strategies is now examined in
sequence.

7.6.1 Interpreting Initial Member Responses to the Role

Network principals perceived that they identified two predominant groups
of network members based on their responses to the role, namely, the ‘resistant’
and ‘active’ members. The resistant group of members refers to those network
principals whom claimed were unwilling to help others organise network activities.
Network principals confided that they primarily obtained feedback concerning the effectiveness of their influence through the unspoken member resistance manifested in not participating in network activities. Initially network principals interpreted the members’ responses as not understanding the role. An example of the network principals’ perspectives was Brian’s viewpoint when he explained that he changed his perspective to using more effort to understand the needs of network members. He commented on this as follows:

I wanted to make sure that we had an active network that we had processes, structures and direction. So for me, it was better that I do something about this ‘cause no one else was doing much about it because they just sat there in meetings. I had to understand what they wanted and change what I did to make an active school network. (Brian, August 2012)

However, over time, network principals reinterpreted these members’ reluctance to mean that they were ambivalent towards the role. Often network members were sceptical. Barbara was an example of a network principal who sought to change the type of professional learning offered. Yet, network members seemed not to desire a move towards a purposeful network direction. She commented as follows:

Traditionally, we have been together as a cluster of schools. I guess I fell into the position, being a bit pro-active wanting to move on from this. No one else wanted the position. I gained the position by default. There has been a few issues and our network is just starting to take off (after 12 months) after changing strategies. One of the issues had been getting people to understand what the role of the network principal is, how it works, and networking. It is all well and good going to the PD [professional development] we have done about the network principal job, but it is about how you utilise that back with your network and whether they [network members] are willing to hear the message. (Barbara, August 2012)

Certainly, in the formative stages of developing a network, network principals observed that resistant members displayed little understanding of their role and they interpreted this to mean that members did not want to initiate or share the leadership of networks. Network principals explained that this resistant group of members’ responses were different from the most active group of members.
Active members, who comprise the second group, refers to those who network principals identified as being supportive, particularly as they shared the leadership of network activities. For instance, Jenny’s view related to network principals’ interpretation of the responses of active members in the following way:

There are some people who, I think, would just expect me to do it [role agency]. I think there is an element of that, not that anyone has said it. But, there are also a few people who were very keen to contribute. I think that Beth is one and Julian was another one. Beth has been saying we could do this, we could do this, we could do this, and I know someone who is doing this. She’s been a good source of ideas. I take the ideas back to the network. (Jenny, July 2012)

Jenny reported that she regularly contacted Beth, a network member, for early childhood ideas and information about the extent to which the facilitation of network meetings had met the needs of network members.

Another network principal, Marilyn, exemplified the disappointment of network principals when some seemingly active members generated ideas but then expected network principals to implement their proposals. Her comment was illustrative of this interpretation:

Adrian is an ideas man. Adrian will throw ideas. He just seeds ideas. You just can’t do every one of Adrian’s ideas. They are good ideas, but you can’t do all of them. I have the capacity because I actually think like Adrian, I know that that is a good idea, and I say, “That idea could actually work if we did it in another way.” I need that person’s support to make this work for us. (Marilyn, May 2012)

The first strategy in the adapting group represents the way in which network principals perceived they interpreted the initial members’ responses to the role. Based on their interpretation of network members’ responses to their influence, network principals reported that they began to be aware that they needed to adjust their influence to a more authoritative approach.
7.6.2 Adjusting Influence

Network principals pointed out that they were regularly checking the response of network members to new initiatives regarding professional learning. Network principals claimed they interpreted member responses to gauge how far they could proceed in furthering their own suggestions of network activities, which determined the extent of their influence. At the point when network principals perceived that they had focused on the implementation of specific aspects of the funded national *Australian Curriculum*, member responses became positive. Emboldened by this feedback, some network principals indicated that they then presented their ideas of expanding network activities. They reported that, on the whole, they had received a negative response to their suggestions from members.

For example, Jim described how members were unsympathetic to his ideas to bolster the potential strength of his network to one of sharing school strategies and resources. He provided an analogy to illustrate that the members wanted a small-scale, minimalist network model. He explained the disposition among members in his comment below:

> I need to respond to that, the negativity. You don’t go throwing out the [idea] bubbles when people are saying, “Listen, mate, just give us the [General Motors] Commodore version, we don’t need the Merc [Mercedes].” It was people saying, “Yes, I am in for the [implementation of] the *Australian Curriculum*”, which was the burning issue for them. Okay, if that is going to support that, then we can come up with giving something that was going to be helpful, like planning tools. We have been making these in our own schools. (Jim, June 2012)

Jim’s example illustrates that network principals became aware of member resistance to proposals to increase the sophistication and precision of school networks. Network principals interpreted this resistance to mean that they had reached the full extent of their role. The stance of not exploring the full potential of the network by members was tied to the concern that network activity might create extra workload and that schools did not want to fund network activities themselves. Indeed, only the Cape David school network added extra funds to projects that were organised before the establishment of school networks.
To ensure an appropriate leadership approach, network principals self-monitored and adjusted their leadership approach in a manner that also reinforced their credibility; this was dependent on their ability to perceive accurately relationships between network members (Day et al., 2002) and to regulate their behaviour (Zimmerman, 2006). Network principals reported that the pursuit of strategies was contingent on how members responded to their influence. This was a similar process to that described by Zimmerman (2006) insofar as experts deliberately practise the development and adaptation of their skillfulness to improve performance. Furthermore, network principals noted that they more readily identified those members who were worth the bother (Vangen & Huxham, 2003) and in implementing network projects they concentrated on enthusiastic members. They revealed that they adjusted their influence and began to overlook resistant network members. The ways in which network principals adjusted their strategies will now be discussed accordingly.

7.6.3 Adjusting Shaping Strategies

Network principals described how they adjusted their strategies to ensure that their influence over network members was effective. The two tactics within this strategy, described by network principals, were challenging resistant network members, and urging members to reciprocate ideas. Marilyn provided an example of a forthright network principal challenging resistant members. She recounted how she had visited resistant members with the intention of investigating the reasons for their reluctance. Marilyn confided that she had to repress her nervousness and tried to persuade secondary principals to engage with the network. She described the way in which she went about this task by commenting:

I have a group who was really keen and a group that was not engaging. I decided that I would go personally [to non-engaged principals] and have real conversations with them. I went to the principals, and it was pretty scary, as I am a primary principal and I have senior high school principals and senior college principals who run huge organisations. I am in there, cap in hand, trying to sell the network and saying to them, “I really want you on board because it is not what you can get. It is what you can give to us.” I think I had
varying successes, but it was a big move for me to have those real conversations. (Marilyn, May 2012)

Marilyn indicated that her characterisation of “real” conversations meant that she explicitly questioned members as to why they had not authentically engaged with school networks and she ascertained what they wanted from networks. Another example of network principals challenging resistant members was Adam, who revealed how he had organised a one-day conference where schools had the option of attending. The network executive officer and Adam subsequently visited the principals whose staff members had not attended the conference. He revealed his strategy by explaining as follows:

The first strategy was to have an impact on teachers so that they knew they were part of a network. We had the “Big Day Out” [conference]. Not all of the schools came. About 15 came. It was an opt-in day. The feedback [for the day] was really positive. We had some files left over. We took them over to the schools individually. It was making it inclusive. So, we went visiting and gave out the files. We have a chat about how things are going, which is an important thing to do. (Adam, September 2012)

The second tactic network principals revealed they applied to encourage resistant members was urging members to reciprocate ideas. An example of the application of this tactic was provided by Oliver’s comment:

One of the words I use is reciprocity. For example, often, you are in a school, and it might be your school; everybody visits your school. They keep on looking at your stuff, and wow, that’s an excellent program. They photocopy it and go and what do you get? We now say that everybody [in the network] has something to show. I’ll show you mine, and you show us yours. It is quid pro quo. Once that was established, people were quite willing to put their hand up to organise stuff. (Oliver, August 2012)

The third strategy, known as adjusting shaping strategies, represents the way in which network principals perceived that they encouraged resistant members to contribute to school networks. The two tactics used by network principals were challenging resistant network members and urging them to reciprocate ideas. When the role began to focus increasingly on the intention of the sharing of leadership with engaged members, network principals reported that they also started ignoring the resistant members after several attempts to engage them.
7.6.4 Overlooking Resistant Members

Overlooking resistant members meant that network principals disregarded the negative comments of the non-responsive members. Donna’s perspective was representative of the way in which network principals overlooked resistant members. She explained that she had decided to deal with the apathy of members by changing her intention of involving every member. She described how she concentrated on the engagement of members who were active in generating network activities in the following comment:

Some of the principals that were sitting on the side going, “I’m here because I have to be,” “I’m here because you happened to ring first,” and “I’m just here because of the tick-off.” It came down to everyone saying that “I don’t know what we do. Let’s just go with what she says.” To get many principals to be together in the same room to agree to an agenda and let everyone have their say was difficult. I needed to change the approach. So we just said, “Right, six of us are going to do it.” (Donna, May 2012)

An illustration of network principals’ justification of overlooking resistant principals was contained in Jim’s explanation. He attributed resistance to school principals rather than to the staff of schools. On this, he commented:

Part of me says it is not up to me to make them buy it [school networks]. If at the end of this two schools come on board and do it really well, then there is only two schools. Other schools look in and say, “It’s great for you guys, but I do not need that,” and that’s fine. There’s still a lot of this attitude, but it’s usually a principal decision rather than a school decision. (Jim, June 2012)

An example of unsuccessfully overlooking resistant members was depicted in Barbara’s description of how she requested permission to speak to targeted groups of school staff to initiate network activities, which effectively sidestepped principals. Barbara explained her approach in this way:

I went out to the schools and spoke to the education assistants. I went directly to them. I asked the principal first. I took a deputy with me and the speech therapy lady. We virtually canvassed them [education assistants]. What if we were to provide a day for you? They then lobbied their principal. The high school has typically not thought as themselves as part of the network in a lot of ways. They just wanted their money and run. We have set up four different networks of teachers from that approach. It’s been
slow. I would love to say I have a great document with a vision and purpose. But we haven’t got that. We have not got a vision statement, and we might get that down the track. Teachers within the network might come up with a statement and not the principals. A few of the principals were saying that they would like to see not some PD [professional development] for their curriculum leaders, but some PD that enables them to be good leaders. (Barbara, August 2012)

However, many network principals perceived that school principals can effectively block network agency. Barbara’s strategy was effective with education assistants, albeit short-lived.

The fourth strategy in the adapting group represents the way in which network principals had overlooked resistant members. Implementation of this strategy was useful to network principals as they were wary about being “burnt out” so they concentrated on the members “who were worth the bother” (Vangen & Huxham, 2003, p. S70) and, subsequently, they overlooked the cynical network members to moderate their workload.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the third proposition of the study reported in this thesis, namely, that network principals deliberately employed their influence to mobilise network members. This influence was based on the social interaction between network principals and members. This interaction is within a leader-to-leader collegiate configuration and resonates with the “soft” social power bases portrayed by Pierro et al., (2012). Four groups of strategies supported their deliberate employment of this influence, namely, the priming, locating, shaping and adapting group of strategies. The following chapter now presents the conclusion and implications of the study reported here.
CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Introduction

The aim of the study reported in this thesis was to generate substantive theory regarding the perspectives of WA school network principals on their role within government school networks. The study began with the central research question:

What are the perspectives of Western Australian school network principals regarding their role within government school networks?

Network principals were school principals who had adopted the role in an endeavour to support other principals in networks. The role of the network principal was flexible in assisting principals to collaborate as it was demand-driven, and the WA Department of Education, regional executive directors, network members and network principals defined the expectations of the role. A convergence of expectations from the four groups of stakeholders and network principal intentions ultimately determined the way in which they carried out their role. This chapter summarises the research design and methodology employed in the study reported here and the findings. It goes on to discuss the implications of the research findings for theory and research, as well as for policy and practice.

8.2 Research Design and Methodology

The interpretive research paradigm of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 2001) was employed to generate substantive theory concerning the role of the network principal. The employment of the symbolic interactionist perspective was appropriate to investigate the meaning of the role because it supported the construction of a realistic portrayal of the phenomenon from the participant’s perspective (Bogdan & Knopp Bilklen, 1992). The data were collected from two focus groups and semi-structured interviews with 20 network principals. Symbolic interactionism also related well to the use of grounded theory methods of data analysis (Chamberlain-Salaun et al., 2013; Klunklin & Greenwood, 2006).
Accordingly, grounded theory approaches were employed to analyse the data collected to generate theory. The process of comparing in and between themes adopted in the focus groups and individual interviews ensured descriptive clarity of the construction of the role of the network principal.

Providing insight into this new role of the Western Australian network principal was pertinent for three reasons. First, the role of the network leader was important as it has guided collaboration within networks (Chapman & Allen, 2005; Hadfield & Jopling, 2006; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Kubiak & Bertram, 2010; McGuire & Agranoff, 2007). Secondly, there was a call for a discerning theory that might reveal the essence of network leadership (Hadfield, 2007; Hadfield & Jopling, 2012a; Kubiak & Bertram, 2010; Townsend, 2015). Identifying the ‘essence’ of school networks was difficult because of their complexity, particularly in describing the nature of interactions between network principals and members. Thirdly, there has been a recognition that concepts drawn from British and American sources may be inappropriate for the culture and contexts of other countries (Dimmock & Walker, 2003; Mac Ruairc, 2010; Walker & Dimmock, 2004).

8.3 Summary of Findings

The outcomes of this study reported are summarised in the form of three propositions generated from the data gathered in relation to the central research question. These three propositions, explicated in Chapters 5, 6 and 7, are now summarised.

8.3.1 Proposition One

Network principals perceived that the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms influenced their management of the multiple expectations of their role. Network principals selectively interpreted and managed the expectations of the Department of Education, regional executive directors, network members and themselves, because there were significant disparities in these expectations. The Department of Education’s establishment of school networks structurally and psychologically empowered the role of the network principal.
However, network members’ expectations of the role of the network principal prevailed because they determined their level of network engagement, which regulated the extent of the power invested in the role.

8.3.2 Proposition Two

Network principals perceived that their prime intention was to share network leadership with members. They observed that the WA Department of Education’s assumption that network principals might generate goodwill and reciprocity did not necessarily follow from network members meeting together. Network principals claimed their intention was to generate member ownership of networks, locate their leadership in networks and foster shared leadership by structuring processes. They reported that their intention was to engender collaboration in the form of professional learning communities and in the sharing of the leadership of projects. It was felt that these arrangements would generate social capital through three forms: obligations, norms, and informational channels (Koput, 2010). This intention aimed at forging implicit agreements and relationships between members that would be reciprocated which, it was hoped, would develop the foundations of social capital between members.

8.3.3 Proposition Three

Network principals perceived that they employed a deliberate form of influence to mobilise network members. This analysis of the construction process of this form of influence captured the interplay between the interpretation of contextual factors, comprising the WA Department of Education’s policy of empowerment, the expectations of the role, network principals’ intentions and the response of members to the employment of deliberate influence. Located in the intertwining of these factors and the rhetoric of collaboration was power.

Network principals’ employment of influence draws upon informational, expert and referent power bases as identified by Raven (1965). These have been described as the ‘soft’ power bases (Pierro et al., 2012). A particular form of
legitimate social power was also granted by network members to network principals because few principals wanted to adopt the role. Furthermore, network principals’ deliberate employment of influence may be a practical example of network leadership aligned with Gronn’s (2011) position, namely, influence-based relationships applied in the context of collegiate relationship configurations.

In the light of the collegiate relationships within the WA Department of Education’s school networks, Figure 14 indicates that the location of the role’s influence is bound in power, response and context configurations.

Figure 14. The Location of Influence-Based Leadership

The dotted rectangle in Figure 14 represents the social power (Raven, 1990) continuum. The use of servant leadership (van Dierendonck, 2011) is at one end of the continuum while at the other end resides a direct leadership approach of network principals. In positioning their influence, network principals consider the leader-to-leader configuration in the environment of networks when employing their influence. They interpret the efficacy of their influence based on the responses of network members and subsequently make adjustments to their influence-based leadership to match the interest of members. This usually meant adjusting the extent of their use of social power along the continuum, usually moving authoritatively away from servant leadership towards direct leadership to mobilise network members. This placement of influence-based leadership along the continuum was also dependent on the extent to which network principals were willing to lead networks. This deliberate employment of influence may be an example of a form of leadership that is located within social power, rather than positional power.
The context of the location of network principals’ influence-based leadership incorporates their interpretation of the expectations of the four groups of stakeholders towards the role. The WA Department of Education expected that network principals would support principals to improve student results, regional executive directors expected network principals to manage networks, members expected that network principals would lead the collaborative effort, and network principals intended to share leadership with network members. Four groups of strategies, namely, the priming group, the locating group, the shaping group and the adapting group, supported this influence-based leadership.

8.4 Implications of the Research Findings for Theory and Research

There are four main implications of the thesis findings reported here for network theory and future research regarding network leadership. These comprise first, revealing the conditions for effective network leadership, secondly, investigating members’ perspectives on the role, thirdly, examining the evolving relationships and, fourthly, encouraging member leadership. These four implications are now discussed.

8.4.1 Revealing the Conditions for Effective Network Leadership

First, the findings of this research provided for the generation of theory concerning the contextual conditions to develop network leadership. Recognition is increasing that context is significant in understanding leadership (Endrissat & von Arx, 2013; Liden & Antonakis, 2009). The study reported here found that the complexity of disparate expectations of stakeholders encouraged the participant network principals to choose the way in which they interpreted their role. In this connection with policy formulation and interpretation, the conditions that are beneficial to the successful implementation and interpretation of context by network leaders and members could be investigated. These conditions may include how policy makers can purposefully consider the ‘end users’ regarding the role of the network leaders. Implication: Further research could be worthwhile in
8.4.2 Investigating Members’ Perspectives on the Role

Second, the findings of this study suggest that network members had considerable capacity to influence the role, because of the proximity to and the authority to choose, their network principal. This calls attention to understanding the relative power of network members, and how that capacity influences the role of network leaders, from the perspective of members. While network principals concluded that the WA Department of Education had structurally configured school networks the power of network members was significant. Consequently, network principals interpreted that their role was to focus on what members demanded. Furthermore, network members demarcated the parameters of the role by resisting the continual development of network leadership past the point of generating cost-effective professional learning. This power conceivably put an end to extending network agency to the implementation of many of the Department of Education’s expectations.

Network principals also claimed that members questioned the utility and practicality of the role because of the lack of reported compelling reasons to meet or even collaborate in the early development phases of the establishment of networks. By comparison, Vangen and Huxham’s (2003) research has indicated that an awareness of collaborative advantage for working together is important. Furthermore, network principals discerned that the attitude of network members to the role of school networks affected the development of goodwill within networks, which is the foundation of the forming of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Koput, 2010; Lin, 2001). Network principals were also well aware that generating member engagement required significant amounts of sustained commitment and skill (Huxham & Vangen, 2000) and, there was an added danger that attempting to grow network agency beyond an acceptable point may extinguish goodwill. Implication: Investigation of network members’ perspectives may uncover their dispositions,
cognitive processes and the relational leader-to-leader dynamics of members towards the role of the network principal.

8.4.3 Examining the Evolving Relationships

Third, network principals indicated that network members had a significant influence on the role over time. A longitudinal interpretivist study of the relationships within networks might reveal which interactions are likely to promote the sustainability of school network leadership and agency in the longer term. Network leaders may then be able to concentrate on developing those productive strategies to build relationships within their networks. **Implication:** Research on the evolving relationships occurring in networks could identify what promotes the growth trajectory of relationships between network principals and members. This could enlighten understandings of the conditions and strategies that are likely to strengthen the sustainability of mobilising network members towards a network direction.

8.4.4 Encouraging Member Leadership

Fourth, network principals struggled in their attempt to nurture the sharing of network leadership by network members. Indeed, a potential research avenue could draw on Hadfield and Jopling’s (2012a) call for the development of network theory that may build an understanding of the individual agency of multiple leaders within networks and the sharing of leadership. Further research may provide a comprehensive analysis of the conditions that encourage network members to develop as either formal or informal leaders in school networks. **Implication:** Research on the key strategies for fostering network member leadership could encourage a diversity of viewpoints and leadership styles to strengthen leadership reciprocity between network members.

8.5 Implications of the Research Findings for Policy and Practice

It is possible to identify six main implications for policy and practice generated by the study reported here for the WA Department of Education,
particularly in supporting the efforts of network principals. These implications relate to addressing the value of the role to network principals, developing the careers of principals, making role expectations realistic, developing a consistent empowerment culture, considering the influence of parallel networks, and sustaining professional learning for network principals and principals.

8.5.1 Addressing the Value of the Role to Network Principals

First, the WA Department of Education claimed that the role had tangible and intrinsic value in acknowledging network principals’ leadership qualities, the rewarding nature of supporting colleagues, the enhancement of careers and the access to role-specific professional learning (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b). According to the study here, network principals viewed the role in a different light and found that they were reluctant to nominate themselves for the role. The findings of this study suggested that network principals adopted the role because they wanted to influence the direction of their school network and the way it related to their school. They formed a view that the role was not highly valued. Additionally, according to network principals, network budgets did not counterweight the amount of time and effort that were required to gain significant benefits.

Indeed, there is little evidence of an acknowledgement of network principal leadership, enhancing incumbent careers or specific professional learning by the WA Department of Education, which reportedly impeded the efficacy of role. These circumstances led to few principals desiring to adopt the role of the network principal, which undermined the effectiveness of the role. **Implication:** The value of the role seems underrated. Reframing the value of the role as a significant systemic leadership position could enhance the way in which the role is perceived. This might lead to an increase in the number of principals desiring the role.
8.5.2 Developing the Careers of Principals

Second, the findings of the study being reported here demonstrated that network principals employed a different leadership approach than in their role as a principal because they mobilised their colleagues. Subsequently, those who adopt the role may supplement their careers since the role could help inspire a diversification of leadership approaches and strategies for experienced principals who have reached a plateau in their careers. For instance, the mid-career stage (age 40 to 55) appears to be the point at which long-serving principals could make critical career decisions as they may feel their career is stagnating (Oplatka, 2010). Additionally, Earley and Weindling (2007) have suggested that when principals have led their school for eight years onwards they have reached a “shelf-life” and moving to another school reinvigorates them. The same reinvigoration and development may occur if a principal adopts the role of the network principal. The role could be portrayed, therefore, as a means of self-renewal and a supplementation to careers that may serve to rejuvenate some principals. **Implication:** The role of the network principal could be reconceptualised as an acknowledgement of a growing skill base. This development may strengthen network principals’ influence of principals in achieving some alignment of the school network directions with those of the WA Department of Education. The development of the role might lead to increasing network principals’ confidence in seeking to develop their careers in the Department of Education. This might lead to reconceptualising the role as one of systemic leadership so that network principals could then act as a link between the Department of Education and school networks.

8.5.3 Making Role Expectations Realistic

Third, the role of the network principal was “demand driven” and, in being so, network principals faced inconsistency between the expectations of the WA Department of Education and those of network members. The Department of Education expected that school networks were accountable for improved student outcomes, greater school effectiveness and more efficient use of resources
When networks engaged in a collaborative endeavour. The role also supported innovation, the assistance of principals whose schools were undergoing system intervention as a result of underperformance and supported network approaches to Department of Education directions (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011b).

The findings being reported here indicate that, despite the WA Department of Education’s high expectations, network principals chose to concentrate on the demands of members because the role’s locus of power resides within the social interaction between themselves and the members. This was because the role of the network principal was built on social power and relied on building productive relationships based on goodwill (Adler & Kwon, 2002) and quality interactions (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Koput, 2010) to gain advantage by building collective agency (Burt, 2005; Coleman, 1988; Lin, 2001). **Implication:** An investigation of how the Department of Education could support network principals might reveal how they could more effectively balance the needs of the four stakeholders in achieving realistic expectations.

**8.5.4 Developing a Consistent Empowerment Culture**

Fourth, on one hand, the WA Department of Education’s empowerment reforms encourage school independence; on the other hand, school networks have foundations in member interdependencies and collaboration. In terms of empowerment and the achievement of Department of Education outcomes, network principals suggested that the Department of Education reforms conferred the promise of empowerment. In this connection, Conger and Kanungo (1988) have argued that empowerment is a process, and Konczak, Stelly and Trusty (2000) have concluded there are six dimensions of leader behaviour in conferring empowerment to employees, which were not met by the Department of Education. These dimensions include the formal delegation of authority, accountability for outcomes, self-directed decision-making, information sharing, skill development, and coaching for innovation. It would be desirable, therefore, for the connection between empowered schools, network principals and interdependent network members be
clarified as the findings of this study suggests that network principals and networks were entrusted to self-manage, yet were not empowered to achieve the Department of Education outcomes in an environment of increasing school autonomy.

Network principals require clarity as to how school networks and their role relate to the WA Department of Education’s culture of empowerment. They tend to view that the Department of Education has adopted a detached approach to supporting their role in how network principals encourage network member interdependence. The redeeming factor, however, is that networks can provide access to specific Department of Education funding from time to time, such as that provided by the implementation of the new national Australian Curriculum and federal government national partnerships that encourage the exploration of how schools can work together. Hence, it may be beneficial for the Department of Education to devote greater attention to the practical and on-going support of network principals in managing the differing cultural norms of independence and interdependence of schools. **Implication:** Further investigation could occur concerning how the role of the network principal can balance the interdependent nature of school networks to complement the increasing autonomy of schools.

### 8.5.5 Considering the Influence of Parallel Networks

Fifth, one of the main issues revealed in the study reported here is that the role of the network principal was impeded by the design of school networks as Kindergarten to Year 12 entities. Secondary-based networks were established through the encouragement of the WA Department of Education, before the advent of school networks, so that those schools can jointly provide curriculum access to such courses as higher-level physics. The Department of Education then insisted that school networks contain primary and secondary schools of up to 20 school network members (Western Australian Department of Education, 2011c). Network principals claimed that the overlapping network design constrained the role of the network principal. In this connection, secondary principals questioned to what extent they would benefit from networking with primary principals. Furthermore,
the insistence by the Department of Education that school networks comprise primary and secondary schools seemed contrary to the emphasis placed on the increased autonomy of school decision-making and the nature of school networks. **Implication:** Attention could be given to how secondary and primary schools can work productively together without requiring them to operate in a contrived manner.

**8.5.6 Sustaining Professional Learning for Network Principals and Principals**

Sixth, the study reported that network principals recognised the inadequacy of professional learning influenced how they managed their role. In conceptualising their leadership approach to influence members, network principals conveyed that they would have preferred a clearer understanding of their role created by the WA Department of Education. In particular, they reported they were keen on understanding how to generate productive interactions between members. Network principals argued that steadier guidance and support from the Department of Education may have increased their confidence and they believed the lack of clarity regarding the practical aspects of facilitating a network such as exploring Hadfield and Chapman’s (2009) design flow for a network. Moreover, they considered that the Department of Education provided few opportunities for their professional learning or tools of reflection, so their network leadership development seemed to rely on ‘trial and error’, experiential learning based on school principal leadership approaches. Network principals reported they needed the opportunity to understand network processes and to conceptualise their role because they recognised that their approach to networks was different from that of their principal’s role.

Similarly, Evans and Stone-Johnson’s (2010) work has indicated that English headteachers faced such challenges as the contextual considerations in joining a network, their capacity for involvement, building school commitment to networks, and balancing network and school activities. The findings of the study suggest that network members faced similar such challenges of understanding the power of networks and how to engage their staff in network agency. This professional
learning could promote the reasons as to why school leaders should expend energy and time in being involved in school networks (Hadfield & Chapman, 2009). The next step may be to include the way in which members could construct shared leadership with the staff members so that they contribute to their school network.

On-going and contextualised professional learning can lead to coherent development (Fullan, 2007; Little, 1999; Mayer & Lloyd, 2011). This provision may have helped network principals and network members develop appropriate leadership approaches and strategies. In particular, Barnes, Camburn, Sanders and Sebastian (2010) have argued that learning should be developmental because after principal-based professional learning few dramatic transformations occurred in the refinement of their practice. These changes were also neither sequential nor linear. Katz and Dack (2013) further noted that the connection between professional learning and change was where learners subject themselves to scrutiny, particularly at the point of implementation. On-going seminars and coaching that bring network principals together to reflect on their progress in the role may support their development. Enriching the professional learning of network principals should help them develop their practices, which may assist them to gain commensurately credibility in the eyes of the members. The content of professional learning may include how to engage and build the commitment of network members in meetings, facilitating the development of professional learning communities and collaboratively deal with resistant members. Implication: Understanding what type of sustained and rigorous professional learning is suitable to develop appropriate network principals’ leadership could help to nurture their capacity to influence in the collegiate environment of school networks. Furthermore, examination of how principals, as network members, can be included in professional learning could enhance their knowledge base in how to work together. This might increase network members’ capacity to act as leaders within networks and engage their school staff in networks.
8.6 Original Contribution to Knowledge

The originality of the study lies in its in-depth focus on the network principal role and the strategies they employ to influence network members in the specific context of the school network initiative. It adds to the understanding of network leadership and provides new conceptual tools for analysing such leadership. Traditionally, researchers have struggled with the link between network theory (Hadfield & Jopling, 2012a; Skidmore, 2004) and network leadership (Chapman & Allen, 2005; Chapman & Muijs, 2013; Hadfield & Jopling, 2006; Lima, 2010; Townsend, 2015). Often, the analysis of network leadership has focused on the sharing of leadership in networks from the perspectives of co-leaders, external consultants, and activists (Ainscow et al., 2006; Hadfield, 2007; Kubiak & Bertram, 2010). Yet, empirical studies have indicated that network leaders’ management is usually represented in the form of facilitation skills (Atkinson et al., 2007; Church et al., 2002; Kerr et al., 2003). The study being reported here attempted to conceptualise the collective perspectives of the single leaders within WA government school networks to generate substantive theory regarding how they perceived their network leadership. Such an emphasis is rare despite the growing body of research regarding how they perceived their leadership in school networks. Indeed, few studies have investigated the employment of a network leadership approach, founded on social interactions within school networks from the perspective of a collection of single network leaders. The employment of symbolic interactionism reframes the examination of network leadership in terms of a social process, rather than from a social network theory perspective.

The finding that the role of the network principal deliberately employs influence provides a new perspective on the role in WA school networks. The findings of this study suggest that this influence-based leadership is grounded in socially dependent power bases (Pierro et al., 2012; Raven, 1990). The supporting four priming, locating, shaping and adapting groups of strategies can encourage network members to exert their effort towards network purpose and promote
network principals’ influence. The employment of influence-based leadership in networks is different from principal leadership approach as it is employed within the context of a leader-to-leader configuration in a collegiate environment. Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest that the management of expectations and intentions are necessary to the practice of network leadership.

8.7 Limitations of the Study

Five limitations of the study reported in this thesis have been identified. The first limitation regards the timing of the investigation. It could be viewed that there was limited time in which network principals could develop their role within the 12-18 month-old networks. Yet, the advantage of analysing the emerging role at that time was that network principals readily described and examined their perspectives relating to the negotiation with members in the construction phase of their role. They also reported that their leadership had evolved during their tenure. The finding that network principals’ leadership role evolved indicates that this study may be timely. Kubiak and Bertram’s (2010) research, however, claims that the development of school networks in not linear and progress is inclined to be slow and steady.

The second limitation stems from the study’s use of purposively selected participants (Merriam, 1998; Morse, 1991; Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). Even though participants represented 55 per cent of network principals from the two comparatively large WA metropolitan regional areas, they did not represent the views of all network principals. Excluded from the sample were network principals in rural educational regions as their relative inexperience may have impinged on their network leadership approach. Indeed, the inexperience of many of these school principals led to some rural regional executive directors allocating the role to selected principals, which may have attributed positional power to the network principals in those networks. A broader study that includes rural regions could generate a more realistic description of the role.
A third limitation was that the study focused on the retrospective examination of network principals’ self-reported aspects of their role. Research of this type is subject to self-reporting and memory biases (Andrews & Soder, 1987; Martinko & Gardener, 1990). Network principals reporting on their influence may be biased in describing the selection of their leadership approach and strategies. Network principals may have also misjudged the extent of their influence. Furthermore, examining their influence was problematic because they reluctantly described some of the aspects of their leadership, particularly when asked about their ‘manipulation of the agenda’ (Vangen & Huxham, 2003) or ‘harsh’ power bases (Pierro et al., 2012). To mitigate the potential errors in self-reporting, the participants’ comments in focus group and semi-structured interviews were probed and cross-checked. Trends in the data were identified and the researcher searched for negative cases that tested the veracity of the three propositions.

A fourth limitation related to network principals interpreting member responses to their employment of influence and the four supporting strategies. Network principals conveyed that their power within the role was derived from members when engaged in social interactions, which can be viewed from the perspective of either party. The attribution of social power to network principals was based on two explanations. The first explanation was that network principals deliberately employed their influence, which was supported by the application of four supportive priming, locating, shaping and adapting groups of strategies. In this light, committed network principals with members from former principal groups were more likely to describe multiple strategies than the reluctant network principals in new networks. The second explanation was that the members allowed network principals to influence them because they did not want to adopt the role themselves. The latter attribution of power was not fully examined in the study here because that investigation would require the perspectives of the members of networks.

Finally, although the study contributes to local knowledge about the leadership approach of single network leaders in the WA government education system, these findings are unique to these participants and, in the tradition of
qualitative research, they do require verification. This is particularly because the role of the network principal is significantly contextualised. However, since the propositions “function to interpret or explain and predict phenomena . . . [and] . . . guide action in relation to the phenomenon” (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986, p. 4) these findings may be of interest to others. The extent to which these findings apply to other situations may be guided by means of ‘user generalisability’ by which “readers themselves determine the extent to which the findings can be applied to their context” (Merriam, 2002, p. 29).

8.8 Concluding Remarks

It will be recalled that the study reported in this thesis aimed to generate substantive theory regarding the perspectives of WA school network principals on their role within government school networks. In their research on network leadership, Hadfield and Chapman (2009) have concluded that effective network leadership requires “the political skills of mobilisation and the cultural skills of coherence making, and these can defeat even the most skilful institutional leader” (p. 28). Furthermore, school networks are dynamic and flexible organisations that are based on on-going collaboration, which shifts network direction.

In the case of the role of network principals, coherence making included the interpretation of a context of increasing school autonomy and dealing with the leadership paradox in which leadership required them to assert themselves yet not foster a dependency on their leadership. Network principals also perceived that several groups of stakeholders expected some form of network leadership requiring that differences in expectations of the network principal’s role be managed carefully.

Network principals employed a deliberate form of influence to mobilise network members. Indeed, the facilitation of network principal leadership required a different form of leadership than that of school principals and consequently necessitated a more sophisticated application of strategies. As such, network principals consciously employed their influence-based leadership to resolve the
tension between, on one hand, asserting themselves as the leader of networks and, on the other, the necessity of mobilising reluctant network members in an environment of meagre system-level encouragement. From the network principals’ perspective networks tended to operate well and achieved a useful direction when members showed goodwill and collaborated with each other. Hence, the study reported here revealed very clearly that network principals were only able implement the WA Department of Education’s expectations when they aligned with the perceived needs of network members. Indeed, it may be argued that the role of the network principal presents a unique opportunity to champion the Department of Education’s direction given realistic role expectations and appropriate professional learning.
9 References


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Appendix 1 - Aide-Mémoire

Aide Mémoire

Preamble: This research is about your role as a network principal. It is not about the network itself.

Tell me about how your network has developed with your help.

How did you become the Network Principal?

Intentions and significance

Role - (Relationships and things you wanted to happen)

Reasons for these ideas?

Influenced by?

Strategies and significance

Strategies - Structures, interactions, processes, agency and purpose

Influenced by who? How was this done?

Outcomes

Outcomes did you expect to achieve?

Is there anything you would like to add?
Appendix 2 - Letter of Invitation to Semi-Structured Interview

Western Australian Network Principals: An Investigation of their Role within Public School Networks

On behalf of Tony Beswick, I am writing to invite you to participate in a Doctoral study investigating the role of school network principals. Tony is conducting this research in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia. Your involvement in this research will contribute to developing insights into the important and emerging role of the network principal. It may also help you to reflect on your own work in this position. To help you, a one page executive summary of findings will be sent to you at the conclusion of the study and findings will be published in a thesis. The study has received approval from the Department of Education to conduct the research on Department sites.

Participation in the study will comprise an in-depth interview in which you will be asked about your intentions, the strategies you use and the outcomes you desire in your role as a network principal. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be arranged at a convenient time and venue. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed prior to analysis. A copy of the transcript will be available for your verification, if required, and the data will be encoded and stored in a locked safe.

Should you choose to participate in this study, confidentiality will be assured. Neither you nor your workplace will be identified at any stage during the conduct of the research or in any publications that may result from this study. You may also withdraw, without prejudice, from the study at any time. If that is the case, any data that may have been collected from your participation will be destroyed. If you would like to know more about this study, please phone Tony on 0466 779 330 or email him at Radar60@live.com.au.

If you would like to be involved in this study, please complete and return the Participant Consent Form in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Simon Clarke
Chief Investigator
Phone: 6488 2398

Tony Beswick
Doctoral student
Phone: 0466 779 330
Appendix 3 - Letter of Invitation to Focus Group Interview

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

35 Stirling Highway
Crawley, WA, 6009

Thursday, 28 March 2012

Dear

Western Australian Network Principals: An Investigation of Their Role within Public School Networks

On behalf of Tony Beswick, I am writing to invite you to participate in a Doctoral study investigating the role of school network principals. Tony is conducting this research in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia. Your involvement in this research will contribute to developing insights into the important and emerging role of the network principal. It may also help you to reflect on your own work in this position. To help you, a one page executive summary of findings will be sent to you at the conclusion of the study and findings will be published in a thesis. The study has received approval from the Department of Education to conduct the research on Department sites.

Participation in the study will comprise a focus group interview in which you will be asked about your intentions, the strategies you use and the outcomes you desire in your role as a network principal. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes and will be arranged at a convenient time and venue. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed prior to analysis. A copy of the transcript will be available for your verification, if required, and the data will be encoded and stored in a locked safe.

Should you choose to participate in this study, confidentiality will be assured. Neither you nor your workplace will be identified at any stage during the conduct of the research or in any publications that may result from this study. You may also withdraw, without prejudice, from the study at any time. If that is the case, any data that may have been collected from your participation will be destroyed. If you would like to know more about this study, please phone Tony on 0466 779 330 or email him at Radar60@live.com.au.

If you consent to participate in this study, please complete and return the attached form in the pre-paid envelope provided.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Simon Clarke
Chief Investigator
Phone: 6488 2398

Tony Beswick
Doctoral student
Phone: 0466 779 330
Appendix 4 - Consent Form

Thursday, 28 March 2012

Participant Consent Form: Interview

Western Australian network principals: An investigation of their role within public school networks

I, ______________________, have read the information provided and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I may withdraw at any time without reason and without prejudice.

I understand that all information provided is treated as strictly confidential and will not be released by the investigator unless required to by law. I have been advised as to what data is being collected, what the purpose is, and what will be done with the data upon completion of the research. The University of Western Australia’s Ethics Committee has approved the study. If you would like to know more about ethics in regard to this study, please phone Associate Professor Elaine Chapman, chair of the Faculty Ethics Committee, on 6488 2384.

I agree that research data gathered for the study may be published provided my name or other identifying information is not used.

__________________________  ______________
(Participant)    (Date)

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Australia requires that all participants are informed that, if they have any complaint regarding the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher or, alternatively to the Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee, Registrar’s Office, University of Western Australia, 35 Stirling Highway, Crawley, WA, 6009. (Telephone number 6488 3703). All study participants will be provided with a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their personal record.
Appendix 5 – Department of Education’s School Network Statement

SCHOOL NETWORKS

1. Why set up networks?
As school communities become more empowered, the way district and central levels of the Department operate needs to change. Rather than layers of bureaucracy and rules that constrain the work of schools, principals and teachers need advice and support from expert staff who work in schools.

To achieve this, up to 75 school networks in eight education regions will be created from 2011. Each network will be supported by a Network Principal and each education region will be headed by a Regional Executive Director. Within each region, schools will form a number of networks so they can work together to give students access to a broad, high quality curriculum; support each other in areas of mutual interest; and provide support to school leaders and staff.

2. What is a network?
A network is a group of up to 20 schools working together to support each other. Each education region will be made up of a number of networks as the primary units of leadership support and school collaboration and innovation.

3. What does a network do?
The network is intended to maximise each school's opportunity to share ideas and resources in response to common interests and provide professional support for principals. Each network will have the services of a Network Principal to help with collaborative endeavours and offer direct support to colleagues as needed.

4. Who decides the configuration and size of networks?
In consultation with principals, the Regional Executive Director will establish networks most appropriate to local contexts. The size and shape of each network will depend on:
- natural fit – for example, proximity of schools, traditional relationships and shared programs
- complexity – for example, cultural and social diversity, isolation
- leadership capacity, experience and tenacity
- realistic spans of influence.
5. Do all schools have access to a network?
Yes, all schools, including Independent Public Schools, will have access to a network and a Network Principal.

6. Can schools determine their degree of participation in network activities?
Yes, principals will determine their level of involvement in their network and in network activities.

7. Does each network have a governance structure?
No, each principal will remain solely accountable for their school and to the Regional Executive Director. Schools will not be compelled to participate in, nor contribute resources to, any decisions made by network members or the Network Principal.

8. Do networks have separate budgets?
The budget of the network will be the combined resources of its member schools. Decisions about how and how much of these resources will be used for collaborative endeavours will be made by the network. Each regional office will provide the Network Principal with a small operating budget to facilitate collaborative decision making and other related activities.

9. Are networks held accountable for anything?
Yes, where networks engage in collaborative endeavour, this must result in:
- improved student outcomes
- greater school effectiveness
- more efficient use of physical, financial and human resources.

10. Are there line relationships between the principals of a network?
No, the networks are professional and collegiate relationships rather than management structures. The model is best characterised as principals supporting principals.
Appendix 6 – Department of Education’s Network Principal Statement

NETWORK PRINCIPALS

1. Why create Network Principals?
As school communities become more empowered, the way district and central levels of the Department operate needs to change. Rather than layers of bureaucracy and rules that constrain the work of schools, principals and teachers need advice and support from expert staff who work in schools.

To achieve this, up to 75 school networks in eight education regions will be created from 2011. Each network will be supported by a Network Principal and each education region will be headed by a Regional Executive Director.

2. What is the role of Network Principals?
Network Principals will:
- support innovation, efficiency and collaboration so students have access to a broad, high quality curriculum
- provide professional support to principals
- support schools undergoing system intervention for underperformance
- support the efficient management of physical, financial and human resources
- help develop planning for crisis and emergency management
- advocate for schools in the network
- support network approaches in implementing relevant Department policies and directions
- support communication between schools within a network.

3. What process is used to appoint Network Principals?
Network Principals will be selected on merit through a process initiated by the Regional Executive Director. All positions will be based on a common set of expectations.

4. What are the eligibility requirements to become a Network Principal?
In most cases, a Network Principal will be highly regarded and effective school principal from within the network.

5. What is the tenure of Network Principals?
The position of Network Principal will be a limited tenure position of between one and two years.
6. How much time does the role entail?
The time dedicated to each network will depend on local context including:
- number of schools in the network
- level of school complexity
- geographical factors, particularly isolation
- level of demand by school principals.

7. How does the role affect the ongoing leadership of the Network Principal's own school?
This is a demand-driven, support-oriented role that does not require intensive,
ongoing involvement in all schools in the network. Regional Executive Directors
will be allocated FTE to offset any potential impact on schools that host a Network
Principal. Use of the FTE will be at the school's discretion.

8. How much are Network Principals paid?
Network Principals will be paid at level. The position has intrinsic value through:
- tangible acknowledgment of each Network Principal’s leadership qualities
- the positive and rewarding nature of the professional support role itself
- career enhancing dimensions attached to the position
- access to role-specific and high quality professional learning.

9. Do Network Principals get a travel allowance?
All Network Principals will be reimbursed for costs associated with the role, including
those involving travel.

10. Do Network Principals get a budget?
A budget will be negotiated between each Network Principal and the Regional
Executive Director. This budget will support the Network Principal to undertake their
functions. In addition, the host school of the Network Principal will be given additional
FTE in recognition of any costs associated with the role (for example, additional
d clerical support and relief).

11. Can Network Principals be based in a regional education office?
Most Network Principals will be working principals released for some time to support
the schools in their network. In networks with widely distributed schools and high
levels of need, mainly outside the metropolitan area, Network Principals may be
located in an office or other location.

12. Do Network Principals have a line management relationship with the
principals in their network?
No, Network Principals are colleagues who work alongside their peers to support
their professional needs and support collaborative opportunities for the network as a
whole.

13. Are schools compelled to engage with the Network Principal or is
involvement voluntary?
The nature and extent of engagement with a Network Principal will be negotiated by
the individual schools involved. This includes principals of Independent Public
Schools who, like all principals, will determine the nature and extent of the
relationship with their Network Principal based on their own needs.
14. Are Network Principals accountable for student outcomes or the effectiveness of schools in the network?
No, each school principal is accountable for the improvement of their school and the outcomes of their students.

15. What are Network Principals accountable for?
Network Principals will support the conditions for collaboration within the network and build relationships that support leadership.

16. To whom do Network Principals report?
All principals, including Network Principals, report to the Regional Executive Director.

17. Can Network Principals be part of school reviews?
No, Network Principals will support peers and will not be involved in school assessment or evaluation. They may, however, be part of a network response to findings of underperformance or risk. Such a targeted level of support will be at a school principal’s request or at the direction of the Regional Executive Director.

18. Do Network Principals have a role in the performance review of other principals?
Network Principals will be trained and able to offer professional support and feedback to principals on request. They will not monitor nor intervene in the performance of principals.

19. Do Network Principals play a role in complaints management or grievances?
Other than support and advice for individual principals who are subject to, or otherwise involved in, grievances or complaints, Network Principals will play no role in the management of either. This will be the work of the school principal, coordinator regional operations, Assistant Regional Executive Director and/or Regional Executive Director.

20. Can Network Principals select principals?
The Regional Executive Director can invite the Network Principal, like any other school principal, to be a part of Department sanctioned principal selection processes.

21. Do Network Principals support system initiatives on behalf of the Department?
Yes, but they will not be responsible for implementing or monitoring system initiatives. In the main, negotiated support will be in the areas of communication, consultation, advice and guidance to school principals.

22. With how many schools does each Network Principal work?
This will vary according to what constitutes a reasonable span of influence within each context. Local issues (including geographic isolation, cultural diversity and socio-economic disadvantage) will play a part in deciding the number of schools with which a Network Principal works. Nominally, this will range from five to 20 schools.

23. What is the role of the Network Principal in underperforming schools?
Network Principals may be a key support for schools that are undergoing formal intervention as a result of underperformance. They may work alongside principals of these schools, either at the direction of the Regional Executive Director or request of the principal, to offer professional support and advice. They will not have a line relationship with school principals.