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The significance of trust in school-based collaborative leadership

ANDREW COLEMAN

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The expectation that schools should work in partnership to promote the achievement of children has arguably been the defining feature of school policy over the last decade. This rise in school-to-school partnerships and increased emphasis on multi-agency-based interventions for vulnerable children have seen the emergence of a new form of school leadership, required to simultaneously reconcile the pressures of cross-organizational partnership working with the demands of effectively leading a single institution.

Based on original, doctoral research, this article discusses the fundamentally important role trust plays in assuring the leader's integrity and capability within this context. It explores the concept of trustworthy leadership, offering an innovative model for the emergence of trust and a three-dimensional framework to account for its manifestation in collaborative contexts. The article concludes that trustworthy leadership is fundamentally relational in nature and based on the leader's consistent modelling of their values in their day-to-day behaviours. Furthermore, it requires that followers perceive a flawless connection between these aspects, which in turn is dependent upon understandings as to the nature of professionalism within a specific context. Trustworthiness is therefore viewed as both an innate and attributed quality, the precise nature of which is contextually constructed.

Background

Context

The formation of the coalition government in England following the hung election of 2010 may be viewed within the context of a broader trend towards partnership working in this country. It serves as a helpful illustration of how collaborations are seldom the perfect outcome of explicit intent but instead are often clumsy solutions, precipitated by a range of messy factors, not least potential political advantage and expediency. Few would claim that LibDems and Tories are natural bedfellows, yet circumstances conspired to make the formation of an alliance between these parties both advantageous and a logical response to the circumstances

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they found themselves in. At the same time, areas of difference continue and indeed the two parties remain competitors at heart, as evidenced by the LibDems commitment to fielding separate candidates at subsequent by-elections (Porter 2011). The coming months and years promise a very public demonstration of the complex and multifaceted dynamics of how such partnerships work in practice.

In the English education system, partnership working has been an increasingly common focus for policy in the last 10–15 years. Indeed, it has arguably been the most significant feature of education policy in the last decade and was a consistent and central feature of the previous administration's vision for schools (Connolly and James 2006). Moreover, the focus on collaborative working to promote improved outcomes for children (DfES 2003) has arguably been the defining feature of government schools' policy over the last decade, as Hopkins notes:

> Even a dozen years ago, few would have predicted the amount of collaboration and mutual support in the schools system today. The shift from competition to collaboration, from top-down control to organizational autonomy has been quite remarkable. (Hopkins 2009: 1)

A closer inspection of the policy initiatives introduced during the (New) Labour years (1997–2010) reveals three main preoccupations for this government. These centred on the following aspects:

1. child protection—for instance, the emergence of 'Every Child Matters' and extended services, a greater focus on multi-agency intervention and merging of education and social care at the Authority level etc.
2. school improvement—for example, a focus on sharing good practice between schools, for instance via Networked Learning Communities, the emergence of system leadership roles such as School Improvement Partners and National Leaders of Education via City and National Challenge, the growth in clusters to support the professional development of staff, etc.
3. economics and access to funding—for instance, the encouragement of school-based partnerships to support joint bidding for funds and commissioning of services, federations to increase the viability of underperforming/vulnerable schools, etc.

While each of these themes has been significant, it was perhaps the first, child protection, which most dominated during the previous administration and it is this which offers the backdrop to this paper. However, while the emerging education policy of the new government indicates that partnership will continue to play an important role in schools, the focus for such activity is likely to change, with a far greater concentration on how collaborative working can support school improvement. Indeed, the coalition's first schools' White Paper, 'The importance of teaching' (Department for Education 2010), signals a very clear belief that schools should focus on their 'core business' of teaching and learning and that schools themselves are best placed to work together to promote improvements in this across England. It outlines a number of

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specific policies aimed at achieving this goal, each of which involves partnership working at some level. Examples of these include the introduction of teaching schools, the extension of academy chains and federations and the increased use of national leaders of education.

However, the White Paper also clearly articulates ambitious plans to establish significant numbers of quasi-autonomous academy schools, thereby potentially increasing competition in the system as the focus on attracting students becomes even fiercer. While it is anticipated that schools' sense of moral purpose and collective responsibility (with additional support from the new £35m Collaboration Incentive) will help to address this, the growth in the academies movement offers a helpful illustration of the tensions which potentially act as disincentives to joint working. Indeed, the rise in academies is perhaps just the latest reminder that, like the coalition government, school-based partnerships operate within a broader context of competition.

It was the introduction of *Local Management of Schools*, in the 1988 Education Reform Act which first established a quasi-market for the provision of education and gave parents greater power to choose their child's school. This focus on parental choice has arguably reached its natural conclusion with the rise of the free school, introduced by the current government to enable parents and professionals to launch their own school (Young 2010, Department for Education 2011). On the one hand, therefore, free schools represent the ultimate acknowledgement that education is reliant upon positive partnerships between the family and school (Desforges and Abouchaar 2003, Fink 2006). On the other, the increased competition for pupils introduced by free schools threatens school-based partnership working and undermines the relationship between school and local authority, as funding is increasing channelled directly to schools (Chima 2010). These policies have also introduced greater opportunities for collaborative working with a wider range of partners, for instance, from the voluntary or private sector. Thus, even policies which at first view potentially signal a move away from partnership working may at one level simply change the nature and focus of collaborative working.

This paper hypothesizes that the coming years will see schools engage in an increasingly diverse range of partnerships, characterized by relationships with a wide range of different agencies, other schools, private providers and parents, and focused on promoting school improvement and increasing outcomes for children. At the same time, competition for resources (not least students) is likely to increase, thereby resulting in an increasing complex environment for such partnerships. Reconciling these pressures for collaboration and competition is one of a number of challenges facing school leaders, and to which this paper now turns.

Collaborative leadership

While the assumption that closer working relationships improve choice, efficiency and the transfer of knowledge is intuitively appealing, it would be a mistake to assume that partnership working itself is unproblematic

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and inevitably successful. Hargreaves and Fullan (1998), for instance, note that collaborative working is not a panacea for all of education ills and that successful partnerships take time and considerable effort. Huxham and Vangen (2005) go even further by explicitly cautioning against partnership working unless there is an overwhelming need to do so:

> Collaboration is complex and multi-faceted and there are no easy routes to success....the overwhelming conclusion from our research is that seeking collaborative advantage is a seriously resource-consuming activity so it is only to be considered when the stakes are really worth pursuing. Our message to practitioners and policy makers alike is don't do it unless you have to. (Huxham and Vangen 2005: 12–13)

So while such partnership approaches promise much, they also bring with them a range of challenges for the leaders involved. However, little research has been published on the practice of *collaborative leadership*, which itself only emerged as a theme of note in the early 1990s. Of that which has, little has considered such practice within schools and instead has frequently focused on relationships between public agencies, not for profit organizations and individual citizens in promoting community regeneration or addressing social issues (e.g. Chrislip and Larson 1994).

Indeed, while the growth of partnership working within schools means that collaborative leadership has increasingly become an area of interest, the evidence base on the nature of leadership demanded in such contexts remains patchy. Lumby (2009), for instance, notes that while the discourse on partnership is 'ubiquitous', considerations of collaborative leadership have ostensibly focused on the internal mechanics of the single institution, rather than collaborations which are cross-organizational in nature. Thus, such reflections have more commonly focused on the concept of *collaboration as leadership style and strategy* (e.g. distributed and collegiate in nature) rather than *collaboration as a focus for leadership activity* (i.e. the practice which supports leaders across organizational boundaries). Nevertheless, an assessment of literature from both education and beyond identifies a number of consistent challenges for leaders in multi-organizational partnerships, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Sense making—helping to promote a common vision and inspiring others to follow (e.g. Barton and Quinn 2001, Gillinson *et al.* 2007, Edwards *et al.* 2009)
2. Empowerment—encouraging ownership and participation in the collaborative process (e.g. Huxham 1996, Davies and Hentschke 2006, Hill 2007, Hargreaves 2010)
3. Conflict management—resolving disputes and potential competition between partners at a strategic and operational level whilst retaining the potentially positive elements of challenge and differences in opinion (e.g. Allen 2007, Briggs *et al.* 2007)
4. Commitment and effectiveness—promoting genuine buy-in amongst partners to secure the benefits and added value of joint working (e.g. Bishop and Mulford 1999, Linden 2009, Middlewood and Parker 2009)

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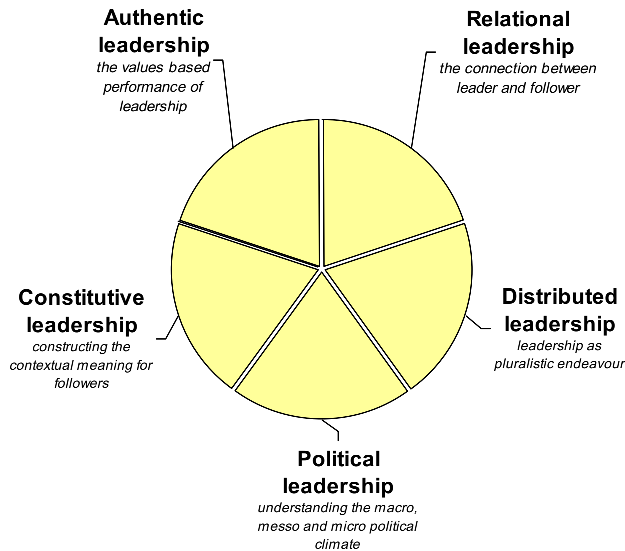

Figure 1. Elements of collaborative leadership

These priorities were echoed in the findings from the original research which underpins this paper and which similarly conceives collaborative leadership as a composite rather than distinct concept, containing a number of both competing and complementary demands. There is insufficient space in this paper to fully consider the detail of these leadership elements and the interested reader is referred instead to (Coleman 2011) for a fuller discussion. However, in broad terms these elements are summarized in Figure 1.

On a day-to-day basis, the effective performance of collaborative leadership demands the appropriate blending of these alternative elements in a way which is sensitive to the situation within which they occur, while remaining consistent with the underpinning authenticity of the leader. Thus, collaborative leadership may at once be seen as both structured and agentic, informed and driven by the constraints of context, yet manifest in accordance with the character, values and beliefs of the individual leader themselves. Furthermore, the relationship between structure and agency is itself dynamic and reflexive, as the leader actively shapes their context through word and deed, in accordance with the principles of constitutive leadership itself. I will return to these themes subsequently during the course of this paper.

Trust and collaboration

There is a well-established literature that evidences the significance of trust as a positive factor in promoting school effectiveness. For instance, the presence of trust has been found to be beneficial in areas such as student achievement (e.g. Goddard *et al.* 2001, Bryk and Schneider 2002),

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leadership success (e.g. Bennis 1989, Hoy *et al.* 2006) and positive interpersonal relationships (e.g. Hoy and Sabo 1998). Similarly, writers such as Cosner (2009) and Hargreaves (2003) have highlighted the contribution trust between peers plays in the sharing of good practice and learning between professionals.

There is also considerable evidence to demonstrate that trust has a positive influence in collaborative working between organizations. Hudson *et al.* (1999), for instance, states that:

> Trust is often identified as the sine qua non of successful collaboration and conversely mistrust as a potential barrier. (Hudson *et al.* 1999: 709)

Trust is especially important to partnerships within the English schools system, where it plays a critical part in helping schools to reconcile the areas of competition described earlier in this paper, and thereby realize potential opportunities for mutual advantage (Davies and Hentschke 2006). Central to this is its role in helping leaders manage the vulnerability associated with collaborative working in competitive contexts (Bottery 2003, 2005). Connolly and James (2006), for instance, describe the role of trust in resolving this potential paradox and how the generation of positive relationships within such contexts calls for 'substantial managerial sophistication' (Connolly and James 2006: 75).

Robinson (2011) has also described the important role trust plays in supporting 'system leadership' in English schools and identifies two functions which it fulfils. Firstly, trust is important in promoting positive relationships between the 'supporting' and 'supported' and is especially important in instances when this relationship has not been initiated by the latter. Secondly, the notion of system leadership is itself predicated on a belief that it is the professionals within schools who are best able to identify and deliver the support required for school improvement. This philosophy therefore requires civil servants and politicians to extend sufficient trust to school leaders to ensure its delivery.

Dering *et al.* (2006) have also described the role trust plays in deepening relationships between partners, thereby facilitating deeper and more effective collaborations than would otherwise be possible. Covey (2006) similarly describes the benefits that high trust relationships bring in terms of reducing transaction costs and increasing the speed with which exchanges occur (a point also made by Granovetter [1973], Lane [1998] and Sako [1998]).

Bryk and Schneider (2002) have highlighted the connection between high levels of trust and improved performance in schools, with trust fostering the conditions (structural and social psychological) for individuals to initiate and sustain the activities necessary to improve learning and productivity. Tschannen-Moran (2004) has also highlighted the essential role of trust in school effectiveness thus:

> without trust, schools are likely to flounder in their attempts to provide constructive educational environments and meet the lofty goals that our society has set for them because energy needed to solve the complex problem of educating a diverse group of students is diverted into self protection. (Tschannen-Moran 2004: 13)

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Elsewhere, West *et al.* (2005) have described how trust underpins a culture of learning within schools, which in turn is critical to increasing the professional capacity of teachers. Timperley (2008) echoes this point and sees trust, together with a willingness to challenge, as the critical conditions for professional learning in schools. Similarly, Bolam *et al.* (2007), Hupp and Huffman (2007), Jackson and Temperley (2007) and Fleisch (2008) have all highlighted trust as a major factor in promoting effective professional learning communities between schools and the critical role leaders play in promoting the development of such a culture. Meanwhile, Earl and Timperley (2008) and Tschannen-Moran (2009) have described how leaders contribute to the development of this positive culture by promoting the norms of trust and respect throughout the organization.

Chen and Chen (2009) have described how trust increases the effectiveness of dynamic project teams in delivering a partnership's priorities across organizations and discipline areas. Trust also promotes improved efficiency by supporting informal interpersonal networks which underpin formal inter-organizational partnership. Muijs (2007), for instance, describes how trust promotes mutual respect and credibility between professionals from different backgrounds within the context of extended schools. This was found to play a major role in the social integration of partnerships and its development of functional intragroup relationships. Similarly, trust is important in promoting effective communications between partners, for instance, in supporting dialogue at a range of levels in organizations and promoting the sharing of non-essential information. In particular, trust informs the lens through which 'official' messages are viewed and interpreted, helps to reduce cynicism and promote receptiveness amongst followers (e.g. Kanter 1994, Hudson *et al.* 1999, Cummings *et al.* 2007). Trust also plays a major role in overcoming areas of potential misunderstanding at the operational level, where confusion may arise as a result of differences in professional culture or language (Stone 2001). Smith and Wohlstetter (2006) also note how trust can help overcome potential opportunism, while Bijlsma and Koopman (2003) make a similar point as to how trust may promote goodwill and increases discretionary effort.

Trust plays an essential role in promoting change, which is often a central feature of collaborative working within schools (Archer and Cameron 2010, Bryk and Schneider 2002). More specifically, it promotes greater ownership of change amongst staff (Bishop and Mulford 1999) and reduces the perceived level of threat the proposed change is seen to represent (Daly 2009). From a cross organizational perspective, writers such as Putnam (2003), West-Burnham (2003), Caldwell (2008) have described the value of *bridging social capital*—effectively inter-organizational trust—in promoting partnership with others from outside the organization.

Trust is fundamental to developing strategic relationships between organizations and managing issues of power, control and risk (Vangen and Huxham 2003). It is therefore critical to changes in the ways of working necessary to undertake collaboration, most notably the move to autonomous and self managing teams needed to facilitate distributed leadership

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(Tyler and Kramer 1996, Rousseau *et al.* 1998, Tyler 2003). For instance, Muijs and Harris (2007) have described the significance of trust in supporting distributed leadership as a part of school improvement measures in the English system, while Hallinger and Heck (2010) have also described the role of distributed leadership in school improvement from a US perspective. Sydow's (1998) work on different organizational types also highlights the importance of trust in supporting cross-agency work by:

- supporting the formation of 'collective strategies'
- facilitating the coordination of economic activities
- promoting open exchange of information
- reducing transaction costs
- promoting stability but facilitating change
- reducing levels of negative management conflict.

Finally, from a broader viewpoint, collaborative working promotes a shift from transactional to transformational leadership (Bass and Avolio 1990, Bass 1998). The role of trust in supporting this is difficult to overstate, as it effectively guarantees the key leadership activities of sense making, empowerment, conflict management and promoting commitment (Day 2004). But what exactly is trust? And how is trust in leaders of collaborations developed in practice?

Trust cuts across a number of disciplinary areas (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; Worchel 1979) and has no universal definition (Creed and Miles 1996, Coulson 1998, Connell *et al.* 2003). For instance, Rus and Iglic (2005: 373) focus on the issue of uncertainty, while Gambetta (1988a) concentrates on trust's role in relation to protecting one's own interests. Ferrin *et al.* (2008: 174) highlight this multidimensional quality in their description of trust as '*a family of related concepts*'. However, a number of recurring themes can be identified in the literature on trust. These are as follows:

- trust as a means of managing uncertainty, risk and vulnerability (Powell 1996, Doney *et al.* 1998, Humphrey 1998, Hudson *et al.* 1999, Rus and Iglic 2005)
- trust as a basis for increasing interdependency and reducing independence (Powell 1996, Putnam 2000)
- trust as confidence that the other party will not behave opportunistically (Cummings and Bromily 1996)
- trust as a belief that another's actions will not be detrimental to one's own interests (Gambetta 1988b, Lane 1998)
- trust as a belief that the other is both benevolent in attitude and competent in deed (Mishra 1996, Doney *et al.* 1998, Mishra and Spreitzer 1998, Covey 2006)
- trust as a belief in the authenticity of the other (Greenberg *et al.* 2002, Covey 2006)

The following definition was developed for this study from a consideration of the literature and was used as the basis for exploring trust:

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> Trust is confidence in the integrity and abilities of another which serves as a basis for discretionary individual or collective action.

The remainder of this paper outlines the findings from doctoral research, supported by the National College for School Leadership, which explores the nature of trust and the ways in which it is developed within the context of collaborative leadership. This discussion describes how trust is fundamentally relational in nature and dependent upon the perceived existence of competency and benevolence on the part of the leader. Nine specific factors that support the development of trust are described and combined to develop a coherent, three-dimensional view of trust. In doing so, the grounded nature of notions of benevolence and competency are explored, while the discussion concludes by noting the critical role the leader plays in helping followers to understand these concepts within their specific context. In this way, it is argued that leaders both respond to and create the context within which they operate in an ongoing and reflexive relationship with followers. Trustworthy leadership is therefore viewed as both an innate and attributed quality, the precise nature of which is contextually constructed.

Methodology

This study used an approach consistent with the principles of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), with data collected in two broad phases.

Phase one

Phase one explored the nature of leadership required by school-based partnerships. It involved the completion of 49 structured and unstructured interviews with a range of school leaders who had a strong tradition of collaboration, and local authority advisers, researchers or senior academics with an interest in this field. Interviewees were principally identified from published research, inspection reports and case studies produced by organizations with an interest in this field (e.g. Department for Education, Continyou, Teacher Development Agency, Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills [Ofsted], etc.). A small number of respondents were also identified via a snowball sampling technique and following recommendations made by researchers, senior officials and individuals interviewed as part of this study. In such instances, desk research was undertaken to verify that these recommendations were suitable for this research.

Table 1 summarizes the occupation and educational phase of interviewees in phase 1.

Phase one also involved a structured survey of attendees at a series of seminars on partnership working in extended schools, hosted by the

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Table 1. Summary of interviewees in phase 1 by occupation

Phase	Job role	No.
Children's centre	Total	4
Of which:	Children's centre manager	4
Primary school	Total	9
Of which:	Headteacher	4
	Extended schools manager	1
	Governor	2
	Other school leader	2
Secondary school	Total	22
Of which:	Headteacher	7
	Extended schools manager	7
	Deputy/assistant headteacher	7
	Other school leader	1
Special school	Total	2
Of which:	Headteacher	2
Non-school based	Total	12
Of which:	Professional from other agencies	3
	Researcher/academic	5
	Local authority advisor	4
Total		49

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National College for School Leadership and Continyou. In total, 139 delegates responded to this survey, which represented a response rate of 37%. This survey collected a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data, focused on the following:

(a) the main challenges facing leaders of extended schools,
(b) strategies used to address these challenges,
(c) the key characteristics, skills and experiences needed by leaders in an extended school and
(d) the key factors in ensuring the continued success and sustainability of extended schools.

Forty-nine per cent of respondents were headteachers in schools, 17% described themselves as an 'other senior school leader' and 9% were extended schools coordinators, employed by a school with specific responsibility for developing extended services. Thus, 76% of respondents were directly responsible (to a greater or lesser extent) for leading the development and introduction of extended services within a specific school. The balance were employed by local authorities to support the development of these services and so were able to offer considerable insight into issues of collaborative working.

Phase one was completed between June 2004 and March 2007.

Phase two

The second phase of this study explored the practice of collaborative leadership. As phase one identified trustworthiness as the single most critical factor in effective collaborative working, phase two focused particularly on the factors that encouraged followers to trust leaders in such contexts.

Phase two comprised six case studies, each of which examined a school with a strong track record of effective collaborative working. In total, 32 interviews were completed with a range of individuals associated with these case studies, including headteachers, other school leaders, governors, professionals from other agencies, community workers and other parties, identified as relevant during the completion of fieldwork. In this instance, case studies were viewed as a means of developing rich understandings of the issue in hand, through the production of thick descriptions (Hammersley 1992) of the phenomenon of collaborative leadership. Such descriptions were not therefore intended to provide generalizable results in the strict sense associated with statistical reliability, but rather to offer insight which was potentially transferable and promoted a sense of connection, understanding and empathy.

Phase two was completed during March to September 2007.

Review of relevant literature

Burton *et al.* (2008) state that '*conducting a high quality review of existing ideas is probably the most important element of any successful research study*' (Burton *et al.* 2008: 29). Considerable time was therefore dedicated to reviewing literature throughout this study.

Classically, a literature review should be undertaken at the commencement of the study in order to see whether the answer to the research question in hand already exists. However, inductive studies such as Grounded Theory advocate a more gradual exposure to literature (Corbin and Strauss 2008) and argue that while an initial consideration of literature should be undertaken prior to the first exploratory phase of fieldwork to help identify areas of focus and for questioning, this should be far from exhaustive to avoid potentially skewing the focus for the work which follows. This philosophy was adopted in this study.

Prior to and during phase 1, the review of literature focused on exploring the broader issues of collaboration and leadership within the context of the provision of extended services in schools and school-based collaboration. The majority of this work was completed between June 2004 and January 2006 and revisited in the summer of 2009 to include any relevant materials which had been subsequently published (a further review was undertaken in winter 2010/11 in support of the production of this paper). This review comprised searches of relevant academic databases including the British Education Index and the Education Resources Information Centre. Google Scholar searches were also undertaken. Texts were also identified from a review of the main policy documents in this field and through discussions with officials from

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Department for Education, NCSL, Continyou and other stakeholder groups. In a total of 158 reports, publications, articles and other sources were reviewed in this process.

A further literature review was undertaken in phase two of this study to support the production of substantive theory. Again this review was revisited in 2009 and during the development of this paper to ensure that any important material published subsequently was included. This review comprised a search of the Metalib 'education' and 'business and management' sections, which in turn involved a review of twelve databases:

1. British Education Index
2. PsycINFO
3. ABI/INFORM Global (via ProQuest)
4. Academic Search Premier
5. Business Source Premier
6. JSTOR
7. Lancaster University Library Catalogue
8. ScienceDirect (Elsevier)
9. SpringerLink Journals
10. Web of Science (All Subjects)/Web of Knowledge
11. Wiley Interscience Journals
12. Zetoc

The keywords 'collaboration', 'leadership' and 'trust' were used to cover the years from 2000 onwards. In a total of 117 publications, articles and other sources were reviewed in this process.

Ethical considerations

Interviewees were encouraged to describe their positive and negative experiences of collaborative working, in order to gain a more rounded appreciation of the issues. Ethically, it was critical then to protect participants from any negative consequences that such disclosures may produce. To this end, all interviews were conducted on a confidential basis and the names of participants have been changed in the findings section to ensure their anonymity.

Analysis

Evidence from the interviews completed in both phases of fieldwork was analysed using N-Vivo in an approach sympathetic with Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Codes were created from a grounded analysis of the data, then sorted and compressed through a process of axial coding to develop a relatively small number of overarching themes (Graham and Hannibal 1998). A further process of theorization was undertaken to develop the overarching explanatory

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concepts, which offered a means of explaining the phenomenon observed.

The results from the survey were analysed using SPSS. Analysis largely comprised the production of descriptive statistics.

Findings

Defining trust

The definition of trust utilized in this study highlights its implicitly relational nature; trusting fundamental involves some*one* or some*thing*. Respondents in this research consistently supported this view, for instance:

> Trust centres on relationships and having confidence in the behaviours of others. (Peter, secondary head)

This study sought to explore perceptions of this relational nature of trust in more depth and found participants consistently identified three distinct elements to this relationship. These comprised the following:

1. the values and ethics of the potentially trusted individual (termed 'ideological trust')
2. the ways in which these values and ethics are operationalized and manifest on a day-to-day basis ('behavioral trust')
3. the perceived fit between these behaviours and values, i.e. the trusted's perceived authenticity and integrity ('perceptual trust').

The first and second of these—ideological and behavioural trust—are arguably largely intuitive and perhaps unsurprisingly feature prominently in literature on this subject. However, this paper proposes that the third—perceptual trust—is largely neglected and frequently overlooked. Furthermore, the evidence from this study found that leaders who demonstrated the greatest awareness of this and adopted a reflexive approach to 'managing' others' perceptions of them enjoyed higher levels of perceived trustworthiness than their peers. Such approaches are viewed as consistent with the notion of constitutive leadership (Grint and Woolgar 1997) and broader discussions on the leader's role as organizational meaning maker (e.g. Hardy *et al.* 1998, Yukl 2002, Hannah *et al.* 2005). At the same time, this study found that leaders needed to demonstrate considerable care in adopting this strategy in order to protect their perceived integrity and authenticity as a failure to do so could be viewed as an attempt to manipulate others and taken as evidence of untrustworthiness. The remainder of this paper offers a more detailed exploration of each of these three forms of trust and describes the ways in which they were found to be manifest in practice. It contends that *ideological*, *behavioural* and *perceptual trust* form the basis of all social judgments in organizations and concludes that it is only when each domain is positively aligned and 'in-credit' that trust will be generated. Thus, the perception of good

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intentions alone is insufficient to promote trust if it is not seen to be supported by the skills and attributes required to put these ambitions into effect (in such instances it is seen as 'well meaning incompetence'). Similarly, it is perfectly possible to pursue a highly efficient campaign for questionable motives (viewed as 'efficient self-interest'). Trust therefore only exists at the intersection of all three characteristics.

Exploring the domains of trust

Ideological trust—what we are

Ideological trust is concerned with the underpinning values and ethics of a potentially trusted individual. The emphasis on values is particularly strong in teaching, which for many teaching professionals represents a vocation rather than occupation. Fullan (2001), for instance, states that a sense of moral imperative is the underlying feature of schools, which are predicated on their ability to 'make a difference' at a range of levels (for instance, in relation to the individual, the school, the system or the future). Gold (2003) also describe a view of teachers as on a 'mission', based upon a desire to do their best for their school and its pupils. Other writers such as Flintham (2010) and Day (2004) have utilized quasi-religious concepts to highlight the sense of 'calling' that some feel towards teaching. Flintham (2010), for instance, uses the notion of 'secular spiritualism' to describe an individual's personal moral and ethical values system and highlights the consistent features of this for those within schools, while Day (2004) employs the concept of 'passions' to explore a range of values and principles which guide the practice of high-performing school leaders.

School leaders interviewed in this study echoed this emphasis on values and consistently described their work as values based or moral in nature, for instance:

> Moral purpose is about doing what's right for children and perhaps a stronger theme in education than in other sectors. In education it is very difficult to work 'on the make'. Moral purpose is paramount to schools. It's what underpins everything. I'm very clear on the importance of having that. (Mary, primary head)

Stoll has described the important role leaders play in promoting values-based, collegial networks (Stoll 2005), and this study also found that having confidence that others held similar values on the importance of education was important in individuals' decisions to trust. This point shone through particularly clearly amongst those who worked with the neediest children and families:

> When I'm trusting people to take things on, I have to believe that they want to do the best thing for children, and trust that they'll recognise the confidentiality issues and those kinds of things. . .I think anyone who works with children has to have that [purpose] about them, want to do the best for children and see the welfare of children as paramount. If you don't have that you might as well give up the job I think. (Ben, special school head)

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> The primary moral purpose has to be on the child, but you can't help the child in isolation. So the secondary moral purpose is to provide support to those around the child and in the child's life to help achieve the primary moral purpose. (Donna, special education needs coordinator [SENCO], secondary school)

This study found a degree of consistency in the values held by those headteachers and school leaders with the strongest records of collaborative working and the highest perceived levels of trustworthiness. These related to five themes, summarized in Figure 2.

Figure 2 offers a values base for high trust relationships between leaders and followers in school-based partnership working. On inspection, these values can be viewed as linking strongly with broader social democratic/liberal humanist beliefs and as such may potentially be criticized from some perspectives as somewhat obvious. However, this paper argues that while similar studies into the values of professionals in other contexts may show strong similarities, they may also identify significant differences in both focus and emphasis. Most notably, the focus for, and the nature of altruism and caring for others is likely to vary depending upon both sector and role. Similarly, while professionalism is a concept respected in all roles, its composition will vary.

The significance of values to trustworthiness is also based on a commitment to clearly articulate and demonstrate these beliefs as part of the everyday execution of one's role. Thus, simply *believing* in honesty, for instance, is not enough; instead, trustworthiness is dependent upon a clearly articulated espousal of this value, evidenced through accompanying congruent behaviour. Indeed, leaders with a strong track record of part-

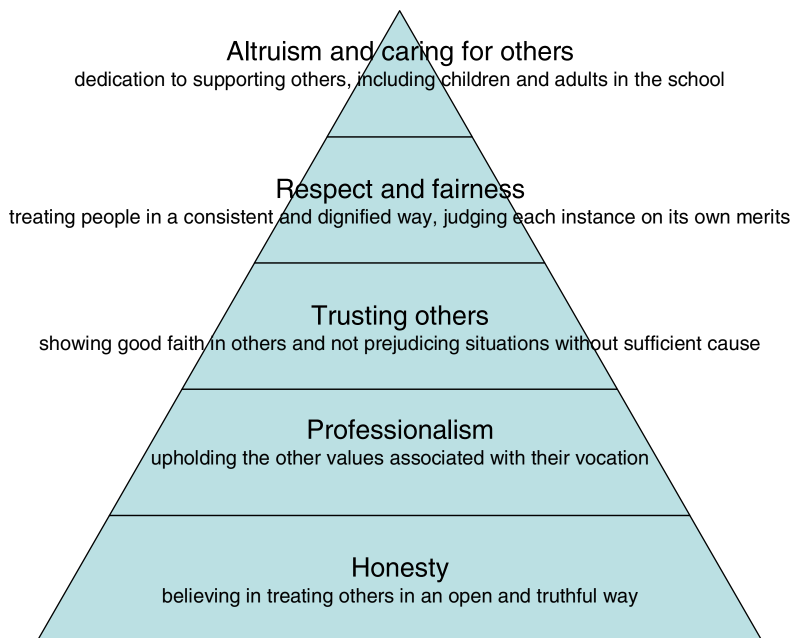

Figure 2. Elements of ideological trust

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nership working interviewed in this study frequently highlighted the importance of offering others a transparent means through which they may be judged. Clearly articulating their personal beliefs, for instance through assemblies, mission statements and so forth, was pivotal to this process.

Behavioural trust—what we do—(i.e. the day-to-day manifestations of values)

As noted above, a key finding from this study was that maintaining a high degree of consistency between one's espoused principles and one's actions was critical in determining leaders' perceived trustworthiness. In practice, for these high-performing leaders of school-based collaborations, this meant paying close attention to the minutiae of their day-to-day practice, to ensure that all behaviours, however routine and mundane, were commensurate with their underpinning values. This concern with demonstrating a values-based approach to leadership is shared in writings on authentic leadership and regarded by many writers as the basis for all leader/follower relationships (e.g. Avolio and Gardner 2005, Broussine and Miller 2005, Gardner *et al.* 2005).

The remainder of this subsection explores the ways in which the values and beliefs described above were evidenced in the behaviours and approaches of the leaders who participated in this study.

Altruism and caring for others. Concerned with demonstrating a commitment to supporting other people, this study identified two strands to *altruism and caring for others*. The first related to the core mission the leader saw their work focusing upon, which in this study was their commitment to improving children's life chances. For instance, Anna, the head of a primary school, clearly articulated her commitment to promoting the well-being of children and her work as a special education needs coordinator had been driven by a passion to help the neediest of children. This desire had in turn led her to apply to teach at one of the toughest schools in the city. Similarly, Ross, the head of a secondary school in this study, was driven by a strong personal belief in inclusion and had implemented a series of initiatives which had resulted in his school receiving successive 'outstanding' ratings from Ofsted in this respect.

The second strand involved how these headteachers demonstrated care for other adults in their school as part of their pursuit of these aims. For instance, the high-performing leaders in this study displayed a consistent commitment to their staff's continued professional development, through approaches such as external training and directly coaching and mentoring staff. Indeed, the instances where the heads themselves offered personal guidance evidenced this most graphically, a finding consistent with Tschannen-Moran's (2004) view of coaching as important in promoting trust. Several of the heads in this study demonstrated a strong coaching style of leadership, combining support and challenge to help individuals develop their own solution to the issue they faced. Coaching involved talking indi-

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viduals through a challenge they faced and helping them to develop potential strategies for tackling it. Such capacity-building approaches empowered the individual concerned, building their self-confidence and belief in their own capabilities. For instance, one school leader commented:

> On a one to one basis her approach was outstanding. It was her counselling, her coaching skills; she'd question you and take you through issues. She was really clear and would help you through with your thinking. She'd never give you advice or make judgements she'd just help you work it out. Her support was outstanding. (Sam, SENCO, primary school)

Caring for others was also frequently evidenced through the performance of mundane acts such as making others an occasional tea or coffee, opening doors and finding time for others for instance through an informal conversation when the opportunity arose. Support for this point comes from Larsson and Lundholm (2010) and Alvesson and Sveningsson (2003) who have also described the importance followers attach to the seemingly mundane actions of leaders. This theme is returned to again in the consideration of perceptual trust.

This study also found that followers felt listening to be important evidence of caring and trustworthy leadership, particularly when undertaken as much for its own sake as part of any formal consultation strategy. Listening was a means of demonstrating interest in the individual and, like coaching, was taken as evidence of a caring personality:

> My manager is always very clear that if anyone has any personal issues or anything on their mind, they can go and talk to him. He's always quite open, always has an open door policy. He always says 'if you need to come and talk to me, I'm here for you.' All we have to say is 'can I have five minutes?' or whatever, and he makes time for you straight away. That's important. If people make the time for you to talk it makes you feel that your issues are worthy of being talked about. (Ruth, police officer, secondary school)

Fairness. Interviewees frequently described the significance that demonstrating a clear commitment to fairness played in securing the trust of others. For instance several respondents described the importance of promoting equity and establishing clear processes which would prevent potential injustice and the prejudicial treatment of students and staff. A number of heads highlighted the potential short-term cost of this commitment and the courage that it sometimes required, particularly when it involved facing robust challenge from parents and staff. However, over the longer term, leaders highlighted the greater respect and regard that this behaviour produced and how it resulted in increased trust. For instance, Steve, the head of secondary school C, was clear that resources and support should be allocated on the basis of need and not convenience and, reflecting on his predecessor, noted how she was distrusted for lacking the integrity and moral fibre required to carry through on her commitments:

> The former head responded to whoever shouted the loudest. There wasn't much trust in the school. People weren't confident that if the head said yes to them, ten minutes later she wouldn't say yes to someone else. Rewards were allocated on the basis of volume—whoever shouted the most got them. People were promised things but these promises weren't always carried through. (Steve, secondary headteacher)

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Fairness was also seen to involve a willingness on the part of the leader to recognize their mistakes and to seek to right any resultant wrongs. For instance, several interviewees described past errors which they had learnt from and sought to avoid in the future.

Trusting others. Respondents in this study consistently highlighted how trusting others helped develop mutually trusting relationships. For many heads, this formed part of a broader attempt to model the behaviours they expected of others and thereby promote the development of a positive culture within their organization. Indeed, this approach represented a very conscious attempt to utilize social learning (Bandura 1977) as part of a wider strategy of cultural management. Creed and Miles (1996: 33) have also highlighted the important role such approaches play in trust building strategies, noting how '*trust is built by trusting…trust begets trust*'.

In this study, trusting others was observed through attempts to distribute leadership (Kirwan *et al.* 2007). For instance, one special education needs coordinator, responsible for addressing the needs of children requiring specific additional support, described how her headteacher had trusted her early in her career to lead school assemblies. This had a significant impact on her self-esteem and professional capabilities and resulted in a strong sense of loyalty to the head. Several other respondents described how the headteacher had effectively delegated both strategic and operational responsibilities to staff for significant areas of activity while retaining overall responsibility for their success, actions which were viewed positively by followers. For the headteacher interviewed, this distribution of leadership was in part a pragmatic response to the day-to-day demands of their job. However, it also reflected a strongly held commitment to empowering others, which formed part of a broader belief in collegiality, highlighted by writers such as Sergiovanni (1992) as characteristic of the schools system.

Another example of trusting others centred on the often close relationships between these headteachers and selected members of their senior leadership group. In many instances, headteachers had one or two close confidents who they were prepared to share more sensitive information with, for instance, particularly thorny problems affecting the organization or more personal concerns and problems of their own. These 'trusted lieutenants' were an important part of leaders' coping strategies, most notably in relation to reducing their sense of isolation their experienced in their role as headteacher (Mercer 1996, Swaffield 2008).

Honesty. Displaying honesty—believing in treating others in an open and truthful way—was found by participants in this study to be fundamental to trust. Honesty involved demonstrating openness and authenticity—one head, for instance, highlighted its importance in discussions with other professionals in reaching a shared understanding of a child's need:

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> One of the things I knew would be an issue when I started working with people from different professional bodies is there is a different way of thinking and trust is respecting and understanding that difference. For instance social services will look at a young person's needs differently to me, because I'm an educator and that young person has got to learn in this environment and not affect the learning of others. But social services will look at that person's needs quite differently, particularly if they start getting excluded, so it's trying to see other's points of view really. That's the key element. There needs to be a robustness that you can challenge people and be open and honest with them, because if you try to hide things from others then trust breaks down. And that takes time because initially you can't have that dialogue as it will have an adverse affect on the relationship. It takes time to build up that respect for different people's point of view. (Steve, head, secondary school)

In addition to being open and truthful, honesty was also found to involve displaying integrity—a point consistent with theories of authentic leadership (e.g. Broussine and Miller 2005, Mendonca 2001). Headteachers also described honesty as being willing to acknowledge one's mistakes and being open to feedback. This, in turn, needed to be accepted in good faith and several leaders described breaches of trust they themselves had experienced when others had solicited feedback but resented the messages they received. Ensuring consistency between espoused and actual behaviour—in this case the request for and subsequent response to feedback—was therefore critical in promoting a view of the leader as authentic, which in turn supported trust between leaders and followers. The concept of perceptual trust is explored further in the next section of this paper.

Professionalism. Professionalism was the final element of behavioural trust. Professionalism involves defining and performing a role in accordance with an underpinning set of beliefs and assumptions, commonly shared between individuals in different settings. Professionalism is effectively the glue which binds together individuals in a similar vocation and offers a shortcut to productive peer to peer relationships within the workplace.

Hargreaves (2003) describes how *professional trust* represents a form of social capital that supports collaborative working between teachers and is essential to improving pedagogy in schools. He identifies it as comprising an active commitment to a set of common values and the principles of shared work. While Hargreaves concept of professional trust has been applied largely to teacher-to-teacher relationships and less within the confines of leadership, this study nevertheless found evidence to support its application at this level. In this instance, professionalism involved delivering results and keeping one's commitments. Being able to trust the head's word was also critical and demanded the ability to fulfil the aspects of the role in a reliable and efficient way (Yukl 2002, Erickson 2006). This need for reliability covered the head's professional and private life. Professionalism also involved a commitment to confidentiality and demonstrating a general care in the way one talked of others, especially when they weren't present.

In these schools, the *specific* nature of professionalism emerged through its day-to-day performance and was informed by the responses of the audience who observed it. Professionalism was therefore reflexive and socially constructed—what Hanlon (1999: 3) describes as '*the*

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product of a dialectical relationship with its environment'. Riddell and Tett (2001) describe how the emergence of extended schools has blurred the nature of school leadership (a trend continued by the rise of system leadership and executive headship), and this study found evidence of this in schools with the most well established inter-agency partnership working. For instance, in one school, the headteacher worked closely with the designated school social worker to support the families of students most at risk, in a way which may have seemed unusual in other sites in this study. This blurring of boundaries also often affected the roles beyond the headteacher. For instance, a police officer based at another school was viewed by students as effectively 'just one of the school's staff' and described the very different duties he performed in this context compared with those more commonly expected of police officers at his station.

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Perceptual trust—what others see (i.e. our perceived authenticity and integrity)

Perceptual trust focuses on the lens through which the trustor views the trustee. It is therefore concerned with how we are *seen* to be or act and draws attention to the ways in which followers interpret and construct meaning from a leader's action (Hughes and Sharrock 1997; Saunders *et al.* 2003). To this end, the main focus of perceptual trust is on those factors which influence our viewpoints of others.

Thomas *et al.* (2004) have described the almost continual glare of attention that leaders receive from followers and the ways in which their interpretations inform leader–follower relations:

> People in organisations are keen observers of leadership behaviour. They quickly note any disparities between what leaders say and what leaders do. (Thomas *et al.* 2004: 64)

Tschannen-Moran (2004) has also highlighted the need for leaders to demonstrate trustworthiness at all times and how any perceive disconnect between a leader's espoused values, and their manifest behaviours potentially threatens leader–follower relationships. Perceptual trust encompasses both ideas and is developed in instances when the leader is commonly seen by followers as *authentic*, i.e. that their actions are consistently in line with popular understandings of their personality and belief system. There are clear connections between perceptual trust and theories of authentic leadership, which also highlight the role this sense of genuineness plays as a basis for leaders' authority (e.g. Avolio *et al.* 2005, Chan *et al.* 2005, Begley 2007). For instance, Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2005) describe how a disconnect between these factors can lead followers to attribute manipulative and self-serving intentions to the leader, resulting in negative emotional reactions and adverse leader–follower relationships.

This study found that the leaders viewed as most trustworthy recognized the significance of even the most mundane action in promoting positive relationships with others. These leaders were therefore aware of the significance of their personal presentation was every interaction and

the importance of positive leader–follower relations to organizational performance more broadly. This high level of self-awareness and reflexivity is also a consistent theme within authentic leadership—for instance, Chan *et al.* (2005) describe authentic leadership as involving a commitment to self-awareness and self-regulation, resulting in positive multiplying effects on performance.

To understand perceptual trust further, this subsection explores the issues which affect our predisposition to trust others and the ways in which we assess their level of trustworthiness.

Dispositions to trust and perceptions of trustworthiness. As noted early in this paper, trust serves as the basis for discretionary action, effectively acting as a form of insurance and helping individuals to manage risk within a context of uncertainty (Humphrey 1998, Hudson *et al.* 1999, Rus and Iglic 2005). According to transactional theories, trust is only granted if the likely benefits of trusting are felt to outweigh its possible risks (Powell 1996, Doney *et al.* 1998). This study found two factors underpinned this assessment of costs and benefits. These were as follows:

1. general disposition to trust; and
2. perceptions of the trustworthiness of the other.

These factors are distinct but closely connected. *Disposition to trust* relates to our generalized and abstracted willingness to trust while perceptions of the *trustworthiness of the other* centre on specific, concrete decisions to trust within a specific given context.

Our general disposition to trust is influenced by both cognitive and affective states. Seashore Louis (2003), for instance, notes its strongly emotional dimension, which in turn is based upon more general beliefs about the treatment individuals expect to receive from others (Mayer *et al.* 1995, Costa 2003). These beliefs are not static but rather are influenced by our life experiences, cultural background, education and other socio-economic factors (Sako 1998). For instance, several headteachers interviewed in this study described how they had become more comfortable and confident in decisions to trust others as they had progressed in their career and accrued greater experience of leadership.

The perceived trustworthiness of another is informed by this general disposition to trust, but represents a more specific assessment of the potential benefits and costs at the interpersonal level. It is therefore a more localized decision, sensitive to the specific context within which it occurs. This study found that one important factor in this was the extent to which the other was seen to display the values and behaviours associated with their professional role. For instance, several followers described how they expected headteachers to display strong but considered leadership, concerned with promoting the best interests of the child rather than the pursuit of personal glory or aggrandizement. There are echoes of this in Tschannen-Moran's (2004) concept of *quiet leadership* identified in her study of trust in elementary schools. This emphasis on

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displaying personal humility, restraint and modesty, while simultaneously remaining tenacious in their pursuit of the overarching goals, was summarized by Sally, an official from the local authority, in the following terms:

> The head is one of the quietest, most dignified and modest gentlemen on one level, but he is assertive and knowledgeable, and doesn't typify what some people would see as a 'classic' leader. The respect and the trust that his staff have for him is total and completely reciprocated. He just role models how an outstanding leader can be. (Sally, local authority official)

Sally's comments highlight the value of humility and modesty, which were consistently cited as important factors in the development of trust. Moreover, her quote is especially relevant as it calls into question the ways in which leadership is defined and highlights its highly contextualized and socially constructed nature (Sjostrand and Tyrstrup 2001, Grint 2005). In this instance, Ben's quiet and modest approach was defined as a strength rather than a weakness, as it connected strongly with the values held by subordinates and was viewed as promoting meaning through the effective day to day performance of leadership. However, in contexts that may place a far greater emphasis upon charisma and oratory prowess, such an understated approach may be viewed as a potential weakness. For instance, the most obvious example of this is front bench politics and the case of Iain Duncan Smith, the former leader of the Conservation for whom the sobriquet of 'The Quiet Man' ultimately became of term of derision.

A further factor in these decisions relates to the amount of power and control the 'truster' retains over a situation (Sydow 1998). This study found evidence of this in the ways in which headteachers adopted differentiated approaches to distributed leadership, depending upon their experiences of the individual concerned. More specifically, leaders invariably displayed a greater willingness to devolve authority and responsibility in instances where they had worked extensively with a member of staff than they did in cases where the individual was largely 'untested'. This sort of incremental approach to trusting represented a form of 'exposure management', as leaders tolerated increased levels of risk in interactions with individuals with whom they had enjoyed successful 'trusting encounters' in the past. In these cases, these positive experiences formed the basis for potentially greater extensions of trust, a finding consistent with staged based approaches described by writers such as Lewicki and Bunker (1996) and Bottery (2003, 2005).

Conclusion

We live in a time of partnership. For the first since 1945, Britain is governed by a full coalition and a desire to realize the benefits of collaboration drives the business strategies of many public and private sector companies alike. Meanwhile, partnership working has increasingly become viewed as essential to addressing wicked problems at a global level. This paper has sought to describe how the greater focus on partnership work-

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ing has resulted in the emergence of a range of new demands on leaders. It has also attempted to highlight the implications of this trend for leaders, foremost amongst which is the move away from the leadership of a single organization, based upon formalized, hierarchical and institutionalized lines of power, towards one stretched across organizational boundaries and based upon a common acceptance of leaders' authority to lead.

This paper has argued that trust plays a critical role in collaborative contexts, and how many of the key policy developments in education are premised on a greater willingness to trust school leaders to exercise their professional judgment. Examples of these include flagship policies such as the establishment of academies and free schools, the introduction of greater freedoms in curriculum design and changes in the inspection regime for outstanding schools.

This paper has also sought to demonstrate the essential role that trust plays in partnership working between schools and with other agencies, as it mitigates leaders' and followers' vulnerability in times of uncertainty, supports risk taking and serves as a bridge across organizational boundaries. Trust is therefore viewed as fundamental to the distribution of leadership, effective sharing of information and the reduction of transaction costs.

However, this paper has argued that little research has been completed on how trust is developed by school leaders within the context of partnership working, and this may lead one to speculate as to the extent to which the development of such high trust relationships represents an assumed and taken for granted aspect of effective leadership. It has therefore sought to cast fresh light on the precise nature of trust in leaders in this context and identified the separate but strongly inter-related notions of perceptual, ideological and behavioural trust as a means of understanding this. At the same time, attention has been drawn to the socially constructed nature of trust and the role professionalism plays in informing the context within which trust resides and against which it responds. This paper concludes that headteachers play a particularly important role in consistently modelling the elements of professionalism and thereby contributing to the (re)construction of the context in which trusting relationships and collaborative work may flourish. It is recommended that further research is undertaken into how such behaviours are manifest on a day-to-day basis and in a range of context, to more fully understand the ways in which trusting relationships are developed in practice.

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