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Leaders at the Top: Are Top Management Teams an Oxymoron?

Carolyn Patricia Kus

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Sheffield Hallam University

For the degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

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Abstract

A group does not necessarily constitute a team. Teams normally have members with complementary skills and who generate synergy through a coordinated effort, which allows each member to maximize their strengths and minimize their weaknesses. There has been a great deal written about teams; so much that it becomes confusing, in particular when one is unsure of the type of team being written about. But little of the work has been about top teams in public sector organisations. This research covers a period from 2011 to 2014, and includes research undertaken across four large public sector organisations. Local Authority, University, National Health Service and Prison. The research was conducted in a hermeneutic manner; the methodology used was interviews with 12 members of top teams.

The research brought forward the following aspects; firstly, top teams are a myth, often they are a group of individuals brought together for a specific period of time, who have individual roles within the organisation. Secondly, these teams are transient and spend most of their time not connected and involved in their primary role within their own division. Thirdly a top team did not need to have trusting relationships in order to lead, Fourthly individual roles of top team members is not acknowledged, this became a fundamental finding of the research.

My research as implications for future, as most of the academic research extols the virtue of top teams, whereas my findings clearly show that there needs to be more consideration on the individuals' role which is important due to the limited time these individuals connect. This thesis proposes a new approach to understanding how top team lead using the term 'Conjoined Leadership', which describes and emphasizes both the separateness of things that are joined and the unity that results when together. It is suggestion this approach will lead to a better understanding of top teams.

Declaration: This thesis is all my own work, and has not been submitted for any other academic award.

CHAPTER 1

Research into Top Management Teams in the Public Sector

Introduction

This chapter explains why I chose to research top management teams (TMT). As a member of a top management team, I am continually surprised as to just how dysfunctional it can be at times yet how indispensable it is to the organisation. An example of this is the apparent inability of the top management team to set a clear strategic direction for the whole organisation despite followers expecting it to do so. This type of situation often results in a top team being seen as an orthodoxy of organisational success and as a key component of the structure of an organisation, whether due to actual causal or reciprocal relationships or simply a romance with leadership (Carpenter 2011), and most people perceiving that there is a real relationship between leaders and organisational performance.

As I consider top management teams to be almost a given part of the organisational structure (Peterson 2003), I am interested in learning more about them, in particular by comparing the differences between the perceptions of followers, on the outside, and team members, on the inside. Research into top management teams has burgeoned in the last several years (Lawrence 1991; Higgs 1999; Lichtenstien 2005) and much has been learned from this work; however, the findings of the numerous TMT studies have been mixed or limited, meaning they have been

inconclusive overall (Mooney and Amason 2008). It has been suggested that despite the growth of interest in top management teams, there is still limited understanding of them and that this may be due to the difficulty researchers have had in gaining access to such teams (Higgs and Dulewicz 1993; Kilduff et al; 2000). Therefore, I viewed this study as an opportunity to explore and describe how top teams operate and impact on organisational effectiveness from the perspective of an insider.

Over the past three decades, organisational scholars have debated the importance of top management teams and their effect on organisational outcomes (MacCurtain et al. 2009). Throughout this time, there has been disagreement as to whether top managers matter or not (Peterson 2003). Researchers are now seeking to learn a great deal more about the good, the bad and the ugly of the 'upper echelons' effect (Carpenter 2011). This study examines the role of top management teams in leading complex public sector organisations, focusing on how they lead, how they communicate and how members trust one another while operating in 'team mode'.

The study was undertaken within an interpretivist paradigm, using hermeneutic methodology due to its focus on a deep interpretation of language in order to arrive at richer understanding of the meaning of that language. Armed with such an understanding, the readers of the research can judge the conclusions drawn and how valid they are for themselves (Alevesson et al. 2000). This method involves the researcher

putting aside all assumptions. However, it is important to acknowledge the researcher's pre-understanding and the impact this may have on the research process, findings and conclusions.

The Study

This study stems from my interest in top management teams, especially in how they function, in the roles of team members and in top management teams apparently being a symptom of an organisational structure rather than a necessity. Undertaking this research has given me an opportunity to study these top teams, which are often perceived, whether through rhetoric or anecdotally, by both their followers and customers, as the font of all knowledge. The followers and those 'outside' look to such teams to make sense of things and set the strategic direction of the organisation. However, the declared leaders and how they lead within a public sector environment is of interest both internally and externally. I hope that this research will further an understanding of how teams lead organisations for all interested parties. Having been both a follower of a senior team and a senior manager within the public sector for a considerable period of time, I bring to the research an understanding of public sector organisations and how they function as well as an awareness of both organisational strengths and weaknesses and some of the dilemmas leaders face.

Reflecting back on the start of the Doctorate in Business Administration (DBA) journey, I was interested in top teams and leadership and had

several pre-understandings, which affected my thinking and how I approached the study. During this study, I wanted to explore and determine the credibility of hunches I had regarding why leaders within organisations behave as they do, for example, that top teams are essential for organisational success (Hambrick and Mason 1984). The findings from the research led to some interesting conclusions, which I cover in the final chapter. The notion of top teams being a myth began to emerge as I interviewed key people, and this helped with further questioning and research of the literature on top management teams. This thinking is further explored in chapters 4 and 5.

However, firstly I explain why top management teams are of interest to me and discuss my own experiences of working in the public sector.

Leading in a Changing Public Sector – My Story

In this section, I explain how my personal interest in top management teams and leadership began, some of the hunches and ideas I had being based on my own experiences of working in the public sector. I took on my first management post in 1984. We were in the era of ‘new public management’, which viewed market disciplines as the solution to the ills of the public sector (McLaughlin et al. 2002). This was evident in the amount of best value activity being undertaken, increased management training courses being delivered and the concept of outsourcing services in order to deliver efficiencies being popular. I was working in the care industry as a manager of the work force on the frontline, providing

personal and social care to vulnerable adults and trying to make sense of the concept of 'leading' or 'leadership' of the top management team. Although there were clear processes and procedures, in order to carry out the role, I needed to understand the notions of innovation, strategic planning, best value, outsourcing and return on investment, and all this was a whole new language, the meaning of which was unclear to me. So began the learning. As I grew more confident in my management role, I became fascinated with how things were 'done' within such a complex organisation. I wondered how it was possible to reconcile providing personal services with business principles. Surely they were not compatible.

As we moved further into the decade and then into the 1990s, the language changed and the use of core business principles became the norm. Terms such as 'achieving value for money' and 'being lean, efficient and effective' resonated throughout public sector. This was a period of fast paced change, and reflection on 'how the private sector did things' was to become commonplace. I can recall now discussions with colleagues about trying to fit models of business into our service plans and becoming incredibly frustrated as there appeared to be no easy way; one felt almost as though we were shoehorning concepts and ideas into an alien world, which was no easy feat, I can tell you.

The 1990s thus saw organisations going through an accelerated change programme, with the greatest impact being on top management teams.

The aim was to reduce bureaucracy, have multi-skilled managers and provide flatter organisational structures (Ferlie et al. 2005). In 1998, the first of what was to be many Government White Papers on Best Value set the scene for the upcoming decade in the public sector. The paper proposed the use of a 'best value framework', based on the 4 Cs, and this quickly became the 'business bible'. This was later enhanced in the Modernising Government Initiative (2002) with a further C being added, leading to the 5 Cs: Challenge, Compare, Consult, Compete and Collaborate.

So public sector top management teams began to adopt what were very much perceived as 'business principles' in order to review and provide services. The introduction of such principles was met with some hostility, not just from frontline staff and trade unions but also from top management teams, the members of which had for years taken pride in leading organisations that provided a 'public service'. The top management teams had difficulty reconciling 'how they had always led' with these new proposals. During this period of change, I witnessed a good deal of movement within top management teams, with a large proportion of local authorities undertaking major re-structuring of top management teams, due to the need for these teams to become more strategic and multi-skilled. Outsourcings of services became common, and managers were encouraged to undertake MBAs and to implement business processes into their work environment.

In some respects, the very front-end of public service has remained the same, particularly in relation to social work and personal care. The biggest change has been in management and, in particular, in the top teams of these organisations, and this is where – even today – we see conflict, particularly with the trade unions, who hold the view that the public sector, its ethos and principles, are in direct conflict with the private sector business goal of ‘making a profit’. It seems that leaders of the public sector and those at the top have embraced the concept of business principles. However, one can see this is not a view shared by the wider staff or, indeed, by the general public. Protests over potential changes can and do lead to conflict, and decisions to reduce or stop a service being met with horror and resistance are frequently reported in the local press. However, what many seem unable to grasp is that in order to develop and future-proof services, changes need to take place. Buchanan and Fitzgerald (2007) refer to the situation this has created as ‘accessorised bureaucracy’, which describes an organisation that retains many characteristics of professional bureaucracy whilst accessorising it with the “trappings (structures, processes, discourses) of modern commercial enterprise” (Clegg et al. 2011:5).

This recollection is of my personal journey in the world of leadership and ultimately as a member of a top management team. I thought this important to share with the reader as the need to drive improvements and meet outcomes is still relevant today. As one of those ‘top team leaders’ it now falls to me to lead and deliver the desired outcomes. I

believe that the research findings, when shared with colleagues, will offer us an opportunity to learn and improve the way we lead. The realist and managerial concepts used are relevant to the context of the organisation and help to identify the environments in which this research will be undertaken.

Having shared my story, which outlines the reason for my interest in TMTs and discusses my relevant experiences, the following is my research question, with some narrative around the areas I intend to focus on. This study explores the concept of top management teams, their leadership roles, functions, environment and behaviours and whether trust is a crucial element, in order to further the understanding of the role of TMTs in the public sector. As this study was to be undertaken within the public sector environment, I thought it useful to begin by reflecting on public sector leaders, focusing on their environment and perceptions, then reflect on top management teams, especially on leadership and the notion of trust.

Public Sector Leaders

Having outlined the study, I want to begin by discussing the general view of the public sector and how leaders and the directorates within this environment are usually portrayed. I think this is important as even today leaders within the public sector are commonly viewed as being stifled by bureaucracy and processes and limited in their ability to innovate and lead. Over a number of years, there have been debates

about the differences between public and private sector organisations, with the former often likened to a 'large slow beast' (Morgan 2006) that is constantly hungry yet lethargic and impotent due to being tied down by bureaucracy. Morgan describes public sector organisations as 'machines' and states that, "organisations that are designed and operated as if they are machines are now usually called bureaucracies" (Morgan 2006:13). When interviewing members of the public about the public sector, Van Keer and Bogaert (2009) found that, "nearly everyone has a strong opinion regarding how things are going". They sum these opinions up thus: "public sector organisations show a clear lack of efficiency. They are dominated by rules and regulations that make it almost impossible to manage them properly, and resistance to change is so strong that it is virtually inconceivable to think of a public organisation as a modern structure that uses up-to-date technology" (Van Keer and Bogaert 2009). Based on my own experiences, I would suggest that these opinions have been formed based on incidents that occur from time to time and are in no way representative of all of the public services at large.

I am aware, however, that those who lead within the public sector are often portrayed as being less materialist, having weaker organisational commitment and being more bureaucratic, with few or no creative or innovative skills in the areas they have control over and operate within. In my experience though, there is a great deal of innovation within the public sector and an overwhelming desire to change and challenge

current policies despite the inevitable restrictions associated with working within a political environment.

Academic studies comparing public and private sector management have found more similarities than differences between the two (Simon 1995). The common view of public sector organisations is of overly bureaucratic institutions, with bureaucracy being blamed at various times for rising costs and poor services. However, if these organisations were as bad as they are portrayed to be, all the clearly visible positive results of the welfare state could surely not have been achieved (Flynn 2002). An appreciation of this view of public sector leaders and their environment is key to the reader understanding the context in which this study of top management teams was undertaken. The systems and controls of the public sector environment can and do impact on top management team members, often leaving them feeling constrained. Whether this affects how they lead, how they behave, their emotions and how they trust is addressed in both the literature chapter and the data interpretation chapters.

Having reflected on public sector leaders, I now narrow the focus to the small group of individuals referred to as the top management team.

Top Management Teams

The term 'top management team' entered into the academic literature in about 1980 and is now an expression widely used by both scholars and

executives. This focus on top teams represents an important advancement in the way executive leadership is viewed, with acknowledgment that the management of an enterprise is typically a shared activity that extends well beyond the chief executive. For example Hambrick and Mason (1984), in their Upper Echelons Theory, argued that although senior leadership matters a great deal, chief executives do not make strategic choices on their own. To some, the term 'top management team' implies a formalised management-by-committee or co-executive arrangement, such as 'the office of the CEO'. Most commonly though it refers simply to a relatively small group of the most influential executives at the apex of an organisation (Katzenbach and Smith 1993). Researchers typically assume that top management teams work together in a 'team like fashion', determining the strategic direction of the organisation (Jones and Cannella Jr 2011). Typically though it is the chief executive or CEO who is the most powerful individual in an organisation (Rajagopalan 1996; Rajagopalan and Datta 1996).

One cannot write about top management teams without acknowledging leadership, which is often seen and referred to as a core component, and I discuss this below.

Leadership and Top Management Teams

From both a personal and professional perspective, I wanted to explore further and understand better top management teams within the public

sector. I was and continue to be particularly interested in leadership within top management teams, especially in the widespread assumption in the organisational literature and in business practice that an organisation's performance is a reflection of its top management team (Childs 1972). My interest in TMTs basically stems from being a member of a top management team and from a desire to achieve a better understanding in order to influence future top management team thinking as well as to add to the current academic literature on TMTs. Current research continues to strive to improve understanding of top management teams, in particular how they seek to lead, with variations on findings on leadership, depending on whether the study includes or excludes the chief executive as part of the team. Some of the studies have found that not all members of the TMT are equal to the chief executive, who may dominate the rest of the team (Finklestein 2009).

Top management teams are clearly important to organisations, but the performance of the team often falls short of the performance of the individual members of that team in their specific roles within the organisation (Bandura 1997). Why the individual success of team members does not translate into the success of the team is a question I seek to address. These individuals are often very successful, or at least they are perceived to be successful, within their individual roles, primarily due to their ability to manage and lead their own directorate, which they have control over. I believe that this ability depends to a large extent on their being able to adapt to the environment they find

themselves in and the situations they are faced with within their own directorate. A good leader has the ability to operate in any mode (system of thinking) and, importantly, see situations from the perspective of others, giving them an advantage in this ever-changing world. Take, for example, Howard Schultz, who several years after standing down as CEO of 'Starbucks', took over again when the organisation was failing (Yang and Gordon 2011). The key to his success in turning the company around was his 'connectivity' with the staff, which resulted in improved performance. I find this concept of connectivity very interesting because I believe that gaining a better understanding of what, how and when people connect leads to a better understanding of TMTs. This is an area of leadership I discuss later in this thesis.

An early hunch I had in relation to TMTs was that team members need to trust each other in order for the team to operate successfully. In the next part of the chapter, I thus reflect on TMTs and trust.

Top Management Teams and Trust

Trust is widely viewed as an important aspect of top teams; however, I was curious to know whether this opinion was valid. My initial thoughts were that trust is indeed a key component of any team, and in particular a top team, if it is to function. When I consider my senior team at a directorate level, trust is clearly an important element that enables it to lead the service, which leads me to believe that it is a key aspect of all successful top teams. Indeed, research suggests that trust is important

and should be included in leadership models (Rickards and Clark 2006). In the trust literature, Rickards and Clark (2006: 144) suggest that, “trust is an essential ingredient of effective leadership”, whilst Galford and Drapeau (2002) speak of the ‘trusted leader’, advocating the need to develop trust both inside and outside the organisation. However, they focus on middle managers rather than top team members. What does not seem to have been fully explored is trust between top team members, leading to my desire to explore this area in some depth. Chapters 2, 4 and 5 cover this area in more detail, with Chapter 6 offering a conclusion.

This study has given me the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of how top management teams work, which I intend to share with my colleagues. I am part of a top management team and have worked within the public sector for a long period of time. This study has enabled me to reflect on my leadership role within the organisation and to gain a greater understanding of how I work with colleagues, and thus this study represents a very personal journey for me.

Summary

This chapter has set the scene for the study, identifying the reason for choosing top management teams as the topic of research and stating the research question. This study is about making sense of top management teams, their role, function and the contribution they make

to their organisations. Although the study is set within the public sector environment, top management teams have been found in organisations for decades, and indeed, the default position for most organisations is to have a top management team. One can find a great deal of literature on teams and top teams, most of which highlights the virtues of a top team although some researchers discuss the concept of a 'non-team'.

Exploring the concept of trust is also an important and interesting element of this study. Although the data supports its importance, its status and relevance within top management teams does appear to be limited. Chapter 6 covers this in more detail.

Reflecting on the research question, the conclusion of this study is that the notion of a top management team is somewhat of a myth and that teams are better described as 'transient groups'. Chapter 4 and 5 show how the data led to this conclusion.

The overall aim of undertaking this study is to contribute to both professional practice and theory. I hope it will lead to improved knowledge on top management teams as well as a better understanding of leaders, especially in the public sector. I also hope it inspires future study into the need for top management teams.

What has been profound for me is how the DBA has given me the opportunity to reflect upon my own leadership approach, and I am

aware of how I have changed and become more reflective and thoughtful. In the conclusions chapter, I discuss the impact of this study on my professional practice.

The next chapter reviews current thinking on the concept of top management teams, exploring individual roles, trust and leadership in a wider context. As the research is within the public sector, I also include a reflection of new public management. I both share and critique some of the current and past thinking on top management teams in order to achieve a better understanding of them. I also take the opportunity to explore some relevant theories and how they can and do impact on how people lead, recognising that leadership is complex and, therefore, has an impact on how leadership is viewed by differing individuals.

CHAPTER 2

Top Teams: A Consideration of Current and Past Thinking

Introduction

In this chapter, I review some of the current thinking on top management teams. I begin by providing a general overview of teams. I then focus on top management teams, exploring three key areas. Firstly, I look into leadership and trust, defining leadership and examining a number of leadership themes, then exploring trust, in particular the formation, effect and impact of trust on top teams. Secondly, I explore culture, describing how both behaviour and role orientation can impact on culture. Finally, I investigate emotion, looking at this both from an individual and organisational perspective.

These themes or what I refer to as hunches, I felt were important areas on which to base my review of the literature of top management teams, as these hunches all appear to be the most common areas considered when there are discussions and debates of top management teams, and from a personal perspective resonate with my own personal experiences of top management teams. Therefore I wanted to explore these areas within the literature review.

These hunches could also be described as hypotheses but for me there was a distinct difference, a hypothesis must be structured in a certain way as research is often seeking to produce either a positive or negative

result (Baldwin 2014). Whereas using the term hunches is describing my own thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I found this also enabled me to be guided by the research Dalton (1964) describes chiefly three reasons for not explicitly formulating hypothesis “being sure what is relevant for hypothesizing until more intimacy with the situation as developed; concern that once uttered a hypothesis becomes obligatory to a degree; and the hypothesis will become esteemed for its and work as an abused symbol of science” (Dalton 1964: 54). I also resonated with (Dalton 1964) who felt to use the clarity of hypotheses explicitly would seem false with a premature hypothesis binding ones conscience and vanity. Therefore I have used the notion of hunches, which are based on my own professional and personal experiences within public sector, and more recently as senior manager.

These hunches which were my own feelings and personal experiences at this point, were then explored through examining the current literature, as I followed a hermeneutic approach as my hunches further developed I explored other areas of literature around top management teams, this becomes evident in chapters 4 and 5.

As this research is conducted within the public sector, I include an analysis of new public management as I believe it is important to have an understanding of the potential constraints of the political bureaucratic environment in which top teams work and to be aware of the dilemmas they may encounter.

I begin this chapter by examining definitions of the term 'team' in order to come to a shared understanding.

The meaning of 'team'

A shared understanding of the term 'team' is often assumed, but an examination of the literature reveals that this is not necessarily the case. Mickan states that there is "general agreement that teams contain a small, manageable number of members, who have the right mix of skills and expertise, and who are all committed to a meaningful purpose, with achievable performance goals for which they are collectively responsible" (Mickan 2005: 358). While this definition may provide a useful means of conceptualizing 'team', there is actually no evidence of general agreement with it across a broad selection of the literature. The detail in Mickan's (2005) definition contrasts sharply with the simplicity of the definition of a team provided by Thylefors, Persson and Hellström (2005: 105) as "an organisational work unit made up of at least three different professions". Teams are often presented in the literature as being both easily identifiable and stable entities (Crocker, Higgs, Trede 2009).

The term 'team' has been applied to a number of different types of work group. Definitions as to what a team is or does, how teams are structured, how team members differ from traditional employees, what limitations are placed on teams and how team members will be held accountable can vary greatly from one company to another (Mussnug

and Hughey 1997).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines a team as “two or more people who work together”. Most people believe they know how teams work as well as the benefits teams offer, and when discussing teams, they often describe them as a group of people who are linked by a common purpose and are conducting highly complex tasks with interdependent subtasks (Ray and Bronstein 1995; Tjosvold 1991).

The use of teams in voluntary and charitable organisations as well as industry has spread rapidly. Meanwhile, the concept of a ‘team’ has been reshaped to fit many circumstances, ranging from temporary to permanent, single function to multi-function, routine to non-routine and co-located to virtual (Beyerlein 2001).

However, opinions differ on the efficiency of teams, with some seeing ‘team’ as an overused and under-useful four-letter word (Devine 2002). Others though, for example West and Slater (1995) and Furnham (1992), see teams as a panacea that brings out the best in both workers and managers. Hackman (2002) argues that team effectiveness should not be viewed only in terms of performance. While performance is an important outcome, a truly effective team will also contribute to the personal well-being and growth of its members (Cannella et al. 2008). The debate on the usefulness of teams is set to continue, with some arguing that “teams outperform individuals acting alone or in larger organisation groupings, especially when performance requires multiple skills, judgments and experiences” (Katzenbach and Smith 1993: 9) and

others disputing this. Hackman (2009), for example, takes the opposite view, claiming quite simply that, “teams don’t work”. Teams are often considered almost sacrosanct, with a belief that working in teams makes individuals more creative and productive. However, Hackman argues that, “In reality, most of the time, people are really bad at teamwork, with research showing team members have difficulty agreeing on what the team is supposed to be doing” (Hackman 2009:36).

Tu (2014) states that “great teams are rare, and even fewer remain great for long” (Tu 2014:2), suggesting that the role and function of a team is limited to achieving a specific desired task and then moving on. The failure of a team to flourish may be the result of the relationships between individuals within the team. There have been numerous studies on group dynamics, with the most famous and influential one being by Bruce Tuckman (1965), who created a four stage model that involved ‘forming, storming, norming and performing’, to which the stage of ‘adjourning’ was added in 1977. Tuckman’s model has become the most predominant and widely recognised description of team development in the organisational literature (Miller 2003), and it is still often used to explain how groups work as well as being the basis of group development sessions.

Nevertheless, gaps remain in the literature on team dynamics (Beyerlien 2001). For example, although the stage model of development proposed by Tuckman (1965) and enhanced by Tuckman and Jensen (1977) has become popular as a framework for discussing teams and organising

diagnosis and training, a validated instrument that could be used for assessing the stages of Tuckman's model was not published until 1999.

The dynamics of developmental change are not easily mapped onto the four, five or more stages of developmental models, so more process oriented models have been produced, such as Gersick's (1988, 1989). This model explores the life cycle of the group and asserts that not all groups progress in the smooth linear fashion described by Tuckman (1965) but rather that groups go through phases and periods of transition before moving forward to the next stage. Few researchers, however, have tested Gersick's model and very rarely has the model been used in practice, so it is difficult to comment on its effectiveness. Katzenbach, the author of half a dozen books on teams and leadership, stated in his keynote speech at the 10th International Conference on Work Teams in 1999 that he had only seen four teams in his 30 years of consulting that corresponded to his published criteria on a mature team, that is, one that is committed to a common goal that team members feel individually and mutually responsible for achieving. However, despite its flaws, the model proposed by Tuckman (1965) is still widely used on numerous training and development programmes since it is still generally accepted as being the model that best describes the basic life cycle of a group/team and the normal patterns of behaviour of team members as they move from one proposed stage to the other.

One cannot help but wonder if the use of teams within organisations is

truly the most effective way of achieving organisational success, especially when we often hear of underperforming teams. In their book 'Why Teams Don't Work' Robbins and Finley (2000) cite a lack of team intelligence as a factor that prevents teams working together, stating that, "a team that is smart about itself knows where its strengths and weaknesses are. Team members know what each of them wants and needs" (Robbins and Finley 2000:ix). However, if the team does not progress, the team members may never become self-aware. This is an area that needs to be acknowledged as top management teams do not work together often enough to develop a relationship.

The debate around teams and their effectiveness will continue while ever structures within organisations continue to be built around teams of individuals, despite this method clearly not being a solution to all current and future organisational needs. According to Katzenbach et al. (1993: 25), teams can and often do "represent one of the best ways to support the broad-based changes necessary for the high-performing organization". This claim correlates with Tu's (2012) thoughts on 'superteams', which are at their most creative when they have identified a common purpose. So the use of teams in any organisational context has strengths and weaknesses, depending on the task and whether there is a common purpose or not.

The above views on teams and when they work or do not work are helpful to my research as they allow me to develop some of my thoughts

on top teams.

It is claimed that one of the primary advantages of adopting a team approach is that decisions reached by a group tend to be superior to those made by individuals (Beryerlien 2001) and that group consensus provides a strong foundation on which to build an organisation. Whilst a group's ideas are derived from those of its individual members, which have merit in their own right, only once there is group agreement can those ideas be considered as superior. There are also disadvantages to team decision-making, such as that it can be a very time-consuming venture that requires all team members to be proficient in both technical and human relations skills (Judge and Miller 1991). Team members must also be willing to relinquish some of their authority to the team in order to give the team approach a legitimate chance of succeeding. Some top management team members who are used to being in control will find it difficult to relinquish authority. However, in spite of the problems, the use of top management teams has long been seen as an important determinant of corporate success (Certo, Lester, Dalton and Dalton 2006) and is likely to continue to be seen as such.

The above discussion reveals that the term 'team' has various interpretations, with the majority of academics favouring the concept of teams coming together to undertake a task of some sort. Reflecting on top management teams that have dedicated roles and functions, one may need to ask whether the individuals actually form a team or a

group. Having explored the concept of a team and reflected on the roles of team members, I will now focus on top management teams.

Top Management Teams

It seems to be widely accepted amongst organisational researchers that top management teams (TMTs) are responsible for setting the strategic course of their organisations (Thompson 1976). This is the assumption of many senior scholars in the field, for example, Hambrick and Mason (1984), Carpenter (2004) and Finkelstien et al. (2009). The contribution of effective teamwork, particularly by top teams, is an enduring topic within the management literature, with teams often being viewed as the solution to many a pressing, and often complex, dilemma relating to organisational performance. However, even a cursory review of the vast literature on teams and teamwork reveals that assumptions have been made. West and Slater (1995), in a review of the benefits of team work, comment that “assumptions about the value of teams are plausible, but the research shows this value is difficult to demonstrate” (24). A number of authors have highlighted a degree of confusion and divergence in relation to the concept of a top management team in an organisational context (Rossevelt 2001; Pegels, Song and Yang 2000). Although the term ‘top management team’ is now widely used, it is not uncommon practice to see pieces of research that emphasise different aspects of what is in essence a multidimensional construct.

A definition of a TMT in Hambrick (1984) Upper Echelons literature is “the CEO and other top executives who report directly to the CEO” (Jones and Canella Jr 2011: 15). My use of TMT in this study will conform to this definition, so a TMT here is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other executives who together form the ‘dominant coalition’, a phrase coined by Cyert and March (1963) to describe the entire team of top decision makers.

Having sought to define TMTs, I now aim to explore the concept of a top team and explain the role of those who are often referred to as the strategic leaders of the organisation, that is, the innovators, creators and policy makers, the individuals who those in middle management aspire to be. Marton (2003) suggests that a TMT is essentially a group of executives who are responsible for the performance of the whole organisation. When describing the structure of organisations, Mintzberg (1979) talks about the ‘strategic apex’, whilst Hansen and Peytz (1991) refer to the ‘corporate centre’ and Pasternack and Viscio (1998) use the term ‘core’ in relation to the position of top management teams. Finkelstein et al. (2009) describe a top management team as having three central conceptual elements “composition, structure, and process” and refer to the collective characteristics of the team members as values, cognitive bases, personalities and experiences.

What it means to be a team member and the role each team member plays has been widely researched. Within the writing on the plethora of

research undertaken into top teams, there is a recurring claim that every CEO seeks their own 'team at the top' and that quite often the concept of a 'top team' implies a strong, cohesive, complementary group, working towards the vision and aspirations of the organisation. So one could, in effect, describe a top team as a group of individuals coming together for a common purpose or "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approaches for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" (Katzenbach and Smith 1993: 24).

In their book 'The Wisdom of Teams' Katzenbach and Smith (1993: 4) make two statements which seem to typify the assumptions frequently held by researchers in the field. Firstly, they state that it is obvious that teams outperform individuals and secondly, that the concept of a team is well known to everyone. Interestingly, Katzenbach and Smith refer to these statements as 'team basics' that are essential in order for a working group to deliver outcomes, and they liken them to commonsense findings.

Katzenbach (1997:85) identified a number of myths surrounding top teams, which he divided into 'strong leader myths', which are as follows: "the CEO determines whether a company wins or loses; the CEO has to be in charge at all times; it's a team because they say so; the right person in the right job naturally leads to the right team; and the top team's purpose is the corporate mission" and 'real time myths', which

are as follows: “teamwork at the top will lead to team performance; top teams need to spend more time together, building consensus; CEOs must change their personal style to obtain team performance; the senior group should function as a team whenever it is together; and teams at the top need to set the example”. Seeking to offer explanations for the myths, Katzenbach (1997) explores each one in detail, and this leads to the 3 basic messages that his book focuses on:

1. The best senior leadership groups are rarely a true team at the top.
2. Most senior leadership groups can optimise their performance by consciously working to achieve a better team balance between their team and non-team efforts.
3. The secret to better team balance is to learn to integrate the discipline required for team performance with the discipline of executive (single-leader) behaviour.

It appears that Katzenbach (1997) is attempting to dispel the myths associated with ‘top teams’, which are in fact a group of individuals with conflicting executive priorities and individual agendas that may interfere with the ability of the team to achieve its goals. This is a very simplistic view by Katzenbach and is not an unreasonable assumption to make. Whilst a ‘true team’ is in fact difficult to describe precisely, the words ‘effective’ and ‘real’ seem to concur with the general idea held by most of what a ‘true team’ is. Katzenbach’s view on single leader behaviour is

also of interest since he suggests reflecting upon and perhaps acknowledging the individual roles of team members.

This notion appears to conflict with Hambrick's Upper Echelons Theory, the thrust of which is that, "leadership of a complex organization is shared activity, and the collective cognitions, capabilities and interactions of the entire "top management team" enter into strategic behaviours". (Hambrick 1984:334) . Following on from Hambrick, Katzenbach's ideas do seem to recognise that people tend to behave autonomously. He goes on to say that there are, in his opinion, two modes of operation: 'non-team' and 'real team', with the more successful top teams being able to acknowledge and integrate these two modes of operation. It may be that Katzenbach is describing an effective team (real team) and an ineffective team (non-team). The most common way to determine whether a top management team is operating effectively is to assess its organisational performance.

According to Beckman and Burton (2008), the structure of TMTs is often not given enough prominence in the TMT Literature. They claim that, "just as organization designs vary within any given context, the roles that comprise the top management team also vary" (54). The roles played by the members of top management teams often reflect how an organisation is structured and are an indication of the functions which are deemed to be the most important within the organisation (Beckman

and Burton 2011). This is evident with the role of directorates, which are formed to help the organisation achieve its core objectives.

Critiquing Hambrick's (1984) definition, Katzenbach (1997) proposes the use of 3 litmus tests to identify a 'true performance team', namely: mutual accountability; collective or joint work products; and a sharing of the leadership role. Katzenbach's (1997) argument is based on the whole notion of the integration of what he describes as 'non-team effects'. He appears to be describing when members of the 'top team' are operating in what is generally referred to as 'out of team mode' that is, when they are playing an ineffective team role, when their primary focus is on their individual role within the organisation or when they are disconnected from each other. This is a useful consideration and raises the issue of connectivity, that is, how the team interacts at a given moment in time. Connectivity is an area I explore in chapters 5 and 6.

Evidence seems to be growing that over time the structure of TMTs and the role of TMT members has changed, with scholars documenting dramatic shifts in organisational structures (Hayes and Abernathy 1980; Fligstein 1987), the emergence of new executive roles (Hambrick and Cannella 1993) and the rise and fall of particular functions (Fligstein 1987; Nath and Majahan 2008).

The common assumption that 'top teams' are driving the strategies of organisations now needs to be considered the individuals with those

teams and potential benefits of understanding the dynamics of top teams. Katzenbach's (1993) notion of 'non-team' and 'real team' is pertinent as currently the majority of public sector organisations have a hierarchical structure, with one CEO who a number of executive directors report to directly. This group of executives is often perceived as the strategic leadership of the organisation and a source of guidance and support for followers. Whilst they may be seen as a 'real team', the manner in which they connect and function may suggest that they are in fact a 'non-team', with membership depending on official position rather than skill or talent.

Taking this notion of non-teams and real teams into account could enable 'top teams' to acknowledge and focus more on the followers (this idea is explored further in the following chapter), who are often the ones who implement change and can also be the greatest blockers of change. Before moving onto other views on 'top teams', it is, I think, worth reflecting on what Katzenbach (1993) was trying to achieve with his research. He was keen for the reader to have a different 'mindset' and therefore put forward the notion of non-team and real team dynamics in order to explain the complexity of the team and highlight the importance of individual differences, which can have both a positive and negative impact on the team and the organisation. However, I do think that the suggestion that the time when the team is a 'real team' is when they are being challenged and facing dilemmas could be perceived as an inaccurate assumption as not all 'top teams' face dilemmas and

challenges on a daily basis yet do function as real teams every day. If this were so, the notion of 'non-team model' becomes irrelevant. The idea of a team is that individuals come together as one group in order to solve what are often perceived as the 'wicked issues' or make the strategic decisions necessary. Jones and Canella Jr (2011) identified three broad factors that influence the strategic decision process: (1) the perspective of the decision makers; (2) the organisational context; and (3) the environment. Researchers have attempted to understand how decision-making takes place by studying the potential influence of top management teams as well as organisational cultures (Pettigrew 1992).

Later refinement of Hambrick's (1984) Upper Echelon Theory proposes two important moderators as a way of reconciling where there could be two opposing views: the use of managerial discretion and executive demands. According to Hambrick (1984: 340), "top executives greatly influence what happens in organisations" or "top executives have little effect, because organisations are swept along by external factors and constrained by a host of conventions and norms".

Both of the above views can be considered as conditionally valid, depending on how much managerial discretion is shown and is reflected in strategy and performance.

Whether top management teams are referred to as 'dominant coalitions' (Cyert and March 1963; Bourgeois 1980), 'inner circles' (Thompson

1967; Finkelstein 1992), 'top management groups' (Hambrick 1994) or 'top management teams' (Bourgeois 1980; Hambrick and Mason 1984; Carpenter et al. 2004), there is much to learn from focusing on the team at the top of the organisation. The concept of top management teams has been widely studied since they are thought to be an important aspect of corporate success (Lester et al. 2006). However, merely having a team at the top does not necessarily lead to success; these teams need a number of key components, leadership being one. This is an area I focus on next.

Leadership and Top Management Teams

A consideration of leadership within top management teams necessarily includes a debate on the pros and cons of team leadership versus individual leadership. Hambrick's view, for example, conflicts with other academic thinking, such as that of Kotter, as leadership is often referred to as a 'person' leading rather than a 'team. Kotter (1990), when writing about what leaders really do, discusses the notion of creating a culture of leadership through developing those with leadership potential. He goes on to describe how "individuals who are effective in large leadership roles often share a number of career experiences" (Kotter 1990: 50).

There appears to be conflict amongst academics over the concept of top teams and effective leadership. Katzenbach argues that although the notion of a top team is seductive, a top team is not a real team and thus

that their attempts to lead the organisation may not be as productive as they would like. He goes on to claim that, “wise leaders recognize that strong executive leadership and true team performance require different disciplines” (Katzenbach 1997: 87). This raises an inevitable question regarding the number of wise leaders in organisations. History tells us that most leaders, particularly within the public sector, take on the leader role when they obtain a position within the hierarchy, so they inherit a position of power, purely on the basis of the role and position they hold. This will give autonomy and power to a small number of individuals.

It is unclear whether Katzenbach is referring to wisdom that is borne of experience or whether he feels leaders need to be taught leadership skills. I would suggest that most top team leaders are there due to their position and experience and the skills they can thus bring to the team. If wisdom involves the ability to be reflective (Heifetz et al. 2009), this may be what needs to be considered when embarking on leadership training. Reflectivity in leadership is an area that is being considered more by academics such as Heifetz, Grashow and Linsky (2009), who in their writing on adaptive leadership claim that, “people feel pressured to solve problems quickly, to move to action. So they minimize the time spent on diagnosing” (Heifetz et al. 2009:7). This is seen time and time again when the fast pace and pressure to act requires quick decisions to be made, sometimes with poor outcomes. More time spent reflecting and a less reactive approach might lead to better decision-making.

Kotter (1990) draws attention to some organisations seeking to create a culture of leadership, having recognised that the on-the-job experiences of most people appear to undermine the development of the attributes leaders require. Kotter (1990:51) suggests that, “one way to develop leadership is to create challenging opportunities for young employees”, thus creating an environment where promising individuals can grow and develop. This idea of ‘talent spotting’ is not new as organisational development has always included training and development programmes, which are often used to identify the ‘rising stars’.

Take for example a recent report by the American Society for Training and Development (2014), which refers to findings on developing first time managers. The report does not focus on frontline leaders in isolation. Instead, it takes a holistic approach to people capability within the organisation from a talent management, people development and frontline leader development perspective. This type of focus appears to be more common within what appears to be a growing number of organisations developing so-called matrices and frameworks to help uncover hidden talent. Once uncovered, these individuals are developed in order to provide a succession of talented employees willing and able to uphold the values and ethos of the organisation.

Patel (2014), in his report on talent management, found that, “an integrated talent management approach is necessary to understand the

capabilities within an organization as well as the formal and informal development opportunities needed to provide the skills to achieve results". This is particularly important for frontline leaders who undergo a dramatic role transition from being an individual contributor to entering the management pipeline. However, there is a danger that only those who put themselves forward as talented are considered.

Having reflected on top management teams and leadership, it is clear that top team members require good leadership skills (Bass 1990). Thus, the next part of this chapter focuses on leadership, starting with a general overview and then describing two specific models of leadership that are commonly identifiable within top management teams: Leader Member Exchange Theory (LMX) and Situational Leadership. These two theories have been chosen because they are recognised as key models. Within my own organisation, for example, most of the leadership training focuses on followers and the ability to lead followers in different and varied situations.

Defining Leadership

As explained earlier, leadership is often viewed as a key aspect of a top management team. In the next two parts of this chapter, I undertake some reflective thinking on leadership before seeking to define leadership and some of its core components.

One could argue that there is already enough writing on leadership and that all the different theories, from great man, to trait leadership, to situational leadership, have been thoroughly explored so there is no need for more research (Bryman 2006). However, there still appears to be no consensus or clear definition of what leadership is, and thus the subject continues to fascinate scholars and researchers alike. Since the 1980s, there has been a growth in academic research, particularly into leadership and top management teams, with still no firm conclusions. What is exciting about researching leadership is that it appears there is always something else to uncover, be it another theory, a trait or better understanding. Leadership is still hotly debated, and new thoughts are often subject to scrutiny and questioning, allowing for further debate and discussion. According to MacGregor Burns (1978: 28), "Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth", and yet an indisputable definition of leadership still eludes researchers. Some would say leadership is about how a person helps influence and shape the environment around them, whilst for others leaders are individuals who have power and authority in decision making, often aligned to the position and status they hold within the hierarchy.

Leadership as a Figment of the Imagination

Some critics argue that leadership is in the 'eyes of the beholder' (Bass 1990), while others go as far as comparing leadership to romantic fiction (Meindl and Ehrlich 1987; Meindl et al. 1985). Other critics, such

as Pandey (1976), see leadership as a concept used for understanding social influences. An extreme position taken by some theorists is that organisational outcomes are determined primarily by factors other than leadership but that leaders are credited with what has happened. Miner (1975: 200) abandoned the notion of leadership, stating, "the concept of leadership itself has outlived its usefulness. Hence, I suggest we abandon leadership in favour of some other more fruitful way of cutting up the theoretical pie". In 1982 Miner recanted this statement but still maintained that leadership had limited usefulness. Others took a similar though less extreme view. Pfeffer (1977), for example, said leadership is a sense-making heuristic used to account for organisational performance.

Despite the scepticism over whether leadership is real or important, throughout history all social and political groupings have relied upon a leader to initiate and develop them, to achieve outcomes for both the organisation and the individuals within it. Tucker (1981:87) stated that, "in the beginning is the leadership act. A leaderless movement is naturally out of the question". Indeed, leadership is often regarded as the single most critical factor in the success and failure of organisations (Bass 1990).

This section began with a focus on Bass's (1990) interesting view that leadership is a figment of the imagination as often the effects of leadership are indirect. For example, Katzell (1987) was able to show

through analysis that although direct influence was modest, leaders did increase followers' morale by relating rewards to performance. Jongbloed and Frost (1985) modified Pfeffer's (1977) reasoning, arguing that leaders still have an important general role to play.

Definition and Components

'Leadership' is a relatively new word used to describe an age-old concept. In early history, the most common words used to describe those at the front or in the lead were 'head of state', 'military commander', 'chief' or 'king'. The Oxford English Dictionary (1933) notes the appearance of the word 'leader' in the English language in 1300. The word leadership, however, did not appear until the first half of the nineteenth century in writings about political influence.

In simple terms, one could state that a leader leads and followers follow. If only the situation was that simple though; there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept, and there are over 5 million websites offering a definition of the word 'leadership'. Despite numerous texts and much academic research, a clear definition is still elusive. As Pfeffer (1977) noted, many of the definitions are ambiguous, and indeed, the definition of leadership may change according to the organisational context.

Despite the difficulty in agreeing on a definition, I still believe there is value in trying to provide a clear one here in order that the reader understands where I started from regarding my understanding of leadership. So, for this study, I am using the following definition of leadership: "a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse 2007: 3). I chose this definition as I was able to recognise the following four components, which Northouse describes as central to the phenomenon: 1) leadership is a process; 2) leadership involves influence; 3) leadership occurs in a group context; and 4) leadership involves goal attainment. All of these are relevant to leaders and in particular to management teams.

Leadership is without doubt a complex phenomenon, a word widely used but with a different meaning to different people, in part depending on where in the organisation an individual lies. Leadership has been around for a considerable period of time, and it is, therefore, worthwhile reflecting on early ideas on leadership.

Early Thoughts on Leadership

I want to reflect on the how leadership and the concept of leading or leadership have been around for a considerable period of time.

Leaders and the concept of leading or leadership were not newly discovered in the 20th and 21st centuries in relation to management. Shakespeare explored leadership over 400 years ago. In his plays, he

portrayed the leader in different roles and scenarios, depending on the circumstances. For example, Richard III and Macbeth's need to manipulate their entire nations is a reflection of their ambition and desire for power, which shows how people are driven to achieve, whereas Henry V's ability to motivate and lead reveals people management skills (Corrigan 1990). Shakespeare's characters demonstrate very different ways of providing leadership, but, interestingly, all the leading characters suffer failure in the end despite what appears to be an initial period wherein it seems their tactics and strategies may succeed (Corrigan 1999). There is, perhaps, no better example of the difficulties associated with being a leader than King Lear. Lear gives away his kingdom in a show of bravado and omnipotence despite having been given advice not to do so by the Fool. This provokes the audience to reflect upon what actions they would take to avoid failure. In a management context, it leads to reflection over whether it is wise to listen to the advice of subordinates, especially those named Fool, or to ignore it and follow one's own initiative.

We do, however, need to acknowledge that Shakespeare was writing during a period of great social change, at a time when there was blind acceptance of leaders who were born to rule. These leaders were born into a separate world from the one they were to rule, a very different world from the one their followers lived in. This was a time when everyone knew their place and their role within their world. It may be that we are seeing an early leadership theory in relation to the notion

that leaders can be born into the role or, alternatively, created. It appears that many of Shakespeare's main characters are in a position of authority, either through royal birth, such as King Lear, or the military, for example, army generals, such as Anthony and Macbeth. Nearly everyone who has enjoyed a Shakespeare play will comment on how thought provoking the characters are, and it is through these characters that Shakespeare provides us with lessons about leadership. It is interesting, however, that in Shakespeare's plays some of the leaders fail precisely because they claim authority based on the fact that they were born to rule. However, although the 'great man' approach continues to be considered, particularly in the confines of the academic world (Peters 1989), its heyday appears to be long past in the business world as we now see individuals from various backgrounds rising to positions of power through sheer hard work.

So, leadership has been an integral part of our history, and yet despite all the successes and failures of past leaders, people still aspire not only to lead but also to understand leadership and what it entails.

The next part of the chapter opens the discussion on leadership theories in relation to top management teams.

Leading at the Top

There are several leadership theories, which are relevant to top management teams at some point in time. However, based on my professional experience of being a member of a top management team,

I believe that two specific theories are especially worthy of investigation: Situational Leadership and Leader Member Exchange Theory. These two theories are the most frequently used and recognised by leaders (Herifetz et al. 2009; Northouse 2007). Also, I recognise these theories from the Corporate Literature used for recent leadership training programmes, where they were recommended as leadership theories to adopt. Furthermore, my colleagues acknowledged that these two theories were the most well known and the best understood ones.

Leader-Member Exchange Theory

Leader-Member Exchange Theory “conceptualizes leadership as a process that is centred on the interactions between leaders and followers” Northouse (2007: 151). LMX theory focuses on a dyad, that is, the relationship between the leader and each subordinate on an independent basis rather than on the relationship between the leader and the group. Each linkage, or relationship, is likely to differ in quality. Thus, the same leader may have poor interpersonal relationships with some subordinates and open and trusting relationships with others. The relationships within these pairings, or dyads, may be of a predominantly in-group or out-group nature. Graen (1976) assumes that leaders behave differently with each follower.

One of the implications of this theory for both individuals and organisations is that members of the in-group are invited to participate in decision-making and are given added responsibility. The leader

allows these members some latitude in their roles; so in effect, key subordinates are elevated to the unofficial role of the leader's 'trusted lieutenant'. In contrast, members of the out-group are supervised within the narrow limits of their formal employment contract and authority is legitimised through the implicit contract between the member and the organisation. The leader will provide support, attention and assistance out of duty but will not go beyond such limits and, therefore, in effect, "the leader is practicing a contractual exchange with such members; they are 'hired hands', who are being influenced by legitimate authority rather than true leadership. In return, out-group members will do what they have to do and little beyond that" (Lunenburg 2010: 1).

Later studies seem to recognise this dilemma and recommend using LMX theory to increase organisational effectiveness through the creation of positive exchanges between leaders and all followers and groups. Northouse (2007: 155) argues that, "organisations stand to gain much from having leaders who can create good working relationships".

However, one of the main criticisms of this theory is that on the surface it is antagonistic to the basic human value of fairness and treating people equally as it is dependent on the development of a relationship which could advantage one set of staff and disadvantage another. Dienesch and Liden (1986: 631) concluded their research with the notion that, "empirically, the LMX relationship explains variance over and above other leadership approaches", their view being that, "conceptually, it

gives a more complete picture of the range of leadership processes". This is a theory that needs to be researched further before concluding that it provides a clear picture of the range of leadership processes.

This theory is commonly used and well understood by public sector leadership, and it is used as the basis of a large number of internal training programmes. I therefore felt it important to investigate and critique it. It would be helpful when interviewing subjects to have an understanding of the leadership theories they both align to and recognise.

The next theory I examine here is Situational Leadership, which is also a well understood and used model within the public sector.

Situational Leadership

Following on from Leader-Member Exchange Theory, I now explore Situational Leadership Theory, which has become popular of late. Graeff (1983: 285) undertook a critical view of the model and found that, "casual conversation with organization and development consultants and/or industry personnel managers quickly reveals the enormous popularity of the situational leadership theory". Northouse in his description of the situational approach, highlighted this as one of the most widely recognised approaches to leadership, developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard (1969) based on Reddin's (1967) 3-D management style theory. This approach has been through several

refinements and revisions since its inception (see Blanchard, Zigarmi and Nelson 1993; Blanchard, Zigarmi and Zigarmi 1985; Hersey and Blanchard 1977,1988) and has been used quite extensively in organisational leadership training and development.

This leadership theory offers leaders the opportunity to be flexible, encouraging them to be adaptable and responsive to their surroundings. It enables those leaders with different skills and abilities to utilise them. It does not require leaders to adopt a specific 'style', but rather identifies four styles a leader may move between to meet the varying demands of each situation. Finally, it is composed of directive and supportive dimensions.

Some have taken the concept of situational leadership and used it in a contemporary way in order to stimulate thought processes. Rickards and Clark (2006), for example, refer to 'The Safari of Leadership'. They put forward a method whereby the reader is not just a passive recipient but a participant on a journey wherein they must consider how they would react to dilemmas or "hard to resolve but important issues" (Rickards and Clark (200: 3). Participants must use "mental rehearsal or visualisation" to develop self awareness of what motivates them to respond in the way they do. This, the authors say, helps leaders to be more prepared for making those tough decisions one often has to make as a leader. However, I am unsure if leaders should have to follow the journey strictly through all the stages. It would be useful if leaders were able to dip in and out of the safari, depending where their leadership

experiences lie. There are some useful dilemmas on the safari that participants must face in order to assess how they would respond, but the journey is neatly designed, unlike real life. However, the notion of safari is useful in that, like life, leadership is a journey, sometimes into completely unknown territory. Through exploring potential dilemmas and/or situations along that journey, it does seem that there is an opportunity to almost achieve a state of readiness.

Like the safari of leadership, situational leadership could also be construed as theorising what can be seen as common sense, for most effective leaders are able to read situations and make the necessary adjustments, and hence, the leader becomes a product of the situation (Bass 1990). The skill is knowing at what point one needs to change, and this may depend on being emotionally intelligent. The ability to read the environment and people is though for some not easy. Sadly, there are still people in leadership roles who appear to have little emotional intelligence. I say sadly as often it is the followers who suffer as a result of the low emotional intelligence of their leaders, while often the leaders move on. This is an area I spend more time on in the chapters that focus on the research findings.

Situational Leadership identifies individual styles and how those styles come into play at different times. Proponents of this theory have advanced the view that the “emergence of a great leader is a result of time, place and circumstance” (Bass 1990:38). Numerous studies have

been undertaken to determine the styles of behaviour that are most effective in certain situations. Studies undertaken at the University of Michigan (Cartwright and Zander 1960 ; Katz and Khan 1951; Likert 1961, 1967) explored leadership behaviour and came to the conclusion that there are two types of leadership: employee orientation and production orientation. In their original studies, the Michigan researchers put employee orientation and production orientation at opposite ends of a single continuum, suggesting those leaders who were orientated towards production were less orientated toward their employees. This was later re-conceptualized to acknowledge that leaders were able to be both at the same time. It appears the measure of an effective leader is that he or she can move between two styles depending upon the demands of the current situation, being able to direct, support, coach and mentor equally well. This is the basic premise of situational leadership.

As with any theory, there are both strengths and weakness to situational leadership, and articles have been written that describe it as flawed. For example, Nicholls (1986: 27) argues that, "the deficiencies of Hersey and Blanchard's situational leadership arise from their disregard of three logical principles of consistency, continuity and conformity". However, the model's ability to adapt to the situation is seen as a strength rather than a weakness since it allows the effective leader to recognise that there is not one best style of leadership and effective leaders are flexible and able to adapt to the situation. Nicholls' (1986). However, unlike

many other leadership theories, this approach does not have a strong body of research findings to justify and support the theoretical underpinnings on which it stands.

Despite this, Northouse (2007) identified a number of strengths in the situational approach: it is recognised as a standard model of training for leaders; it is easily understood; it clarifies how leaders should act to improve effectiveness; and, importantly, it allows for flexibility and responsiveness. Both the theories discussed above highlight the benefits of leaders being able to influence their followers whilst recognising the need to develop relationships and being aware of what is happening around them as connected leaders. Both theories are used by top management teams as they lead complex organisation. From my professional experience, I find I spend a lot of my time building relationships with staff in order to influence behaviour. So, having an understanding of the two core leadership theories that are most used by top management teams enables me to use some of the thinking when interviewing top management team subjects.

After reflecting upon and reviewing leadership and top teams, the next part of this chapter considers trust. As highlighted earlier in chapter one, trust appears to play an important role within top management teams.

Exploring Trust

Having explored TMTs and two of the most commonly used and understood leadership theories, a key component within the majority of studies on TMTs appears to be trust. The next part of this chapter will explore the most pertinent issues when considering trust, namely: 1) how trust is formed – incorporating knowledge, structure and motives; (2) the effect of trust on culture, behaviour, support and environment; and (3) the impact of trust on organisational change, leadership and strategies. Therefore, the current literature and thinking on the formation, effect and impact of trust in relation to effective leadership is now explored in some detail. In most academic research into top teams trust is seen as an important function Clegg et al. (2011) and Rickard and Murray (2006) conclude that trust in direct leaders leads to improved performance and better job satisfaction. Giddens (1990) claims that trust derives from faith in an individual, such as a leader, and recognises the importance of followers trusting their leader.

The meaning of trust

Trust can be perceived as both an emotional and logical act. Emotionally, it involves exposing vulnerabilities to others but believing they will not take advantage of your openness (Galford and Seibold-Drapeau 2003). Logically, it involves assessing the probabilities of gain and loss, calculating the expected utility based on hard performance data and concluding that the person in question will behave in a predictable manner (Bass 1990). In practice, trust is a combination of both.

When seeking to understand the exact meaning of trust, various words can be used to elucidate it, such as consistent, reliable and integrity. In this research, I am using the following definition of trust taken from the Oxford English Dictionary: "Firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something."

Trust and Top Management Teams

How Trust is formed

Trust is a word commonly used but perhaps not fully understood within organisations. The actions of followers will depend on whether there is trust in the leadership or not and that trust must be earned. When undertaking a survey of 30 companies and 450 executives, Hurley (2006: 55) found that there was a general consensus that, "half of all managers do not trust their leaders". He asked the survey participants to describe working in an environment of 'distrust', and the most frequently used words in their responses were, "stressful, threatening, divisive, unproductive and tense". Contrastingly, they described a 'high trust' work environment as "fun, supportive, motivating, productive and comfortable".

This led Hurley (2006: 56) to conclude that, "Companies who foster a trusting culture will have a competitive advantage in the war for talent". On that basis, it seems reasonable to make an assumption that people would prefer to work within an environment where there is trust. If, as

suggested, trust leads to improved performance due to staff being more motivated, this would seem to be a simple concept that leaders ought to be able to grasp easily. Yet, the majority of workplace survey's undertaken often highlight a 'lack of trust' as the reason why there is limited confidence in the management team leading the organisation.

It may initially be useful to look at the roles and behaviour of leaders that ultimately lead to the formation of trust and identify what determines whether or not people choose to trust others. According to Hurley (2006: 60), "when people choose to trust, they have gone through a decision-making process – one involving factors that can be identified, analysed and influenced". Using the work of social psychologist, Deutsch (1975), on trust, suspicion and the resolution of conflict, Hurley developed a model that he claims can be used to predict whether or not an individual will choose to trust or distrust another in a given situation. The model uses decision maker factors (3) and then goes on to describe a number of situational factors (7).

The decision maker factors focus on risk, power and how well the individual is adjusted, whilst the situational factors focus more on how relationships are formed and maintained. Hurley proposes a common sense model based upon the notion that the psychology of most individuals will depend on their personality and previous experiences will impact on whether they are able to trust. The challenge for leaders of organisations is to be able to recognise the benefits that trust within an organisation can bring and then demonstrate trustworthiness. This

ability is the focus of most of academic debate in the area, in particular whether or not trust leads to benefits and if it does, for whom.

According to Dirks and Ferrin (2002: 611), "Trust in leadership has been recognised by researchers for at least 4 decades" as an issue that demands attention. Dirks and Ferrin focus on two different theoretical perspectives on trust in leadership. The first is the notion of the leader-follower relationship, which Northouse (2007) claims is the basis of LMX Theory and refers to the dyadic relationship between the leader and his or her followers. Followers dependence on their relationship with the leader will determine whether they are part of what Northouse terms the 'in-group' and the 'out-group'. Being a member of the in-group brings rewards in terms of information and communication, whereas those in the out-group have little communication or interaction with the leader.

The second theoretical perspective focuses on the influence leaders have on their followers and, in particular, leaders' characters and the role and position they hold within the organisation. This is aligned with the LMX theory and the concept of in and out groups but is more focussed on the relationships between leaders and their followers.

This formal hierarchy is not uncommon within organisational structures and is often seen as the most appropriate way of governing. So, in an organisation like public services, power often resides in one position or

job and the person appointed has the right to exercise legitimate power, which is later passed on to the new incumbent.

Managing power is one of the most challenging aspects of a leader's job. Dirks and Ferrin (2002: 614) refer to this as a character-based perspective since they see "trust as a belief or perception held by the follower that is measured accordingly; it is not a property of the relationship or the leader per se". These theoretical perspectives are then used to provide a framework that explains the bivariate relationships between trust in leadership and its antecedents and consequences. It also allows for the development of hypotheses about the two different theories, how the way leaders behave or are perceived by their followers will impact on the followers' behaviour.

A model provided by Mayer, Davis and Schoorman (1995) (and see Clark and Payne (2006) who extended this to include openness) suggests that followers who believe their leaders have integrity, capability or benevolence will become more engaged in behaviour which could put them at risk, for example, the sharing of sensitive information. The opposite side to this though is when an employee believes their leader cannot be trusted or is not perceived as having integrity and thus uses all their energy to cover their backs, distracting from their poor work performance, which will impact on organisational outcomes and performance.

Galford and Seibold-Drapeau (2003: 90) suggest it takes more than personal integrity to build a trusting or trustworthy organisation. In their view, it also requires skills, smart supporting processes and unwavering attention on the part of top managers. Their view is that trust within an organisation is far more complicated and, therefore, more fragile than trust, say, between a consultant and a client. This is in part, I believe, due to the very nature of organisations and the need to have different relationships within different groups that often have very different goals. My experience within the public sector is that there are often services silos, an unwillingness to cooperate with each other and what appears to be a lack of focus on meeting the needs of customers, rather than directorate targets.

Using the concept put forward by Galford and Seibold-Drapeau (2003), one can identify three different kinds of trust, namely: strategic, personal and organisational. Therefore, if the formation of trust is based on behaviour and through this behaviour an environment is created whereby leaders are reliant on the workforce for knowledge, learning and action, then one could assume that "how the leader behaves towards the dependant is based on whether they are confident or arrogant" (Zand 1997: 22).

When leaders gain access to knowledge and use this to develop relationships and solve problems, trust begins to form. This is a relatively simple concept but one that seems to elude the most

experienced of leaders, often leading to mistrust that can take years to diminish. Galford and Seibold–Drapeau (2003: 94) argue that, “any act of bad management erodes trust” and go onto say “if people think the organization acted in bad faith, they’ll rarely forgive – and they’ll never forget”. This can affect future relationships, and potential development opportunities may be lost as the leader will be spending a great deal of time offering reassurances rather than delivering the goods.

The formation of trust within an organisation requires leaders to communicate, developing relationships based on constructive independence. Importantly, the leaders and the organisation will be judged based on the way they behave. One could argue that there is a need for leaders to demonstrate everyday leadership in the way they behave, react and respond to their followers. The manner in which trust is formed is important as this impacts upon how future relationships develop and are maintained (Finkelstein et al. 2009). For top management teams, understanding how trust is formed and the benefits this could bring to both individuals and the organisation, is important, particularly when they are seeking to make strategic decisions.

This understanding of how trust is formed leads to the next part of the chapter, which focuses on the effect of trust on both individuals and organisations.

The effect of trust

Almost as important as the formation of trust within organisations and the relationships between leaders and followers are the by-products of trust: its effects on both individuals and organisations and, in particular, the notion held by some that trust leads to increased productivity. Although, current theories around the notion of trust make bold statements about the benefits for an organisation, determining that a trusting environment leads to improved performance, it appears a number of favourable events need to occur in relation to both the individual and the organisation. In the article "The Enemies of Trust" Galford and Drapeau (2003) explore the notion of trust and argue that it takes more than personal integrity to build a trusting organisation. They describe behaviour which they believed contribute to a trusting environment, namely: consistency, clear communication and a willingness to deal with difficult situations. It is their view that when these are breached, trust in management and, ultimately, the organisation, begins to decline. They conclude with the idea that trust is an important part of the organisation's structure, stating, "Trust is the crucial ingredient of organisational effectiveness. Building it, maintaining it and restoring it when it is damaged has to be at the top of every Chief Executive's agenda". They go on to declare that, "trust within organisations isn't easy to pin down. It is hard to measure, even in a quick and dirty way. And suppose you could measure it perfectly –

the truth is that no company would ever get a perfect score" (Galford and Drapeau 2003:95).

This view that it is not possible to measure the effect of trust conflicts with some of the other thoughts on trust and the effect it has on organisational performance. Covey (2008: 44) puts forward the notion that "trust is not just a soft, nice-to-have social virtue" but rather that "trust is an economic driver; when trust goes down in any relationship, everything takes longer to do while costs go up". He believes that "trust is quantitative, it's measurable, you can measure an improvement". However, as yet there is no empirical evidence that 'trust' leads to improved performance; rather, it is usually considered that it could or will and therefore with a number of leaders' activities will have an impact on behaviour and environmental factors such as culture and organisational history. This is important for top management teams as they reconcile their work together as a 'team' with their duties within their primary individual role.

In an attempt to support his theory, Covey describes 13 key ways the follower will determine the effectiveness or not of the leader. Thus, trust is subject to the assumptions and perceptions of a number of individuals. It appears Covey is describing behaviour associated with what is often described as transformational leadership. If someone is successful in this area, they are often described by followers as

“someone who we can trust”, but this trust in an individual does not necessarily translate into trust in the organisation.

Whether trust can be measured or not is debatable. Clark and Payne (1997) presented a theoretical and empirical analysis of trust at work, leading to the development of a definitional framework of trust, which was then used as a theoretical basis for the analysis of the structural characteristics of trust. Incorporating the facets of modality and other qualities they were able to identify five conditions of trust: integrity, competence, consistent behaviour, loyalty and openness. The outcome of the research led to the conclusion that the conditions described above are relevant to the development of a relationship of trust between managers and workers. Some would say this is common sense and present in most organisations; however, what would be interesting to know is whether there would be trust if, say, only three of the five conditions were met.

There has been a growing interest in the notion of trust and, in particular, the effects of trust both organisationally and individually for leaders. Dirks and Ferrin (2002: 644) claim that although there has been a significant and growing interest in the concept of trust “several key issues have been overlooked”. It is their view that there has been no attempt to cumulate and assess empirical research on trust in leadership and that because of this there is a lack of clarity, which has

led to a difference of opinion between scholars, ranging from “trust being a variable of very substantial importance to having little impact”.

Using meta-analysis to quantify, summarise and evaluate the relationship between trust in leadership and 23 constructs, Dirks and Ferrin (2002) produced a theoretical framework to try to explain bivariate relationships between trust and leadership. So, for example, different relationships could potentially lead to different outcomes. This is not difficult to understand as where an individual sits in an organisation together with the influence and power he has can all impact on relationships as well as whether or not the relationship is one of trust or respect without trust.

If you trust someone, then it is easy to collaborate with them. The benefits of the relationship will not only be improved performance but also changes to both culture and behaviour. Take, for example, the work of Monty Roberts (2001), who is renowned for his work with horses and his method of inviting them to be part of the ‘herd’ by getting the animal to trust. His methods have been used by executive groups all over the world, enabling leaders to understand how to be successful within their environment through developing trust in a meaningful way.

Roberts (2001) believes that for a leader to be successful, they should walk in the shoes of their workers once in while and develop a greater

understanding of how it feels to be them. He also believes that doing so would develop trust, thus producing a more engaging and productive environment for people to want to work within. Roberts (2001) states that, "Trust should flow through all walks of life. This higher level of co-operation can improve the quality of our lives" (p 25). Once trust has been established, he claims that "trust radiates out, extending the benefits of trust to the people around us, like ripples across a pond into which a stone has been thrown" (Roberts 2001: 33).

With the benefits of a trusting environment so apparent, it is astonishing that all organisations do not make the creation of this a top priority. Perhaps it is because some organisations believe that leadership is about control of 'subordinates'. The very nature of organisations, with their rules and policies, would support this theory. It could be that the history of and bureaucracy associated with public sector management along with the environment in which business is conducted is actually an antidote to trust. On the other hand, perhaps there is a recognition that trust can be wide-ranging both internally, leading to a more cohesive and productive workforce, and externally, leading to a satisfied customer base, whereas the flip-side of no trust is an environment of suspicion, oppression and one which does not encourage creativity and innovation. Ultimately, not having trust could lead to business failure. Whether or not we can provide empirical evidence of the impact of trust, we can confidently predict that the environment would be more

conducive to delivering outcomes if we consider trust as a set of leadership behaviours.

Having considered the formation and effects of trust, the next part of this chapter considers the impact trust can have on leaders, followers and the organisation.

The Impact Of Trust

Buzotta (1998: 9). States that "Trust is essential not only for improving performance but for sustaining it during turbulent times. The more trust you engender, the more people will be committed to the mission, goals and bottom-line results. Without trust, there is no risk-taking, no commitment, no empowerment, no collaborative teamwork"

A recent survey by the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) found that senior managers in local government are among the least trusted managers. The survey found that one in three workers "had little or no trust in their senior managers, while Chief Executives were significantly less trusted than line managers". Staff surveyed said they would expect Chief Executives to "demonstrate integrity and ability, while line managers should show understanding, integrity and fairness". According to Penny de Valk, ILM's Chief Executive (2010: 76), "trust is crucial to the performance of an organization and a cornerstone of good leadership. Teams are more effective in a trusting environment and people work better and harder if they trust leaders".

There is a growing interest within the academic world in the notion of trust and an increasing belief that trust has a significant impact on organisational outcomes. However, this belief is not supported by empirical evidence and is often based on the softer or transformational elements of leadership, in particular, how a leader behaves and whether they are consistent in their behaviour, which for followers evokes the idea of trust as the leader is perceived as one 'who can be trusted'. For top teams, it would appear it is a necessity not only to have the skills and capability but also integrity and to be able to engage with a wide range of individuals. Mayer et al. (1995:710) propose that, "when followers believe their leaders have integrity, capability or benevolence, they will be more comfortable engaging in behaviours that put them at risk". Thus, they may be more willing to share sensitive information. The opposite of this though is often seen in organisations where a leader is not perceived as trustworthy. People use all their energy to 'cover their backs', detracting the focus from their poor work performance, and this impacts on organisational outcomes as a great deal of energy and time is spent on avoiding blame and/or not being held accountable/responsible.

"Scholars have offered different explanations for the processes through which trust forms, the process through which trust affects workplace outcomes and the nature of the construct itself" (Dirks and Ferrin 2002: 612) . Thus, to address what they refer to as "theoretical diversity", they use a framework, which is intended to explain the bivariate relationship

between trust leadership in its antecedents and consequences. Using these concepts, the following shows the relationship between leader actions, follower attributes and performance outcomes. It is designed to incorporate three key areas associated with leadership and trust, namely: attitude, behaviour and performance.

Dirks and Ferrin (2002: 613) argue that trust in leadership “should be associated with higher levels of job satisfaction, higher organisational commitment and lower intention of quitting”. So, in an environment where there is trust, one would expect to see a satisfied work force performing to a high standard and delivering outcomes and benefits to both the customer and the organisation.

Thus, despite the dearth of empirical evidence, one could conclude that the presence of trust and having a trusted leader at the helm can help organisations achieve effective outcomes, particularly due to enabling effective change strategies to take place. Organisational trust often represents a belief in the “way things are done around here”, and it develops from an abundance of personal trust leading to “organisational trust as truly a composite; it’s the trust that develops in a wide range of individuals throughout the organization. And it is the processes and traditions to which those individuals adhere” Galford and Dapeau (2002:89). Having explored leadership and reviewed trust, I am now going to look at the issue of culture in top management teams as

culture affects behaviour and is important as it can impact on both individual and organisational success.

Culture of top management teams

Schedler and Proeller (2007), in an attempt to explain culture, describe it as differences in the behaviour of diverse groups of actors in situations that are objectively alike. Their research conclusion reaffirms the general consensus that culture is important to the success of an organisation. Leaders of organisations often speak of developing 'the right kind of culture', apparently seeing this as key to improving performance and outcomes, whilst consultants have touted 'cultural surveys', claiming they can improve organisational performance by helping to create the 'right culture'.

This, however, is not a view held by Schien (2004: 36), who states that, "the use of the word culture displays not only a superficial and incorrect view of culture but also a dangerous tendency to evaluate particular cultures in an absolute way and to suggest that there are actually right cultures for organisations". His view is that one needs to understand what is underneath the organisation in order to begin to understand how different departments and groups work together as well as how this then affects the culture of the organisation. One could, therefore, assume that, if we seek to understand the dynamic of the culture, it will

lead to being less likely to be puzzled, irritated and anxious when we encounter seemingly irrational behaviour (Schien 2004).

One could argue that culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin. The culture of an organisation often reflects the way its systems, processes and groups are organised. Culture allows for organisational success but can also be the catalyst that leads to an organisation becoming dysfunctional. The bottom line is that leaders need to manage the culture or it will manage them (Bettman and Weitz 1983). Organisational culture within the public sector began to change some years ago, particularly in the Thatcher era. Whereas bureaucracy and formality had previously been an indicator of the strength of culture, these characteristics now render an organisation fragmented and decoupled. In part, this is due to the hierarchical structures often found in public sector environments and the division of work across very distinct directorates, each containing a number of professionals, which has led to the development of silos, each of which has its own processes and reporting structures.

For top teams in this environment, there appears to be a need or an obligation to display compliance through the appliance of corporate governance policies, despite the fact that these policies more than likely lead to greater bureaucracy, leaving the public sector, allegedly, inherently inefficient. Such inefficiency may not be as much of an issue to top teams in the public sector as it is their counterparts in the private

sector. Inefficiency in the latter ultimately leads to the demise of the organisation, whereas the former always has the government to fall back on when it fails. One could argue that this security net offers no incentive to be efficient. This has led to the notion of impoverished public services ethics, with Marquand (2004: 22) claiming that, “the service ethic is a rhetorical device to legitimize a web of monopolistic cartels, whose real purpose is to rip-off the consumer”. These words are harsh and, one could argue, a little unfair as the political framework in which most public sector managers have to work does often stifle innovation. However, having said that, one has to acknowledge that public sector culture needs to be challenged and changed but from within rather than via a plethora of consultants.

The adoption of the beliefs, values and ideals of the private sector, either through re-education or direct pressure from the market, would put the customer in control. The establishment of the ‘sovereignty of the customer’, whereby the customer has control and choice regarding how their needs are met, is an aim that governments are keen to pursue. Whether this will lead to greater outcomes has yet to be determined and, ultimately, may require that the politicians ‘let go’ and delegate more to local government and local communities.

Organisational culture can and often does impact on behaviour as the values of the organisation will be embedded in the culture. Culture is a dynamic phenomenon, which is constantly enacted and created via our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behaviour. According

to Schein (2004:1), “the dynamic process of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership and make one realize that leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin”.

Top management teams do play a key role in the setting of the strategic direction of the organisation and are put in place to lead organisations, providing direction and often assurances that all is well (Lega 2014). Thus, the culture of a top management team can and often does influence organisational culture, with leaders creating the cultural conditions due to the way they communicate, lead and react emotionally.

Emotion is becoming more and more relevant within the workforce and is often seen as affecting people’s behaviour in terms of how they relate to one another and lead. For top management teams, understanding emotion and how this impacts on the organisation is important. Thus, emotion is the next area I discuss.

Emotion and top management teams

Leaders often say that emotion is the enemy of rational thought and that we cannot allow it to cloud our thinking. It then becomes easy to believe that thinking and feeling lie at two different ends of a long continuum, with emotion being perceived as the opposite of rational thought and even as a barrier to sound decision making (Cure 2014). In

reality though, thinking and feeling, thought and emotion, operate in conjunction with one another.

However, one has to acknowledge that emotion is a relatively new, though rapidly growing, area of study within organisational research (Campbell, White and Johnson 2003; Fineman 2000, 2003; Madlock 2008). Human behaviour is made up of a triangle of forces: cognition, emotion and behaviour (Kets De Vries 2011). These help motivate us and, therefore, emotion needs to be considered. Within the workplace, the need for 'attachment/affiliation' is a strong motivational factor, hence the use of teams. Having a better understanding of the emotions within a top management team will aid an understanding of the character and culture of the organisation.

Fineman (2000) uses the term 'emotional arenas' to describe the intense emotional activity in organisational life, which can both bond and divide members, arguing that, "work-day frustrations and passions, boredom, envy, fear, love, anger, guilt, infatuation, embarrassment and anxiety are deeply woven into the way roles are enacted and learned. Power is exercised, trust is laid, commitment formed and decisions made" (Fineman 2000:1). Research into emotion appears to lead to the idea that engaging and connecting as a management team and recognising the importance of emotion can only improve how the team functions. Some agreement amongst researchers in the field of organisation emotion is apparent, and two key issues are emerging: first, that emotions play an important role in organisations and, second, that

rationality and emotion are not the antitheses of one another but are in fact intertwined (Ashforth and Humphrey 1995; Fineman 2000; Madlock 2008). Researchers now believe that high professional motivation is not possible without emotional engagement in the work. However, leaders are often unaware of the role emotion plays in their seemingly rational decision-making.

A crucial aspect of the study of emotion in organisations is leader-member interaction. It is claimed that leadership is enacted through communication in such a way that it always contains an affective, relational component and a task component (Campbell et al. 2003; Madlock 2008). Emotional experiences are described by Fineman (2000) as 'flashpoints' signaling the balance between public, private and personal realms. Using emotions as a 'barometer ' allows one to listen to the emotional pulse of the organisation. However, a certain level of emotional intelligence is required as well as the ability to understand and manage our own emotions and identify emotions in others (Kets De Vries 2011).

The final section of this review of top teams focuses on the public sector and top teams, in particular on the rise of new public management. I thought it important to include this within the review as new public management and the changes within the public sector have had and continue to have an impact on top management teams and how they lead.

New Public Management and Top Management Teams

According to the Institute of Leadership and Management (2010: 2), “The public sector touches everyone’s lives, providing a range of essential services and employing one in five of the UK workforce. In 2010, as the UK emerges from a recession and with the public deficit expected to reach £178bn, the public sector as a whole will be challenged to reduce costs, while maintaining quality of service”. This section reflects on this situation, considering the associated challenges, especially in relation to public sector management being weighed down by legislation and being overly-bureaucratic, making it difficult to adopt business principles. Some of the history of public management is also explored here. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, a plethora of research into public management has been conducted, leading to an abundance of writing on the subject (Pollitt 1990; Hood 1991; Dunleavy and Hood 1994). The 1980s saw the rise of the concept of ‘New Public Management’, a notion that private business principles could be readily adopted/adapted for use by top management teams to impact on public sector management positively Ferlie et al (1996). Today, the organisations that have taken this path find themselves facing criticism, branded as ineffective and in need of modernisation. There is a sense of urgency to transform them and, once again, comparisons are being made with the private sector, to the extent that we are witnessing service reductions and outsourcing on a scale never experienced before, all of which leads to greater challenges for the top team manager.

The greatest impact would be felt within the top management teams who had to change how they led as the new public manager would now have to become use to the notion of steering rather than rowing. However, this would prove difficult as leaders in public sector organisations rarely have undisputed sway over people or unlimited autonomy Finkelstein et al (2009).

Top management teams are viewed as an important aspect within new public management (Flynn 2002, Finkelstein et al. 2009, Hambrick and Mason 1984), and one can see within the current structures of public sector organisations a top management team. However, the overreliance on these teams to deliver the strategic outcomes of the organisation could be describe as almost like a 'fetish' without who the organisation will be unable to function. This is borne out with the growing number of academic work extolling the virtues of such team, (Bass 1981, Beckham et el 2008, Carpenter 2011). However, as the notion of top management teams grew, within new public sector there were those who began to question the whole idea of teams at the top, and their effectiveness (Frish 2011, Wageman et al. 2008). For now though top management teams within new public management are seen to be an integral part of the organisational structure. My research however starts to begin to question the role of top management teams, chapters 5 and 6 debate the concept of TMT and questions the role and function.

Public Sector Leadership

Looking back over the recent history of the public sector reveals how successive governments and academic researchers have changed perceptions of the 'public sector', both positively and negatively (Osborne and McLaughlin 2002). Over the last 120 years, there have been 4 distinctive stages of public sector development, *minimal state*; *unequal partnership*; *welfare state*; and *plural state*; taking us to where we are today, creating almost a full circle, whereby the state is seeking to hand responsibility over to the private and voluntary sector.

Although change has been occurring throughout the last century, the rate of change has accelerated over the past twenty years, with successive governments launching public sector reform programmes in what appears to have been an almost constant drive to effect change. What is less clear is what the outcome of any of these changes will be. If we look at the history of the public sector, it goes through periods of being re-structured, re-formed, privatised, re-organised and modernised. These constant changes appear to serve no purpose, simply adding to the burden of running a 'publically-owned' company. The dilemma for top management teams is the ethos of customer ownership being similar to shareholders of a company but with the added burden of government intervention. So they are accountable to customers as well as obliged to adhere to central government legislation and policy.

Hood's (1998) description of public management is useful in this context as it reflects current thinking on the area. His view is that public management is the study and practice of the design and operation of arrangements for the provision of public services and the executive government. However, in order to truly understand public management, to clarify the relationship between public management, private management and the leadership of an organisation, one has to go beyond this rather simplistic catchall.

The success of an organisation inevitably depends on how effectively it is being led, within public sector the leadership stems from the top management team. Where there is success, there is usually good leadership. Where there is failure, leadership is often weak and ineffective. A primary problem is that leadership principles have largely been drawn from concepts that pertain to business organisations. Frequently, one hears business leaders extol the virtues of business while criticising top management teams, and many top management teams will agree, seeking to run their organisation as a business, using some of the transferable concepts and principles. In the era of Best Value, we witnessed a drive for efficiency through outsourcing, with value driven services seeking outcomes or return on investments.

The simplistic view of a leader or a top management team member as an autonomous, powerful and influential manager, who determines the future and destiny of the organisation, falls wide of the mark in the

public sector since top team managers within the public sector have a clear role to play as relatively powerless officers of the organisation, whilst the elected Councillors/Members hold the power. Within public sector organisations, top team managers rarely have undisputed sway over people or unlimited autonomy in order that they are able to determine strategies and are often described as 'pluralistic' in nature. This increased pluralism brings added problems. Cohen and March (1986: 195) indicate that, "when purpose is ambiguous, ordinary theories of decision making and intelligence become problematic. When power is ambiguous, ordinary theories of social order and control become problematic". In addition, top teams within public sector organisations often have to operate with the added complexity of contradictory rules, procedures and safeguards within an environment with scarce resources.

Hence, much debate over how the public sector could become more efficient and effective and what lessons could be taken from business and used successfully within the public sector took place. During the 1980s and 1990s the concern over the public sector and its ability to function efficiently grew. Dawson and Dargie (2002: 161) argued that this led neither to cost containment nor to quality improvement and indeed that it opened the way to undue the influence of employees (whether they were protected by virtue of their membership of professional associations or by trade unions. There were also concerns over a potentially dissatisfied electorate that was unhappy about

declining standards in public service. All of these concerns led to the creation of what is now commonly known as 'new public management'.

New Public Management

According to Ferlie et al. (1996: 10), "sometimes new public management seems like an empty canvas: you can paint on it whatever you like". This eloquent introductory quotation by Ferlie and associates suggests that there is little, if any, consensus on the meaning of the term 'new public management' (NPM). These authors suggest that there is not only disagreement about what new public management is but also about what it should be. Perhaps though there is some agreement at the most fundamental level, specifically, that NPM is a tool for governmental entities to use in public sector governance (Lane 2000).

NPM began as a concept that added structure to academic and scholarly discussions on contemporary changes within organisations and to the management of government. It matched a mood for reform in state bureaucracies to make government more 'business-like' with a greater emphasis on the role of managers, and in particular the top teams of the organisations.

Hood (1998) takes the view that, "public management is ambiguous and able to convey mixed and multiple messages". He argues that if 'public management' means "put the stress on the public", it appeals to those

who believe that there is something quite distinctive about government and public services, which are often viewed as requiring special knowledge and skills. However, the flip side of this is to “put the stress on management”, which appeals to those who see government and public services as a field of activity whereby management methodologies from business schools can be applied.

Trying to fit public management into a discipline has been the subject of academic debate for years. Waldo (1968) referred to public administration “as a subject in search of a discipline”, whilst Ferlie (1998) identifies six features of the new public management: privatisation; introduction of market mechanisms into the public sector; a separation between core, or policy, activities and peripheral, or service delivery, activities; the outsourcing of service delivery activities; enhanced management, including the use of performance management; and labour market flexibility. Stake (2004) describes the features of NPM as: decentralising and de-layering government agencies; encouraging competition between public and private providers of service; providing greater choice for citizens; benchmarking and measuring output; implementing performance contracts and various financial incentives for employees of public agencies; creating internal markets; and applying private sector management approaches.

Meanwhile, Hood (1998) attributes seven features to new public management, including: allowing managers to manage; establishing

specific standards and performance measures; emphasising output controls; disaggregating units in the public sector; increasing public sector competition; increasing the use of private sector management approaches in the public sector; and increasing discipline in resource utilisation. Hood (1998:3) revealed that, “however diverse the literature, it was built on 3 closely related assumptions, either implicitly or explicitly”: (1) public management is in the throes of transformation into a new style; (2) today’s NPM differs sharply from early ideas, suggesting that serious thinking about public management only began in the 1980s; and (3) contemporary public management through the use of private business practices, in particular the use of engineering metaphors, such as business process and benchmarking, is becoming increasingly popular.

Each of these assumptions comes with widely held perceptions on public management. According to Hood (1998: 173), “variations in ideas about how to organise public services is a central and recurring theme in public management and that such variations are unlikely to disappear in spite of the engineering metaphors and the prophets foreseeing convergence on a new stable for modernity”.

Public management is not a new concept and was not newly minted in the 1980s. Most of the basic ideas about how to manage government have a history, and it is this history and interface between NPM and

modernization that produces tensions, which are subsequently played out in public sector organisations. Top teams within the public sector seek to accommodate new definitions of role and purpose, all of which causes dilemmas for top management teams. What is consistent about NPM is the need to describe features of NPM, suggesting the need for NPM to have a 'label' so that it is possible to describe what it is. Such a label helps those outside public management to understand the phenomena and to form an opinion on it, and that opinion is influenced by the holder's views on public versus private.

In conclusion, NPM has been approached from multiple angles by specialists in political science and public administration, (McLaughlin et al. 2002) and there has also been consideration of NPM as a set of doctrines and an approach based on sigma-type administrative values. The notion that NPM is about organisational design became popular, and Carnevale (1995) pursued this idea, putting forward the notion that NPM draws on codified views on how to achieve well-performing organisations and responsible government. However, Barzelay (1992) and Schick (1996) both proposed plausible doctrines of public management, describing the organisation as having rules and routines for operating central administration and steering, motivating and controlling employees. NPM in its early formation has given rise to two types of scholarly discussions that befit a field of public policy research, one being the explanatory analysis of policy, choices and organisational change in complex government systems and the other being doctrinal

and policy issues (McLaughlin et al. 2002). The stage is now set for a more productive discussion, particularly around the role of TMT within public sector environments.

Summary

Having explored the notion of top teams and examined leadership, including public sector leadership, culture, emotion and the three themes of trust, a number of questions began to formulate in my mind on top teams' behaviour and roles, on how they lead and on what part trust plays in teams. I found that I wanted to explore these themes further and thus included them in my research questions. In particular, I wanted to explore whether there was a link between leaders, trust, culture and emotion and whether any such links lead to trust based leadership, which might lead to benefits. When considering this, I was reminded of Monty Roberts and his approach to leadership, which involves building trust through adopting the right culture and acknowledging emotion. Roberts (2001: 89) claims that, "If you want to pursue trust based leadership as a concrete practice, you must give up what I call the myth of the gentle. There is a prevailing, virtual worldwide belief that gentleness equates with weakness, slowness and a lack of discipline. When in a tough situation, I am calm because I have learned that any other state of mind is detrimental. It is also knowledge that keeps me calm and free of any desire to dominate through fear. I am a willing partner. Gentleness is the true strength of the world

...violence always come back in the form of more violence". Roberts appears to be advocating the need to be reflective and aware of emotion and to use this to develop a culture of trust. This approach could be applied to teams when they are working together. It is a simple format but one that may work for teams, even top management teams.

In conclusion, in this chapter I sought to reflect upon and critique current thinking around top teams, leadership, trust, culture and emotion, examining different leadership styles and the behaviour of both top management teams and the individuals within the teams to understand how this might affect organisations.

It was also useful to reflect on public management and the top teams within this area, considering the complexities of the public sector and the differences between it and the private sector. In business, the focus is often about the top team's bottom line and achieving a winning situation to meet the team's goals. However, government organisations are influenced by both legislation and customer demand and leaders in local government have to work within these boundaries. This obligation does not stop creativity and innovation altogether; however, it may slow the pace down. One must thus acknowledge that the added burden of government intervention makes it more difficult to manage a service within an ever-changing environment, where strategies are devised but often do not come to fruition as another piece of legislation takes precedence.

This is the dilemma that faces top management teams in public services. One has to ask if applying private sector principles within the public sector achieves anything. Perhaps this leads to improved quality or increased performance. Public management is not about making a profit but about making a difference. Sacrificing this principle in order to 'make a buck or two' may well be on the agenda though. If this is the case, the whole ethos of the public sector set within the confines of the welfare state may change. This is an interesting notion worthy of research in its own right.

This literature review helped me to formulate the questions I asked members of the top management team I interviewed in relation to how they lead and whether trust was important to them in order to gain a better understanding of top management teams within the public sector.

The next chapter is a description of how the research was undertaken, detailing the chosen methods and methodology.

CHAPTER 3

How the research was undertaken

Introduction

This chapter describes how the research was approached and undertaken. This introductory paragraph covers a number of issues, which I will discuss fully later in the chapter. The research was conducted in a hermeneutic manner from a critical position, using interviews as the research method. This is appropriate for my study as it allowed me to gain a deep understanding of top management teams. It is important to recognise the subjectivity of both myself and the interviewees as an important element in evaluating the data and reaching the conclusions. According to Cole et al. (2011), one needs to consider the researcher's role both methodologically and epistemologically. Acknowledging this and approaching the research through reflexivity brought benefits (Alevesson and Skoldberg 2000), with the interviewees helping to shape the direction of the research by confirming my pre-understanding or rejecting it and opening up new areas for discussion. The literature review, which focused on public sector literature, highlighted a number of themes appropriate to top teams, which then helped me to formulate the research questions and thus the interview topics.

The Research Question

Understanding the role of Top Management Teams in the Public Sector

The purpose of my research is to understand top management teams and their role in the public sector. In particular, I wanted to follow up on several hunches I had about top teams and what in my experiences is important to top management teams. Due to my own professional experiences I decided not to formulate explicit hypothesis, as like (Dalton 1964) I wanted to use my series of hunches as guide.

Considering a hypothesis is often a proposed explanation for a phenomenon, I was concerned that the use of hypotheses may have guided me towards a fix view, and the “tendency for the hypotheses to degenerate into frozen prejudice” (Dalton 1964:54).

The most important aspect for me undertaking this research into TMT was allowing the hunches to guide me through the findings, and not try to prove or disprove a hypothesis. Like (Dalton 1964) who used analysis to uncover recurring processes and events this was similar to how I approached my research. The use of hunches allowed for creativity, and the ability to follow different paths, it was an opportunity to discover how top management teams worked, and to for me test out my own assumptions and prejudices about top management teams. As (Dalton 1964: 54) articulates, “once uttered a hypotheses becomes obligatory to a degree”. I found that with the growing knowledge I attained of top

management teams, I was able to establish my hunches and both drop those no longer applicable and bring new ones into the discussion.

Having a better understanding of top teams and the impact they have on individuals and organisations should contribute to both my professional and academic learning. From an academic perspective, my research should make a contribution to the current body of knowledge on top teams, especially top teams in the public sector, leading to a greater understanding of top teams in general as well as in the public sector.

When beginning my research into top management teams, I had several hunches, developed from both my professional experience and the academic literature.

From my professional experience:

- Teams at the top are essential
- They work as one and are cohesive
- Trusting each other is a core requirement
- Anyone can be a top team member with the right support

From the academic literature:

- Leadership is important
- Teams outperform individuals
- Leading in a complex organisation is a shared activity

- Emotion and emotional intelligence play a key role

In particular, I sought to understand the impact top teams have on their organisations. What I wanted to know is how these people lead within public sector organisations and whether my professional and academic hunches were an accurate reflection of such teams. The research approach I chose to adopt enabled me to test these hunches and reveal new areas for consideration.

Theoretical perspectives

The aim of my research is to understand top management teams in the public sector. I intend to carry out this research through interpretivist means, using hermeneutics and interviews. Undertaking the research in this way inevitably means that I will make sense of the data subjectively as I have a subjectivist epistemology. However, as I believe reality is out there, notwithstanding its subjective construction, my ontology is objectivist. This is a well understood approach which has delivered results consistently for many years (Crotty 1998; Blaikie 1993).

Identifying my epistemological and ontological view helped me choose the most suitable methodology and methods to use in order to explore my research question (Crotty 1998). Determining this was the first challenge. How I view knowledge and truth is key, as is how I make sense of reality. Once I had identified my epistemological and

ontological view, this determined my theoretical perspective and helped me to identify the methodology and methods I intended to use (Blaike 1993).

Consideration needs to be given to how people view what they perceive as the 'truth'. One could assume that most of the time, truth is what people believe to be common sense. Therefore, people are able to interact with life without having to consider their philosophy, unaware that epistemology and ontology can be used to analyse and bring some understanding to how they perceive their world.

One can assume that most people would not be interested in knowing the value of philosophy (McAuley et al. 2007). However, for the researcher, trying to analyse and make sense of what the data is telling them is important, and understanding their own epistemological and ontological stance enables them not only to try and understand but also to express the desire to find foundations (Johnson and Duberley 2000).

The researcher also needs to be aware that there could be preferences depending on whether the research is undertaken from inside or outside of an organisation, particularly if the researcher is researching their own organisation (Blaikie 1993) as this could impact upon any potential pre-understanding and also any awareness of and insight into the organisational culture. When attempting to introduce the importance of epistemology into management research, Johnson and Duberely

(2000:70) found that our assumptions are often based on how “our behaviours can be internally motivated and internally justified, by what we believe about the world”. Thus, if researchers’ pre-understanding helps them make sense of things, one has to acknowledge that it can also influence how they interpret the data. However, whatever methodology and methods are chosen, those choices must be justified in order that any conclusions stand up Crotty (1998).

I sit within the subjectivist paradigm, using an interpretivist approach, thus accepting that in order to understand the social world, one must be fully immersed in it in order to understand the language, meaning and rules. Hay (2011:168) argues that, “interpretivism is centrally motivated by a concern to understand and indeed to explain—actions, practices and, perhaps to a somewhat lesser extent, institutions”.

Interpretivism

The origins of interpretivism lie in the intellectual traditions of hermeneutics (Blaikie 1998). Interpretivism can be traced back to the work of early German idealists and British ordinary language philosophers, such as Weber (1864–1920), Schutz (1899–1959) and Winch (1926–1997), who took the view that the reality of the universe lies in ‘spirit’ or ideas rather than in data. This approach runs counter to sociological positivism, which owes much to the work of Immanuel Kant (1724–1803), whose philosophy is open to a wide range of interpretations. He posited that, “a priori knowledge must precede any

grasp or understanding of the sense data of empirical experience". On the other hand, Burrell and Morgan (1979:227) argued that, "there must be inherent, in-born organizing principles within man's consciousness". This notion of prior knowledge or pre-understanding and interpretation are the characteristics of hermeneutics, which, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979), have been heavily influenced and shaped by the work of Dilthey (1976), Husserl (1929) and Weber (1949). Within the interpretive paradigm, Burrell and Morgan (1979:235) determined four distinct, but related, categories of interpretive theory, namely: "solipsism, phenomenology, phenomenological sociology and hermeneutics", with hermeneutics identified as being the most influential as it allows the researcher to focus and interpret "meaningful social action, its role in understanding patterns in social life and how this meaning can be assessed" (Blaikie 1993:48).

Hay (2011:168) states that a centrally motivated concern of interpretivism is to understand and "explain actions, practices and, to a lesser extent, institutions". This then leads to the underlying assumption of interpretivism, which "positivism and critical rationalism ignore – that is, that the meanings and interpretations, the motives and intentions, which people use in their everyday lives and which direct their behaviour, elevate them to the central place in social theory and research" (Blaikie 1993:176). Therefore, determining from the inside how members are experiencing their social world is a key part of the

researcher's role, and the aim is not only to discover the insider's view but also to describe it. So, simply discovering why people do what they do, by exploring the mundane, the pre-understandings and the taken for granted, can help one understand a phenomenon, where there could be several realities. Some of the crucial ingredients are the researcher's judgment, intuition or ability to see and point something out. The interpretive paradigm embraces a "wide range of philosophical and sociological thought" (Burrell and Morgan 1979:31) in an attempt to not only understand the social world but also, through the view of actors directly involved in the process, to explain and interpret it.

There is also a shared view of interpretivism that the subject matter of the social sciences, the people and their institutions, is "fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. The study of the social world therefore requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order" (Bryman 2008:15). This distinctiveness reflects the clash Von Wright (1971) described as a division between the positivist approach to social sciences, which seeks to understand human behaviour, and interpretivism, which is concerned with a more empathetic understanding of human actions. When undertaking a review of interpretivism, Hay (2011:170) found that what sets interpretivism apart is its "particular understanding of the inter-subjective character of

meaning and hence the social origins of the beliefs and understandings that inform our actions and the practices to which they give rise”.

One of the criticisms of interpretivism is that the results cannot be generalised to the whole population because it encourages the study of a small number of cases (Hammersley 1989). However, some have argued that the detail and effort involved in interpretive inquiry allow researchers to gain insight into particular events as well as a range of perspectives that may not have come to light without that scrutiny (Macdonald et al. 2000; McMurray et al. 2004).

Interpretivism is a good choice in this context because it fits with the methodology of hermeneutics (indeed, it is heavily influenced by hermeneutics) and enables the researcher to understand and explain the social world from the perspective of those directly involved. It is therefore suitable for my research, which focuses on exploring my pre-understanding of top management teams within the public sector.

Positivism

Positivism claims to be the path to unambiguous and accurate knowledge of the world (Crotty 1998), and it is the dominant philosophical stance within organisational theory (McAuly 2007). Hence, not undertaking research from a positivist stance requires the researcher to justify their decision. Positivistic research methodology is regarded as being reliable as it allows the scientist to objectively test

theories by gathering empirical data and thoroughly analysing that data. Thus, we are able to determine the 'truth', according to Crotty (1998). "It is also the keystone to much common sense epistemology" (McAuley et al. 2007:34) as it provides 'truths' to control and authority to undertake the controlling.

There has, as one would expect, been much writing on positivism, with both its advantages and disadvantages being highlighted. A key advantage is "that there is a point at which an observer can stand back and objectively or neutrally observe what they understand to be an external reality" (McAuley et al. 2007:33).

However, for all of those who see the advantages of positivism, there are others who are critical of the process. Rorty (1979: 46) argued that positivism must be able to neutrally describe the facts through the use of language in order to "see whether or not these claims about the world do fit the empirical facts that we have discovered and collected from out there". At the turn of the 20th century, the first wave of German sociologists, including Max Weber and Georg Simmel, rejected the idea of positivism, founding the anti-positivist tradition (Ashley and Orenstein 2005).

Although scientific data makes it possible to establish facts in relation to the questions asked, I needed to be able to interact with the subjects in order to learn about their feelings on being a member of a top team and to thus explore my hunches and pre-understandings. I wanted to

be able to capture the richness of the responses, to hear, to see, to interpret and understand the environment. Interpretivist research presents a rich and complex description of how people think, react and feel under certain contextually specific situations (Cavana et al. 2000) and thus it suited my research purposes far better.

Having considered the alternative theoretical perspectives and identified my epistemological and ontological stance, the next part of this chapter focuses on the chosen methodology.

Chosen research methodology

Whilst reading various books and articles on research management, I found, as one would expect, numerous approaches one could take when undertaking management research, all of which are of value. In his attempt to represent the “many methodologies and almost countless methods” Crotty (1998:5) produced a table that incorporates epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodology and methods, highlighting the “several etcetera’s occurring in the table, as it is not an exhaustive list”. He then goes on to discuss nine different theoretical orientations in social research, for example, postmodernism, feminism, critical inquiry, interpretivism, constructionism and positivism, all of which involve problem-solving, developing plans and following procedures and “span the decisions from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis” (Creswell 2009:3).

The methodology chosen for this research is hermeneutics as it interprets the text according to the social and historical context within which it was produced, which is exactly what I wanted. Burrell and Morgan (1979: 236) highlighted the work of Dilthey as key in determining that the hermeneutic school sits within the interpretive paradigm, stating that, "Dilthey singled out hermeneutics as a key discipline and method in the human sciences. He advocated that social phenomena of all kinds should be analyzed in detail and interpreted as texts to reveal their essential meaning and significance", thus allowing for the analyses of the text from the perspective of the author, who would "adopt the style of literary analysts, rather than natural scientists" (Burrell and Morgan 1979:237). Thus, rather than producing general predictive laws about human behaviour, interpretivist research presents a rich and complex description of how people, think, react and feel under certain contextually specific situations (Cavana et al. 2000).

Having decided upon hermeneutics as my methodology, the next part of the chapter discusses this in more detail.

Hermeneutics

The discipline of hermeneutics emerged within the 15th century as a historical and critical methodology used for analysing texts, mainly biblical ones, providing guidelines for scholars as they attempted to interpret scripture. The word 'hermeneutics' is of Greek origin and means 'to interpret' or to 'understand' (Reese 1980). In reality,

interpretation is an integral aspect of day-to-day communication between humans; we interpret the speech of others in a very complex and interesting way that may involve listening intently to others. However, we cannot be so attentive all the time, and this is where we may use our pre-understanding or prior knowledge to interpret language. According to Crotty (1998:87), "Language is pivotal to and shapes the situation in which we find ourselves enmeshed, the events that befall us, the practices we carry out and, in and through all this, the understandings we are able to reach". Thus language is central to our lives, shaping the situations we find ourselves in and leaving memories for us to refer to when we are in similar situations in the future. Therefore, using hermeneutics to interpret language and understand language seems almost natural and the right approach to adopt for my research question.

Hermeneutics is thus defined as a method for deciphering indirect meaning, a reflective practice of unmasking hidden meanings beneath apparent ones, and the aim of early hermeneutics was to uncover the meaning of texts written in radically different situations (Blaikie 1993).

There are a number of definitions of interpretation, all of which basically describe the process of interpreting as 'explaining the meaning of something'. Through interacting with text or symbols, lost meaning can be recovered in order that understanding can be enhanced and accepted knowledge can be challenged.

If we were to consider the concept that the whole consists of parts and can only be understood if its parts are understood, this leads to the notion of the hermeneutic circle (Heidegger 1927), whereby “the part can only be understood from the whole and the whole only from the parts” Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000:53). Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000: 53) go on to say that “from the very beginning, the main theme in hermeneutics has been that the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole; thus a biblical text can only be understood if it is related to the whole bible”. This metaphor for hermeneutics was introduced to help envision a whole in terms of a reality that is situated in the detailed experience of the everyday existence of an individual (the parts). So understanding was developed on the basis of ‘fore-structures’ of understanding that allow external phenomena to be interpreted in a preliminary way.

Hermeneutics is and was a method for interpreting biblical text. Since its early use, it has evolved, with hermeneutic methodology now being used “on texts other than the scriptures, but it has also been brought to bear on unwritten sources, human practices, human events and human situations in an attempt to read these in a way that brings understanding” Crotty (1998:87). This widening of the use of hermeneutics could lead in some instances to a level of confusion as the different explanations and descriptions of hermeneutics are put forward for the researcher to consider. Whilst acknowledging the common theme of intuition, interpretation and understanding, McAuley (2004) claimed that the hermeneutic paradigm encompasses many positions. Ricour, for

example, states starkly that, “there is no general hermeneutic ...but only disparate and opposed theories concerning the rules of interpretation” (McAuley 2004:16), highlighting how each different perspective brings with it useful insights. From another perspective, Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000:52) refer to objectivist hermeneutics “that results in the understanding of underlying meaning, not the explanation of casual connections”. This correlates with what Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000) refer to as a more traditional Verstehen philosophy, with an emphasis on the re-enactment of the meanings that the originators of texts and acts—authors and agents associate with. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000:52) also refer to althic hermeneutics, “which focuses on truth as an act of disclosure, in which the polarity between subject and object is dissolved in the radical light of a more original unity”. They subsequently identify nine themes that form part of the process.

Hermeneutics, through the work of Dilthey (1976), was further broadened by relating interpretation to all historical objectifications, through understanding moves from the outer manifestations of human action and productivity to explore their inner meaning. In his last important essay, "The Understanding of Other Persons and Their Manifestations of Life" (1910), Dilthey makes it clear that this move from outer to inner, from expression to what is expressed, is not based on empathy as this would involve direct identification with the other and interpretation involves an indirect or mediated understanding. He therefore suggests that placing human expressions in their historical context can only attain this, thus arguing that to understand is not just

a process of reconstructing the data of one's mind but rather of articulating what is expressed in the work.

This main thrust of hermeneutics is illustrated in the work of Dilthey, who, according to (Blaikie 1995), insisted that the foundation for understanding human beings lies not in rational speculation or metaphysical theories but rather in life itself. However, while Dilthey's contribution to hermeneutics is important in terms of developing modern hermeneutics, Gadamer (1985:291) suggests that his "attempt to explain the human sciences in terms of life and to start with the experience of life does not reconcile with his views held on the conception of science", with the split between the outer and inner aspects of life.

Since Dilthey (1976), the discipline of hermeneutics has detached itself from this central task and broadened its remit to all texts, thus widening its appeal as a research methodology within the social sciences. The 20th century brought Martin Heidegger's (1962) philosophical hermeneutics to the fore, shifting the focus from interpretation to existential understanding. This was treated as a more direct, non-mediated and thus, in a sense, more authentic way of being in the world than simply as a way of knowing. Heidegger (1962) called for a "special hermeneutic of empathy" to dissolve the classic philosophic issue of "other minds" by putting the issue in the context of the being-with of human relatedness, although he did not complete this inquiry.

Advocates of this approach claimed that texts and the people who produce them cannot be studied using the same scientific methods as the natural sciences, thus drawing on arguments similar to those of anti-positivism. Moreover, they claimed that such texts are conventionalised expressions of the experience of the author; thus, the interpretation of such texts will reveal something about the social context in which they were formed but, more significantly, the texts will provide the reader with a means of sharing the experiences of the author. The reciprocity between text and context is part of Heidegger's hermeneutic circle. Key thinkers, such as the sociologist Max Weber, then elaborated this approach.

As hermeneutics has become more widely used, it has encompassed everything in the interpretative process, including verbal and non-verbal forms of communication, as well as prior aspects that affect communication, such as presuppositions, pre-understandings and the meaning and philosophy of language (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000). Thus, it is now broadly defined as a discipline or theory of interpretation.

For a researcher wanting to use the interpretative approach of hermeneutics, the inherent contradictions that arise can be problematic. Hermeneutics solves this problem by transforming the circle into a spiral, which allows the researcher to "start at one point and then to delve further and further into the matter by alternating between part and whole, which brings progressively deeper understanding of both"

(Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000:53). The researcher will also be experiencing the data as the interpretation of the text takes place. This fits with the notion, as suggested by Gadamer (1985: 293), that the hermeneutic circle “is not formal in nature; it is neither subjective nor objective but describes understanding as the interplay between the movement of tradition and the movement of the interpreter”. The anticipation of meaning that governs our understanding of a text is not an act of subjectivity but proceeds from a commonality that binds us to the tradition”. This version of the circle, however, “can only service to sanction the prevalent use of language” (Bleicher, 1980:161) due to emphasis being placed on the commonality of tradition. Habermas (1960) suggests that this enables a self-conscious reflection on social conditions, on the production and on how the text is subsequently analysed. Habermas criticised previous hermeneutics, especially those of Gadamer, because the focus on tradition seemed to impede the possibilities for social criticism and transformation. Habermas also criticised Marxism and previous members of the Frankfurt School for missing the hermeneutical dimension of Critical Theory; for Habermas, hermeneutics is a dimension of critical social theory.

Hermeneutics is a means of transmitting meaning, experience, beliefs and values from one person or community to another. It prompts one to recognise the researcher’s role within the research process and the intellectual and emotional pre-understanding that the researcher brings to the process. A review of the literature and some prior research plus any pre-formed ideas and understanding help to develop loose

boundaries and provide some direction regarding what is to be explored, and from this pre-understanding, the researcher can interpret a range of events, such as non-verbal phenomena, the physical environment and unexpected events. When interpreting the data, it is very important that it is recognised and acknowledged that pre-understanding often sets the scene at the beginning of the research journey.

I have chosen to use hermeneutics as my methodology because of its interpretive nature and because it acknowledges pre-understanding as part of the process. Using a hermeneutic approach will enable me to test out my hunches, with the data guiding me. Using hermeneutics though does require a degree of reflection when interpreting the data. The following paragraphs consider reflexivity and the role of the researcher within the research process.

Reflexivity

According to Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), reflexivity implies 'reflection and thoughtfulness'. Further to this, King and Horrocks (2010: 125) suggest that, "reflexivity in qualitative research specifically invites us to look inwards and outwards, exploring the interesting relationships between existing knowledge, our experience, research roles and the world around us". Thus, reflexivity entails researchers being aware of their effect on the process and outcomes of research based on the premise that, "knowledge cannot be separated from the

knower” (Steedman 1991: 22) and “In the social sciences, there is only interpretation. Nothing speaks for itself” (Denzin, 1994:306).

When carrying out qualitative research, it is impossible to remain ‘outside’ the subject matter; our presence, in whatever form, will have some kind of effect. It is necessary to be self aware of the impact one has on the interview as one could easily influence an individual’s thought process. Reflexive research takes account of the researcher’s involvement.

The concept and practice of reflexivity has been defined in many ways. Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000) describe it as the “interpretation of interpretation” – another layer of analysis after data have been interpreted.

Within qualitative research, the notion of reflexivity seems to be on a continuum of evolving yet different views. What stands out, however, is the concept of the researcher being a “thoughtful and ever-present subject who throughout has an impact on the what, why and how of the research”.

Thus, when reflecting on how I approached and undertook this research, it was very important to acknowledge my role throughout and, because I did know a number of the subjects interviewed, I was fully aware that I would have some pre-understanding and hunches that might impact

upon the research process and outcomes. With this in mind, I made a conscious decision at the start of each interview session to acknowledge this. I found that having this conversation allowed for a level of openness and honesty, which helped set the scene. This also helped me as a researcher; as the interviews progressed, I learned that some of my pre-understanding changed in relation to my assumptions about top teams and how I expected the members to respond to the questions. I found more openness and willingness to share than I had anticipated. This was apparent in the detail given in the answers and in the enthusiasm for sharing thoughts, views and ideas on being a member of a top team.

Having reflected on the theoretical perspectives and the research methodology, the next part discusses the chosen method, that is, interviews.

Chosen method: interviews

Having determined my methodology as hermeneutics, I then needed to consider the method I would use to obtain the data, I wanted to use a method which would compliment the hermeneutic approach and allow the data to guide me when testing my pre-understanding and hunches on top management teams and how the individuals in them perceived their roles within the organisation. I did, in the very early stages, consider participant observation as I felt there was something to be said for sharing the experiences of the participants. Like Douglas (1976:

112) I felt that “when one’s concern is the experience of people, the way that they think, feel and act, the most truthful, reliable, complete and simple way of getting that information is to share their experience”. I was concerned, however, that as I knew a large majority of the participants, my presence could impact on their behaviour. There was also a concern that individuals would not be able to freely express their views, thoughts and ideas. Considering this, interviews were identified as the most appropriate method to collect the data.

Using interviews as a method

Interviewing is the most common method of data gathering (King 2004). It is simply a way of collecting data as well as gaining knowledge from individuals. Kvale (1996:14) regarded interviews as “ ... an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest”. There are, however, various types of interviews to choose from. As my methodology was interpretative, the interviews needed to be able to gather qualitative data and capture the participants’ perceptions. Therefore, before commencing the interviews, I spent time determining ‘what I wanted to understand’ and ‘what the purpose of the research was’. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:267) explain “ ... the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself. Its human embeddedness is inescapable.” I was conscious that it was important that the participants had a clear understanding of what I was hoping to better understand and why. King et al. (2004:11) argue that, “the goal of any qualitative research

interview is, therefore, to see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee and to understand how and why they come to have this particular perspective". Meanwhile, Kaval (1996:1) states that, "if you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them?" If only it was so simple; clearly, when talking, one is simultaneously digesting and then seeking to respond. I think on the whole people would say that when they are listening, they are also processing what is being said so therefore not fully hearing what is being said. Blanchard (2006:2) emphasises the importance of 'active listening' in the business environment, arguing that, "Failing to listen to feedback, ignoring alternative viewpoints, or failing to seek clarity through active listening can undermine leadership effectiveness and trust".

Several methods may have been appropriate for this research, but I decided upon interviews as my research methodology for several reasons, the most important of which being that I felt they would be the most effective method for obtaining the information. Using this method allowed me to meet a wide range of people over an agreed period of time. I was keen to meet people on a 1-1 basis as this allowed for more of a conversation and discussion, which would give me a more rounded view as I would be able to observe their body language and thus surmise the emotions behind the responses and so give some colour to what they were actually saying. This was important to me as on a couple of occasions when I was able to see people's reactions, I changed how I

interacted. So, for example, with one of the interviewees who was quite defensive at the start, I began by asking 'chatty' questions about them and their role, which I concluded was 'safe' ground for them. In chapter 4, I reflect on this and share a number of statements made by the individuals.

Having decided to use interviews, consideration still needed to be given to both the advantages and disadvantages of this method. The next part of this chapter discusses some of the current common views on using interviews as a method.

Advantages and disadvantages of interviewing

From a theoretical perspective, in order to conduct investigations, researchers use a variety of techniques. These fall under two methodological categories: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative methodology, which is the chosen methodology for this research, is interested in the depth rather than breadth of the data and, therefore, requires the researcher to play an active role in the data collection. Face to face interviews, the technique of choice here, allow the researcher to do this.

There are, as with any technique, both advantages and disadvantages to interviews. Face-to-face interview have the advantage of being suited to examining topics that have potentially different levels of meaning, which need to be further explored in order to be understood better. This method is often described as one of the most flexible methods available

to the researcher as it “can address quite focused questions about organisational life, for instance, specific decision-processes such as selection decisions” (King and Horrocks 2004:21). It is also a method that can be used to examine broader issues, such as organisational culture and behaviours. The main characteristic of face-to-face interviews is that they are synchronous as the communication takes place at a certain time and in a certain place (Kings and Horrocks 2004). Due to this, interviews can take advantage of social cues, such as the voice, intonation and body language of the interviewee, which can indicate how comfortable the interviewee is and whether they are distracted or vague. Of course, the value of social cues depends on what the interviewer wants to know. Another advantage is that there are no significant time delays between questions and answers as the interviewer and interviewee can interact and react directly. Due to this spontaneous reaction, the interviewer must concentrate much more on the questions to be asked and the answers given.

Having to expend a considerable amount of concentration when undertaking the interviews in order to ensure that one is listening actively is one of the key disadvantages of interviews in my opinion. From a practical perspective, I was very aware of this throughout. I often began my sessions by acknowledging this as it is important when an unstructured or semi structured interview is used and the interviewer has to formulate questions during the interview as a result of the interactive nature of communication. Wengraf (2001:94) even speaks of

"double attention", which means "that you must be both listening to the informant's responses to understand what he or she is trying to get at and, at the same time, you must be bearing in mind your needs to ensure that all your questions are liable to get answered within the fixed time at the level of depth and detail that you need".

Another area is undertaking the transcribing and interpretation of a large amount of data, which can be incredibly time consuming. I needed to be mindful of interpreting the data as objectively as possible without letting my assumptions or pre-understanding interfere. I found that referring back to the original hunches I had was a useful way of keeping focused. The large amount of rich data collected might lead to feelings of data overload, which could be perceived as a disadvantage in relation to qualitative interviews. King and Horrocks (2010:143), reflecting on data overload, suggest three ways the researcher can address this. Firstly, through reflecting on the original aims of the study and asking "is this adding to the understanding of the topics I set out to study?" or by turning to "the literature describing other studies using qualitative research interviews to provide examples of how problems were tackled" or by using "personal networking". As the number of researchers using this methodology grows, there will be opportunities for networking to gain a greater understanding of potential dilemmas and to share experiences that can facilitate the use of interviewing as a method.

Despite growing pressure to think about research methodology in new ways, Qu and Dunmay (2011) reveal that it is only recently that interview methodologists have begun to realise that, “we cannot lift the results of interviewing out of the contexts in which they were gathered and claim them as objective data with no strings attached” (Fontana and Frey 1998:663). The benefit of the research interview lies in its unique ability to uncover the private and sometimes incommunicable social world of the interviewee, to gain insight into alternative assumptions and ways of seeing. Thus, Alvesson (2003:13) defines qualitative interviews as “relatively loosely structured and open to what the interviewee feels is relevant and important to talk about, given the interest of the research project”. Managing the tension between listening and maintaining a sense of direction is a key aspect of creating a good experience for both the interviewer and the interviewee. There is no doubt that interviewing, despite its flexibility, is a skill that often improves with experience. I learnt during the process that the silences were acceptable and did not require a prompt and that it was alright to let the interviewee divert the discussion onto a different subject if it helped them to be responsive.

Having considered the use of interviews as a method and discussed both the advantages and disadvantages of using this method, I determined that this was still the most appropriate method to use for this research.

The next part of the chapter discusses the practicalities of using interviews.

Introducing the environment and the participants

I now needed to select the participants who would be willing to contribute to this research. I knew I wanted to interview the top teams, and at the beginning, I started with somewhat of a narrow focus on the area in which I had the most experience, that is, Local Government. However, after thinking this through, I came to the conclusion that the cohort was too narrow, and so I widened my subject cohort to include NHS, University and Prison top management teams. This gave me a richer data field and allowed me to make useful comparisons across public management since despite the interviewees working in different services, they were a homogenous group as all worked in the public sector. In widening the cohort, I also widened the gender base and, therefore, now had an opportunity to consider if there were differences between male and female leaders. In total, twelve top managers who were part of a recognised team and one person from the prison service were interviewed. The number of interviewees was not predetermined. Thirteen people were interviewed due to their willingness to take part and time constraints.

The research environment for this study was four large public services organisations. Each one of the organisations is different in respect of the services it provides, although ultimately they all lie within either

local authorities or strategic bodies, with legislation being put forward by central government, which can often result in conflict between local demands and central policies. In order to begin to get an understanding, this study included an exploration into the career histories, work experiences and attitudes of the top team members. These were all senior leaders from within Local Authorities, the NHS, the Prison Service and Universities, each with different governance arrangements, from elected political members to boards of trustees to senior management boards.

The table below highlights the individuals and the environment. All of the participants had varying degrees of length of service from 10 to 30 years, and the average time of being in post as a senior leader was 10+ years, so their experience varied. All were at either Director or Chief Executive level.

Within the data chapters 4 and 5 each of the characters are further explored, however the three people here who are the chief executives, I have given a mini profile as within the team how they impacted was dependent on how influential they were viewed.

Individual	Environment	Role	1-10 years	10+ Years	Profile
Sue	University	CX		✓	Experienced Confident, clear view of role and expectations of the team. Clear in control

Anna	University	Director	✓	
Lily	University	Director	✓	
Ruth	University	Director	✓	
Lynn	University	Director		✓
Henry	Local Authority	CX		✓
				Confident manner, expected the team to get on, had a clear view of own role and power within the team, uncomfortable with conflict sought to avoid
Charles	Local Authority	Director		✓
Hugh	Local Authority	Director		✓
George	Local Authority	Director		✓
Jim	NHS	CX		✓
				Very experienced, firm views could be perceived as bullish, clear view of how the team should work.
Walter	NHS	Director		✓
Sharon	NHS	Director	✓	
Steve	HMP	Governor	✓	

The senior person within the prison was chosen, firstly, because the opportunity arose and, secondly, because it would enable me to ascertain what data I would be able to get from someone in a very different environment.

Hunches

Finally, in order to complete the research journey, I thought it would be helpful to briefly explain how I determined the questions I used during the sessions. From my professional experience and the academic literature I identified a number of hunches about top management teams that I wanted to explore further. However, when interviewing the subjects, I allowed the interview to evolve as we began to discuss certain aspects. The sub questions and areas I covered are detailed in appendix a, and these were based on my hunches, which were:

From my professional experience:

- Teams at the top are essential
- They work as one and are cohesive
- Trusting each other is a core requirement
- Anyone can be a top team member with the right support

From the academic literature:

- Leadership is important
- Teams outperform individuals
- Leading in a complex organisation is a shared activity
- Emotion and emotional intelligence play a key role

I found all of the sessions useful and, in some cases, enlightening as the interviewees shared concerns, anxieties, hopes and fears. I was able to gather a wide range of rich data, which helped me not only to begin to formulate a conclusion around the notion of top teams and the dilemmas they faced but also to highlight areas of interest which were worthy of further reading and exploration. One particular area was the notion of role orientation and how the behaviour of individuals changes when in a group setting compared to when leading their own directorate. I explore this concept further in the next chapter.

How I carried out the interviews

In order to create a more relaxing space in which to undertake the interviews, prior to the interview, each participant was given a 'contract' and a brief description of the research project. This not only reiterated the confidentiality of the research but also, importantly for me, allowed me to establish my role as one of researcher rather than subordinate, colleague or peer. I thought this important as I did not want to get into role conflict. King and Horrocks (2010) suggests that drawing a clear boundary helps to avoid such a situation. I found that agreeing to a 'contract' helped set the scene. I was also mindful of how I dressed, so I did not, for example, wear my work suit. I found that undertaking this preparation allowed the interviewee to feel comfortable and, therefore, the conversation to flow. I was also mindful that the participants needed to be comfortable and, therefore, I offered each one of them choices regarding the interview environment. The majority chose to be

interviewed in their office, with others wanting to be 'off site', which according to King and Horrocks (2010:43) is to be expected: "it is general practice to ask participants where they would like the interview to be held, and more often than not, they will select somewhere on 'their' territory".

Each of the interviews was recorded and transcribed, although I did take notes as well, noting body language, which was particularly useful when reflecting back and also when a particular comment had been expressed with emotion. Each interview lasted between 35–45 minutes. Although I had some set questions for the interview, I used them almost like an aid memoir, thus allowing the conversation to flow. As noted by King and Horrocks (2004:35), often a qualitative interview is not based on a set of questions, but rather the interviewer generally "uses an interview guide, listing topics".

When interpreting the text, I chose not to use any software packages, but instead I spent time with a flip chart and highlighter pens. Initially, I identified areas of commonality. These may have been a word or phrase, which then generated a number of themes, against each of which I put a comment or a thought. This became a framework for me to work with when interpreting the data and following up on specific thoughts. Although using software would have helped in respect of speed, through taking a manual approach, I was able to spend lots of time thinking and to identify a number of core themes based on the

original thoughts, which were common to all the participants, namely: behaviour, environment and culture, the role of the Chief Executive, and communication and language (see appendix B for details). These are explored in chapter 5. Adopting a manual approach also allowed for me to explore aspects of my own pre-understanding and appreciate my impact on the interview sessions. Listening to the tapes was fascinating and brought the interviews to life for this research. I felt that they were important as they allowed me to reflect upon what people had actually said, as well as the sighs and the laughter. This is detailed in chapter 4.

Ethics

As well as reflecting on how my own pre-understanding could impact on the research, it was important that the ethics of this research were understood. It is important to have an understanding of the potential impact any research could have and the potential interpretations of what is produced. Thus, when carrying out this research, as explained earlier, I issued all those who were willing to participate with a contract. I also asked them to sign a consent form so that they understood that although their identity would remain anonymous, the data, once transcribed, would be used to form a view of the research subject and maybe used in future publications. Ethical practice of qualitative interviewing is wide-ranging, but it is often there to help and has been referred to as the “moral compass” (King and Horrocks 2010:104). One needs to reflect on the knowledge that it is ultimately the researcher who is accountable and, therefore, one needs to ensure that care and respect is maintained throughout. In conducting interviews, ethical

issues are one of the main concerns. Confidentiality must be given. Respondents “should not be harmed or damaged in any way by the research ... It is also important that interviews are not used as a devious means of selling something to the respondent” (Gray, 2004: 235).

Summary

I started this research into top management teams with a number of hunches which came from my own pre-understanding, which has developed as a result of being a member of a top team, namely: *teams at the top are essential; they work as one and are cohesive; trusting each other is a core requirement; anyone can be a top team member with the right support.*

I also determined a number of common hunches in relation to teams as a result of reviewing the academic literature, namely: *leadership is important; teams outperform individuals; leading in a complex organization is a shared activity; emotion and emotional intelligence play a key role.*

Whilst undertaking the interviews, I was conscious of my pre-understanding and my role as one of the top team. I therefore acknowledged this at the beginning of the interviews. I did this by asking each individual to agree to the interviews via a contract, within which my role within the public sector and therefore the pre-understanding and knowledge I had of the interviewees and their organisation was acknowledged. I found this helped with introducing

the subject and my interest in top teams. It also enabled me to share some of my pre-understanding. Undertaking the research using a hermeneutics approach, I hoped to be able to both test out my hunches and also to explore new areas, which would be highlighted through interpretation of the data.

Once I had completed the interviews, I analysed the transcripts by looking for common themes, in particular those that I had a pre-understanding around or that had been referred to often throughout the literature. To begin with, I read through each of the transcripts and highlighted common themes, using highlighter pens to do this initially. Once I had read all of the transcripts, I began to group the common themes. I then looked to how these themes reflected my hunches. In order to follow through on a hunch, I used post-it notes and put them onto flip charts. This allowed for me to have a visual understanding of the hunches, and I was able to draw cross lines where there was commonality.

As I continued to work through the findings, I used another flip chart to record my thoughts and make comments. This then lead me to identify any new hunches that were emerging, such as the notion of a transient team, and to check through the transcripts as to how common this was across all the interviews. Most of my pre-understanding around top teams were evident in the hunches in relation to trust, behaviour and leadership. I found, however, that some of my pre-understanding on top

teams changed during this process of discovery. Rather than teams being essential, which was part of my own pre-understanding, what I uncovered was that the individual roles of team members were the most important aspect of the team and the one that was least understood or acknowledged.

As the individual role began to take centre stage, it led me to consider how the team members led, trusted and communicated with each other, particularly as this was an area which had until now not been recognised as an important aspect of top teams. This led me to consider their individual roles more and how these affected how they interacted as a group of individuals.

This then made me consider whether or not the individual role could be the reason why top management teams are not able to fully function as a team. Once I had discovered this, I spent time re-examining the literature to determine if this issue had been identified before. I found very little evidence other than that in the writings of Katzenbach (1997) and Katzenbach and Smith (1993). They argue that top teams are something of a myth but give no specific reasons for or evidence to support this claim. Time and time again within the literature, the virtues of top teams were promoted and their importance as the leaders of organisations was declared (see Hambrick 1984; Finkelstein 2009; Cyert and March 1963; Bass 1990).

Reflecting on the data further, I then went back through the transcripts, picking out further themes, which I looked into. In particular, I focused on emotion, reflecting Fineman's (2000) view that organisations are 'emotional arenas', wherein a number of roles are enacted and learned. I was interested in the notion of emotion and the individual role and how this impacted on the ability of team members to interact in an open and trusting way. The message I was getting from the interviews was that the groups were less trusting. At first, I thought this was merely due to poor team dynamics. However, I now began to consider that this was due to their individual roles impacting upon and impeding the development of relationships within the team and thus the formation of a more cohesive team.

Another area of consideration was the concept of the team as a myth, which was discussed by Katzenbach (1997). Surely, if they were a myth, they would not exist, and we are all aware that teams at the top do 'exist' as we see them every day in structure charts. This led to me thinking of them as a transient group and the concept of a 'top team' in the truest sense of the word not being relevant for this group. If they were indeed transient, this could impact upon how we perceive and train such a group.

Throughout the analysis of the data, I found myself moving in different directions as it guided me to one and then another view, but on each occasion, I kept coming back to the 'individual role'. I concluded from

the research that the individual role of top team members is not recognised as an important aspect of their job. This leads to frustrations, for those in the top team and their followers, who often have preconceived ideas about and expectations of the roles which in reality are frequently not matched.

I found that using a hermeneutic process worked well for my type of research as it allowed me to test out my pre-understanding and also enabled me to uncover new areas that I had not expected to emerge. It was a process of discovery and, at times, enlightenment.

The negative part of undertaking the analysis in this way was related to the need to know when to stop; interpretation and reflection of the data could have continued *ad infinitum* as each time I read the transcript something else arose that was of interest. However, upon reflection, I do not think I should have undertaken this in any other way as the whole research process has led to some interesting outcomes and enabled me not only to address my pre-understanding but also to challenge my hunches.

Although this research focuses on top teams, specifically teams within the public sector, it also explored how the members of such teams behave as individuals. In particular, I wanted to explore and share their dilemmas and thoughts around trust and leadership and how these leaders had developed ways of leading in the context of the public

sector despite the bureaucracy within their organisations.

In the next chapter, I analyse the initial findings from the data and begin to explore some of the emerging themes in detail, applying a hermeneutic approach.

Interpreting the Data – Initial Findings

Introduction

This chapter describes how I explored my initial hunches on top management teams via the use of hermeneutic methodology to interpret the data. Using this method, I was able to reflect on the description of top management teams in the literature as a dominant collation that represents the recognised leadership of the organisation (Cyert and March 1963), as those at the highest level of management (Ferrier 2001) and as critical to strategic decision making (Jones and Canella 2011). What I found, however, as I explored my hunches was a complex set of individuals, whose behaviour and ability to connect with each other impacted on how they led.

The idea of a top management teams (TMT) is not a new one, Looking back into history, one can see that there has been a growing interest in them, both in the world of academia and in organisations themselves as they strive to improve performance. In particular, during the 1980s, there appeared to be a great deal of interest in the notion of team characteristics and leadership of an organisation as a shared activity. Hambrick and Mason (1984: 365) argue that, "If we want to understand why organisations do the things they do or why they perform the way they do, we must consider the biases and dispositions of the other most powerful actors – their top executives". But one could argue that just

because a person holds a certain position of power, they are not necessarily the right person to lead the organisation since they may not have the skills needed to do the job. Furthermore, if you were to ask people within the organisation about the top team, the immediate response is most likely to be 'well they are not really a team'.

Hence, through exploring top management teams, I am able to describe here a moment in time in public management, which improves understanding of how top management teams work. I took the opportunity to reflect on the behaviour of top team members, how they work together, how they lead and their experiences and views on being part of a top management team. Therefore, this chapter concentrates on the emerging themes, which became apparent through the interviews, and how these relate to the notion of top teams. Then I interpret the data, reflecting on and sharing the senior managers' views on being a member of a top team and how they perceive their role within the team. Following on from this, these themes remain the focus of the next chapter, and I explore further the concept of top management teams. The final chapter reveals some compelling conclusions on teams.

Leading within the public sector

I have always been interested in top teams and how they lead. As I am a member of a top management team within the public sector, I chose to focus the research on this area. I had the opportunity to interview a

number of individuals across four public sector organisations: a local authority, a large university, the NHS and a prison. All of those interviewed were comfortable with being recognised as a member of a top team and, therefore, seen as one of the strategic leaders of their organisation. Each of the individual interviews lasted up to 45 minutes, and although a number of questions were asked, there was ample opportunity for the interviewee to put forward their thoughts and ideas. In essence, I was seeking to understand how people lead, both within a team and as individuals. In particular, following on from an initial hunch about top teams, I sought to explore leadership and how important being a trusted leader was to individuals, the team and the organisation. As I began to interpret the data, the individual role emerged as a key theme. Interestingly, the individual role has not been identified as an important aspect of being a top team member in the academic literature; there is reference to it but little else.

Participants' Voices

At this point in the chapter, I have included a selection of the participants' statements. This is done to help to bring the research to life since I do, after all, use a qualitative approach, whereby the researcher not only interprets and is reflective but is also guided by the interviewees in regards to the direction of exploration. The many interesting comments that were made along with the descriptions of the people provide the reader with a mental picture, which fits well with the hermeneutic method of interpreting and analysing the data (Blaikie

1993). I think it is important to give the participants their own voice and to share this with the readers so they are able to begin to see the participants as real people rather than just data. I did not want the human to be lost in the data but rather wanted to share their reactions and feelings.

During the interviews, I obtained a wealth of information, from which I have chosen a selection of statements pertaining to several different views and ideas put forward across all the interviews. This sets the scene by giving some insight into how members of top teams think about the functioning of those teams, in particular in relation to leadership, the role trust plays within the team and how they perceive their behaviour and that of other team members. Some very strong statements were made by a number of individuals, who had particular views about certain aspects of the team and how it functioned. This was particularly relevant to the university team. (All of the names have been changed).

Sue had been a member of the top team at her university for a considerable period. She had a very clear view of her role in the team and how she expected the team to work. Explaining how she operated within her individual role as a manager at the university she said, "I have one to one meetings and will ask them to show me the red flags. I need to know so I can say, 'this is not going well guys'" (Sue UN). She was very clear in her views on how people should be able to cope with

pressure, saying, "I have had people come to me in tears wanting to let off steam, but I say to them, 'How do you think this is playing out for me? You need to think how you could do things differently.'" Sue clearly felt that being 'tough' would help the person. When probed further, Sue saw this person's reaction as an indication that they were not coping in the job. Reflecting on this, Sue said, "I am just not sure you know, erm, if the person has the emotional resilience to undertake the job. I mean I would not dream of behaving like this". Sue appears to be demonstrating here what in her view is the right way to deal with people who are perceived as being less tough. For Sue, being emotionally resilience could be linked to emotional intelligence and/or emotions.

Fineman (2000) refers to organisations as 'emotional arenas' wherein a number of roles are learned and enacted. Sue may have learned how to cope with her emotions, possibly by supressing them. If that is the case, one would expect Sue to be more supportive of colleagues, recognising that we are not all born emotionally tough but can become resilient. Henderson (1998) believes that we can learn to be more resilient and that resilient behaviour can be interwoven with contextual life experiences. Others argue that emotional intelligence can be developed and dramatically increased through support and education (Flach, 1988; Garnefski et al., 2001). According to Edward and Warelaw (2005:102), "fostering resilience and emotional intelligence has the potential to improve outcomes". One then has to ask whether emotional intelligence, which engenders understanding and empathy, is a trait of a good

leader.

However, not everyone takes this view. Interestingly, one of Sue's colleagues stated, "We come into academia because we don't want to be led, and then people try to lead you" (Lily UN). Lily went on to say that she did not want to be a 'penguin' but rather that, "We want to be able to do what we want to do". When asked to explain this more, she described resisting leadership and being cynical about people who claim to be leaders, saying, "They're completely schizophrenic, and I include myself in that". This person is in a leadership position. Perhaps we can conclude that she is a reluctant leader. Or perhaps this is an example of how the individual role begins to conflict with the corporate one as in an individual role you have more control than in a corporate one. Control and not being in control is an area Ruth found irritating. She said, "You know what I get sick of is those who sit in meetings just going grrrrrr, not saying anything. I say to them 'You need to put things on the table, get them aired.'" (Ruth UN). Ruth was frustrated with what she described as "pointless meetings, where little was said, but you know people are not happy". When asked how she would encourage them to express themselves more openly, she said, "They should just be able to".

Anna, one of Ruth's colleagues, had a similar view to this but talked about being tough and having high energy. She said, "You have to be really emotionally robust. You can't have an off day because that's when

you won't take enough care, erm... I mean you will not be at the top of your game and, erm....you are not going to perform" (Anna UN).

Those from other public sector areas expressed similar views, for example, "You do not want to be the First World War general 13 miles behind the front line. You want, although not necessarily going over the top, to be showing some leadership and providing clarity" (Charles LA).

Charles is a long standing employee, who has been in the same role for over 20 years, and he gave the impression he was someone who has seen it all before. The above quote sums up many of the views of the people I interviewed: a recognition of being the leader, showing the way and giving direction but not necessarily of putting oneself on the front line. All saw themselves very much as being at the top of the establishment and used the hierarchy to communicate with the front line staff, sending messages down and receiving a response back via several layers of staff rather than through direct contact. This method of communication, although perfectly feasible and common within all of the establishments, did bring with it constraints and frustrations, with some of the top team members feeling messages were not being shared as intended. Charles, for example, felt that, "There is always some mischief making; it is not unique". This was in particular reference to an incident when a member of the top team had shared their thoughts from a meeting to discuss staff changes quite openly, at one point putting forward a view which did not align with the corporate one. This

then had been interpreted in a different way, leading to number of heated exchanges and several hours of time spent explaining. When asked how he would have communicated, Charles' response was, "I would have explained why we have done things and that there will be difficult decisions. Some people will not agree with them, and we will have to agree to differ" (Charles LA).

Charles says he has a specific style of communication, which he refers to as 'being direct'. However, there was no apparent recognition that if he had communicated the message in a direct style, it would have been any more effective.

Another of the interviewees, Hugh, sees himself very much as a team player but finds some of his colleagues' behaviour difficult to understand. "One of my colleagues is happy to be labelled a control freak and takes it as a compliment rather than a criticism" (Hugh LA).

This was shared with awkward humour. The idea that the person could be comfortable with the label seemed to be a source of amusement, but I wondered whether Hugh felt awkward about this and why his colleague's preference to be controlling was so amusing. Hugh is an interesting character; he believes his subordinates view him as "the father of the team", and he often described himself as such. During our discussion, I began to think he quite liked this label as it gave him some sort of kudos. I felt he was a person who needed to be in control. Hugh also needed to be able to have some impact, to be seen as a core team member; being a part of the 'in group' (Kakabadse 1991) was very

important for him. This is reflected in his comment, “I often take the ideas we have talked about and put them into a model. It is my engineering background. But they all seem to appreciate this, and it has become an important part of our team discussions” (Hugh LA).

During our discussion, we explored the notion of openness within the team and had quite a lengthy discussion about having hidden agendas. Hugh claimed he did not have a hidden agenda, but he added, “I am not absolutely certain whether that’s true of everybody”. This discussion arose from Hugh reflecting on the behaviour of the other members of his team. He felt that, “People talk the talk but then don’t in my observation go away and take the same message”. Hugh was of a view that his peers would agree with the discussion in the meeting but once back in their own ‘silos’, they delivered a different message. Hugh believed this was dishonest and, in his view, did not lead to a trustworthy environment being created.

It became apparent from the data that being open was an issue for all the interviewees. For example, Henry felt unable to share his feelings with team members. “I do get annoyed by a few things, but I think it is very important that you keep as much of that to yourself as possible” (Henry LA). Here again, we are seeing reluctance to be open within the team and what appears to be an unwillingness to communicate, and this will undoubtedly have an impact on the organisation. In his work on leaders at a higher level Blanchard (2010: 10) found that, “In high

performing organisations information needed to make informed decisions is readily available to people and is openly communicated. Sharing information and facilitating open communication builds trust". If we examine again how Henry is describing his behaviour, this could be perceived as a potential lack of trust in his team members. If there is a concern that individuals are not able or willing to share how they feel and are keeping thoughts to themselves, teams may struggle to become trusting teams. However, whether team members do need to trust each other is debatable. In the next chapter, the area of trust and top management teams is explored further.

The notion of vulnerability within the team was explored in the interviews as trust has been defined as 'being vulnerable to the actions of another' and it has been claimed that in order to operate in a trusting environment, one must make oneself vulnerable (Northouse 2007). So if the team is a trusting one, it would follow that the team members could be open and show vulnerability. Questions pertaining to the issue provoked a number of responses, with this one standing out for me, "Nobody wants to look an idiot in front of anybody else. That's just not something which at a senior level anybody is comfortable with because it could expose you to criticism or ridicule or expose a weakness which others could exploit" (Henry LA). I understand that in higher status roles one is keen to maintain a reputation. This response, however, particularly coming as it did when discussing being vulnerable and sharing feelings within a team, did make me question why team

members would think their colleagues within the team would exploit them. Surely, if you are a team, you should feel comfortable enough to be able to make mistakes or share anxieties. From this I began to wonder whether there is any trust in this local authority team. I began to form a view that when team members do not feel able to be themselves or share their feelings for fear of ridicule, this indicates a lack of trust between those team members. This may be the case no matter how long they have been together as a team. Henry's team has been together for 5 years, and yet he did not trust his team colleagues. Given that trust had been raised as an important issue, using a hermeneutic approach allowed me to start to interrogate the data with a focus on trust, reflecting on trust and top teams.

I wondered whether this concern over not wanting to be vulnerable was a result of a lack of trust within the team. If so, one has to consider whether not having trust at team level could lead to a lack of trust at organisational level and thus have a corrosive effect on the organisation. Zand (1997: 89) highlighted the importance of trust, saying, "Leaders need to understand the meaning and the effects of trust if they are to improve how they make decisions and the quality of those decisions". Thus, not being perceived as trustworthy could have a negative effect (Galford and Seibold-Drapeau 2003) on team decision making. Understanding this issue better could help teams function better. The behaviour of team members may need to change in order for the team

to be more cohesive, thus allowing for people to share how they are feeling.

In comparison, an individual within another organisation felt they were able to be vulnerable within the team. This individual they said they had confidence in their team members being supportive. Also, interestingly, this team had not been together long, so the notion that longevity leads to trust may not necessarily be relevant (Rau 2008). There appears to be little consensus in the literature on the impact of new executives. According to Virany and Tushman (1986:261), “studies have found that executive succession may be either positively or negatively related or unrelated to subsequent organisationally effectiveness”. Anna, for example, had not been in the role long and admitted she was finding her feet and on a learning curve. She is very open and honest with her colleagues about her abilities and, as she highlighted, her lack of perceived abilities at times. I am not sure what Anna’s colleagues thought of this declaration, “I know I am new to the role so have a deal to learn; this is my most senior post”. Anna was quite open and receptive, stating “I don’t have a problem with showing vulnerability” (Anna UN). So, in Anna’s case, perhaps this could be part of being new and needing to be open to learning and sharing experiences. Or maybe Anna is just a trusting person. I think it is perhaps a bit of both, and I did wonder whether she would change with a few more years experience as people tend to gain confidence with experience.

Ruth, one of Anna's other colleagues, reflected, "I try to be as open and honest as I can within the constraints of the business. I have had a couple of occasions where I have been excluded, so I guess I am less trusting on occasions" (Ruth UN). Once again, the issue of trust was raised. This area is considered further in the next chapter.

In contrast, Walter would not willingly admit being vulnerable, and he would only do so with agreements in place so there could be no blame laid upon him if things did not work out. In reality, for Walter, his need for systems and control could suggest a lack of trust and his need to control rather than allow people to make decisions and take actions. In relation to this, Zand (1997: 89) says, "Mistrusts weakens relationships, bringing to them suspicion and deception". Perhaps this behaviour is an outcome of years of being in teams or maybe Walter has always been like this. "As long as everybody follows the system, process and our set of values, so as long as everyone follows the rules, one can be open" (Walter NHS). Walter had been operating at a senior level for a number of years and had very clear views on team working. He was keen to ensure that people were clear about their roles and responsibilities and, more importantly, followed the rules. Following this thought through to his behaviour within the top team, he openly acknowledged, "I like a good argument. I like the challenge. I like people to try to persuade me to try and change my mind". I wondered if Walter could ever accept the notion of vulnerability and whether this was an example of how he

coped. How his colleagues would manage to change his mind is unclear. I am not sure they would.

Anna, however, recognised that not showing vulnerability within the team could have an affect on what you say, leading to frustration at not being able to share 'true' feelings. She stated that, "Not showing vulnerability does impact on your effectiveness in the role because you might not be as honest as you would normally be" (Anna UN).

The aim of sharing these statements is to begin to set the scene, to give the participants a voice and to allow you, the reader, to reflect upon whether these are common views in your own organisation. My view is that the opinions and feelings of Walter, Sue and Anna are not uncommon in organisational top teams. I felt it important to share some of the initial conversations and, although I have sought to comment and translate, what I wanted to do here was to share an early understanding of how these individuals think about the notion of trust, their own behaviour and leadership style and how they perceive themselves working together as a team.

I started by reflecting upon some of the comments made, and when I interrogated the data, I began to identify a number of key themes: behaviours; trust and trustworthiness; organisational environment; the role of the chief executive; communication and language; and

connectivity. It is these themes I am now going to explore in more detail, bringing in comments from the interviewees.

Emerging Themes

Reflecting back on the intention of the research, as outlined in chapter three, which was to gain a greater understanding of top management teams and, in particular, to determine how they lead and whether trust is an important part of a leader's role in top teams, I found that although each of the participants was based within a different service area and, therefore, had a different role though similar responsibilities, in respect of hierarchy, they all raised similar issues in relation to leadership and trust and the dilemmas they faced as a top team leading within a public sector environment. I found a number of emerging leadership, team and organisational themes. When I began to interpret the text, I chose not to use any software packages but rather to spend time with a flip chart and highlighter pens. Initially, I identified areas of commonality, which may have been a word or phrase. This then developed into a number of themes, and against each of these I put a comment or a thought. When I cross-referenced all the areas and individuals, I was able to group the findings into the following themed areas: behaviours; trust and trustworthiness; organisational environment; role of the chief executive; communication and language; and connectivity. These were common across all four cases. It is these themes that I am now going to explore further.

Behaviour(s)

“Much of what happens to us is beyond our conscious awareness. Most of our behaviour is unconscious. To have a better understanding of unconscious patterns, we need to explore our own and other people’s inner desires, wishes and fantasies; we need to pay attention to the repetitive themes and patterns in our lives and the lives of others” (Kets De Vries 2011: 209).

Based on my experience, I believe that those watching us form an opinion of the type of person we are as a result of how we behave in given situations. This is no different if you are the leader of an organisation, where your role is often to give support and motivate followers to achieve organisational outcomes. Indeed, one could safely say that a leader’s behaviour is subject to constant scrutiny from their followers and peers and will impact on whether staff trust and, therefore, feel motivated by them to fulfil their role (Northouse 2007).

According to House and Mitchell (1974), leaders generate motivation when there is clear direction. Northouse (2007: 128) describes “path-goal theory [which] is designed to explain how leaders can help subordinates along the path to their goals by selecting specific behaviours that are best suited to subordinates’ needs and to the situation in which subordinates are working”. Having an insight into how our behaviour affects those we lead could potentially determine how successful we are in achieving the desired goals.

When exploring with the subjects how their behaviour manifested itself and, subsequently, how they then interacted with each other and their environment, I was interested to find out if they had insight into their behaviour and how this could potentially impact on group dynamics and the wider culture of the organisation.

The following statements give an indication of the behaviour of some of the individuals and lead to the assumption that there is a sense of mistrust within the team. Although there are a few positive statements, most appear to focus on self-protection, which one could conclude is the dominant behaviour in teams. However, when one considers these are top teams who have a responsibility for leading complex organisations, this could be seen as quite worrying. What is happening within the environment will also have an impact on how people behave. This area is discussed later in the chapter. The interviewees had the following to say about how they behave within the top team:

“I watch their body language. I listen to throw away lines” (Lynne UN).

“Sometimes you need to be tough; sometimes you need to be soft” (Lily UN).

“I go to events, just chatting with them. I pick up gossip and I say, ‘that’s interesting tell me more’” (Lynne UN).

"I do have to have a mask, however worried, however concerned, however cross; you have to act the part you are playing" (George LA).

What does this mean? Do all leaders 'act' or is George using this to describe how he copes? Is leadership itself an 'act'?

"Be supportive but challenging as well" (Walter NHS).

"I am watchful for those who do not contribute and will say to them, 'you have not said anything. Is there a problem?'" (Steve PS).

"I think it is important to be as open and honest as possible" (Hugh LA). This statement reflected Hugh's firm belief that being open and honest was the best way to lead.

What these statements show are the conflicts and dilemmas top managers face. This could be due to their fear of being seen as weak or to them playing the game by saying what they believe people want to hear or, as I will discuss later, to them developing 'coping strategies'.

But first, let's explore this notion of behaviour and how we react, particularly in relation to understanding how leaders lead, which has been and will continue to be of great interest to both the corporate and academic world. The question of what makes a successful leader has been the subject of a plethora of research and numerous academic books and articles, from which have emerged theories, models and

frameworks that have been slavishly followed by some yet decried by others. The situational leadership model of Hersey and Blanchard has been through several iterations and is still widely used in leadership training programmes today. My organisation recently built a whole training programme around the situational leadership model, the rationale being that this was the preferred option of the top team. However, there was not sufficient evidence that this was the case.

So what makes a successful leader and, in the context of seeking to understand top management teams, is there a need for one? Would it be better to understand what the so-called traits and behaviours that make them stand out are? One of these is the ability some leaders seem to have to understand the environment, reading it, connecting with it and, more importantly, reacting appropriately to it. So it appears that being able to 'read' the people you are leading is important if you are to be a successful leader. It is this thought that led to the belief that emotion and emotional intelligence would be an important area to research. The following begins by exploring the notion of emotional intelligence then considers emotion in a wider context.

Emotional Intelligence and Emotion

According to the numerous texts written on the subject, emotional intelligence (EI) is quite simply being able to understand others on an emotional level and effectively communicate through an awareness of oneself and one's surroundings, which can often result in successful

outcomes. In an organisational context, it is about being connected not only to those you lead but also to the environment in which you lead, and clearly it is important in relation to effective leadership. EI seems to be gaining more recognition as a key part of a leaders' persona, and it is becoming an important part of leadership training (Higgs 2002). This is particularly so within the public sector, where internal in-house training and development programmes on leadership include sessions on EI.

Higgs (2002: 24) sums up EI in a simple and understandable way as "achieving one's goals through the ability to manage one's own feelings and emotions, to be sensitive to and influenced by other key people, to balance one's motives and drive conscientious and ethical behaviour". This definition explains why those leaders with good EI are often more successful in their careers than those leaders with limited EI. However, Goleman's (1995 and 1998) view is much broader. He suggests that EI consists of a set of personal and social competencies, such as self-awareness, confidence, self-regulation, conscientiousness and motivation, with social competence consisting of empathy and social skills such as communication and conflict management.

One would have thought that understanding your environment and the people within it is common sense. However, it appears not to be the case; a great many people who have leadership roles have little insight into how their behaviour impacts on those they lead and the environment in which they work. As a senior manager myself, this is an

area I see the majority of conflicts stemming from. This lack of perceived understanding by the follower or the leader not understanding them or the message the followers are giving not being picked up by the leader can and does leads to confusion, mistrust and disharmony within the organisation. Galford and Dapeau (2002) liken this behaviour to family relationships, with people living together under one roof. In both situations, “individuals usually can’t walk away and forget, and every action or reaction has a lasting ripple effect” Galford and Dapeau (2002:32). Being aware of our environment and our behaviours will have an impact across the organisation.

During some of the interview sessions, I took the opportunity to explore this further. Lynne (UN) believed strongly that she was in tune with her followers and peers, describing her approach as “everyday leadership”, which involves being aware of how she behaves and being consistent in her behaviour. Lynne felt that this had led to a trusting environment, although she was unable to give evidence of this, describing it as a feeling and “something I just know”. However, interestingly, the rest of her peer group had a different take on this behaviour, seeing it as oppressive. One individual in particular did not find the group trusting and found some behaviour was a result of the “individual’s ego”. This is an example of how a lack of insight into one’s behaviour and what can be perceived as the ‘dark-side’ of leadership can emerge. “Self serving leaders think that leadership is all about them and not about the best interests of those they serve. They forget about acting with respect,

care and fairness towards all involved. Everything is about their own self interest” (Blanchard 2010: xviii). Exploring this notion of promoting self rather than working as a team member led to some interesting comments, such as:

“I would seek forgiveness rather than ask permission” (Jim (NHS)).

“I know they will have a real tough time recruiting my successor” (Sue UN).

“I know I am good at leading, and this can cause some jealousy within the team, but if I can be supportive and offer lessons learned, I will” (Charles NHS).

What became clear when talking to these individuals was their real lack of insight into how their behaviour might be perceived by both the top team members and those who they manage, that is, as self-serving, and that it may not endear them to anyone. This so called ‘dark-side leadership’ appears to occur when the leader begins to believe in their own importance and the overwhelming priority is to meet their own needs rather than those of either the followers or the organisation. Gemmill and Oakley (1992) put forward the notion that leaders, rather than empowering organisations and followers, seek to de-skill employees in order that they become excessively dependent on the leader. On the other hand, some find our dark-side “is often an

exaggeration of our bright-side. When we feel out of our comfort zone, we do more of what we usually do; our greatest weaknesses are the overuse of our greatest strengths” (Yeung 2008:54). This suggests that our dark-side is part of our personality and that there are two faces of leadership. Therefore, one would need not only to recognise the two faces of leadership but also to manage them.

Palmer (1994: 25–6), when commenting on current understanding of leadership, noted that, “many books on leadership seem to be about the power of positive thinking. I fear they feed a common delusion among leaders that their efforts are always well intended, their power always benign”. Palmer (1994), in his work on the dark-side of leadership, goes on to assert that, “a leader must take special responsibility for what’s going on inside his or her own self, inside his or her consciousness, lest the act of leadership creates more harm than good” (Palmer 1994:25–26). The challenge then is for leaders to examine their conscience, and to do this, they will require both an insight into self and a willingness to accept honest feedback from the people being led, leading to defining not only the positive side of leadership but also illustrating the characteristics of the negative side, presenting both with equal weight (Washbush and Clements 1999).

Higgs (2009) explores the extent to which ‘leader narcissism’ becomes a dominant cause of leadership behaviour, leading to an exploration of the concept of ‘bad leadership’. McCall and Lombardo (1983) identify a

range of causes of bad leadership', or 'leader derailment/failure', with a particular focus on the personal flaws of the individual rather than their skills since they see these dysfunctional tendencies as the drivers of derailment. So they see being cold, aloof, arrogant and untrustworthy as the main causes of derailment.

Although there is limited empirical research on 'bad' leadership, interest in this area, particularly in the psychology of leadership, has been growing. Haslaam et al. (2011: 203) see the leader's role as inspiring people to travel in a given direction but still recognise what they refer to as the 'seductions of the heroic myth', stating that, "Many of us look to leaders who project an aura of certainty, real or imagined, that we lack within ourselves", which will potentially bring out the dark-side of the leader.

There is some evidence that this type of leadership can have an effect on performance within an organisation. Benson and Hogan (2008) found that although there is often performance success in the short-term, difficulties can occur over the longer term. In particular, there is an adverse affect on followers in relation to job satisfaction, commitment and psychological well-being. The other side of this is what Wasbush and Clements (1999) refer to as negative contributions from followers; they make a point that not all of the counter-productive behaviour emanates from leaders. "Contrary to what might be suggested by transformational leadership theory, inspired and

empowered followers can take actions that produce decidedly negative consequences for the leader" (Wasbush and Clements 1999:147). One may find that no actual or intended leader is immune from taking actions that could lead to the worst of consequences (Wasbush and Clements 1999). I believe there is probably a need to undertake more research into this area, to fully understand what the impact on both individuals and organisations could be over a longer term.

Reflecting back over the previous paragraphs on behaviour, what has been compelling is how some of the behaviour of the top team members clearly has an impact on their ability to trust each other. Trust is often perceived as a complex interpersonal and organisational construct (Duck 1997; Kramer and Tyler 1995). According to Wheelless and Grotz (1977:251), "Trust occurs when parties holding certain favorable perceptions of each other allow this relationship to reach the expected outcomes". Following this train of thought, one can assume that a trusting person, group or organisation will be "freed from worry and the need to monitor the other party's behavior, partially or entirely" (Levi and Stoker 2000:496). The notion of trust and trustworthiness and how this is often linked to the conditions of trust is explored next.

Trust and Trustworthiness

In the next part of this chapter, I reflect on individuals' behaviour and the impact this has on trust and/or trustworthiness. There is evidence that behaviour can and does have an effect on outcomes, either

negatively or positively (Galford and Dapeau 2002) With this in mind, I was interested in exploring the effect this could have on the team. Therefore, during the interviews, I took the opportunity to explore individual behaviour. I did this through asking the participants to share with me how the team behaved and as individuals how they behaved when trying to create an environment of trust. In particular, I wanted to know how behaviour impacted on how the team performed and whether or not it promoted trust. I found this part of the interview fascinating as I had the opportunity to try to ascertain what insight, if any, individuals had. This question of trust and trustworthiness provoked a number of wide ranging responses, a few of which are below. To help with the context, these statements were made in response to exploring how, as individuals, they felt they responded to other team members' behaviour and what behaviour they looked for in order to trust.

"Some people are more communicative, whereas others tend to be closed and more reserved. You need to know the tricks when you come across people from different perspectives to encourage them to open up. This then would develop trust" (Charles LA).

"I am very competitive about ideas, and I like my ideas to come through. There is no doubt that is the way I behave within that team. Whether the team understand and trust me, I am not sure" (Hugh LA).

"I have one or two people in the team I trust whole-heartedly, and they trust me, so I share things with that group of people. There are others whose behaviour makes me trust them less" (Anna UN).

Steve (PS) recognised that the organisation changing had led to a change in relationships, particularly with their subordinates, as the top team changes had impacted on the next tier down. In relation to this, he said, "I am more distant and, therefore, less trustworthy than I might have once been. I guess I am trading off some past historic relationships rather than ones I have nurtured since" (Steve PS)

Sue (UN), however, was clearly anxious about how she would be seen by her peers and was very clear that she would not want to show either concern or a lack of confidence. She said, "If I haven't a clue what I am doing, I may say this to my partner or best friend, but I would not say anything in front of my peers as it may lower their confidence in me and make them less likely to trust me in the future" (Sue UN).

A clear message, however, from those interviewed was that they recognised that trust is important. There was a consensus across all of the individuals interviewed that trust leads to better relationships within the team and, ultimately, that this will impact on performance. Nearly twenty years ago, Zand (1997:97) recognised this too and stated, "Trust frees people to be open, lifting relationships to new heights of achievement". The difficulty for the teams, it appears, is that although

trust is recognised as having a positive effect, it usually takes some time to establish it as it comes with getting to know the other person and building a relationship (Zand 1997). For a team that only comes together for a specific period of time to undertake a specific task, achieving trust may not be viable. Perhaps there is a need to recognise that since the team connects for a short period of time, it may be impossible to establish trust. Maybe there is a need to establish common ground where the team can function. This notion of connectivity seems to be the key to beginning to understand how the team interacts. It should be a top consideration when seeking to understand why a team behaves the way it does or does not trust. Time together is limited, so relationships are not maintained in the same way as they are in a team that is always together and can thus build relationships.

When explaining how trust builds, often there are references to how long people have worked together, with the conclusion drawn being that the more time they spend together, the better they will be at sharing feelings and understanding each other's behaviour. Emotions also run high, leading to people being more open to sharing themselves. Glaford and Dapeau (2002:137) refer to this as an opportunity for a 'trust builder' moment, stating, "When people are receptive to others, they can create strong and lasting bonds". However, they recognise that where there is a need to build trust across teams and other departments, there is a good chance that 'trust silos' exist. In order to develop trust,

Katzenbach (1997:85) suggests that there should be a “meaningful purpose for the team at the top”. This is particularly relevant when they come together so they can reflect more on their corporate roles rather than the directorate. There is still a debate to be had as to whether this would evoke trust as the team would only be together at infrequent intervals.

However, the data suggests that trust within such a team is not actually a necessity in order that the team members can undertake their team roles. This is interesting as the individuals interviewed across all organisations felt trust was important, whereas the suggestion is that it is less important in a team that can be deemed as transient. For a team that is only together for short period of time, the members of which have their own individual role, which is seen as their primary role, the connecting and disconnecting will impact upon building trusting relationships.

Exploring the roles of team members further, an area of commonality for each individual is the role they believe they play as the ‘strategic leaders’ of the organisation. However, there appeared to be a lack of connectivity between how they behaved as a team due to their individual roles being taking precedence, which made it difficult for followers looking for direction to understand. This could be due to a lack of emotional intelligence or evidence of not connecting or the result of not understanding followers’ needs, particularly during organisational

change. An example of this is where a recent change event, led by the chief executive, had led to one top team individual feeling unable to express his frustrations over not being part of the decision-making process with either the chief executive or the other top team members. He had, however, shared his feelings with the next level down. He expressed himself thus, "I would not have done it that way, if trust were the key thing you wanted to build and if I was the chief executive, I would have wanted me on side earlier" (Charles LA). If we take the view that trust is the most valuable asset of an organisation, it may be that Charles is saying, 'trust me, don't trust the chief executive'. Or perhaps he simply sees his role as important to the success of the organisation, felt excluded and shared his feelings openly with his subordinates. This could have an impact, however, on the subordinates he shared his feelings with.

Galford and Drapeau (2002:5) shed some light on this situation when they say that, "Trust can and does melt away in an instant where employees become aware that their company leaders are saying one thing but doing another. Trust is immediately threatened and often destroyed". When considering what a trusted leader is, Galford and Drapeau (2002) highlight the difference between internal trust and external trust, arguing that within an organisation, the option to simply back away or terminate a relationship is virtually non-existent despite the fact that within internal relationships "little is forgotten, especially when you are in a highly visible leadership role. Even less is forgiven".

So the message I was picking up here was the apparent lack of insight of some individuals into how influential top teams are within the organisation and how the way that a team responds and the actions it takes impact upon the success and/or failures of an organisation. Sharing these thoughts at a lower level could, however, be perceived either as evidence of a 'trusting' team or a fragmented team who do not trust each other. Or it could be that the culture of the organisation impacts on behaviour, which ultimately impacts on whether there is trust. Strategic leadership has been the subject of several studies and much theorising. A common consensus is that "one does not need to look very far to find ample evidence that the trajectories and fortunes of companies are often traceable to the actions (or inaction) of their top executives" (Finkelstein et al. 2009: 123).

Within the literature, the significance of senior managers and executive teams has been much debated. On the one hand, the senior team represents an integral part of some theories of organisational development, whilst on the other hand, it is seen as little more than a body administering organisational direction. Where there is consensus is in the notion that top teams can and do greatly influence what happens within and to organisations for both good and for ill. With this in mind, the next theme I am going to explore is the organisational environment(s) and trust.

Organisational Environment(s) and Trust

A good starting point would be to explain what is meant by organisational trust and the impact this has on leaders, followers and, ultimately, the organisation. When undertaking the literature review, an area of consideration was the impact of trust, not only individually but also organisationally. Therefore, during the interviews, organisational trust was an area of discussion. This was in particular reference to how behaviour in top teams impacts on how the organisation could be perceived.

Leading as an individual is complex as one is often required to be responsive and connect to different situations. This idea of being able to change style is referred to as situational leadership, and it is based on the belief that you should tailor your leadership style to the situation and thus, followers will become more responsive, leading to better organisational outcomes (Northouse 2007). However, perhaps it is more about connectivity, that is, being able to read the environment, both as a team member and as an individual. This research was undertaken in public sector organisations, and these are often steeped in processes, procedures and bureaucracy that can make them frustratingly slow to react at times. It is my view that we need to understand some of the dilemmas this can bring to the decision-making process and the impact this can and does have on the effectiveness of the team.

In particular, the participants from the local authority team made frequent reference to the role of the council members and how their behaviour influenced the environment to such an extent that often leaders within this environment operated according to what can be described as 'rules of engagement' in order to have an effective relationship. The following is how Charles says he seeks to engage with council members: "you have to invest time and effort in members, being as open as you can but, err, recognizing confidentially around certain business transactions. So I try to work on the basis of no surprises" (Charles LA).

When exploring this further with Charles, he did express that this, at times, can and does become wearing as he felt it was important to be able to have that open and honest conversation whilst also being mindful that the current political party would not be too happy if too much information were given to the opposition. "Being caught between a rock and hard place" was how he described his experiences. The environment and culture can and do have an influence on the performance of an organisation. Within public management, my experience is that leading within an ever-changing environment, where legislation can cause a large amount of work, without seeing a great deal of benefit can be challenging. Ruth highlighted this, saying, "We have tried different models, and in the current structure, the idea was to share decision making and help develop the strategic direction, but we

have not had universal buy-in to this, and we need to re-build trust in order to make a difference” (Ruth UN).

The frustrations felt by Ruth are not uncommon, especially within the current economic climate. The very nature of public services, in terms of how they are structured, often appears to reduce their ability to innovate and be as responsive as is the private sector. So how organisations are structured does impact on how they are perceived, both externally and internally. If one looks at the last 10+ years, what is apparent is that government legislation and policy-making has impacted on organisational structures, with organisations seeking to refocus on new objectives, often leading to a great deal of energy being used on meeting the changing environment rather than on managing the resources. This feeling of frustration due to the constant change was apparent in the data. Anna, for example, said, “Every time we go through a re-structure at whatever level, we have to spend time to rebuild relationships and trust, all of which can become quite demoralising as you may have just begun to make some impact and then the rug is pulled from under you and you have to start again” (Anna UN). Flynn (2007:278) discusses the “constant state of reorganization, tiers of management created and abolished, funding methods invented, scrapped and reinvented, governance structures established and re-established, targets set and changed with such frequency”.

So understanding the environment in which these top teams operate is important as the organisational environment can and often does impact on the ability of top teams to develop and maintain trust within their work relationships and throughout the organisation, as articulated by Anna. This concept of trust in organisations has received increasing attention in the literature, with an interest in the benefits, effects and impact of trust. Since the 1980s, a number of researchers have shown a growing interest in trust and, in particular, organisational trust as an aspect of organisational theory, and have undertaken to establish how it can be recognised and the potential benefits it could bring. For example, after reviewing five different organisations with different levels of control, Creed and Miles (1996: 150) concluded that, "High control organisations with a high degree of centralization and formulation and a primary focus on efficiency will constrain or impede the development of trustworthy behaviour, such as delegation and open communication". Therefore, an organisation's attributes, such as its structure, politics and culture, may dictate the degree of control managers exert, and for some people being able to control is a form of a trust.

Two very interesting views on potential conflict of trust or control emerged from the data collected. For example, Steve's view was that, "If they trust you, they go the extra mile, they will sign up to your agenda and will try and deliver. If they don't trust you, they have no respect for you as well as undermining you. Often, if they don't trust you, they go out and say 'we have got some crap management here'" (Steve PS). So

for Steve it was important that staff were given clear direction, that communication was open and that the environment was one where trust had an important role, whereas Walter felt it was part of his role to “accept responsibility for the actions of all my staff. I think there is a clear link between being clear about what the rules are and, erm, you know, trusting people to use those rules is what I do” (Walter NHS).

Steve and Walter’s views reflect the evidence from Dirks and Ferrin (2002), who, when researching the theoretical perspectives of trust in leadership, found the level of trust was dependent on a dyadic relationship between leader and follower. Although Steve and Walter held very similar jobs, there was a difference in their age and length of service, with Walter having been in his role for 10–15 years, whereas Steve had only been a senior manager for the last 3+ years. It, therefore, left me wondering if this could be a generation issue in a changing business world, where everything is more accessible and responsive now. Or perhaps this could be about the culture of the organisations and the impact this has on individuals and teams in terms of how they lead and how they build trust. Perhaps the culture of an organisation impacts on behaviour. Sociocultural anthropologists have for a long time attempted to describe the culture of societies by examining their customs and rituals. We have also seen in the last decades that culture has been used increasingly to try and describe the climate and practices within organisations or to determine the organisational values. “Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it

points us to phenomena that are, below the surface, powerful in their impact but invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious in that culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual” Schien (2004: 8).

So, if the culture of an organisation derives from how both individuals and team members behave and through acceptance of shared values, one could assume that this will impact on how the organisation is perceived both internally and externally. Therefore, within a stable team, one could with a reasonable amount of confidence, assume a culture which enables honesty and consensus of decision making, thus leading to a more trusting environment. This is an easy assumption to make, but the situation may change when top team members return back to their individual roles and no-one shoulders responsibility for ensuring the behaviour that enables trust to be maintained within the organisation. Top teams also have a leader, the chief executive. This role and how it is perceived by the rest of the top team is discussed next.

Chief Executive -The Top Team Leader

The chief executive’s role impacts on the behaviour of the team, in particular, where they sit and whether they sit outside consciously or unconsciously as the leader. The role of the chief executive was a discussion point during the interviews with all the individuals. Thus, I am going to explore this area, reflecting on the comments from the

interviews. To help set the scene, I think it is useful to explain that the structure of each of the organisations is hierarchal, with a recognised role at the top occupied by the chief executive, who, through status and rank, is seen as the overall leader of the team. Unlike the rest of the team, chief executives are not equal in respect of position or authority. The chief executive's responsibilities usually comprise a smaller team of individuals who offer administration support. They head up the organisation but rely on others to deliver the outcomes.

However, the role of chief executive often leads to other team members being confused, potentially leading to a conflict of views. This is, in part, due to some top team members seeing the whole team, including the chief executive, as equal in terms of influence and shaping of the organisation, whereas due to the role and position they hold within the organisation, chief executives do play a major role in the composition and functioning of TMTs and are essentially the central player so do have greater influence than other members.

Consider the scenario where the chief executive is not willing to engage in debate and discussion due to having a very clear vision of their own that they wish the organisation to follow. The team may conclude that their views are relatively unimportant to organisational outcomes. In some of the interviews it was revealed that team members had experienced this. Katzenbach (1998), in his research into teams at the top, described the chief executive's role as one of multiplicity and stated

that, “CEOs do make a difference in the balance between team and non-team performance at the top. They set the tone, provide the leadership philosophy and pick the leadership group with which they will work” (Katzenbach, 1998:176). In essence, perhaps some team members put the chief executive’s role outside the team as they are distinguished as the overall leader rather than a team member or player. Katzenbach (1998) goes on to say that the success of top teams is, in part, due to the roles played by both the chief executive and the members of the team. Thus, being aware of your role within the team is important, but equally so is the influence you have within the team – either real or perceived. Research undertaken by Dargie (1998: 170) found that, “the chief executives spent little time alone and little time thinking or making strategic decisions”. If this is the case, no wonder there can be role confusion, both as an individual and as a team. Identifying roles and functions within the team could help clarify the position of both the individual and team members.

A number of the interviewees reflected on the role of the chief executive, as follows:

Ruth said, “I have been pleasantly surprised about how we have adapted to our new financial situation and how the chief executive has adopted a more directive style to get us through” (Ruth UN).

Walter felt “totally supported by my chief executive. He allows me to get on and do my job with little interference” (Walter NHS).

Despite the positive comments, there was confusion regarding the chief executive’s role, as seen in George’s statement, “The chief executive has a vision that the whole of the organisation needs to be re-structured. I would have expected the team to set the vision” (George LA). George reflected on a recent incident at a road show the chief executive held, where the vision was shared for the first time with a group of managers. He said that, “This experience left me feeling very disadvantaged and disjointed. Although I know the chief executive has a role and responsibilities, I thought we were all a team and would have expected to have some influence on what was being proposed” (George LA).

One could assume that the chief executive clearly took the view that their status and role within the organisation gave them the right to not consult others but to drive through their own vision for the organisation. It is this role orientation that sometimes causes conflict within the team. Hugh found the lack of clarity very frustrating, saying, “We lack a team vision. We sometimes make assumptions about how others feel and whether we have agreement” (Hugh LA). I wanted to understand a bit more about this, so I asked Hugh to explain further. He described how a recent proposal made by the chief executive did not go down very well with his subordinates, who subsequently complained to

him. He felt disadvantaged, "As there is a feeling that the chief executive does not understand what he is doing, my subordinates are finding this a difficult time and I, as one of the so called top team, have not had the opportunity to influence. In fact, I have been treated like my subordinates" (Hugh LA).

This feeling of being 'left out' was not uncommon. Sharon said, "there is huge uncertainty around people vying for the attention of the chief executive, and, therefore, some of the trust, for me, has broken down" (Sharon NHS).

Interestingly, Bob Frisch (2011) suggests that senior teams do not make the big decisions. He argues that the chief executive often has a number of confidences to consult with, and these are the decisions-makers rather than those deemed as the top team in the organisational structure chart. Comments made by chief executives when exploring their roles in the team would seem to indicate that this is indeed the case. Henry stated that, "most of what they do does not even come my way; I will be aware of it because they will be tasked by virtue of their job description or whatever objectives I have set for the year " (Henry LA). He clearly felt that his role was to set the direction and let the individuals within the top team take forward the ideas. For another chief executive, the need to have support from people outside the team was important. Sue said, "Although I work well with the top team and I do trust them, I do have a couple of people I call my lieutenants, who I

totally trust and will run ideas past before I share them with the team”
(Sue UN).

I think what we are seeing here is typical behaviour in managers. My assumption, based on my own experiences, is that if you go through all organisations’ leaders and managers at different levels, you will find they have trusted subordinates to check ideas out with. I know I have certain people I will go to. I believe we need to acknowledge this and use this information when attempting to understand how top teams behave. Frisch (2011: 107) concurs, recommending that we “acknowledge these nameless teams exist and ask how you can make more deliberate use of these along with the senior management team”. Recognising that these teams exist may help the senior team determine their roles and decide how their time together could and should be used more usefully. This attitude adjustment for the senior team could lead to better outcomes. According to Frisch (2011:110), “a company that conceives of its senior management team in an advisory and coordinating role can focus its efforts far more productively than a company that treats it as a decision -making body”. However, where that would leave the organisations and the individuals within the team is unclear as the structure very clearly determines how corporate decisions are made, and, after all, they are the top management team.

The role of chief executives within organisations is complex as they are part of a top team yet sit outside it. They may have trusted people who

are not in the top team and so they need to manage different inter-relations. Dargie (1998:174), when undertaking research into the role of public sector chief executives, found “deriving a single, universal set of mutually exclusive, meaningful roles that conceptualize what public sector chief executives do is difficult”. Whichever approach is adopted, the chief executive chooses. Ideally, the ultimate goal is not to seek to win or to obtain the consent, real or otherwise, of the team members but rather to make a decision based on the best possible input. However, recognising the complexity of the roles of the top team and how the role of chief executive fits within the top team may lead to a more honest conversation of what is in their gift to achieve and, ultimately, to a more trusting environment.

Frisch (2011) advocates a better use of the top team’s time, suggesting a more advisory role, which concurs with Katzenbach’s view of top teams. He argues that, “A team is seldom the most efficient way of getting something accomplished” since contrasting disciplines produce conflict that is often difficult to resolve (Katzenbach 1997: 87). This, thus, leads to the consideration as to whether a team is needed. Wageman et al. (2008: 30) suggest it may be worth asking the following questions: “Does this organisation need a team at the top? Or do we need something more?”. The debate over the role of chief executives is one set to continue; it is often portrayed visibly in the structure as the leader at the top, and it is an agreed and recognisable way of describing an organisation’s function. My research data suggests that although

chief executives are supportive of a top team, they are aware of their own role and function, which sits outside the top team.

The ability of team members to communicate with frankness and candour is key to a team being effective (Kets De Vries 2011). Well-functioning teams “sharing open, honest, and accurate information is the norm. In addition, members are prepared to provide feedback about the quality of each other’s work when appropriate” (Kets De Vries 2011:56).

The final theme I want to explore is that of communication, language and connectivity. This was a key feature in the data, with a number of interviewees reflecting on communication, especially on incidents when poor communication had led to mistrust. What is said and how things are said was raised a number of times throughout the interviews and, for the most, played an important part in their roles as leaders. So not only communication but also the language that was used became a focus. The next part of this chapter reflects upon and discusses communication, language and how top team members connect with each other.

Communication, Language and Connectivity within Top Teams

According to Bass and Stogill (1981:673), “An important aspect of a manager’s leadership style is the way he or she communicates with colleagues and subordinates”. How a leader communicates and the

language used is important in order that they get across the right message. For example, Lynn felt that, “although some people are communication wise, others tend to be closed and more reserved. I think you know, erm, one of the tricks when you come across people from those different perspectives is how you encourage those closed ones from sort of opening up” (Lynne UN). She thought it was important to listen as well as to talk, whereas Henry expressed some of his frustrations when trying to communicate, saying, “Sometimes you are damned if you do and damned if you don’t. You try to be inclusive, but people say they don’t understand what it is we want from them or they say they have been kept out of things” (Henry LA). I asked how, or if, he had tried to address this. His response was “I keep repeating myself, with the hope that people will eventually get it”. This lack of apparent insight into communication was not uncommon amongst those interviewed, not just in relation to the people they managed but also, and indeed particularly, with each other.

Walter’s way of communicating with his direct peers was to “seek forgiveness rather than ask permission” (Walter NHS). Exploring this further, his view was that as a senior manager he had the status and, therefore, could make decisions without the rest of the group’s consensus. I suppose he was right as this team only came together on an infrequent basis and he needed to get on with his job. Interestingly though, he used the words “seeking forgiveness”, almost suggesting

either a lack of confidence in his decision-making or someone who is willing to take risks.

How we communicate and the language we use are key issues for any leader. However, whether we communicate or are just informing is debatable and may affect how the message is received. Davidson (1996) recognised the importance of knowing whether we are informing (v., to tell of, about) or communicating (v., to impart, to share with). Davidson formed a view that there is quite a difference between the two, and he felt that leaders may need to consider “how to bridge the gap between informing and communicating” (Davidson 1996:181). We need, firstly, in my opinion to understand what it is we are trying to communicate. As with earlier discussions around situational leadership, connectivity and emotional intelligence, adjusting our communication style and language to suit both the message we are trying to convey and the audience we wish to receive the message may lead to a better outcome. Denning (2007), when describing his own leadership journey, found that in order to communicate effectively he needed to employ a “secret language of leadership” Denning (2007: vi), which is based on the leader being able to get attention, stimulate desire and reinforce with reasons. His view is simply that successful leaders should follow this pattern. One, however, needs also to take into account the current situation and environment as words alone are often not enough. There are usually enabling conditions in place, but the use of sequencing, as described in

the above figure, could help focus communication to ensure the right messages are given and received.

Being able to influence people is one of the key aspects of a leader's role (Hambrick 2007). This is a bold statement, but as leaders are often at the forefront of leading proposed change initiatives, changing views and, in some cases, mindsets is an important part of what leaders do. There are, however, negative aspects to this as it can also imply the manipulation of people for personal gain. This could be, as discussed earlier, a consequence of the dark-side of leadership. One could assume that as a leader what one is doing is enabling people to come unstuck and move forward, and there are, of course, many ways to influence. "You can coax, flatter, or even threaten them. However, the most potent way is by helping them to imagine how things could be different" (Carruthers 2003: 6). All of these techniques can achieve the desired outcome, but some will have a more positive impact on followers than others. Bass and Stodgill (1981), when considering the concept of leadership, argue that influence is often a key component of leadership, along with behaviour and persuasion. Thus, they define effective leadership as "successful influence by the leader that results in the attainment of goals by the influenced followers" (Bass and Stodgill 1981:14).

Communication and language, as discussed, are important aspects of the leader's role. A third aspect of effective leadership is connectivity.

Individuals are often not aware of where things can and do go wrong in this area. According to Gobillot (2007:3), "In order to be successful, leaders must adapt to the situations they face. Yet by focussing on these situations, they often miss the radical shifts that are occurring around them". Here, Gobillot (2007) describes how through not being connected, leaders can lose their way, and if the connections with followers are lost, this may lead to failure. An example of this was Walter, who said, "I try and keep lines of communication open, but I do get frustrated when I'm giving clear messages and yet people don't respond how I expect them to" (Walter NHS). Exploring this further with Walter, he could not acknowledge that his messaging may have not been clear and said, "If they don't get me, they should say so. I think I am clear" (Walter NHS). We did not continue the conversation much further as I sensed he was getting frustrated.

The ability to connect with others is the key to good communication. Being connected means actively taking notice of what is happening around us in order that we can understand both the environment and the individuals within it (Gobillot 2007). Once we understand how individuals work, we can determine the most effective way to achieve connectivity.

'Connected leadership', as I have termed it, may be just another fad, the fashionable way to describe what makes a good leader, or it may be a concept that has some gravity, one we should pay careful heed to since it has implications for 'real' leadership. Gobillot (2007: 93) argues

that, “to be successful, leaders must ensure that both the source and the impact of their power is rooted in the real”. This appears to be a somewhat confusing statement, but if one takes the notion of relationships and the number and quality of connections those involve, it could be prudent to say this allows for a measure of both power and influence of the leader. Gobillot (2007) claims that leaders who connect well with others hold a different set of beliefs.

Within the research data, communication and being connected was a key theme and point of discussion, not just with one person but several. A number of participants recognised the need to connect. Ruth (UN) said, “You need to work with your colleagues in the top team, share your vision; you need to connect and not get sucked down into the weeds”. In exploring with Ruth the meaning of not being sucked down into the weeds, she explained that, for her, this was when she lost focus on the direction, found communication was not clear and had a feeling of being disconnected. This was made in reference to a particular incident Ruth found herself in when a meeting with important visitors had been arranged and one of her colleagues had put together a paper, which they were unwilling to share at this point. Ruth said she found this very ‘disloyal’ and challenged her colleague, who reported that they found the challenge aggressive. This is an example where communication and connectivity is not working. I am not sure why information was not shared, and from our conversation there had been no real attempt to understand why it could not be shared; but this had provoked a reaction

in both parties. Do you trust your colleague? I asked “I am not sure after this episode” was her response.

Whereas when discussing communication and keeping connected, Jim said, “I work with people on a 1–1 basis to understand what motivates them, what their needs and requirements are. I ask questions like ‘what could I do better to make your job easier for you to achieve?’” (Jim NHS). Jim very much felt that his role was to nurture and understand the group members. He went on to describe how he likes to communicate to the team, “When you have bad news, it is better to tell people rather than let them discover it; there is honesty in that and honesty engenders trust” (Jim NHS). This may be true, but it is interesting how he sees his role within the team. I discuss team roles in more detail in the next chapter.

The participants appeared to share a common understanding that being both commutative and connected is important. They felt that having a greater understanding of the individual and what is happening around the organisation is beneficial in enabling the leader to lead. Walter said good communication involves “creating a clear narrative, creating some clear standards and, erm, feeding back to people, reinforcing the positive, exhibiting patience, but ultimately being consistent in how you give your messages” (Walter (NHS)). Sue acknowledged an interest in people and felt that communicating effectively was about “walking the talk, walking around, listening, erm, outside and inside, erm, when I hear bad stuff, not always assuming that person is to blame, but

triangulating the gossip” (Sue UN). Sue felt that this method allowed her to connect not just with the top team but also with those outside the team. She said, “I like to chit chat over coffee with people, its amazing what people say to you in these informal sessions”. Sue (UN) What I did not find out is how both her peers and subordinates viewed this.

Communication, language and connectivity are often cited as key in enabling leaders to lead. The discussion often, however, gets around to how this happens. The top team members interviewed for this research had similar views with regard to communication, seeing good communication as key. This resonates with a recent survey undertaken by Blanchard, in which they found that, “43% of respondents identified communication skills as the most critical skill set, while 41% identified the inappropriate use of communication as the number one mistake leaders make”, indicating that, “the ability to communicate appropriately is an essential component for effective leadership” (Blanchard 2006:1).

Summary

The emerging analysis has raised a number of issues in relation to the public sector. It highlights the complexity of the public sector and the difficulties this brings for top teams in this sector, especially in relation to some of the interesting aspects, for example the idea of adopting what I have termed ‘coping strategies’. The need to ensure that an image of being in control is portrayed at all times was referred to one participant as ‘hiding behind a mask’. Despite the status and power these individuals hold, they all experience some form of vulnerability

and lack of confidence at some point, which one could say is quite normal – after all, we are all human. However, for these leaders, the fact that they were seen as the upper echelons of the organisation meant that they somehow had to cope with these insecurities while at the same time leading the organisation and being measured for the effectiveness of how they did so. “Team at the top is a badly misused term that obscures both what teams can accomplish and what makes them” (1997: 83). He found that even in the best of organisations a so-called top team seldom functions as a real team.

The individual views of the participants on life at the top was fascinating, and I quickly became aware that, despite being one of the upper echelons in the organisation, they still had many doubts, fears and prejudices about themselves and their organisations. Although in the public domain they were keen to be a corporate player, there were those who would have liked to be more innovative in how they led. For some there was a struggle with the norms of the organisation, which sometimes conflicted with their own values. It is often thought that transformational leaders are less common and less effective in public sector organisations. However, this may not be the case, as my research indicates. The thoughts and views of the participants in this research may lead to a better understanding of the public sector leader.

In the next chapter, I explore further the notion of top teams and, in particular, follow on from thoughts from the emerging data, regarding

whether or not there is such a concept as a top team. I discuss whether they really exist or, as I am now concluding, whether they are in fact a transient team or group who come together to discuss specific items and then go back into their role of leading their own service area. I ask how the notion of the individual role works within the team and the organisation. If top teams are transient, this may affect organisational team building. If we had a better understanding of this, we may be able to improve our leaders. If our mindset of what is a 'top team' changed, one could see how this could contribute to improving practices. So one has to ask whether the concept of a top team is actually a myth.

The next chapter draws further on these themes, namely: behaviours; trust and trustworthiness; organisational environment; the role of the chief executive; communication and language; and connectivity. The first half looks at the many functions of top team and, therefore, it touches upon a number of relevant areas. The second half of the chapter focuses on the concept of top teams as a myth and the transient team model. It discusses whether trust is a core component of the team, in particular focussing on the individual roles of team members and how this issue began to focus my thinking about top teams in a different way.

Chapter 5

Interpreting the Data – Further Findings

Introduction

This research journey began with my wanting to gain a better understanding of top management teams. I started with the view that a top management team is an orthodoxy of organisational success and a key element of an organisational structure, but I said that I am continually surprised how dysfunctional such teams seem despite being so indispensable. The research enabled me to test out this hunch. This chapter takes further the notions and concepts that emerged from the data, exploring how these concepts link to top teams. The intention of this chapter, therefore, is to continue to discuss these concepts, leading to my conclusions.

Whilst acknowledging the existence of top management teams, I concluded that a top team is something of a myth. A top team is transient, connecting and disconnecting, rather than static. This led to a new concept, which I term 'conjoined leadership'. This describes both the separateness of things that are joined and the unity that results when they come together, an approach that could help with the design of 'team training'. Acknowledgment of the importance of the individual roles of team members could help us to understand why top teams are often seen as dysfunctional and yet are still a much needed aspect of

the organisation. I highlight the importance of the individual role using a heuristic diagram, showing that this is now acknowledged as a key aspect of top management team make up.

What is a Top Management Team?

It is useful to start by spending some time exploring what top management teams are. Although this was discussed in the literature review, the analysis of the data using a hermeneutic approach emphasised the issue of what exactly a top management team is. As a result, the quest to gain a better understanding of teams, with their individual roles, became more prominent.

The term 'top management team' is widely used and describes the upper echelons within an organisation, but what actually constitutes a top management team and what do they actually do? Back in the 1960s, Thompson (1967:143) discussed the structure of organisations and the need for a 'dominant coalition' thus, "Although the pyramid headed by an all-powerful individual has been a symbol of organisations, such omnipotence is possible only in simple situations, where perfected technologies and bland task environments make computational decision processes feasible. Where technology is incomplete or the task environment heterogeneous, the judgmental decision strategy is required and control is vested in a dominant coalition". The conditions of omnipotence described by Thompson (1967) are rare these days since organisations tend to be simple and the consensus is that teams make better decisions in such complex situations. Top teams also play a

key role in setting the strategic direction of the organisation and ensuring performance and outcomes are achieved. Finkelstein (2009:123) describes a top management team as having three central elements, “composition, structure, and process”, with members bringing to the team their values, cognitive abilities, personalities and experiences, their individual role within the organisation also being important along with how they interact.

I found trying to understand what a top team is and then defining it to be quite challenging as there are various views, which often depend on whether scholars are referring to the whole team or not, including or excluding the chief executive. As I felt it important to have a definition, I decided to use Mintzberg’s (1979:24). He describes a top team as “The group of top executives with overall reasonability for the organization”. Membership, however, one can safely assume, often consists of those people with the greatest power to affect the overall strategic direction of an organisation.

Taking this thought a step further, it is worth considering whether these top management executives are a team or a group. A team is a number of people who work together both interdependently and cooperatively on a continuous basis and “represent a dominant approach to getting work done in a business environment” (Barczak et al. 2010: 332), while a group is a number of individuals who come together for a limited period of time to work towards a specific agreed goal. In essence, a

team has a cohesive and continuous nature, whilst a group is loose knit and transient. Virtually all published research characterises the top team as a team, irrespective of whether they are cohesive or cooperative or how often they meet. However, my research indicates that top teams better match the above description of a group. Hambrick (1994:172) contends that, "In short, many top management teams may have little teamness to them. If so, this is at odds with the implicit image in much of the top team literature". Further to this, Finkelstein et al. (2009:126) comment on the notion of a top team and conclude that it is "self-evident that TMTs are really top management groups because virtually all of the underlying theoretical support on TMTs is based on research on work groups in social psychology", with studies being undertaken by psychologists interested in understanding group process and group performance.

Jackson (1992:354) makes the following observation: "several important conclusions follow: (1) definitions of top management teams or groups need to make clear which executives are included and why, (2) the importance of power dynamics, and (3) relationships amongst different facets of TMTs need to be empirically investigated". So, that being the case, it may be necessary to acknowledge these individuals as a group rather than a team and reflect on the notion of them being 'communities of interest groups' that come together to influence and shape.

Having debated whether the top team is a team or a group, my conclusion is that they are a group comprised of individuals with roles external to the top team. I want to reflect on this as the analysis led me more and more towards the individual roles of team members as being significant rather than the team role. The key to understanding whether top managers are a team or a group is in the acknowledgment of their individual roles and whether top team members see this as their primary role or not. Members of the top management team need to consider how their individual roles impact on the wider decisions made by the team.

When I discussed leadership style and understanding with the participants, they took into account that leadership is complex and did not offer a single definition. They described leadership as an activity an individual undertakes and then reflected on their own style and behaviour within the top team. Not one of the participants discussed leadership as a shared group activity, even with the chief executive being recognised as the leader. Although there was recognition of issues, they were less inclined to take ownership as an individual and although there was, in some instances, group ownership, this appeared to be limited to the meeting time, with issues often not being carried forward by individuals. Hence, one would often see a cycle of recurring themes and discussions taking place.

I would suggest that this is a view that is not uncommon. At the beginning of this thesis, in the literature review, I reviewed current and past thinking on the notion of leadership, focusing on leadership within top management teams. I found a number of conflicting views, from Katzenbach (1997), who seeks to dispel the notion of the top team, through to Hambrick and Mason (1984), whose view is that leadership of complex organisations is a shared activity, giving rise to their Upper Echelons Theory. They further argue their case by proposing a litmus test for 'true' team accountability, joint work products and a sharing of the leadership role.

The question of whether we actually need top teams is also pertinent. Perhaps they are merely a product of the environment and what is perceived in many organisations as a necessity. The environment this research was undertaken in was the public sector, which is steeped in bureaucracy and where a top team is an accepted part of the hierarchical structure. I discuss environments and the top team in the next part of the chapter

Environment and the Top Team

Having a team at the top still remains the most common approach in most organisations, the traditional structure of a chief executive and numerous directorships being the norm in both public and private sectors. Most chief executives refer to 'their top team' and shape the organisational structure around the notion of a top team. However, it is

debatable whether these teams actually bring value to the organisation. Hambrick and Mason (1984) in their Upper Echelons Theory argue strongly that this is the case, and, more recently, Hambrick (2007) asserts that “leadership of a complex organization is a shared activity and the collective cognitions, capabilities and interactions of the entire top management team enter into strategic behaviours” therefore allowing the business of the organisation to be conducted in a manner that is able to meet its many demands. This view of ‘shared leadership’ may have implications for organisations and top teams. When researching shared leadership, Koccolowski (2010:22) found that, “The speed of change and complexity in today’s business environment makes leadership increasingly exigent, placing unrealistic expectations on heroic leaders (Yukl 2006). Ostensibly, it is becoming more difficult for any single individual to possess all of the skills and abilities required to competently lead organisations today”. It seems that there could be benefits for organisations that consider shared leadership. However, for most people, the notion of shared leadership is counterintuitive, their view being that leadership is obviously and manifestly an individual trait and activity. O’Toole, Galbraith and Lawler (2002:67) challenge this view, stating, “Frequently, organisations learn the hard way that no one individual can save a company from mediocre performance—and no one individual, no matter how gifted a leader, can be ‘right’ all the time”.

Exploring this area with the participants and how the environment often determines the hierarchal structures and these lead to a number of

ideas being shared, the issue of trust arose. Hugh, for example, when reflecting on his role in the team, stated, "I think there may be a better way for the team to work together if trust was the main key thing you wanted to develop. But I am not sure that is the main driver here; rather delivering to agreed tasks seems to be the main area of discussion and, for that, do we need to trust? I am not sure" (Hugh LA).

Hugh raised an interesting question regarding the team's need to trust each other in order to achieve the desired outcome. One of his colleagues, Charles, however, had a clear view that trust was important, stating, "In order to build an organisation, we have to have trust and confidence in each other and the organisation" (Charles LA).

On the other hand, Steve, who worked in another organisation, said, "I guess we all know trust is important, but I spend more time with my subordinates rather than this team so for me where I place my trust is with my subordinates, who, after all, you often rely on to watch your back" (Steve PS).

Perhaps these different opinions are a reflection of the different organisational environments. Finkelstein et al. (2009:109), in describing the determinants of top management team characteristics, highlight the importance of the environment and how this impacts on the top team and how they behave. They put forward three fundamental dimensions of the environment to consider: complexity – in reference to the number of environmental factors which have an influence; instability – in

reference to the number of changes which are taking place; and, finally, munificence – in reference to the ability of the organisation to be flexible to enable it to meet changing demands.

I think it is important that we consider the impact of the environment as organisations continue to change and develop to meet demands and that, as we appear to be in a prolonged era of austerity, we keep in mind that these organisations may change considerably in the future. We are now seeing, particularly in local government, a period of review and analysis of core functions as well as different structures being proposed. Interestingly, in my own organisation, where this is being considered, the top team is still very much in evidence and the structure is somewhat traditional, with the chief executive and a number of directors overseeing the function of the organisation. So how the top management team both react and then lead could have a direct impact on whether the environment is perceived as one where there is trust.

Researching a diverse range of organisations highlighted the differences in top teams and how the environment impacts on behaviour. For example, Steve, who worked in a prison environment, was very much aware of the need for control, “There are clear policies and procedures which must be followed at all times, for example, the locking and unlocking of doors. If someone does not follow procedures, the consequences could be disastrous” (Steve PS).

Hugh, a senior manager of several years standing, described an environment which did not, in his view, lend itself to an effective team, "It is difficult to judge how effective we are as a top team as we only see each other in one circumstance and that is at our two-weekly management meetings. Perhaps that tells you something too" (Hugh LA). What Hugh is experiencing here is the coming together of a 'group of individuals', whose function at the moment of contact is to address issues presented, make decisions and offer solutions according to the environment they are in at that moment, which will, more than likely, have its own rules of engagement and a different culture to the one in which they have direct leadership responsibility. I felt that Hugh was describing an environment that was more fluid and less controlled, potentially due to the lack of shared accountability and shared leadership.

The different environment they find themselves in will have an impact on how the top team members behave. This led me to consider how a top team achieves consensus of behaviour or consensus of decisions or agreement to a vision or policy, bearing in mind that top teams are often a group of individuals who come together at an agreed period of time to discuss and debate business in a changing environment. One would imagine that to achieve consensus, a team would need to work together on a frequent basis rather than connecting infrequently. The question of what happens when the team members do connect could be asked. Although few studies have directly examined in what way top

management teams are shaped by environmental influences, some studies have investigated the impact of environmental complexity on top teams. For example, Finkelstein et al. (2009) found that, "The more diverse an organization's environment, the more necessary it becomes to have a differential top management team in order to appropriately monitor the diversity of the environment", suggesting the need for a top management team with a different set of skills or competencies. In some respects, this conflicts with Katzenbach (1998), who describes these groups at the top of large companies as 'non-teams'. He finds it odd that we continue to persist in calling them 'teams at the top'. Discussing this, he says, "it is even more curious that the behaviour they exhibit is perceived to be un-teamly most of the time; the reason of course is because the term team is used in casual conversation to describe a wide variety of different group interactions" (Katzenbach 1998:42).

This view appears to be supported by Beyerlien (1998), who describes top management teams as 'an oxymoron'. Opinions amongst researchers regarding when and where to use top teams are varied (see Kakabadse 1991; Katzenbach 1997; Kets De Vries 2011; Wageman et al. 2008). "Use them anywhere anytime, to don't use them to use them in limited ways, in limited places, with the range of limitations varying from a few to a complex set of contingencies" (Beyerlien 1998).

So, we might consider that a top team is a 'group' of individuals, who come together at a set time to work with a single leader, usually the chief executive, to help shape strategic priorities, enforce operating standards and establish corporate policy. Or perhaps we might agree with Katzenbach (1997:84) when he says that the "team at the top is a badly misused term that obscures both what teams can accomplish and what makes them work". This resonates with other academic findings into top management teams, which suggests that TMTs often fail to achieve their potential. Some scholars argue that many senior teams do not engage in real teamwork (Hackman 1990; Hambrick 1994; Katzenbach 1998), whilst others report that TMTs can find it difficult to resolve conflict (Amason 1996) and establish commitment (Wooldridge and Floyd 1990).

The role of the chief executive was a theme within this research. How both they and their team perceived their role led to some interesting comments. The next part of this chapter is focussed on this role.

There was a chief executive in all of the teams involved in the research, and during the interviews I asked all members the same questions about the role. I wanted to understand if the chief executive was seen as a team member or as sitting outside the team due to status. Ruth reflected on the role and remarked, "Although we are seen as the senior management team, we are all aware of the chief executive's role, and I would say they are seen as not really part of the group" (Ruth UN).

This is not surprising really as often the chief executive will be one person who has overall responsibility. In their research into strategic leadership, Finkelstein et al. (2009:148) found that chief executives play a major role “in the composition and functioning of top management teams”. They describe chief executives as being “central members of the top management team, who have a disproportionate impact on team characteristics and behaviours”. This was reflected in George’s comments on the chief executive role, “Ultimately, in my experience, the chief executive gets what they want, whether through putting a sound argument or just driving through a change. You just learn to accept that is their role” (George LA).

Hugh, however, felt “the problem at the moment is we do not give ourselves enough time to discuss issues such as leadership philosophy. The chief executive tends to want to just delegate; he needs to be more directive at times” (Hugh LA). Perhaps this could be a symptom of a top team where there is limited time and connection or a lack of communication between the chief executive and the other team members. Hackman (2006:2) argues that, “Clear messages are the essential foundation for connecting people to achieve common outcomes”.

Lily saw her role as being “to ask the questions and challenge the chief executive and other members to make sure they have clear thinking, so its about, you know, erm...coping with complexity, being supportive

but, erm... challenging them as well" (Lily UN). However, Walter was interested in what the chief executive really thought, "I would really like to know what his perceptions are. I think he often plays his cards close to his chest, but I, erm... guess that is part of being chief executive" (Walter NHS).

Anna expressed some concern about the new chief executive in her organisation, saying, "I worry about the change as we are used to certain ways. I think, erm.. that we are all going to have to go on a bit of a journey, and I should, erm ... well, what I mean is we have been a good team; it will take time" (Anna UN). Here Anna was anxious about the change of leader, which one could consider is natural, but it was interesting that when asked further what the features of the previous chief executive were, their social skills had stood out for Anna, who said, "Our previous chief executive was very, very accessible, with a very bubbly personality. She ran lots of different things.... cake at birthday times, so you got to know her as a person" (Anna UN).

My probing resulted in some clear views being expressed by the team members on how they saw the role and function of the chief executive. To understand further, I spoke with the chief executives about their role and how they perceived themselves within the top management team. I was particularly interested in their understanding, or not, of how their role could impact on how team members viewed them.

Henry said, "I am aware that although we are the top team, I am the chief executive and, therefore, at times I will push through ideas, simply because I can. It does not go down well, but I have to do this and hope when I explain, people understand" (Henry LA). During further discussion, Henry recognised that this behaviour could potentially impact on team 'trust', but he was confident that he would be able to communicate his views. He believed that as the team had been together for a while, they would understand. It would be interesting to test out this theory in a team that had not been formed for as long and question whether or not subordinates would concede to status.

Although not as strongly as Henry, the other chief executives all recognised their role within the team and were of a view that they were senior to other members by virtue of their status and, therefore, took the overall lead. Jim said, "Although I am the chief executive, I am quite relaxed. But I do, er.... quite like to be challenged. Otherwise, I will adopt an answer which firsts comes to me, and if they don't challenge me, then that's silly of them because they should, or I will do what I think needs to be done" (Jim NHS).

Sue, another chief executive, was keen not to "lay the law down" but said, "if I have got difficult messages to give, if I am getting pressure elsewhere for answers, I will push " (Sue UN). In contrast, however, Sue did discuss the role as being a nurturing one, "This is a difficult role, but I like all my direct reports to feel supported and able to come to me with

ideas and solutions. I, erm tend not to drive through things without consensus" (Sue UN).

The whole issue of chief executives and the role of seniors is interesting. In comparison to leaders of work teams, the chief executives "have far greater positional power and legal and fiduciary accountability, making truly shared leadership difficult to achieve in these teams" (Edmondson et al. 2003:311). One could, therefore, conclude that chief executives are seen as the ones with the overall responsibility for the conduct and performance of an entire organisation. Their role within a top team could be seen as distinct from the roles of other members of the team, impacting ultimately on leadership decisions, leading to dysfunctional groups and potential errors in judgement. The chief executive may lose touch with immediate reality, and members of the group may participate willingly in their even irrational decisions. Kets De Vries refers to these moments as "folie a deux" or acting out your superior's fantasies. Notably, Janis's (1982) early work on groupthink attributed certain flawed decisions to the pressure of conformity.

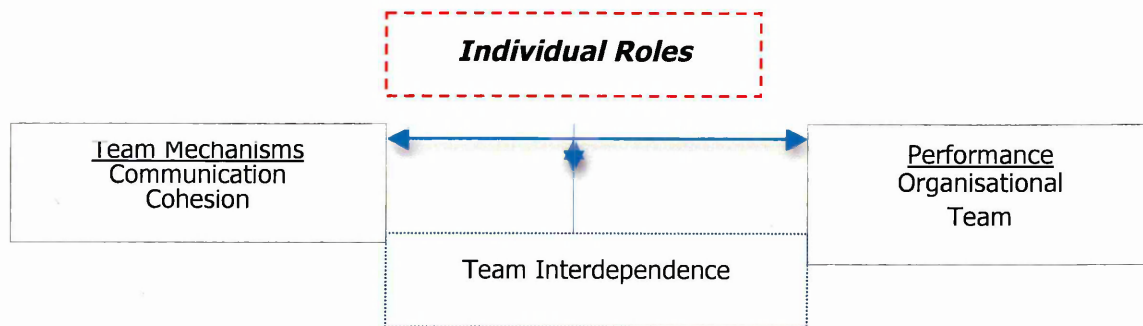
When reflecting upon the role of chief executives, those who have researched top management teams see them as "central members of the TMT who have a disproportionate impact on team characteristics and outcomes" (Finklestein et al. 2009:148). It became apparent through the research that each member of the top management team interviewed had an individual role outside the top team and that balancing that role

and their TMT role often led to conflict. As the research evolved, the individual role began to become more prominent, and it became clear that this was an area that was often not recognised but was of great importance to the TMT members. The next part of this chapter explores further the individual role.

Individual Roles

During my analysis of the data, it became apparent that the individual roles and responsibilities of the team members when outside the top team had been considered but were not openly acknowledged. Therefore, the notion that top management team members have complex roles outside the top group that will potentially impact on how they interact as a team became an important part of the reflection on top teams and, in particular, on how they lead. Finkelstein et al. (2009:123), when discussing the conceptual elements of top management teams, found that although the term 'top management team' is widely used "it is not uncommon for individual pieces of research to emphasize what is, in essence, a multidimensional construct", which will then be defined by the roles of individual members and the interdependence of team members when they are together. Their roles outside the team are not taken into account, and what is often researched is the moment they connect rather than when they disconnect and return to their own directorates.

It is important to recognise that each connection requires a moment of bonding and re-developing of relationship and trust. This may not take as long if they know each other; however, they do still need to move from an individual mindset, focused on their own areas of responsibility, to a team mindset. So, having clarity regarding their role within the team and what the goals of the team are helps in re-connecting the team. Below is a heuristic view of how I see the individual role (highlighted within the red box) fitting with the overall team make up that is often associated with top management teams.



The diagram above shows the basic inputs and outputs of a team. If there was just a line, it would read across from the team mechanism box to the performance box, with team interdependencies determining the degree to which members need to rely on one another to complete projects and fulfil member needs. Thus, “a team with high interdependence is often referred to as a ‘real team’, whereas teams with low interdependence are more commonly labelled ‘working groups’” Barrick et al. (2007:546). The additional box I have added is ‘individual roles’ as, like interdependencies, these need to be acknowledged. I thought this important as there is a tendency in the

literature to ignore the fact that, firstly, team members do have other roles outside the team and, secondly, their individual roles could impact on the team, with most of the focus being on their team function. For example, Mulki et al. (2010) view teams as a way of getting work done, leading to a collaborative culture, whereas Schaffer et al. (2007) look at the shortcomings of previous top management research and do not acknowledge the different roles individuals play and how this could potentially affect how they behave. Instead they undertook to investigate the characteristics of individuals and how these affect strategic decision-making. Although understanding characteristics is helpful, I think that recognising individual roles could only benefit the richness of the connection when the individuals meet.

During my interviews with the research subjects, I took the opportunity to ask about roles. In response to this probing, Charles said, "Although you invest time in building relationships with your peers in the top team, it is important and, in some instances, more important, to invest time in building relationships in your own individual directorate" (Charles LA). Charles recognised the need to work with his peers in the top team but saw his own directorate as more important. Lynne also emphasised the importance of her own directorate, saying, "The most important thing for me is my staff and how I develop my staff. I want my area to achieve, to be the best it can be" (Lynne UN).

The team members interviewed indicated that their priority was their directorate rather than the top team. However, unilateral commitment to the top team is critical to success. People at the top are used to being individually accountable, but to become a true team and achieve the agreed outcomes, they must adopt a more subordinate approach and be mutually accountable, recognising that this may be advantageous to the organisation as a whole.

Interestingly, individual roles are recognised when one begins to look at how people lead and manage their direct reports. Mintzberg (1973: 56), after studying chief executives, identified a number of duties that are performed by leaders, which he allocated to three overall roles: “interpersonal role, informational role and decisional role”. Katzenbach (1998), whilst recognising the multiple roles of the CEO, explores how senior leaders could achieve better balance between what he terms ‘team and non-team performance’. He claims that senior members are often able to recognise and understand “the difference between situations that call for team discipline and those that require single-leader discipline” (Katzenbach 1998:162). This fits with his view that it is very difficult to define the meaningful purpose of a team at the top. He focuses on the different approaches required for ‘executive leadership’ versus ‘team leadership’, concluding that due to several differences, a top team “is seldom the most efficient way of getting something accomplished” (Katzenbach 1997:87).

A potential dilemma for top management team members is having to consider their own roles within the organisation and how they could impact on the effectiveness of the team in terms of achieving its goals as well as understanding what happens when they connect and are disconnected. The time they are together accounts for a short part of their day. Consideration of this may help us to develop a new approach to 'team building'. This may also require re-visiting traditional models of team building. According to Katzenbach (1997:84), "when conditions are right, a team effort at the top can be essential to capturing the highest performance results possible". Understanding how they connect and interact as well as their roles and responsibilities needs to be a key part of future team work training in order to achieve the best possible outcomes. I would suggest this could be achieved not only through formal training but also through working with TMTs on a small scale basis. Furthermore, I recommend that further research is undertaken into TMTs with a stronger focus on individual roles and connectivity rather than the just the 'team'. The next part of this chapter reflects further on the individual role and, in particular, how the team members behave in their individual roles.

Individual Roles and Behaviours

The team roles of the members of the top management team are important as they allow for a sense of identity and belonging. In addition, each of the individuals involved has a role within the

organisation outside of the top team, which will influence how they view their job, what satisfies them, what motivates them and how they lead. All of this will no doubt be brought into the top team and will impact on how they behave, leading to a potential conflict between their individual role and team role.

These interactions within the top management team are important, and it is worthwhile exploring the roles and the behaviours that often occur as they allow us to better understand top teams. In particular, if we consider the composition of the team, as well as the team structure and process, we begin to understand why we sometimes see what can only be perceived from outside as game playing. Describing how he interacts with his colleagues in order to move forward decision making, Henry said, "I know what will get me the votes and how to irritate my colleagues if I need to" (Henry LA). 'Playing the game' is, apparently, how Henry copes as a top team manager. Interestingly, when discussing the notion of power, the other members of Henry's team made it clear that he was perceived by most as having a great deal of power. Perhaps though he is just a master at 'game playing'. In contrast, Anna felt that she was better at "playing the emotional intelligence game. And I know when I need to act differently in different situations. I am probably better at play-acting than my colleagues" (Anna UN).

So, how we behave and how we communicate is a key part of who we are, and within the organisational environment, the more skilled

individuals, it appears, reap the greatest rewards, achieving promotion, status and improved salary quicker than others due to what are often seen as successful outcomes.

Lily claimed, “I can get people to do things that they didn’t even know they wanted to do” (Lily UN). One has to consider whether Lily’s persuasive behaviour would be seen in a positive light and lead to greater trust and collaboration within the team.

I wanted to spend some time exploring team roles and, in particular, how people behaved when they came together since better understanding should lead to better outcomes. In order to do this, I am going to reflect on Berne’s work, which can still be used today to identify the roles people play when in a team environment. In the 1950s, Eric Berne developed the theory of transactional analysis (TA), which focuses on how we relate and communicate with others, offering suggestions and interventions that will enable us to change and grow. Basically, Berne proposed that when two people meet and communicate, there is a transaction between them, in which the former speaks, sending a stimulus, and the latter reacts, sending a response. TA examines that transaction. In the early 20th century, Freud established that the human psyche is multi-faceted and that we all have warring factions in our subconscious or ego states, which he named Id, Ego and Superego. Berne (1964) claimed that when we communicate, we do so from one of those subconscious ego states, either as Parent, Child or

Adult. The Parent is our ingrained voice of authority, the Child our internal reactions to external events and the Adult our ability to think calmly and react to data received. Berne contended that effective transactions must be complementary. So if the stimulus is Parent to Child, the response must be Child to Parent. Otherwise crossed transactions occur and these lead to communication problems and disharmony (Berne 1950).

So, considering the concepts of TA and the three ego states of Parent, Adult and Child, how the individual team members communicate with one another, whether their transactions complement each other or are crossed, could impact either negatively or positively on the team and effect strategic decision-making.

Understanding how people interact could help improve team performance. Another issue to consider is how the team may be influenced by an individual's behaviour, resulting in a state described by Kets De Vries (2011:6) as "folie a deux¹", which is "a regularly occurring phenomenon in organisations and can be considered one of the hazards of leadership". This is the notion that the thoughts of one person can have a profound effect on the whole group, leading to what can be described as almost a delusional state, wherein losing touch with the immediate reality of the organisation's environment, "subordinates will,

¹ Folie a Deux: acting out your superior's fantasies –potentially leading to delusional beliefs transferred from one individual to another. (shared madness)

on occasion, willingly participate in even irrational decisions without challenging what is happening” (Kets De Vries 2011:6). Thus, understanding how we behave as an individual is important, but equally so is understanding how we behave as a team as the consequences of our decision-making and actions can and do have a profound effect on the organisation and those within it.

However, in order to be a team, there has to be a ‘we’, a sense of belonging. Haslam et al. (2011: 45) claim that in the prevailing approaches to leadership, there are also unresolved issues, and they suggest that, “leadership is not just a relationship between leaders and followers. It is a relationship between leaders and followers in a social group”. This ‘social group’ then begins to form an identity and adopt behaviours that are acceptable and agreeable to those within, who are part of the ‘we’. However, if the group is only connecting for a limited time and team members are, therefore, functioning very much as individuals, it is probable the team will be seen as dysfunctional. In fact, what is not being recognised is that this is not a team or a social group and, due to their individual roles in the organisation, they are socially affiliated with another part of the organisation.

In an earlier chapter, I discussed the notion of emotional intelligence, exploring this from an individual perspective. However, one can see how emotional intelligence within the team could play a key role. Barczak et al. (2010:335), when researching team creativity, found “both

individual and team emotional intelligence enhance a team's ability to communicate with one another, to be receptive to diverging opinions and to utilize emotion to improve team decision-making".

The notion of team emotional intelligence and how people behave and communicate appears to impact on team performance and seems to be emerging as key in making a team more aligned. Barczak et al. (2010) suggest that team emotional intelligence will promote team trust, which in turn will foster a collaborative culture that enhances team creativity.

Exploring the concept of team emotional intelligence further, one can see how the theoretical framework and hypotheses Barczak et al. (2010) have used to determine this suggest a team that spends a great deal of their time together as a team. Therefore, this team is their primary team, whereas the top teams within the organisations I have researched often only come together on an infrequent basis. The top team, therefore, is their secondary team, and thus the notion of developing a collaborative culture, through shared emotional intelligence, could be problematic as once the team members disperse and go back into their individual silos and roles within the organisation, the potential for creativity has gone. So, in this instance, trust and collaboration develop through recognition of behaviour and acceptance that behaviour will change in the different teams.

I found some of the interviewees were very open about their behaviour and acutely aware of how they were behaving and the impact of their

behaviour. "Being aware of what triggers emotions, erm... I think helps you actually manage yourself, manage the environment, erm... helps you do your job. Although there can be a dark side if you use it in a manipulative way, but the upside is incredibly important" (Walter NHS)

Walter has been in a senior management position for a number of years and worked with several different chief executives and teams in that time. Having spent time talking with him, I found that Walter was incredibly concerned about how he was perceived by the team and often used his subordinates to check out that he was doing okay. "I am supportive of my staff, and they are honest with me. I think they do have a great deal of trust in me and would quickly say if they thought I was going in a different direction. I do though often ask them" (Walter NHS). It would appear that Walter is aware of his surroundings and how his behaviour impacts upon it.

George revealed that he took the opposite stance to Walter when he said, "I am not really interested in what is going on around me. It seems to be all game playing and politics. I say my bit and then leave" (George LA). I am unsure if this was about a lack of emotional intelligence or whether George was someone who just did not engage at any level. Lily, however, was very aware of her behaviour and worried about it. She expressed her concern thus, "I don't like conflict. I can tell when someone is not happy, and I will try to mediate, unlike some of my other colleagues, who don't seem to care about the impact" (Lily UN).

Good emotional or team intelligence does have benefits. Research, particularly into transformational leadership, often highlights that leaders of successful teams are 'in tune'. Therefore, one could assume that leaders benefit if their feelings, moods and emotions play a central role in how they lead. It is unclear whether this is due to emotional intelligence or common sense, but what does appear to happen is that those who are in tune develop a wider trust base across the organisation.

Top Management Teams and Organisational Trust

A further area of discussion in the interviews was the impact top teams could potentially have on organisational trust. I discussed this in the last chapter, looking at the wider environment. The next part of this chapter is a reflection and interpretation of the data from discussion of their roles within the top management team and how they could potentially impact on how trustworthy the organisation is then perceived.

I began by trying to understand trust in top management teams and looked to the literature for information and guidance. When looking into trust in organisations, Rickards and Clark (2006) put forward two platforms of understanding. From that of Dirks and Ferrin, it is possible to see how individuals' vulnerabilities play out in high or low trust relationships, whilst from Giddens', trust emerges as a consequence of conditions of modernity. Dirks and Ferrin's views on trust are based on

‘the relationship-based perspective’, which focuses on the followers, and ‘the character-based perspective’, which focuses on the leader’s character, thus allowing the vulnerabilities of individuals in high or low trust relationships to be seen. Anthony Giddens considers trust a social necessity under conditions of modernity and examines trust from a sociological perspective. He concludes that leaders who “give preference to empowerment over control” and who accept the “leader’s vulnerability to the values and needs of others within the organisational group” may be better at developing the trust basis for leadership as trust is seen as an essential ingredient within most organisations (Rickards and Clark 2006:145). I found this notion of trust-based leadership resonated when discussing trust with the participants.

“I have one hundred percent trust in my staff. I just let them get on with things” (Hugh LA). Hugh had the utmost confidence in his team. He believed that they were honest at all times, and his experience to date had proved this to be the case. What I was not able to get a sense of, which would have been helpful, was how his staff felt and whether the feeling was mutual, whether they trusted him as much as he, apparently, trusted them.

“My staff trust me as I am a bit of a Babelfish² in that I translate management speak, so my staff can understand me and, therefore they

² Babelfish is a character from Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy who was a translator of languages.

trust what I say and do" (Walter NHS). Walter felt that being able to communicate in a language which all his staff understood was key to developing a trustworthy environment. His view was simply that staff who clearly understood the direction of travel of the organisation were able to influence and shape it.

"I feel confident to be vulnerable in the sense I may not always agree with my staff but I trust them" (Sue UN). For Sue, being able to openly express how she felt to her staff was an important aspect of building trust. Her view was simply that she was human and, therefore, prone like everyone else, to insecurities.

Lynne was concerned about stabilising the organisation after a period of change. She thus felt that, "One of the key issues we need to look at over the coming months is how we build trust and confidence in the organisation" (Lynne UN).

Henry reflected on what he perceived as being a state of organised chaos and was concerned that he would be seen by those within the organisation as not knowing what he is doing. "I am trying to be consistent in an environment where there is a complete lack of clarity and a lot of difficulty in managing it" (Henry LA).

One could see the how organisational trust could be important in how the organisation is perceived by those both within and those externally.

The challenge would be then to maintain trust. Galford and Seibold Drapeau (2002:147) point out that, "In organisations where various departments reside in their own silos, there's a good chance that trust silos exist as well". As the people involved in this research all had individual roles and directorates in which they resided, breaking down the silos in order to achieve cohesion would always be a challenge. However, as organisational trust is seen as important, acknowledging the challenges could potentially lead to opportunities for the TMT members in their roles as strategic leaders. As this research unfolded and the individual roles became more of a focus, the notion that TMTs are not really teams but groups of individuals who come together for an infrequent and limited period of time emerged. This next part of the chapter discuss if TMTs are indeed real.

Are Top Management Teams a Myth?

'Team at the top' is a badly misused term that does not indicate what the team can accomplish and what and how they need to work in order to function. There is little doubt that many senior executives become frustrated in their efforts to form a team. The comments made by the participants regarding the coping strategies they had developed confirm this. All too often the top team members feel that not enough gains are made for the effort they put in, and the rest of the organisation often perceives the senior group as not really working together as a team. Katzenbach (1997), in his exploration of top management teams, found

that although the team's primary purpose is to shape the strategic priorities of the organisation, what normally happens is that, "The CEO chairs the meetings, controls the agenda and gains support for decisions from members" Katzenbach (1997:84). This supports the idea that this is a group of individuals who come together for a specific purpose rather than a top management team.

Beyerli (1998:2) argues that the concept that teams could be instituted in any work situations has been refuted within a fair amount of the literature. He describes the work conditions which must be in place in order for a team to function as a team, namely, the group is a focal point that must be aligned and cohesive and it must perceive itself as a team and be perceived by outsiders as a team. He concludes by pointing out that there are a lot of work situations where such conditions simply do not exist. If this was recognised, our understanding of 'top managers' and what their roles should be might change. It might lead to a better understanding so we could explore different ways of these groups coming together, which may deliver better outcomes or solutions. Perhaps, however, the concept of a team at the top is so ingrained in our governance and structures that it would be difficult to envisage anything else.

Hambrick (1994) suggests top management teams may be unable to collaborate and puts forward the notion that such teams are 'merely a constellation of executives'. His views on this are based on an

awareness that these individuals differ from others in the organisation, and he goes on to cite several ways in which they are different, for example: they can cope with vague, competing and complex operations; each heads a significant sub-organisation; they are often achievement-orientated; and they prefer quite a bit of autonomy. These are not characteristics one would normally associate with team players but could lead to the concept of a 'non-team', and according to Katzenbach (1997) better fit the power structure of top management teams.

The research data produced a number of themes, which I explored earlier. During this exploration, I began to reflect on whether there is such a thing as a top team. I asked whether the whole idea of team values, norms and roles apply or whether what happens is that a group of individuals come together in order to influence and shape what is in their power. This is a relatively short term function, with them returning back into their silos at the end of the meeting, despite leadership training programmes and team building sessions. What appears not to be understood is what a top team actually is. Can we describe one, is there a vision of a top team or are we trying to achieve utopia based on out-dated concepts?

A plethora of books and articles based on research have been written about top teams, the value of teams and how to develop a high performing team within an organisation. Furthermore, a great deal of time and many resources have been invested in seeking to obtain a

successful team, with varying degrees of success. However, if a top team is in fact a group of managers who come together for a very short period of time and is transient in nature, trying to impose team dynamics could be unrealistic and may not lead to the desired outcome. Katzenbach (1997:86) reflects on the notion of the “all my direct reports” fallacy, stating that, “Top-level executives are chosen because their individual capabilities and experiences qualify them for extremely demanding primary responsibilities. Team challenges at the top seldom require the particular mix of skills represented by CEO’s direct reports, and such challenges do not usually take clear priority over the individual executives’ formal responsibilities”, recognising that these people are employed to undertake specific roles within their own directorate while at the same time being required to work as a top team. Blanchard (2010:167) argues that, “Teams fail for a number of reasons, from lack of clear purpose, to lack of training. Teams are a major investment of time, money and resources.” Clearly, we need to begin to recognise their individual roles and what is entailed in being a member of a so called ‘top team’.

Experience shows that the answer to team failure is to remove the so-called ‘dysfunctional member’ and re-invest in training programmes. However, perhaps it would be better if there were recognition that this group of individuals only comes together for a limited period of time and to understand the team members’ roles, how they connect and what is in their gift to achieve. This would allow for a more trusting and

honest relationship between the members of the top teams as there would be a greater sense of what their individual roles are and what the purpose of the team coming together is. Importantly, there would be recognition of the inter-connectivity they have with each other and across the organisation. Within my research, some recognised this need to connect. However, across all the interviews, the norm was a lack of recognition of connectivity. This was played out in the various displays of behaviour, from coping strategies being designed to game playing to different rules of engagement, depending on the leadership style of the individuals. And yet all had been employed to manage a specific area because of the skills and abilities they brought to bear.

The notion of connectivity and how individuals behave was explored with the interviewees, and while some really believed in the idea of 'becoming a real and trusted team', others had very different views and recognised that some of their behaviour might not make a positive contribution to the team. Jim, when reflecting on how his own behaviour potentially impacted on the team, said, "I think I am a maverick. I don't think people would entirely trust me to behave in a way which would compliment the team" (Jim NHS).

I keep referring to this notion of being connected, or connectivity, as it comes out more and more when seeking to understand the concept of a top team. But what is connected leadership? I have taken a definition used by Gobillot (2007:15), "connected leadership is the ability to

channel the vitality of the 'real' organization towards the delivery of the 'formal' organization's objectives. The 'real' organization is made up of the networks of relationships people have within (and outside) the 'formal' organization". This notion of teams who connect and then disconnect became a more prominent thought as I began to analyse the data. This led me to consider the team as more of a 'transient team' as they only came together at a specific time to undertake specific actions, and from this came a recognition of their individual roles. What had not been considered was how they behave at the moment of connection and then when they disconnect as well as how this impacts on the organisation as they returned to their own division and individual role and functions.

The data highlighted a number of behaviours that took place during this time of connectivity. Looking at these in the previous chapter, I established a number of what I termed 'coping strategies'. What I did not cover in detail was how the team members behaved with subordinates, although some of the discussion that took place began to give an indication of this. When reflecting on communicating with his subordinates, Henry said, "In any large organisation there are tensions, but that is always true between layers; but with my own team, I think they understand where I am coming from" (Henry LA).

On the same topic, Walter said, "First of all, I accept responsibility for the action of all my staff, so if something goes wrong, the buck stops

with me. I don't believe that any one of my staff sets out to do something wrong, but they are clear I will support them" (Walter NHS). Walter felt this showed him in a caring and supportive role, and when I explored the potential for staff to see this as controlling, he did not agree at all. "My staff know I am there for them, I am very laid back" (Walter NHS). Despite further debates on how this could be seen as controlling, Walter was adamant he was supported and that I should ask his staff to verify this. I did not have the time, but it would have been interesting to find out.

Anna was very clear about her role with her subordinate team, confident in their ability to undertake their roles fully, "I am a leader who works with people and through people. I recognise I am not a doer of anything. I am the conductor of an orchestra of some very talented players" (Anna UN). These statements are a reflection of how these top managers interact with their followers. They take a strong view that they are the leader of the group and are clear about their expectations and how they interact.

Gobillot (2007:12) thought being connected was important, "If you are a leader you will fail. If you're not a leader you've already fallen. It's all about being connected". Most of the leadership literature focuses on the formal authority of organisational structures and fails to take into account the 'real organisation' or the individual's role within the organisation. This is described by Gobillot as the powerful network of

informal relationships. Reflecting on history, Gobillot (2007:14) uses this as evidence of powerful leaders who failed because they did not recognise the change in context. He goes on to reflect upon the strange paradox of leadership and how leaders, often through internalising, miss what is going on around them, stating, “while trying to spot and adapt to changing events, leaders run the risk of missing a change in era”.

This notion of connectivity and disconnection fits with the flow and ebb of top management teams as their days are often focused on their areas of direct control and, therefore, the concern has to be that at the moment of connection, i.e. directorate meetings, their focus may be elsewhere. Gobillot (2007) explores the concept of a ‘new breed of customer’ and what he calls the ‘people economy’ “requiring leaders who are connected and fully engaged in order to respond to the changes they sense (whether or not these fall within their remit)” Gobillot (2007:15).

The concept of a connecting and disconnecting team and the recognition of individual roles leads to further consideration of the notion of trust and how essential it is within a team. It is debatable whether or not it is wise to invest time and energy trying to build trust in a team that spends so little time together. The next part of this chapter explores this area further.

Is trust essential in Top Management Teams?

The emerging data has led me more and more towards a conclusion that the notion of a top team is built on organisational requirements and structure. It is a concept embedded in our history as one can see that there has always been a group of individuals deemed as the upper echelons and, therefore, through status, role and power, as the leaders of the organisation. Having people who are accountable and responsible is not wrong; however, what needs to be considered is the role the individuals have and the recognition that they are not a 'team' as such but a group of individuals who come together to deliberate corporate initiatives and seek to agree a direction of travel for the organisation.

Starting from the basis of a team that is transient changes how they need to connect and also potentially impacts on the trust within the group. So let's reflect on the notion of trust within a top management team. The academic writings all suggest the importance of trust and, to be fair, the members of the top management team see trust as important. But is the trust more about 'I trust you to do your job' rather than an all consuming need that we have to trust each other in order to be a team? When exploring this concept of trust within the current teams, some of the participants' statements reflected this view.

Reflecting on the notion of trust within the team, Hugh said, "I don't think it is universal in all relationships. For example, I trust them to do that which is essentially in their job description" (Hugh LA).

Henry also felt there was trust but expressed this feeling thus, "there is almost a tension of trust. Yes, we have trust in each other's abilities, but we would not want to trust ourselves in an emotional sense" (Henry LA). Jim, however, felt that there are varying degrees of trust, "There are different levels of trust, and it will vary between members; sometimes one person will trust more than another person" (Jim NHS). When I asked if trust was important, Ruth said, "Yes, because it helps with being open and allows for honesty as a team" (Ruth UN). Reflecting on the importance of trust, Steve said, "It is very important actually as I know people who I have worked with who I have not trusted, and I have been very particular about how I interact with them" (Steve PS).

The above is just a sample of the interviewees thoughts on trust. There was a consensus that trust is important not only to this group of individuals but to the organisation as a whole. If trust or trustworthiness is an important variable within top management teams, one has to ask how can relationships within a team that is transient be developed in order to create the right environment to achieve elements of trust when they come together. If we recognised and accepted the transient nature of these groups and their individual roles, perhaps it would be easier to put forward a framework for trust.

Exploring this notion of developing and maintaining trust in work relationships, Lewicki et al. (1996) argue that consideration needs to be given to the changing environment in which these relationships are formed. With a move towards new alliances and partnerships, there is a new emphasis on trust in the professional relationship. However, as most work focuses on trust developing in close personal relationships, how trust can be developed within a working relationship is an area that needs investigating. Addressing this, Lewicki et al. (1996) suggest that three types of trust operate within any relationship:

- Calculus (deterrence) based trust. This involves consistency of behaviour, so individuals will do what they say they are going to do, and uses a metaphor of snakes and ladders, so progress is made by climbing the ladder slowly.
- Knowledge based trust. This is grounded in predictability, relies on information and develops over time. It uses a metaphor of gardening, so tilling the soil year after year to understand and learn what will grow.
- Identification based trust. Here, parties effectively understand and appreciate each others' wants and can act for each other. It uses a metaphor of harmonising, so people learn how to use their voices to sing in harmony.

This framework allows for trust to develop sequentially. As the relationships change, so do the levels of trust. Lewicki et al. (1996) extended the framework and replaced deterrence based trust with calculus based trust, agreeing with the concept of linking the levels so

achievements at one level enable trust to develop on the next. This model is based on the notion of no history and, therefore, no previous reputations to overcome. Although this team will have a history, due to it being transient and coming together infrequently, the relationship is potentially developing, so understanding these three types could help with the development of a 'trust base' for our TMT team.

Taking this thinking a step further, rather than them moving levels, perhaps it would be acceptable for them to sit within knowledge-based trust thus allowing them to trust they will have enough knowledge to develop a general expectancy of behaviour as they will be able to reasonably predict how another colleague would behave or react. This could be extremely useful in developing training programmes for a TMT since it acknowledges their individual role as well as their role as a team member.

The overall consensus appears to be that trust in teams is important, just as it is within any relationship; the challenge is gaining trust and maintaining it. One only has to reflect back on history to see the importance of trust. For example, Shakespeare made reference to trust when describing Richard III's downfall. Through his own behaviour he managed to alienate all around him, leading him to fight his last battle on his own. In concluding with this phrase, 'My Kingdom for a horse' Shakespeare demonstrates the futility of Richard's ambition.

Considering all these factors leads one to the conclusion that trust for this team is important within their individual roles, but when they are part of the TMT, trust is not essential for them to function.

During this research, as the individual role began to develop further, a number of the participants raised the coping strategies they used as a TMT member and also took into their individual role. These coping strategies are discussed next.

Team Members and the Development of Coping Strategies

One of the interesting areas within this research was seeking to understand the team members' behaviours because they came together so infrequently and were not really in the purest sense of the word a team at all times. A number of interesting themes emerged around what I describe as 'coping strategies' or 'rules of engagement'. All the participants have a senior role within a public sector environment. Each of them, as well as being a member of the identified 'top team', is an individual director of their own specialist service area, with its own hierarchy and functions, and they have different lengths of service as a senior manager. Thus, their daily and primary role is to lead their own directorate. However, at a given time, they come together in a secondary role to determine the direction of the organisation as a whole and to make some key strategic decisions.

When these individuals come together as the Corporate Management Team (CMT) or Senior Management Team (SMT), a number of behaviours appear to manifest as a kind of self protection occurs. These are then carried forward into the team members' own directorates, where only a small and trusted few may see the 'real' person. So what is behind the lack of trust that leads to this behaviour? Possibly it is the feeling that they are not really a team in which trusting relationships have developed. As I analysed the data, the evidence began to suggest team members who do not entirely trust each other as the team is only together for a limited period of time to carry out a specific function. Therefore, they had not developed relationships as would a team who are together with a long term team goal and a level of interdependency.

The following are some interesting statements made when discussing how as individuals they behaved within the top management team. These are interesting as they give an insight into how individuals have either developed or learned to cope within these 'teams'.

Charles could see a different agenda developing outside of the top team, where he felt able to share what he really thought about key issues with those of a similar view. "You may have to do a different approach. You may have to build that one-to-one relationship with one or two individuals, err... sort of behind closed doors" (Charles LA).

“What I have noticed is that people cover their backs, play games, play to the gallery, making sure the boss knows when they are being fantastic and hiding when they are not. This is not my style, so I prefer to keep my own counsel” (Lily UN). I explored this notion of keeping her own counsel a bit more with Lily; in particular I wanted to know if this meant her engagement was limited. “No, I still engage, but I do recall a mentor of mine saying to me that the higher you ascend in management the more you will have to draw upon the well that is yourself” (Lily UN). Discussing this more, Lily revealed she was selective with her engagement, ensuring she had all the facts before making her contribution to the group. I wondered if being this selective could result in ineffective interaction. Discussing this, Herb et al. (2001: 6) say, “Many management teams pay lip service to the importance of interaction but foster a working style that inhibits candid communication and collaboration”.

Being able to interact with each other should lead to better outcomes. However, Herb does not acknowledge the transient nature of this group, and although he puts forward a suggestion of spending one day each month together, this is what happens now for top teams in the public sector, and there may be a danger of trying to “shoehorn a group of top-level executives into a team?” (Katzenbach 1997:84). It may be necessary to consider a different approach to enable this ‘group’ to function and achieve its potential. I will follow up on this thought a bit more later as I want to further consider some of the so-called ‘coping

strategies' and the behaviours members of the top team adopt when at work.

Sue had a great deal to say on how she behaves and copes with the role. The following are her reflections in response to how she works with her peers. She also reflects on how she carries this behaviour beyond the team.

"I think your behaviour has to be consistent. I think you have to be physically robust. I think you have to be emotionally robust and you can't have an off day. From the minute you get up in the morning to the minute you leave you have to be what I would call on high energy. Your antenna needs to be able to pick up what the vibe is. Erm...I always go around with a smile on my face so the people I manage will think everything is okay. I had a colleague once who came to me and asked if I was, erm... okay as I had not been myself. They thought I look worried and therefore the message to staff is they need to worry. So I have learned that I have to wear a mask. You have to act a certain part and play the part very well, play a role" (Sue UN).

What Sue is saying here is typical of what the interviewees were reflecting in regards to how they sought to behave in order to portray an image. In relation to this, Anna said, "You've got to be seen to deliver. I have seen what happens to those who make mistakes or don't deliver" (Anna UN). She went on to explain, "One of the things I don't think I

understood is that, you know of the things that you get at the top, is you get every little problem, mostly HR, and that people can be really horrible, and I am just staggered at how horrible people can be" (Anna UN). Experiencing such negativity had obviously impacted on her thoughts and ultimately how she interacted with her colleagues.

Hugh, however, who had been a senior manager for a long time, recognised the importance of trying to maintain relationships and keep lines of communication as open as possible, saying, "Avoid making enemies of anyone; it is surprising who turns up in the future, and I use my personality to create a sense of direction and momentum" (Hugh LA). Hugh did share that he was in the main a very private person, so he was conscious of how well people would be able to get to know him. He did, however, say, "I find it difficult to fall out with people. I don't quite know why. Perhaps I am willing to give a little more for a greater cause". I think Hugh felt that by behaving in this way he was able to influence, "I like shaping and running the ideas. I am quite competitive with ideas". Hugh had recently written a paper describing the management roles, which had largely been accepted without much challenge from his peers, and he felt this was down to his persuasive personality.

Steve's view was that it was necessary to "be confident about where you want to go. You may need to be evangelical. I may not be perfect or right, but I have a view that I am as good as the others. Err... what I find

is that all people can tell a great tale, but if you dig, there are always bodies buried. We just need to be honest about it" (Steve PS).

Although these behaviours could be viewed as somewhat manipulating, what I truly felt when talking with all of the interviewees was more a recognition of the need to survive. There was a clear understanding that as the 'top team' they were under the scrutiny of their sub-ordinates and the organisation and that how they behaved would have an impact, either positive or negative. Herb et al. (2001:6) suggest that the behaviour of the top team has an impact on the organisational culture, "Because the top team's conduct is mimicked lower down in the organization, that this kind of behaviour can come to pervade it". Garratt (2003: xxviii) used the metaphor of "the fish rotting from the head" in order to describe how the impact of a dysfunctional top team has an effect throughout the organisation. He is of a view that directors who are often members of the top team "have not been through the training, induction or inclusion process necessary in order to make the transition from managers to direction-givers". This reflects some of my early discussion wherein it was stated that most of the top team members are there simply because of their status and role within the organisational hierarchy. Whether they have the skills and talents to lead becomes almost irrelevant.

This notion was raised in the research into top teams undertaken by Herb et al. (2001: 7), who found that, "senior managers usually work without a safety net and, frequently, without a second chance. Among

executives surveyed, 80 percent believed that they had the necessary skills to fulfil their role, but only 30 percent believed that all their colleagues did". No one can deny this is a tough job, but understanding better how they work together when they work together could lead to a more informed training programme.

Summary

This chapter has sought to explore further the notion of a top management team and to determine if the concept of a cohesive top management team really does exist. The conclusions lead to the concept of a group of individuals who come together in order to fulfil a task or role. In particular, I explored the notion of connectivity and disconnect as well as the importance of each individual's role. Trust, it seems, is important and recognised by those in the upper echelons of the organisation, but it does not need to be all-consuming. Rather, an understanding develops of how the team members work together using different methods in order to meaningfully engage with their peer group. What this exploration into transient teams did raise was the importance of role orientation and how this could conflict with the role of being a member of a top team.

The emerging data raised a number of issues, which I have sought to reflect on further within this chapter to try to seek an overarching conclusion on what the data is saying. The more this is reflected on, the

more there is a need to consider that the whole concept of teams and team behaviours is a complex one. The individual's role within the organisation will impact on whether they view themselves as a member of a team or not. Although the participants recognise the value of trust and leading effectively, there is also recognition that they have distinct individual roles and responsibilities within the organisation, which may sometimes conflict with their role in the top management team.

Based on the data, I would suggest that top management teams do not really function as one would describe a team comprised of people linked by a common purpose functioning, conducting tasks that are high in complexity and have many interdependent subtasks.

There is a need to consider how their individual roles impact on their corporate one. There is also a need to understand how to derive the most benefit from their coming together for both the individual and the organisation.

When reflecting on leadership and trust as well as the effect and impact of trust, all saw this as an important aspect of their role and recognised the need to both develop and maintain trust, though they also were aware of the fragility of trust within their organisations.

I began to consider that this is, in reality, a transient team that comes together as a group but has members with clearly defined individual

roles within the organisation, and this is a key factor that appears to be overlooked. If that is the case, then how we develop leaders needs to be reconsidered in order to achieve both the individuals' and group's full potential at the moment of connection, with an acknowledgement that it is when there is a connection that a desired outcome could be achieved but that this stage will require different rules of engagement in order for the team to function effectively as the time together will be limited. Therefore, trust and how decisions are made within a top team will become a key determinant of how individuals behave. Zand (1997:90) claims that, "Leaders express their trust through three elements: information, influence and control". Zand's view of trust and the decision-making process is based upon the group accepting mutual influence, sharing information and accepting that the level of individual control will be reduced in order to deliver the outcomes.

Some key learning from this research could be of benefit both organisationally and academically and could help improve leadership development programmes, which might incorporate the notions of individual roles as well as connectivity and disconnect.

The next chapter is a reflection of the data, which leads to a number of conclusions and then the overarching conclusion from this research. This is followed by the proposal of ideas related to both professional and academic leadership development.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusions of the Research

Introduction

At the onset of this research, I wanted to explore the concept of top management teams and how they lead in order to gain a better understanding of these teams within the public sector. I also had a number of hunches from my own pre-understanding and experiences of being a member of a top management team, all of which I wanted to test out.

From my professional experience:

- Teams at the top are essential
- They work as one and are cohesive
- Trusting each other is a core requirement
- Anyone can be a top team member with the right support

From academic literature:

- Leadership is important
- Teams outperform individuals
- Leading in a complex organisation is a shared activity
- Emotion and emotional intelligence have key role

The data from this research led to the emergence of an interesting number of themes on the notion of top teams, in particular, leadership, behaviour, communication, individual roles and the importance or irrelevance of trust. I undertook this research using a hermeneutic approach, allowing the data to lead me, and I therefore identified further themes, such as strategic leadership, team roles and responsibilities, behaviour, communication and connectivity.

Each of the chapter summaries led to conclusions, and it is these that I have drawn upon when reflecting back over the research in order to arrive at the following five conclusions: top management teams are 'transient' groups; the concept of a 'top management team' is somewhat a myth; trust, although important, is not necessary within a top team; and individual roles are not acknowledged. The above conclusions led to a final conclusion, which is that top management teams leading in a different way.

A key element of the findings is that there is a need to undertake a fundamental re-appraisal of the notion of top management teams and in particular the training of such teams. The research I have undertaken leads, I believe, to an alternative understanding of top management teams and why they behave the way they do.

I would boldly say that acknowledging that top management teams are not in fact teams is a fundamental first step to truly understanding them

and, more importantly, that consideration of the individual role of team members should figure within future research on top teams. The notion that the individual role of team members is their primary function has been neglected to a large extent, as is evident in my review of the current academic literature on top management teams, wherein very little reference to this area was found.

Concluding the chapters

In my first chapter, I introduced the subject area of top management teams. I began by discussing my hunches about these teams, which were based on both my knowledge of the service and my views on top management teams from outside of the organisation. I then reflected on leading in the public sector from a personal perspective. I also introduced the participants, recognising the different organisations they worked for and the gender mix. I aimed to compare and contrast the organisations and also to identify any differences between the male and female leaders.

I concluded that although there are differences between public and private organisations' environments, the skills required to lead within both appear to be the same. Leadership universally requires understanding and knowledge of the environment in order to develop the strategic direction, to adapt style, to motivate employees and to encourage followers. There is apparently no real difference whether that

leader is male or female. However, what was interesting was that the all female team had similar traits and behaviour to the all male team, so there was a dominant force and clear roles within the group, whereas the mixed group appeared to be more cohesive and leadership roles were shared. This was interesting as empirical evidence suggests that women make better transformational leaders, although there are still conflicting conclusions (Rickards and Clark 2006) and my study suggests that there is little difference between teams.

Chapter two was an exploration of the literature on top teams, leadership and trust. This started with a general overview of teams. I then focused on top management teams, exploring leadership, reflecting on the historical perspective and drawing comparisons with some of Shakespeare's characters for added interest. I then narrowed the focus, discussing trust and its formation, effect and impact. An interesting conclusion here was that trust between the team members is not essential despite it being seen as important by organisations and individuals. Indeed, the plethora of research on trust and trustworthiness all appears to lead to the conclusion that it is important, and some have even gone as far as saying that trust leads to both 'improvements and increased profits' (Covey 2008). However, the data on top management teams indicates that they spend such little time together that building up trust is difficult. What would be more useful is to acknowledge this and work on relationships when the team is connected.

Another area I considered was emotion and how this impacts on being an effective leader, acknowledging and widening emotion to the concept of emotional intelligence and then aligning this to the notion of connectivity. This then led to me considering the role of 'emotion' in top teams, reflecting on Fineman's (2000) views on emotion in organisations and understanding that emotions are a key part of organisational life and a better understanding of this would help our top management teams with relationships.

The literature on public sector management and, in particular, new public management, was then reviewed, with a focus on how public management had evolved. Here I explored culture, behaviour and how the impact of government can affect how people lead. I concluded by reflecting on the ethos of both the private and public sectors, acknowledging that although similar skills are required in both, the organisational environment impacts on what is deemed to be a successful outcome. I compared the public sector, which is often about making a difference, with the private sector, which may also seek to achieve the same but aims to make a profit in doing so, and I reflected on how this difference impacts on decision making within organisations. I concluded that all organisations had top management teams and therefore that the outcomes found in this study would also be relevant within a private sector organisation. It would be interesting to carry out further research into this to test my conclusion.

Chapter 3 described the research design of this thesis, explaining what I did and why. The research methodology, hermeneutics and the chosen method of interviews were highlighted and justified. I also introduced my research question and identified my epistemological and ontological stance. This was important in order for the reader to understand the research design choices I had made and why these were appropriate.

Chapter 4 covered the initial interpretation of the data, when a number of themes began to emerge around behaviour, environment and organisational culture, the role of the Chief Executive, communication and language. I took the opportunity to explore these themes in detail and found they led me to explore other areas, such as emotional intelligence, strategic leadership and connectivity and communication. The notion of 'coping strategies' and 'hiding behind the mask' was first raised here. As I wanted to understand this area in depth, the chapter following this allowed for further exploration. I concluded with the thought that the concept of a top management team is not new and that there had been a number of studies undertaken to determine the role, function and ability of top teams. However, the notion of the top management team being a 'transient team' arose. I then explored what this meant in respect of how they worked together and the impact on the organisation and trust. I became more drawn to this view that a top management team was a 'transient team' and concluded that the concept of top teams was somewhat of a myth.

Chapter 5 was a further exploration of the data, in particular some of the key themes that the data had exposed, specifically: emotional intelligence, the use of power, the role of individuals, communication, connectivity, whether trust is relevant and what the purpose of a top team is. I also incorporated the notion of coping strategies. So, within this chapter, I had the opportunity to seek to understand further what the data was saying and to use some of the current thinking from previous literature to debate the issues. In particular, I sought to explore the concept of a 'transient team'. I concluded by suggesting that the research led to the view that top management teams do not really function as one would expect a team to function, that is, as accountable, having shifting leadership roles, providing support and removing barriers. Rather they come together, or connected, at a moment in time in order to achieve an agreed outcome. It is at that moment of connecting that one could describe them as a 'team'. As soon as the task or meeting is concluded when they disconnect and go back to their primary roles, they can no longer be considered a team.

Overarching conclusions

This study has lead to a number of conclusions: top management teams are 'transient groups'; the concept of a top management team is somewhat a 'myth'; trust, although important, is not necessary within a top team; and individual roles are not acknowledged. I am now going to take each one of these conclusions and discuss them further.

Top management teams are transient groups

Within the literature, top management teams are often described as being created by organisations for a specific purpose and to carry out certain functions, and they are often seen as the panacea to the strategic problems of the organisation (Finkelstein et al. 2009). Although the literature highlights the importance of certain individuals in the organisation influencing the actions of others, both individually and collectively, and that how these individuals behave can and does impact on organisational performance (Kits De Vries 2011), what is not given attention is how the individuals within a top team interact on a daily basis. The idea that the individuals within a top team are members of a 'transient team' and that they connect when they need to work together to perform a task and then disconnect thus emerged. The literature and previous research discusses extensively the virtues of top teams, explaining their benefits. However, it is barely recognised that these individuals spend most of their time working as individuals. The individual role of team members is almost ignored, and there is very little academic writing on how this impacts on top team roles. When interpreting the data in Chapter 5, I talked in detail about the individual role and put forward an enhanced model for top management teams, which incorporates this important part of their responsibilities (see page 155).

The concept of a top management team is somewhat a myth

The conclusion that top management teams are transient teams led to the view that in fact the idea of a top team is a myth, since despite efforts made within organisations to establish top teams, many team members become frustrated over the lack of gains made by such teams (Katzenbach 1997). Whilst undertaking this research and reviewing the academic literature on teams and, in particular, teams at the top, I found very little exploration of the concept of these teams not really being teams. In fact, I found the opposite, with many researchers going to great lengths to put forward the virtues of top teams, in particular how structures within organisations are often built around teams of individuals. Despite them not being a solution to everyone's current and future organisational needs, they can and often do represent one of the best ways to deal with the broad-based challenges that face a high-performing organisation.

Nevertheless, my research led to the conclusion that a top management team is not the most effective means of delivering the strategic vision of the organisation. I concluded that a top management team is not a 'team' in the purest sense of the word but rather that it is a transient group comprised of individuals who meet infrequently to undertake a specific job, discuss a problem or debate an issue then return to their individual roles and silo working once the task is completed. So, in essence, one would say they are a 'group' of individuals who meet

infrequently rather than a 'team', and if this were acknowledged, it would lead to a better understanding of what their role and functions are within the organisation and to more realistic expectations of what they can achieve.

Trust, although important, is not necessary within a top management team

The overarching message from the participants is that trust or trustworthiness is important to them as individuals and organisationally. However, there was general consensus amongst members of the top teams that due to the lack of time spent as a team, the opportunities to develop trusting relationships were limited. For example, Hugh highlighted this when he said, "I think erm.. that we need our followers to trust us and our customers. As a top team member I erm... don't think it is necessary to have trust" (Hugh LA). This again I think reflects the nature of the team as a transient group that connects infrequently. Trust often takes time to develop within top management teams when team members spend more time in their individual roles than in their top management team roles. Indeed, further to this, Kets De Vries (2011:53) argues that, "when there is no sense of mutuality among the members of a team, the group soon becomes dysfunctional and suffers from many problems". The literature on top teams and trust suggests that people see trust as important, and it is often cited as a key function of a team (Zand 1997; Bennis 1999). However, I have found that for top

management teams, organisational trust and follower trust is of more importance than trust within the team.

Individual roles are not acknowledged

If one recognises the roles and responsibilities of the members outside the team and acknowledges that their primary focus will be their own directorate as, after all, they are “individually accountable for whatever happens on their watch” (Katzenbach 1997:87). Therefore, if consideration were given to this notion, how the team members interact would change as there would be a level of understanding within the group regarding the need to balance being a team member with running your own part of the directorate. This recognition of the importance of the individual role is critical as this is an area that may have been mentioned in the literature but is often neglected. When you consider that this individual role is one that involves leading, directing and communicating with staff, it is surprising that there is such little acknowledgement or understanding of this issue.

Leading in a different way

I do not dismiss the notion of a group of individuals at the top of the organisational environment as obviously within each organisation there are individuals who have acquired the status of ‘top team member’, normally due to the position they hold within the organisation, who are responsible for the strategic direction of the organisation. Within

academic studies, the notion of top management teams being a “critical success factor, with decisions they make being important determinants of success or failure” is widely accepted (Clark and Maggitti 2011:150). As the research progressed, the concept that top management teams are a ‘myth’ and that, following on from this, a top management team is in fact a transient group began to emerge from the interviews with the participants when I explored leadership and, in particular, their role as a member of a top team and how they communicated and interacted with each other.

The conclusions emerging from the data were interesting as they could potentially lead to a totally different approach to leadership, which could make teams really effective. However, one cannot ignore that the concept of ‘top teams’ has led to the production of a great deal of academic literature, most of which seeks to extol the virtues of the team and has led to an abundance of training courses on team building. Despite the extensive amount of writing on teams, there remain unanswered questions about how the team functions, how the characteristics of the individual team members impact on the team’s success, the processes that are being followed, the environment and how all these impact on organisational performance. What has not been truly recognised is the individual roles of the team members. Although these are often mentioned, there appears to be little consideration of the effect the individuals have on the team. The group members spend

a great deal of their time managing their own directorate, often without influencing or being involved in the so-called top team.

A New Approach to Top Management Teams

So, if we accept that top management teams are a myth and that what we have is a 'transient group', we need to understand how this fits within current leadership theory. I have created a different approach, which I have called 'conjoined leadership', recognising the roles of the individuals whilst also acknowledging their behaviour when they become part of a team and the fact that this group connects and disconnects quite frequently. Therefore, the usefulness of the approach I have suggested is that it recognises both individual and team roles; thus, when a connection is made, there will be different behaviour, but this is acknowledged and seen as a strength, allowing trust to develop as all concerned are clear about their role when connected. If we were to explore this further, it could lead to a review of current team building approaches, particularly for those at the top of the organisation, as rather than trying to 'gel' the team through various activities, all of which have to be re-done each time there is a new member, the focus is on the strengths the team members bring to the team when they connect and on their specific roles within the team in terms of improving organisational performance.

Exploring this model further increases, I believe, clarity and ownership for the individual when they are carrying out their primary role function. They are aware of their role and are accountable as a single leader in delivering the agreed outcomes. This role changes once they move into their group role, where all of the members are accountable and the leadership role changes, as the intention is that the group will draw on the leadership ability of each of its members in order to deliver the desired outcomes.

In their individual role they would be: individually accountable, a formal leader, directive, supportive and participative. Whereas in their group role as a TMT member they would be: mutually accountable, shifting leadership roles, shaping collective outcomes, removing barriers, providing support and defining goals. The novelty of this approach is that it recognises the different roles and behaviour required of individuals when in them and so helps develop an understanding of what the team members' primary function is when they are in their group role but at the same time recognises and acknowledges individual roles.

This research has raised questions around how top management teams perform. It has acknowledged the individual role of team members and strongly suggests the need for this to be considered as a key focus when determining TMT's training and development. It highlights the need to consider mutual accountability and shared leadership when the

members are moving from the role of 'single leader' to 'team member'. It should enable Chief Executives to reflect on how they lead teams of 'single leaders' and how through recognising this they can work towards having a group of skilled and talented individuals who perform within a more honest setting of a 'top group'.

Limitations and future research

This research has raised a number of questions that are worthy of further research, in particular around team building and training techniques. There is still work to be done on the impact of trust on organisational effectiveness as this is recognised as a key element of leadership. There is also a need to look further at gender, particularly if we move to a more connected leadership functionality.

There have been, as with most pieces of research, a number of limitations. Due to time constraints, the sample number was kept to 12 individuals and all were from the public sector. A comparison with a private sector top management team may have added more depth, and it may be interesting to compare the findings from this research on public sector top teams with findings from comparable research in the private sector to determine if there are similarities, particularly around role orientation and the effectiveness of top teams.

Contribution to academic and professional thinking

Introduction

By undertaking this research, I hope to make a useful contribution both in the academic world and professionally. In order for my research and its findings and conclusions to cross over from academia into the professional world and for those who are in top management teams or learning and development functions to understand the issues and benefit from my research, I have attempted to write this thesis in a manner that is accessible to all. I want it to be helpful to those who, like me, have an interest in top management teams and how they lead, but I am aware of this also needing to be a piece of academic work, so there are parts of this thesis which reflect academic thinking and put forward suggestions for consideration.

Academic knowledge

What this research has sought to do and, I think, has achieved is to raise a number of questions around the concept of top management teams in relation to the effect and impact of trust within these teams and importantly has identified what I described earlier as coping strategies, which individuals within teams have devised in order to function. It has gathered some compelling data on the notion of a top management team as a myth, on transient groups and on connectivity and disconnect as key concepts in relation to these teams within large complex organisations. It contributes to academic learning as it offers other

researchers an opportunity to explore further the concept of transient management groups and proposes a new approach to leadership, 'conjoined leadership', a relatively simple concept that can be used to describe leadership behaviour during a moment in the leader's working life. It has also offered a unique opportunity to access top managers, to provide a better understanding of what being a TMT member means and to describe the dilemmas and issues they face.

Professional practice

This research has led to a number of surprising revelations, in particular the notion of how individuals cope within their role, how they perceive trust and view their colleagues and how they try to achieve all of this as well as maintain their own individual roles within, often, large and complex organisations. The findings of this research could influence 'top management teams' and training, acknowledging as it does that the time these teams spend together is limited and therefore that how they work together needs to be given more consideration. So, if we accept and acknowledge the notion of connectivity and disconnect, we can envision a different approach to how these groups of people work together and, ultimately, improve the performance for the organisation. I believe that not only will this affect how we train and learn but also how we recruit. We will have to consider how we recognise and thus recruit future leaders and also whether there should actually be such a thing as a top management team.

From a personal perspective, this research has also given me, as a current member of a TMT, time to reflect on my role, and I have found during this research that I have changed how I lead. I willingly accept now my individual role and seek to offer clarity, reflection and solutions when functioning in my TMT role. This has, I believe, enabled me to be more considered and rounded in my leadership decision-making, aware as I now am of the limitations of my influence as a TMT member but clear on the span of control I have in my individual role. This has helped me to communicate and connect better with my peers.

Summary

I started this research with an interest in top management teams and how they lead. At the very beginning of my DBA studies, the focus was on leadership and trust, but as I undertook my research, I found that TMTs are comprised of individuals with their own roles and identities, which somehow get lost when these individuals become a part of a TMT. My study found that organisations do not always need a 'real team at the top'. A reliance on communication and cohesion amongst members appears to impede organisational performance in settings where the TMT should function as a working group. In contrast, real teams structure their tasks in a way that encourages them to work as one but also spend considerable time talking to each other, building a cohesive team spirit.

As I look back on this journey, I can see how my views and assumptions and the things I took for granted have changed, from my initial perception of what a top management team is to my acknowledgement and recognition of the individual roles of team members, who, despite being at the top of the hierarchy, have the same doubts and misunderstandings as the rest of the members of the organisation. I have learnt about myself and how I should not take everything at face value but rather ask questions and check out assumptions. One of the most profound changes has been how I have become more reflective. I no longer just agree or go with the 'flow' but seek to reflect and offer different alternatives. An example of this is that I persuaded the organisation to change how we engaged with a large staff group, using an appreciative inquiry method in order to better communicate. The methodology has proven so successful that I have been asked to attend the European Social Care Conference and present.

This study makes a valuable contribution to the body of literature on top teams and how they lead, both individually and organisationally, within a public sector organisation. A number of gripping themes emerged, and it is the exploration of these themes that will help both academics and professionals to understand top teams better. This research makes a number of significant contributions, including introducing the concept of a 'transient group', raising awareness that trust is important but not essential and emphasising the importance of the individual role of team

members. All of these areas are worthy of further research in order to improve understanding of top management teams in the public sector. The most salient conclusion is that recognition of the individual role of top management team members would be of benefit to these teams, or transient groups, and thus to the organisation as a whole despite this role barely being acknowledged in the literature.

I now intend to take the knowledge and learning I have acquired throughout this research journey into my Professional life and share it with colleagues.

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Appendix A

Through reflecting on the literature around top teams and my pre-understanding of how top teams tend to operate in public sector, (my hunches) led to a number of sub questions I wanted to ask namely:

- Do top team members view leadership as an important part of the top team function? This question was an opener for them to share their views on leadership.
- How do members of top teams balance their individual role with team accountabilities? This question was to enable to get an understanding if individual roles are recognised and taken into account when decisions are made;
- Is trust an important factor in top teams? This question was to enable me to seek to understand the effect and impact that trust may have on both the individual's ability to lead and the organization's ability to respond; in particular behaviours and cultures;

Appendix B

The following table is how I identified the themes with some commentary to question my own thoughts and taken for granted.

Colour	Theme	Comments/Thoughts
	Behaviour(s)	Trying to understand how individual interacts – aware of their behaviour – do they change in different circumstances?
	Events	Environment what is happening around them?
	Meanings	How do they understand their world – values/norms?
	Participation	Engaged? adaptable? Involved or sit outside?
	Relationships	Effective? Positive?
	Conditions/Constraints	What holds them back?
	Strategies/Practices	What happens in place to cope Game playing?
	Setting	Individual approach different to group approach?