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Common Sense Leadership

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
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Abstract – Common Sense Leadership

The purpose of this thesis is to explore in what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership action?

The thesis takes as a starting point typical dictionary definitions of common sense and moves on to critically review related literature from, Delaney (2001), Gerber (2001), Lissack & Roos (2000), Rausch (2009), Zhao (2009) and gains an appreciation of the different aspects of common sense to understand how the implicit nature of common sense influences leadership actions within the context of a large family owned business.

A description of Common Sense as something 'positive and desirable' (Fulton, 2006) whilst at that same time something taken for granted which offers the prospect of development according to Rausch (2009) and the possibility of an advanced form of Common Sense (Delaney, 2001) or Critical Common Sense (Watson, 2006) is also considered.

The common sense literature is reviewed against the past theories of leadership and using Bryman's (2006) leadership framework the interconnecting elements of both strands of literature are pulled together to form a model of common sense leadership incorporating: trait, style, contingency, and new leadership.

The model of common sense leadership integrates common sense with people management, the character and competence of the leader and the new leadership aspects of transformation, vision, and charisma.

The research is undertaken predominantly using semi structured interviews and building on an 'interpretative and subjective' general analytical inductive methodology, it contributes to both theory and management practice by making more explicit an aspect of leadership often overlooked – a common sense approach.

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1.1 Introduction

“We are like sailors who on the open sea must construct reconstruct their ship but are not able to start a fresh from the bottom... they make use of drifting timber of the old structure, to modify the skeleton and the hull of the vessel. But they cannot put to dock in order to start from scratch, during their work they stay on the structure and deal with the heavy gales and thundering waves”

Otto Neurath

This is the end, or should I say beginning. This thesis has taken considerable time and effort to bring to life. Like the sailors, the journey has been at times challenging, enjoyable, frustrating but never dull. I have learnt so much. I have faced personal storms and at times wanted to give up, but I overcame them. In constructing my ship, I have built a vessel for future development, which will continue to develop and grow as my personal journey continues beyond the realms of this thesis. Thinking back now to how it all started!

I remember sitting in a management meeting in the spring of 2003 and, as the senior management team I was part of discussed the current problems facing the business, one of the mangers said, “if only they had used their common sense, we wouldn’t be in this mess”.

I worked for a company called Bailey Telecom. Bailey Telecom was part of NG Bailey, a large construction-based engineering company. The company were privately owned by the Bailey family. I joined the company in December 1999, as

the HR Director. As part of the Senior Management Team, we faced many challenges, but that meeting in the Spring of 2003 was to leave a lasting legacy.

In the meeting the Team had been discussing a particularly challenging situation.¹ I am not sure why that particular comment sparked my curiosity and interest.

I had started my Doctorate in Business Administration a couple of years earlier. For some time, I had been thinking about the research element of the programme and what I would 'investigate' and wanted to find a research topic, which interested me, as I knew it would take a lot of effort and time to complete the research and I wanted to give myself the best possible chance of success by choosing an area of research I could fully engage with and 'enjoy'.

In recalling my first awareness, what was it about '*it*' that prompted me to make a mental note of '*it*', yet I still do not know why the comment regarding common sense aroused such interest. On reflection, it may have been the way my

¹ Bailey Telecom had been awarded a multi million-pound contract to install security systems for British Telecommunications (BT). The project was high profile and involved teams of engineers visiting each of the 4000 plus BT telephone exchanges across the country to install the security system. The contract was worth about £2 million per annum to the company. As part of the security installation process a special key code had to be programmed into the system. The majority of telephone exchanges are unmanned and, when access is required, the person needing access contacts the central security centre and is given the access code to enable them to enter the exchange. CCTV operators who monitor access remotely oversee the whole process. Unfortunately, the Bailey Telecom installation engineers had not retained the key code information and consequently the information was lost, which meant that the systems were inoperative and needed re-programming. For technical reasons, this meant the company physically re-send an engineer to every exchange and manually re-programme the system. Consequently, this re-work cost the business thousands of pounds in revenue. On investigation, it turned out that the engineers had been told the key codes were not important. The manager's subsequent comments about common sense reflect the manager's frustration at the engineers for not appreciating the importance of keeping the information, something that he (the manager) felt to be common sense.

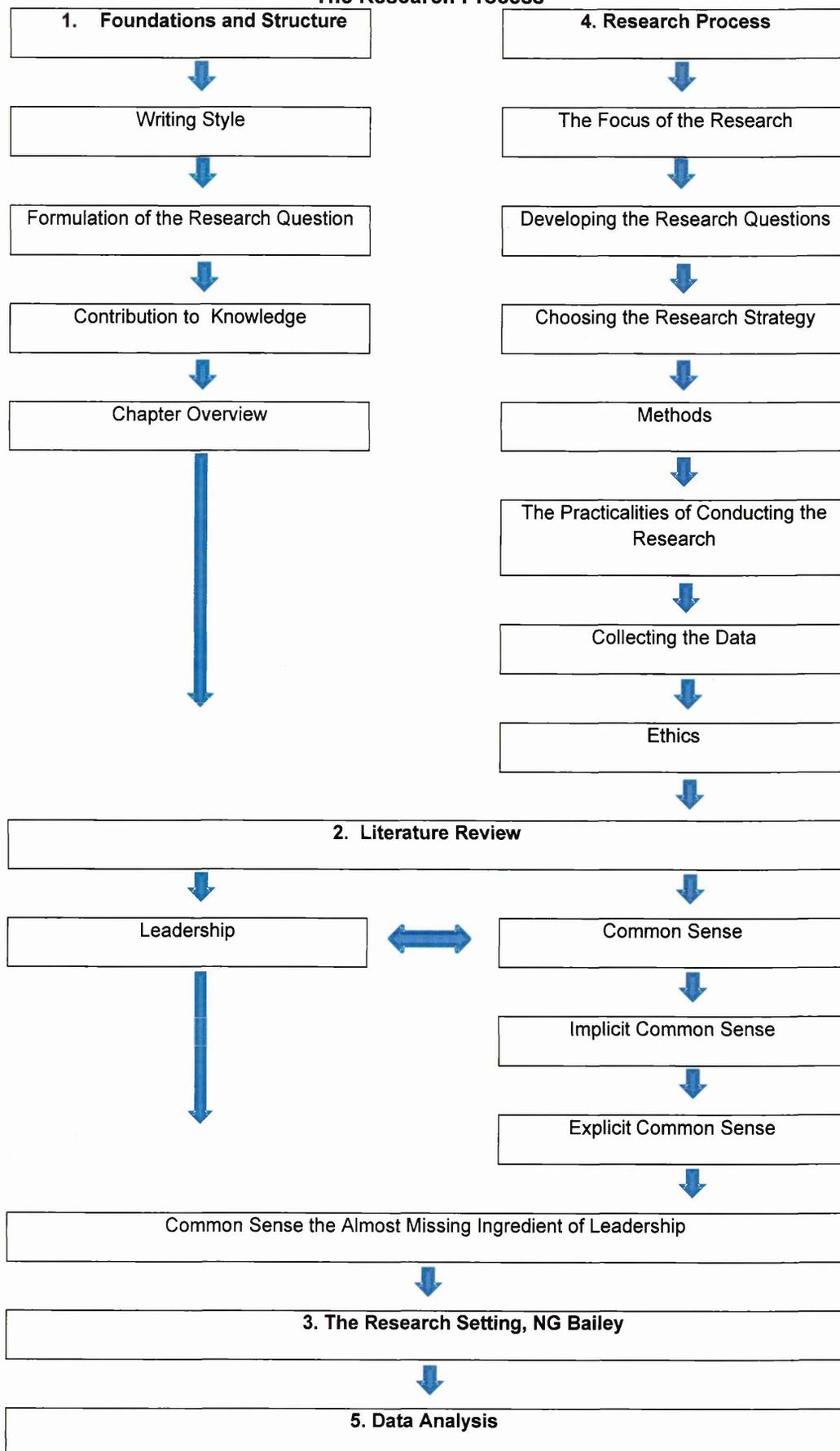
colleague said what he said (he inferred that the people who had not used their common sense were inferior to him and his common sense and that he wouldn't have made such a mistake). But, in attempting to fix a starting point for my research and try to give meaning to the personal experience that prompted my interest in the question: 'in what way might common sense inform leadership actions' I think this is as good a starting point as any.

Additionally, I have always had an interest in leadership, what it takes to be a great leader, and generally believe from a personal perspective that to be a 'good' leader you have to have, and apply common sense. Consequently, from this position of interest and 'unknowing,' I jumped into this 'sea of stimuli', (Gadamer, 1997 p14) (the research process) with no sight of the shore on the other side.

1.2 The Research Process Pathway

To explain the research process I followed I have developed a research process pathway (see Figure 1) it is a simple flow diagram which will be used throughout the thesis to map and sign post the various stages of the research journey. The research pathway will aid the reader as it clearly maps out each stage of the research process and will be used at the start of each chapter to highlight the chapter within the wider context of the wider research process.

The Research Process



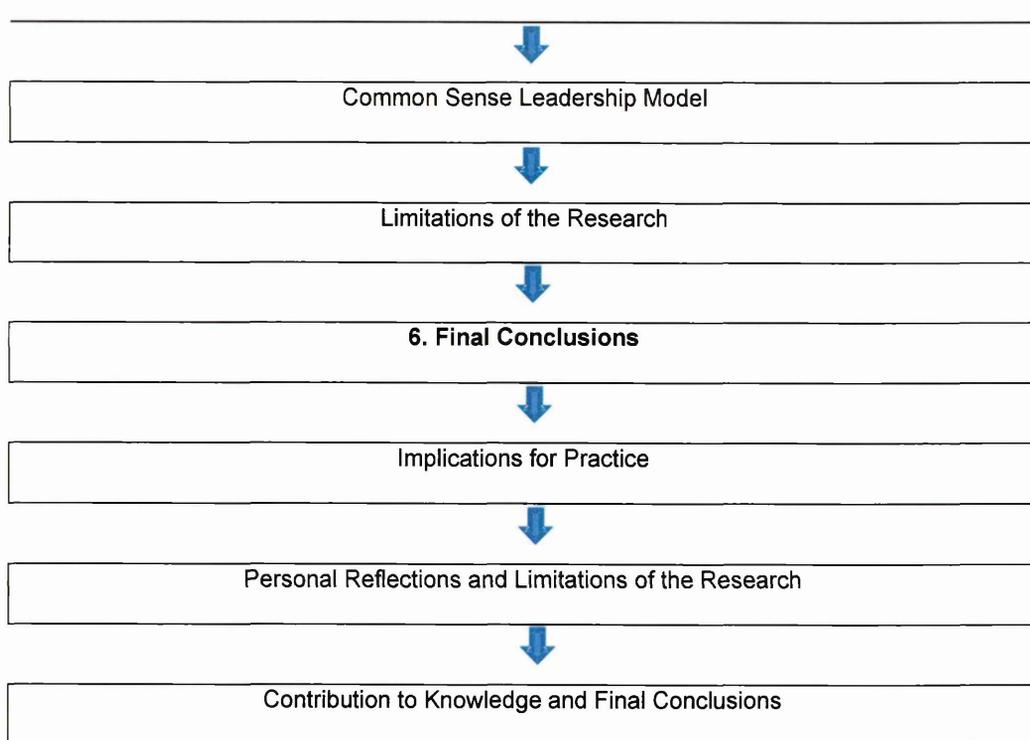


Figure 1 The Research Process Pathway

To further aid the reader I have highlighted the specific sections at each stage and on occasions within each section broken the flow in to sub sections to highlight specific detail.

The research setting I chose was NG Bailey, a large privately owned family business, in part because I worked there and I thought it would be easier to undertake the research in a 'warmer' environment. The company was established in the 1920's, employs over 4,000 staff in the UK and has five major businesses: NG Bailey & Co, Bailey Telecom, Bailey Maintenance, Bailey Prefabrication, and Switchgear & Instrumentation, and was facing many business and operational challenges and dealing with unprecedented levels of change at that time.

Additionally, in 2005, I moved from my role as HR Director at Bailey Telecom and into a new role responsible for Talent Management across the Group². This new role placed me in the privileged position of being part of a senior management team responsible for developing and delivering a new business strategy. In Chapter 3, I explain more about the specific requirements of the new strategy and how this led me to develop a new 'back to basics common sense approach to leadership'.

1.3 Writing Style

I will be writing through a combination of my personal experiences: as a young man growing up in Hull, the first in the family to go to university; as an employee and manager; as an observer of other leaders (good and bad) and, finally; as

² NG Bailey consisted of six businesses at the time, had a turnover of £500m and employed over 4000 staff. The remit of the new role encapsulated the identification and development of future leaders.

someone who has advised others on leadership and leadership development for the past 20 years.

Additionally, in developing my writing style I was very conscious the first person is often avoided in post graduate dissertations or ordinarily it is almost as if the author wasn't there, absent from the process and somewhat detached. I decided like Grey (2007) that I wanted to write in a style that both 'communicated' and yet was also 'conversationalist'. With that in mind I aimed to have a meaningful conversation with you the reader.

Consequently, the thesis aims to satisfy two key audiences: firstly to satisfy the academic rigours of doctoral research adding a unique contribution to professional knowledge and practice, secondly, to inform management and leadership practice within NG Bailey.

In reviewing this thesis, management practitioners should be able to take away a deep understanding of the practical issues associated with developing leadership within a specific context facing unprecedented change. The academic reviewer will gain an insight into the world of NG Bailey and the business challenges they faced at the time.³ This should be interesting to the academic audience as hitherto the research into common sense and leadership has been a neglected area of study and the business setting will provide a rich source of data against which future studies could be compared. By offering this insight the academic

³ The research took place between, May 2005 and August 2008. Since leaving the Company I have found many of the avenues to data have closed to me and gaining access to new material has proved almost impossible. I have to increasingly rely on informal contacts to keep me up to date with developments.

reviewer will be able to place the research into the specific context within which it was set. I believe by outlining the research setting in more detail it enables academic reviewers to compare and contrast similar business environments and case studies which ultimately could be of interest to future researchers researching similar areas of interest an informed comparator on which to build their future research.

Consequently the overreaching aim of this research programme was to undertake an in depth investigation into leadership and consider in what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership actions. In undertaking the research, I hoped to develop a model of leadership based on Common Sense. The model would build on past theories of leadership and develop an approach; I hoped the Company would use.

1.4 Formulation of the Initial Research Question

The purpose of the research was to gain an appreciation of common sense and leadership and all its component parts so that a model of common sense leadership could be developed which ultimately would inform future leadership research and practice and provide an alternative more simplistic view of leadership . At the same time, the research aimed to provide practical solutions by providing an approach to leadership that would help organisations manage change more effectively.

With this is mind, the research will focus on answering the following overarching specific question: In what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership actions? It is hoped that by peeling back the various theories of

leadership (trait, style, contingency, new leadership, and sense making), we can reveal a form of leadership grounded in common sense principles.

As a starting point, I believe everyone has common sense, or, as Spolestra notes, “we live, literally, in common sense: a sense we have in common (from the Latin *sensus communis*)” (Spolestra, 2007 p 56). Accordingly, an element of the research is about whether there a particular type of ‘advanced’, ‘special’ or ‘critical’ common sense (Watson, 2006) that informs or enables people to become ‘better’ leaders, and consequently, equips them to deal more appropriately with the challenges they face on a day to day basis.

1.5 Contribution to knowledge

In setting out my contribution to knowledge and practice, I hope the research contributes in two ways:

- Added an additional dimension to the theories of ‘new leadership’, (Bryman, 1996) adding an original contribution to knowledge and practice by developing a more explicit understanding of ‘common sense’ as an essential enabler of leadership
- The methodological approach would in itself be challenging, utilising a combination of both grounded theory and interpretative approaches. In tackling such a complex question, the lessons learned by researching would contribute to the knowledge and practice of how we could approach such topic areas from different methodological perspectives and this, in itself, may prove to be an original contribution to knowledge and practice. In doing so,

other researchers investigating similar complex constructs may benefit from my experience.

Furthermore, the purpose of the research was to understand what leaders within a large family business actually do. From this information, it was proposed to develop a 'common sense model of leadership' that could identify and display the different aspects of leadership, so that the new business strategy could be implemented successfully.

1.6 Chapter Overview

My thesis will follow the research pathway shown above (Figure 1), here in after at the start of each chapter, a summary of the process will be incorporated into the introduction of each chapter, the research section will be highlighted to indicate to the reader exactly where we are in the process. In undertaking the research it is essential the reader understands the importance of the research question within the context of leadership as we seek to reveal more explicitly an integral aspect or enabler of the leadership process.

In Chapter One, the research question 'in what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership actions?' has been introduced along with an explanation of the research process being followed. I have outlined both the purpose of the research and what I believed the contribution to knowledge would be both from an academic and professional practice perspective. The complexity of addressing the research questions was tackled.

In Chapter two, the 'nature' of common sense is explored. In reviewing the literature around common sense, I offer a view of 'common sense' and consider its relationship to the different leadership approaches. Additionally, I consider the possibility of linking common sense with the various leadership theories. I undertake a review of current leadership literature and discuss in summary the developments of the different theories of leadership and demonstrate where there are possible links with the common sense literature.

Chapter Three deals with the business and economic climate within which the research is set and places the development of NG Bailey within its historical setting. In acknowledging the past, the 'new' strategy is reviewed and explained. In setting out the background, challenges, and issues, we firmly place the research within a specific context and time. The challenges facing NG Bailey are also considered, along with the type of leadership appropriate to meet them taking account of the current literature and theory. The historic context and wider cultural, political and economic strategic challenges are shared and highlighted to add 'richness' to the picture.

In Chapter Four, the specific ontological and epistemological positions are outlined. The methodology and methods deployed, especially given the complexity of undertaking this type of 'qualitative or more appropriately 'interpretive' and 'subjectivist' research, are evaluated. Furthermore, the research strategy is explained and the general analytical inductive (Thomas, 2006) process is highlighted as the preferred approach. Finally in the chapter the practicalities of conducting the research are considered and the ethics of undertaking the research are highlighted.

In Chapter five, the data is analysed and the research findings are considered and the nature of the results are outlined. Key themes are explored and in pulling together clusters of similar themes we see the emergence of a common sense model of leadership.

Furthermore there is an acknowledgement that developing a process of teaching common sense may be like "herding cats" (Watson, 2006) but the elements of a leadership model informed by common sense may be fruitful in so far as a leadership model that embraces previous theories of leadership grounded in practical, simplistic, common sense might prove fruitful as it aids the business through a difficult transformation.

In Chapter Six, the conclusions and implications for NG Bailey are considered. Consequently, we arrive at an informed view that, in particular, moving the organisation and its people from point A (the current way of doing things) to point Z when the vision for the future becomes the new way of doing business. Getting from A to Z however requires taking the people through a series of steps (which pre-supposes a linear / rational view of change) or, moving through the rest of the alphabet so to speak ... a long and difficult journey. On a practical level, additional, information is provided as to how the knowledge of the model was used in the organisation.

The chapter also captures my personal reflections and limitations of undertaking such research and concludes that the concept of common sense does inform leadership action.

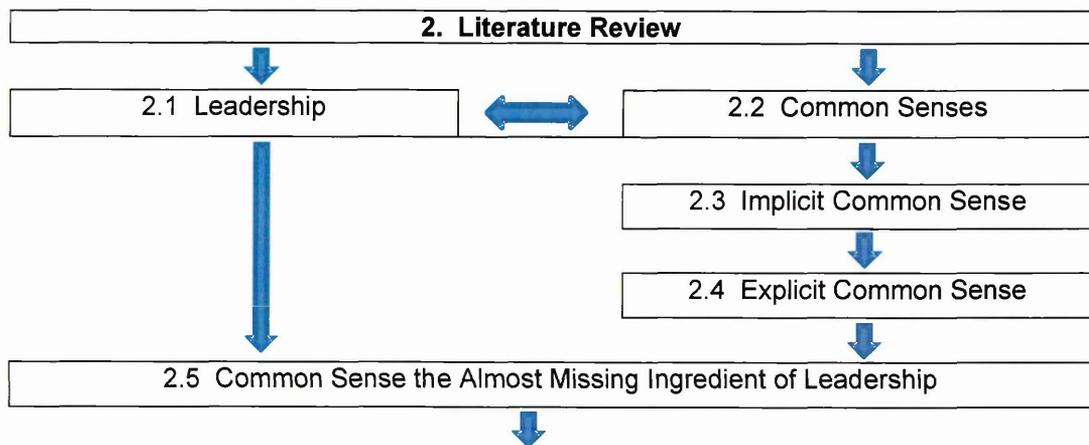
Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the reasons behind my initial interest in the research area. I have sought to find a meaningful starting point and outlined the initial research question. In doing so I have set the research into the business context within which it will be undertaken and sought to demonstrate how the research will contribute to both professional practice and academic knowledge. In the next chapter I review the theories of leadership and the construct of common sense in more detail and provide the underpinning theory on which the research is based.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

In this chapter we deal with the initial literature review and desk based research, the chapter incorporates a review of leadership and common sense literature and provides an underpinning knowledge against which the subsequent research can take place. After reviewing the literature, due consideration as to how both elements could be integrated is given.

The specific aspects have been highlighted in bold so that they can be viewed in the context of the wider process.



2.1 Leadership

A fundamental aspect of the research is understanding how common sense might inform leadership action?, but before considering this particular aspect it is important to understand the definition of leadership being used. Consequently, what do we mean by leadership? Northouse (2004) cites 65 different classifications systems used to define the scope of leadership research. Even more concerning, Burns found 130 definitions (Burns, 1978: 2). It seems the word

'leadership' itself conjures up many different meanings and if we try and define it, we discover it means different things to different people (ibid).

Stogdill (1950), Stogdill (1948) {references to Stogdill's work will be cited in terms of Bass (1990) and Bryman (1992)} acknowledged one of the barriers to studying leadership is related to the 'lack of definition of leadership, but you know it when you see it. Over fifty years later, Jackson & Parry (2008) agree, in so far as they see leadership as something of a 'phenomena' that everyone has a view of but with very little consensus about exactly what it is. They would also argue that it is an "essentially contested concept" (Jackson & Parry, 2008 p14) and there is no sign of it becoming less so, as any definition is "fraught with peril" (Jackson and Parry, 2008 p63).

The definition offered by Stogdill (1950) that "Leadership may be considered the process (act) or influencing the activities of an organised group in its efforts towards goal setting and goal achievement " serves as a starting point. (Bass 1990 p4) provides a general definition of leadership as, "an interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves structuring restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members"

Bryman (1992) identifies three key elements of leadership as influence, group, and goal attainment. Furthermore, the majority of definitions of leadership are viewed as having positive connotations. Gemmill & Oakley (1992) however, suggest a contrary perspective insofar as leadership is a sign of social pathology," that is a special case of an iatrogenic social myth that introduces massive learned helplessness among members of the social system" This

position is reinforced in the writings of Calas & Smircich (1991 p 113), who 'deconstruct' leadership and very much see it as a seductive process. "as a form of seduction, there is nothing profound about leadership. It is a game...." (Calas and Smircich, 1991)

Critically, it appears leadership as a concept itself continues to be a highly contested construct (Jackson and Parry, 2008), but it is apparent that to review the leaders behaviour in isolation from followers is 'futile'. In the development of 'new leadership' (Bryman, 1992, 2006), the interaction of the relationship between the two constituent parts (the leader and the led) is paramount to the study of leadership. In undertaking the literature review it became apparent that common sense as an aspect of leadership is often neglected and, and in some cases is referred too without explanation. (Zhao, 2009)

The definitions of leadership described do not reference common sense, there is no explicit connection between common sense and leadership. It may be that "common sense is leadership" (Cain, 1997, p8) and consequently it is taken for granted in everything that happens within the leadership process. (Delaney, 2001)

However, as a starting point for the research, the fact there does not seem to be any agreement on a definition of leadership, leads me to adopt Bryman's (1996, 2006) definition in that leadership is a process that involves both the leader and the led. From this starting point I will be considering how the concept of common sense might integrate, connect and inform leadership? However before doing so we need to understand what we mean by common sense.

2.2 Common Senses

"Why how will you know that" says she "By means of a magical talisman God gave me when I was born and the name they call it is Common Sense" said I.

Robert Louis Stephenson

In this section, the relevant common sense literature is reviewed with a view to determining in what way the concept of common sense might inform leadership actions. The section reviews the common sense literature two ways. Firstly, the implicit nature of common sense requires illumination, as an underpinning aspect of everything that we do (Spolestra, 2007). And secondly, to understand common sense more explicitly, so that it can be considered as a possible aspect of leadership.

The purpose of this section is to provide further theoretical underpinning to the research. In doing so, the key aspects of past leadership theories or approaches are reviewed and found deficient in explicitly referring to common sense. In providing theoretical underpinning, the intention is to show that any common sense approach to leadership 'builds on' (using a construction metaphor) some of the past theories and highlights any relevant historical aspects. At the same time, identifying any 'gaps' in the past theories that might help in answering the research question: in what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership actions?

2.3 Implicit Common Sense

Superficially from a common sense perspective, management education, and consequently leadership it could be argued is a purely 'technical activity' that

becomes primarily a matter of acquisition (Fulton, 1995). To be effective, the leader needs to acquire the 'techniques and methods' or competencies whose values lie in the potential for practical and effective application. Consequently, the learning of specific {leadership} techniques re-enforces the existing common sense (Grey and Mitev, 1995).

However, it seems what matters is being able to act and lead coherently in the face of 'complexity and change' (Lissack and Roos, 2000). Lissack and Roos (2000) argue the 'old common sense' was about dealing with separate freestanding units of the complicated world whereas they believe that, in the future, the next common sense {leadership} is about mastering the complex interweaving events that surround us.

Higgs (2003) argues that if a sense-making paradigm is adopted, it becomes feasible to identify a model of leadership, which is relevant to the context of complexity and change facing organisations in the early part of the 21st century. "Accordingly, we are leaving the age of organised organisations" (Morgan, 1993, p xvi) and moving into a new era of complexity, challenge and change and, if we want to survive, "chaotic action is preferable to orderly inaction" (Geirland, 1996 p2).

Weick, (1995 p61) agrees there is a requirement for "something that preserves plausibility and coherence, something that is reasonable and memorable, something that embodies past experience and expectations, something that resonates with other people, something that can be constructed retrospectively also can be used prospectively, something that captures both the feelings and thought, something that allows for embellishment to fit current oddities,

something that is fun to construct. In short, what is necessary in {common} sense making is a good story.”

Consequently, it could be argued leaders need to make sense of a complicated world for their followers (Weick, 1995) and that by using their common sense they demystify the challenges facing the organisation (Geirland, 1996) and translate complexity into easily understood ‘common sense’ chunks that facilitate change.

However, common sense must be understood not as a ‘given’ within which ‘I’ must work, but more as a ‘limiting construct’ that must be worked away from if ‘we’ are to introduce change (Grey and Mitev, 1995). Additionally, it is important to challenge the basic assumptions that common sense is ‘good and desirable’ (Delaney, 2001), consequently, I am not advocating that any appeal for common sense leadership should be an appeal to maintain the status quo and inhibit or limit change. Rather, if it is to inform the leadership process the concept of common sense should simplify complex information which makes for better meaning making.

‘Meaning’ itself is a complex construct. Meaning development is a ‘social’ process that involves both a “sense maker and sense giver” (Weick, 1995 p27). In developing shared understanding, the language and the agreed conventions work only if we all agree to work within the parameters set. According to Lye (2002), our view of the world can only exist as a shared or sharable experience. Accordingly, when I read a text, I am participating in social or cultural meaning making. My response is not merely an individual thing, but it is part of my culture and history. This type of involvement does not fit with the view of leadership as a

purely technical activity. However, meaning is contextual. Change the context and you often change the meaning.

Bruner (1990) sought to develop “an all-out effort to establish meaning as the central concept of psychology – not stimuli and responses, not overtly observable behaviour, not biological drives and their transformation, but meaning. It was not a revolution against behaviourism, it was altogether more profound, its aim was to discover and to describe formally the meanings that human beings created out of the world” (Bruner, 1990 p2). He concentrated his thinking on the way people implicitly make sense of their world.

Bruner formulated a view that the culture within which ‘I’ operates has a particular impact. Whilst ‘I’ do not want to be side-tracked down the psychological route, it is clear to me that ‘I’ (as a leader) am intrinsically involved in the sense making process. Simkins articulated this point very clearly, “in the leadership world, ‘making sense of things’ is at least as important as making things work” (Simkins, 2004 p3). Whilst he talked mainly about the leadership of academic institutions, his basic tenets should hold true across organisations.

In understanding the nature of shared meaning as something requiring a ‘giver’ and ‘receiver, alternatively it could be co-created formed through interaction and once meaning has been established, we need to consider how it becomes ‘shared and common’ which requires us to explore in more depth the background to common sense development.

One of the basic assumptions surrounding common sense is that it is implicitly good, beneficial, and desirable. It appears as natural, “everybody knows that”,

“we all know it is true that”, “it makes sense to me”, based on the premise that it is better for society to have sound rational thinking as opposed to unsound rational thinking (Delaney, 2001, p1) I would argue that implicit common sense is inherent within everything that we do.

However, some managers believe it is the one thing ‘lacking’ in people and, all too often, I hear in the workplace “if only they would use their common sense, I could solve that, increase that, and improve that.” It follows, therefore, that if ‘I’ can identify what actually constitutes common sense, ‘I’ maybe able to influence its development. However, “common sense is abstracted from social reality” (Spolestra, 2007 p56) and thus creates a paradox since it comes from the reality it creates. Yet, we cannot live without it; it is needed for us to live our lives; it gives meaning and purpose – it is the implicit under pinner, the taken for granted. (Delaney, 2001)

Therefore, despite some of my colleagues’ protestations, common sense is common and all rational human beings have it (Delaney, 2001). Having said that, common sense is more complex and difficult to explain outside of the context within which it is practiced, but there are a number of basic and simple definitions available:

- “Common sense is sound rationale thinking.....more specifically common sense is workaday sound rational thinking and good problem solving skills I acquire through activating logical intuition, employing prudent insight exercising our ability to observe, turning felt experiences in to sound judgement” (Delaney, 2001 p1).

- “a basic nucleus of insights that enables a person to deal successfully with personal and material situations of the sort that arise in ordinary living, according to the culture and the class to which he belongs” (Lonergan, 1980, p7).
- “sturdy, good judgement uncontaminated by too much theory” (Blackburn, 1996 p70).

Watson (2006) adds a couple of definitions, distinguishing between what he calls ‘everyday common sense’ and ‘critical common sense’:

- “Everyday common sense is analysis-based on unthoughtout, taken for granted, immediately obvious, everyday assumptions about the world and human activity within it”,

and
- “Critical common sense is analysis, based on basic logic, rationality, hard-headedness, to be found in human beings whenever they step back from the immediate situation and critically put their minds to an issue or problem” (Watson, 2006 p 10-11).

Rausch (2009) also offers the prospect of stepped up ‘sharper’ common sense (p414), which corresponds with Delaney’s (2001) view that there is an “advanced” forms or type of common sense which it may be possible to develop.

Furthermore, “Common sense is indifferent to representational truth; it does not matter whether contents of common sense statements are true or false. What matters is that common sense itself constitutes truth” (Spolestra, 2007 p56). In constituting “truth” the “authenticity or credibility” of the leader or meaning maker becomes critical as followers choose between alternative truths and choose the most plausible, credible or believable to believe.

This is critical, as sense making creates a version of ‘truth’ and the challenge is to convert a simple truth into a universal, context specific common sense truth and, in doing so, reduce the contention around the construct. In short, leaders dealing with highly complex situations, need to create a shared and common perspective or, as McAuley (1994) prefers, “control resides in the ability of the leaders to resolve uncertainty and insecurity” (McAuley, 1994 p 476) by essentially making it common sense. There is a very clear link with our chosen definition of leadership in this process, in that the development of common sense is a two way process involving both the leader and the led.

2.4 Explicit Common Sense

However, implicit common sense is, in its very essence, accessible to all and cannot be privileged and to claim common sense knowledge is equal to ‘other’ knowledge may be difficult to justify. In the same way the prospect of developing a process of explicitly teaching common sense may be a bit like “herding cats” (Watson 2006) However by making common sense knowledge more explicit we are adding to the process of leadership (Ford, 1998), and as we saw from the definitions of leadership earlier in the chapter, common sense is left unsaid and not an overt feature of any of the definitions.

However, in solving problems there is a need to seek holistic solutions. Accordingly, individuals and organisations must take account of the cognitive (reason based), effective (feelings, wants), and social (group and team allegiances) (Kirton, 2003, Beckett, undated). This collective or holistic approach to problem solving is, in the 'application of explicit common sense' according to (Kirton, 2003)

Given the complexity of measuring or developing explicit common sense we are left to consider other factors that might influence its development. Historically, in young people, academic achievement and IQ have been the focus. However, in adulthood, there have been a number of studies, which focused on the practical aspects of intelligence. Accordingly, Sternberg & Grigorenko (2000) argued that the development of intelligence follows different paths (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2000) and consequently more focus should be placed on developing practical intelligence – the intelligence most associated with common sense. Although Rausch (2009) argues it is evident that common sense and “everybody agrees...” common sense “improves with age.” (p414) Consequently the research needs to consider age related experiential common sense.

As stated above in the introduction to this chapter, there is an almost a universal acceptance according to Spolestra (2007) that common sense is “good, positive and beneficial” (Spolestra, 2007 p56). There are similarities and links here with some forms of leadership in that transformational leadership is often portrayed as positive and inspirational (Bass, 1990). Gerber (2001) had also highlighted that people who demonstrate common sense, “do not get into trouble” (Gerber, 2001, p11) and by this very virtue is a good thing. Common sense acts almost like an 'inner voice' of reason. The central tenet is that common sense is good, and by

implication, any organisation or institution that is able to demonstrate a high degree of common sense will be 'successful'. However, as and of themselves organisations do not necessarily have common sense, but the people who constitute the entity do. Consequently, when considering the integration of leadership with common sense we must consider interaction of the two elements and the process by which common sense is formed.

According to Bruner (1990) common sense is evident in the 'hot actions' of the workplace. These common sense experiences are typically viewed as 'what I do next' (Spolestra, 2007) when faced with the routines and challenges of the working day. When I see the basis of decisions that are mainly judged as 'right', I apply the logic of common sense because the application of such logic or reason is perceived as 'contextually suited' because the individual displays 'situational cognition'. In making these 'right' decisions, individuals within the workplace are bringing to bear their 'total perceptions'. The application of critical common sense could then be described as 'getting it right more often than getting it wrong', which clearly has implications for leadership (Delaney, 2001).

Lissack and Roos (2000) argue that common sense is changing and evolving all the time and what really matters is that the 'leaders' of organisations are unable to act coherently in the face of increasing complexity unless they can make sense of what is happening themselves. In this context there may also be significant connection with transformational leadership in that such leadership purports to be about the management of change. In essence, the post-modern world has thrown the need for a new common sense, a sense that can meet the challenges of the 'New World'. (Lissack & Roos, 2000)

Nevertheless, in common sense discourse people using common sense do not articulate it in a theoretical way. Common sense knowledge is not explicitly illustrated on a blackboard. (Delaney, 2001). Furthermore, he would argue, we do not carry an encyclopaedia around with us for verifying common sense statements our brain accepts them at face value (taken for granted) otherwise our brain would become overloaded. (Delaney, 2001).

In the common sense mode, sound rational thinking operates implicitly and in communication, when I say part of a 'reasoning set', I assume the listener fills in the rest. Consequently, the things I do not say are also understood as our language develops a shorthand. In essence, common sense relies on the understanding of others filling in the gaps of the unspoken assumptions. (Delaney, 2001)

Within the organisation context, it could also be argued that unless a common language can be established there will be no common purpose, no "identity of interest or ownership" (MacDonald, 1998). Specifically, if we are to establish a common meaning or shared assumptions about experiences or purpose, then the leader's language and narrative must be considered.

Research undertaken in the 1990's by Rod Gerber which culminated in his 2001 study used a phenomenographic approach by which he studied common sense (the phenomena) from a constructivist perspective (a belief that the phenomena is socially constructed): he sought to reveal common sense from the participants' view point. He interviewed a small cohort, including a broad selection of sheep farmers and office workers. He chose these two groups because he wanted to see whether there would be differences in views between the two (from the

outside) vastly different job roles. He used semi-structured interviews with each participant and they were simply asked to describe:

1. What they understood common sense to be?
2. How have you experienced common sense in your work activities?
3. How have you seen other people use common sense in the course of their work?

In undertaking my research, I proposed adopting a similar approach used by Gerber (2001). By undertaking the research in a similar way, I would be able to compare my results with Gerber's to see if there were any similarities, additionally, his methods of approaching the research were in line with the approach I wished to take, and also in the absence of any other studies into common sense at that time (2005) his outcomes suggested a useful starting point to understand common sense in its simplest form as he had sought to deconstruct the concept of common sense in to practical outcomes which might be useful in the development of a common sense leadership model. Essentially, what Gerber (2001) aimed to do was take the implicit 'taken for granted' aspects of common sense and make the aspects that actually make up common sense more explicit to try and reveal what common sense really is.

From his research he identified a number of core aspects about common sense:

1. A gut feeling, knowing the decision is right, based on intuition.
2. Innate ability, something, you are born with and by implication cannot be developed.
3. Skill and knowledge of their work rather than knowing something just for the sake of it, i.e. knowledge for its own sake.

4. Learning related to common sense as a deliberate action. We develop common sense by learning through practical work-based actions, 'on the job'
5. Leading, by using others in a purposeful way.
6. Demonstrate cognitive ability, i.e. the ability to think laterally or 'outside of the box to solve problems' and to think on a wider perspective, in a holistic way. People with common sense seem to be able to "get straight to the point", "hit the nail on the head".
7. Life experience is crucial as previous experiences of problems provide a mental model, which suggests a way of solving the current problem.
8. A number of personal attributes are broken down further:
 - Being self-motivated
 - Having confidence, they know their jobs thoroughly and are willing to make and learn from mistakes
 - Being practical, an aspect closely linked to the practical nature of common sense and the view that common sense is down-to-earth and grounded in realism
 - Being streetwise, fully understanding the work content of the role and workplace and recognised by colleagues as practical and knowledgeable (there is a similarity with Mintzberg, 1989)
 - Having a broad vision, in essence understanding the role within the whole
 - Can control one's emotions

(Adapted from Gerber 2001)

In criticising Gerber's study it is initially difficult to justify the group choices as on the surface the two identified groups are unconnected and he does not say if any

of the factors were relevant to a particular group, sex or age range. There also appears to be no information regarding the level of worker or whether any training or development is required for each of the roles and at what stage of their development in their role each the recipients were at. Additionally, there is no reference to age related experiential common sense, and there is no evidence or discussion on whether either of the groups common sense could be enhanced, improved or “stepped up” (Rausch. 2009 p414) In the absence of any other studies at the time into common sense (2005) and despite the drawbacks highlighted, Gerber’s study offered a good starting point for the research, and his methodology and methods offered an approach by which the research area could be studied.

Common sense is context bound (Lonergan, 1980) formed by the interaction of the actors within the environment over time and, therefore, it should come as no surprise that it is intrinsically linked with the dominant culture of the organisation (Spolestra, 2007). For this purpose, culture is defined as “Pervasiveness of the norms, beliefs, values and behaviours, in the explicit culture (the proportion of members holding strongly to specific beliefs and standards of behaviour) plus the match between the implicit and explicit aspects of culture” (Ahmed, 1998, p32).

Within any culture or sub-culture, there is a need to consider the role of language and words, although Ahmed (1998) notes the importance of creating a culture that goes beyond words alone. Words are seldom enough and, when examining culture, are widely held, but without intensity. For example, within a private sector business like NG Bailey most people according to the annual staff survey understood the need for the company to be profitable, a point reinforced by Fiedler (1974) in that the firm’s focus should be on survival.

Consequently, once there is acceptance of the language surrounding the discourse (profitability, in the example above) a new common sense emerges and conflict subsides as the dominant discourse prevails, profitability is sacrosanct. Failure to gain agreement or acceptance of the discourse will lead to continued conflict, unrest, disengagement and disagreement which could hinder the firm's overall success and survival (Fiedler, 1974).

Lissack and Roos (2000) provide additional criteria, which might also be useful in developing a common sense leadership model. They describe a 'new' common sense, in that managers and leaders:

1. Seek to align common sense around basic values geared towards helping people work together more efficiently.
2. Respect mental models.
3. Use metaphors to describe the environment and processes by painting pictures of the past, present and future.
4. Combine and recombine, using building blocks to break down complex activities and simplify to essentially making sense of complicated things.
5. Fuel coherence with aligned words.

In criticising Lissack and Roos, the study only involved a very small sample, they additionally do not explain how they undertook their research, and there is no profile of respondents, whether they experienced differences because of gender or age.

In the last section the focus has been on gaining an appreciation of common sense from both an understanding of the construct and what it is, or might be,

with additional literature reviewed to provide component parts of common sense. In the final section of this chapter I review the leadership literature, with a view to integrating both the literature on leadership and common sense.

2.5 Common Sense: the 'almost' missing ingredient in Leadership Literature

In undertaking a review of the current literature on Leadership, it was not my intention to identify a specific perspective worthy of support, as my investigation into leadership illustrated recurring themes and progression of thought and views on leadership and accordingly leadership theories may be subject to “fashion and fads” (Grint, 1997 p1). However, it is evident that in all the theories (trait style, contingency, new leadership) common sense is explicitly missing from the definitions, however, in this section I hope to show how some aspects of past leadership theories do, however, connect with the common sense literature and consequently going forward should be an essential aspect of leadership.

Seeking, where possible, linkages and interconnections between the two literature themes. I will, furthermore, review the literature highlighting missing ingredients or ‘gaps’ in knowledge to identify areas for further investigation in the research.

In attempting to reveal a form of leadership based on common sense, I was considerate of Mintzberg, (1989) and his argument that leadership needs to incorporate what he termed “street sense” into any thoughts on leadership. In essence, he argues, that business schools produce an approach to management practice that is “thin and superficial” and “bypass the very things organisations

do...leapfrogging over the realities of business into pure abstractions” (Mintzberg, 1989, p 90).

By peeling back the many complexities associated with the different leadership theories, I hoped to reveal a position whereby leadership was about the application of common sense – specifically, within a relational setting based on mutual Trust, Confidence, Respect and Affection. These four elements are the cornerstone of effective relationships and according to Wylie and Groth (1991) are a good criterion to judge the effectiveness of any relationship. The higher the mutual rating in each of the four areas between a follower and leader would suggest, according to Wylie and Goth (1991), a stronger more powerful relationship. However, if any of the areas are failing on either side of the relationship then the relationship will not be as strong and in some cases could break down altogether.

Whilst the majority of the leadership literature examines the subject of leadership from a positivist perspective - one that sees leadership in terms of dominance and power (Drath and Palus, 2001) - I wanted to consider through the research a number of alternative options or interpretations of leadership that sought to show leadership as a socially constructed process and like common sense is formed as a process of interaction between the leader and the led.

I believed that without a “shared social identity there can be no leadership” (Haslam, 2004 p 48). Core to this approach is the ‘*process*’ of leadership, i.e. the ability of the leader to officially and unofficially make meaning, develop common understanding, shared meaning (Weick, 1995) and in my opinion ultimately common sense with followers. From this perspective we see the connection of

common sense with the loss of sense making leadership described by Weick (1995).

As we saw earlier in the chapter it would seem most writers on leadership suggest similar themes and almost all the definitions of leadership have positive connotations (Gastil, 1994). These positive connotations connect with the aspects of common sense literature which see common sense as something “positive” (Spolestra, 2007, p56), (Fulton, 1995). Parry & Jackson (2008) emphasis the influencing elements and the need to organise groups to achieve goals. Peters & Austin (1985) Rost (1993 p 102) agree, describing leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual processes”. The need to influence, therefore, links with the need to find a common sense approach to leadership because if we are to bring about change then we need to rely on the support of others (Rausch, 2009)

Drath & Palus (1994) see leadership from a different perspective and argue that all of the above definitions see leadership in terms of dominance and power. This assumes leadership is happening when somebody we call a leader acts in a certain way to change the behaviour or attitudes of others called subordinates or followers. Their alternative perspective on leadership suggests that we need to look at “leadership as a social meaning making process that occurs in groups of people who are engaged in activities together” (Drath & Palus 1994 p1). This view connects with the view that common sense is a shared understanding, that evolves from the interaction between follower and leader (Spolestra, 2007).

Consequently leadership and common sense can be seen to be more about ‘making meaning’ than about taking decisions and influencing people. This is

important because it maps leadership away from the leader knowing everything and telling subordinates what to do, to a more inclusive process. This particular approach has a lot of resonance, with a view of leadership that is relational. In applying this to the research, I aimed to develop an approach that would encourage a dialogue all about leadership that would hopefully move away from the traditional leader led conversations and in establishing a definition of leadership based on a process of interaction between the followers and the leaders. This shift away from purely focusing on the leader is essential as we seek to link common sense development within the leadership process. In so far as the interaction between the followers and leaders are according to (Weick, 1995) a critical element of the *{common}* sense making process and to look at only one dimension i.e. from the leader perspective potentially distorts the leadership process.

Addressing the need for greater understanding of leadership suggests the use of metaphor as an aid to understanding (Boulais, 2002) and the idea of using literary forms like stories or metaphors to study leadership is not new. The reader can identify with the characters and setting, therefore gaining a unique insight. As Geber (2001, p17) concluded, using literature “to teach leadership can be a chance to step into a fascinating and compelling leadership context without ever having to leave the classroom”. However, the common sense approach to leadership might argue that leadership is intrinsically linked to common sense in the ‘doing and practice of leadership’ in the ‘hot actions’ of the workplace (Bruner, 2003).

In critiquing the core leadership approaches as defined initially by Bryman (1992) – the ‘trait’ ‘style’ and ‘contingency’ approaches (see Table 1.1) – and take into

account Grint (1997) to incorporate the classical, or historical perspective, of Leadership as well as 'newer' or more 'radical' approaches of post mid 1990's developments and in reviewing each form of leadership, I will be looking for the interconnection to both the implicit underpinning common sense (hidden, shared meaning, taken for granted) and more explicit aspects of common sense as described by Gerber (2001). Namely: the pragmatic, simplifying, experiential, reflective (Watson, 2006).

However, it is appropriate to highlight at this point that none of the approaches are 'mutually exclusive or time bound'. Whilst the progression of thinking tends to be chronological, it is common for elements of one approach to appear in another (van Maurik, 2001). Consequently, any new approach to leadership could draw and develop on the previous theoretical approaches.

Table 1.1 *Trends in leadership theory and research*

Period	Approach	Core theme
Up to late 1940s	Trait approach	Leadership ability is innate
Late 1940s to late 1960s	Style approach	Leadership effectiveness is to do with how the leader behaves
Late 1960s to early 1980s	Contingency approach	It all depends; effective leadership is affected by the situation
Since early 1980s	New leadership approach (includes charismatic leadership)	Leaders need vision

Bryman, (1992, P1) and adapted from Bryman and Parry, 2006

The first half of the 20th century for many was the "modern" starting point in the study of leadership and concentrated on what sorts of individual has the skills, traits or attributes to be a successful and highly effective leader by developing a

clear picture of what is required (Higgs, 2003). This type of trait-based leadership was very heavily promoted. Whilst some traits were described as essential more often than others - honesty, trustworthiness, fairness, enthusiasm, confidence, humility and flexibility (Northouse, 2004)

The trait approach places a strong emphasis on the traits of the individual. "Traits are the fixed characteristics which differentiate leaders from non-leaders and are a "relatively fixed aspect of personality by adulthood" according to (Kirton, 2003) of which the core element is innate ability and they include the physical makeup (height, physique, etc.) of the 'Great Man' trait approach (Callan, 2003, Haslam, 2001). Critically, the trait approach concentrates the focus of leadership directly on the leader with the role of followers traditionally seen as 'passive,' (Jackson & Parry, 2008) paying less attention to the process of leadership and the role of followers. Critics of the trait approach argue this exclusion of followers means, essentially, the trait approach is fundamentally flawed as no study of leadership should exclude all participating aspects – the leader, the follower and the process of leadership.

The early studies of Leadership spoke much of the traits necessary for leadership as we searched for that 'something special' or essence of leadership' (Rickards and Clark, 2006). In searching for that something special there seems to have been very little regard for the 'pragmatic, common sense' explicit approach to leadership. However, Gerber (2001) argued from his research that specific qualities of: self-motivated, confidence, practically minded could be aligned with a trait approach to leadership in that they are innate and you are born with them.

There is a current re-emergence of the 'traitist' approach (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992) as can be seen in many of the new leadership writers (Bennis and Nanus, 2004, Zalesnik 1977). Consequently, the approach should not be completely dismissed specifically, as some writers see the emergence of charismatic leadership and the importance of the leaders role in the process as a variation of trait leadership. Additionally, the view of Kirkpatrick & Locke (1991) that traits can actually be developed is helpful in understanding the development of a leader, but critically says very little about the leadership process or the role the leader plays in the development of common sense.

Whilst the trait approach focused on the leader innate characteristics the style approach focuses on what leaders actually achieve and what they do. Leadership style and skill is important because, once the behaviour that makes for effective or appropriate leadership is known, leaders can be developed or trained to exhibit the specific behaviour and therefore become better leaders. There is resonance here with the idea that basic common sense can be developed or advanced (Delaney, 2001). In acknowledging the basic concept behind the style approach then leadership could be taught and that good leadership was a matter of adopting the right sort of behaviour when attempting to lead other people which, essentially, differentiates the effective leader from the ineffective leader. Consequently, if leadership is a purely mechanistic activity then perhaps a component of leadership like "critical common sense" as expressed by Watson (2006) may be feasible.

The leader's ability to claim legitimacy for decisions through the means they are apparently made can be particularly important if organisational decision making is seen as much a competition between political factions, as of coming to a singular

view as the best view of the organisation's future (Morgan 1986). The view of the leader influencing not just the decision making process but also the variance between actions undertaken and actions planned and points to situations where a contested decision is raised even after it has been mutually agreed. There is very clear alignment with common sense and problem solving, Rauch (2009) and Kirton (2003) both argue that sound and rational decisions are a fundamental aspect of the leaders role and in essence, therefore, of the leadership process.

A degree of divergence of opinion is probably inevitable and effectively a challenge for leadership is how to manage the diversity of opinion, use it and control it with confidence. Kirton, (2003). The consequence of excluding dissenting opinions can be substantial. (Kirton, 2003) notes that decision making by a closed homogenous leadership group will tend to ignore uncomfortable or contradictory (to the preferred leader's view) information. Equally, in the same way the organisation is a product of the past decision and actions, so are the leaders. So essentially, it could be argued that, potentially, the common sense is built up as an interaction of these factors especially (Jackson & Parry, 2008) argue that common sense leaders need to possess many qualities including the ability to connect and solve complex problems.

As leadership theory evolved, the contingency approach "holds that the effectiveness of a group or an organisation depends upon two interacting factors; (a) the personality of the leader (leadership style) and; (b) the degree to which the situation gives the leader control and influence. Stated in somewhat different terms, the degree to which the situation is free of uncertainty for the leader (Fiedler, 1974 p108). Therefore, it holds that the study of leadership and the effectiveness of leadership style is situation contingent. Theories that are more

recent have generally argued that it is an interactive product of both personal and situational characteristics and context (Haslam, 2004). Connecting this approach, according to (Jackson & Parry, 2008, p17) “the common sense way is ... based on direct and indirect experience” and consequently it seems common sense that leadership is influenced by the context in which it is set.

However, as Haslam (2004) points out most contemporary approaches to leadership follow this type of approach and “there has been a notable complementary and convergence of theory in recent years” (p41) most notably around the contingency approach. Hersey and Blanchard (1993) maintained it is not the leader’s style per se which leads to effectiveness, but rather the ability of a leader to adapt his/her style to the needs of the followers and the situational context and by doing so the leader plays a critical role in sharing their common sense (Ford, 1998).

However, if we consider one of the tasks of a leader i.e. strategic management, the classical model is one of the leader following a structured process, gathering and evaluating data with a pre-determined vision or goal. Mintzberg (1989) observes this as a process that seeks to ensure that goals and internal processes and performance are all aligned to the leader’s strategic purpose. The problem in many cases is that this key point (i.e., strategic purpose) is actually ill-defined by most leaders and consequently “somehow the ostensible object of the whole exercise gets lost in the exercise” (Mintzberg, 1994 p66). Therefore he argues the strategic leadership element of leadership in most large organisations has become lost beneath the financial demands of the budget targets and the monitoring process put in place to check the power of the leader.

According to Bryman (1992), we have moved away from the trait, style and contingency era into a 'new' form of leadership, a form that highlights the importance of "leadership as a socially constructed process (management of meaning)" (Clarke & Rickards, 2006 p 27). To encapsulate this new form of leadership, Bryman (1992) calls it "New Leadership", as far as it is a break with the old forms of leadership, encapsulates ideas from 'trait, style and contingency' approaches.

However, one approach to 'new' leadership research has dominated the leadership literature, i.e. transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). According to Bass (1990) transformational leadership is the culmination of Charisma, Transformation, Mission and Vision and represents a departure from the previous approaches, as far as it suggests a process of interaction between followers and leaders with a focus on change as a positive intervention, in which the leader acquires a new critical position as the facilitator of the change or transformation or 'driver' process.(Kousez & Posner, 1996). The focus on change as an integral part of leadership is potentially counter intuitive to a common sense that places a restriction on change and seeks to protect the way things are done and the status quo (Delaney, 2001, p10).

Critically, according to Binney, (2005), during the last 20 years the world of business and organisation has 'overdosed' on the idea of leaders being transformational heroes. It seems leadership has been synonymous with transformation and transformation with leadership. According to them, the model does not work, has many damaging consequences and is now crumbling. They argue it is time for a more "realistic and more flexible" (p 19) to emerge. A

position they describe as a more pragmatic common sense approach (Binney, 2005)

According to McKee, etal (2008) Credibility or authenticity is the foundation of this new leadership. Leaders must stand for something, believe in something and care about something. They must find their own voice linked to their personal values and they must express these values in their own style without forcing their views onto others. Consequently, instead, they should work tirelessly to build consensus on a set of common sense principles (Ford, 1998).

It seems common sense (to me) to suggest the point that effective leaders envision the future. (McKee, etal, 2008) By imagining exciting futures and laying out the various possibilities, visions are empowering. Visions seen only by the leader are, however, insufficient to mobilise and energise followers. Therefore, leaders must enlist others in their dreams and goals by appealing to shared aspirations and it is here that, once again, the element of leadership that involves sense making and sense giving has a critical part to play and interlinks the two theories of sense making leadership with common sense (Weick, 1995).

According to Kouzes and Posner (1987), the art of leadership is to change the status quo and leaders search for opportunities to do this by seeking innovative ways to change, grow and improve. This approach to leadership could be contradictory to the traditional view of common sense that according to Delaney, (2001, p10) seeks to protect the status quo. Leaders also experiment and are more likely to take risks. Kirton (2003) would argue that common sense holds back major change because it is perceived as too risky but common sense tells us by constantly generating small wins and learning from mistakes and taking

one step at a time. Readers will achieve, often despite opposition and setbacks.

Kouzes and Posner (1987)

It is also argued leaders also strengthen others by sharing power and providing choice, making each person feel competent and confident (Blanchard & Johnson, 1985). This is probably why transformational leadership can be said to be relational and based primarily on trust, respect, confidence and affection (Wylie & Grothe, 1993). Blanchard and Johnson (1985 p55) notes, "Leadership is not something you do to people. It's something you do with people" and consequently contradicts earlier views of leadership that focus predominately on the role of the leader at the expense of the interaction with the follower. It is this very element of interaction which is critical to the development of common sense (Spolestra, p61)

Furthermore, leadership is learnt by doing and Adair (1990 p15) states, "leadership is learnt, primarily through doing, and nothing can replace that necessary cycle of experiment, trial and error, success and failure, followed by reflection, and reading". This approach to leadership has a very close proximity to common sense in so far as common sense is developed on the back of experience. (Rausch, 2009). This view of leadership is suggested by the view that "leadership is something that is learned largely and primarily through experiences" (Jackson & Parry, 2008, p115). This view of leadership as an experiential process has resonance with the view that common sense is also experiential and improves with exposure to problems (Gerber, 2001).

Kellerman (2004) argues the need to 'neutralise' the language of leadership. She argues leadership is neither 'good nor bad'. Leaders serve their purpose for good or bad because, according to her, leaders:

- satisfy the human need for security
- bring the need for order, they bring discipline
- can create a sense of excitement, and newness

In understanding 'bad' leadership, Kellerman describes seven types:

Incompetent, Rigid, Intemperate, Callous, Corrupt, Insular and Evil. She argues these are not traits but behaviours, in which leaders and followers mutually engage. Furthermore, she argues, that incompetent leaders "abound everywhere. Sometimes they are so incompetent you wonder how they ever became leaders" (Kellerman, 2004).⁶

Furthermore, Kellerman makes no reference to either 'good' or 'bad' common sense and, under the leadership of Hitler, the Germans killed millions of innocent people because of their religion. On reflection, this surely never made sense. Yet, probably because of the criteria Kellerman outlined, i.e. the need for security and the possible consequences of non-compliance, millions of Germans accepted a new form of common sense. In essence, Leaders have power over followers, and can choose to use it for good or bad.

⁶ This can be particularly true in family owned businesses. Family members are placed in positions clearly above the level they would achieve if they had to rely on merit. In many family businesses patronage and generational leadership is a factor as the business seeks succession to the next generation.

More recent developments in the study of leadership approach the subject from an alternative perspective. These observers of leadership (Rickard & Clark, 2004) emphasise the shift from a belief in a rational and observable reality to a socially constructed reality, a reality that places a strong emphasis on meaning and symbolism (Rickard & Clark, 2004) in my opinion which, has resonance with the development of common sense in so far as the symbols, culture and climate of the company underpin the prevailing common sense.

The work of Smircich and Morgan (1982) present leadership as the management of meaning and portrays leadership as a social process which has developed through shared forms of understanding and structures and symbolism of leaders and followers.

As we have seen, previous leadership research tended to view leadership as a 'characteristic or trait' of the leader and, in this way, the study of leadership and leaders has, according to Haslam (2001), been divorced from the broader social context within which these roles and qualities emerge that give them meaning. Accordingly, "the social identity approach suggests that leadership is much more a property of the group than of the individual in isolation" (Haslam, 2001, p40.) and consequently an essential element of common sense construction.

Bringing the two themes together, common sense leadership is, according to (Jackson & Parry, 2008, p17), a view that leaders need to possess many qualities but particularly: "confidence, integrity, connection, resilience and aspiration". At its core is the ability to make sense of a complex world and make it meaningful. As discussed earlier, meaning is attributed to

language, symbols, culture and heritage. Using metaphor allows for comparison and ease of understanding and the communication of different perspectives. Metaphor allows you to understand one kind of experience in terms of another by suggesting an identity between two things that you would not normally consider equivalent (Hatch, 1997). The 'power of metaphor' in sense making is something highly effective leaders use to great advantage. They use stories to share their vision and to engage followers. (Goffee, 2000) essentially making complex things more simple.

Similarly, Binney et al (2005) suggest that the job of the leader is not to foretell the future during periods of uncertainty but it is rather to "tell the story of the current and past". Consequently, this involves the leader 'making sense' of what is happening to the group or organisation and essentially finding a narrative that the most people accept – constructing the shared common sense.

Therefore, according to them (Binney et al, 2005), to be an effective leader requires consensus and shared understanding of the story. Organisations and groups will never necessarily all be of one mind and it is highly unlikely the leader would ever find full agreement without a narrative (if full agreement is ever possible) that common purpose can be built around.

Therefore, to develop this shared sense of understanding leaders need to be able to tell stories and "the idea of telling stories links to the notion that there is no objective world out there. People can only make sense of the world here and now. The leader must articulate their perceptions and define their world so that it is their reality" (Binney et al, 2005), p68). This articulates the 'sense making' process, and the leader has to find the language to create imagery that resonates

with followers. Grey (2007) sums it up nicely “organisational reality does not have an objective existence but is constructed by people in organisations.” (Grey 2007 p6)

The properties of common sense leadership pay reference to the sense making process outlined by Weick (1995), acknowledge the view that *sense* develops because of the way both the leader and followers view the world. Consequently, he argued, the leader has two key responsibilities: ‘sense making’ and ‘sense giving’. Firstly, leaders have to ‘make sense’ themselves of a very complex world; they also have to help their team or followers to make sense of the strategy and the environment in which they find themselves. Secondly, leaders have to ‘give sense’ to others through this highly complex environment and take account of the processes, designs and structures which filter and hinder sense giving.

In his article about IBM, Hamel (2000 p11) noticed that, “two people can see the same thing but have a very different understanding of the implications”.

Consequently, “we search for meaning, actively engaging with our life, individually and collectively strive to create meaning and sense from the many signals and cues we receive” (Hamel, 2000) collectively what we do is put the parts together to form a meaningful whole – Common sense (Weick, 1995).

Consequently, attributing meaning and developing common sense is a “fundamental tenant of human life” (Gratton, 2000 p28).

Summary

In undertaking a review of the past leadership theories (Trait, Style, Contingent, New Leadership and Sense Making), I reviewed a range of past material, I have tried to outline or overview the key themes or issues espoused in the various leadership theories hoping that by doing so I would gain an understanding of leadership that would:

- Highlight the deficiency of previous leadership thought when it comes to common sense and: -
- Highlight the elements of the leadership theories that interconnect with the literature on common sense.

In reviewing the past literature on common sense, we find key studies (Gerber, 2001, Lissack & Roos, 2000 Rausch, 2009, Zhao, 2009) that have developed ideas and thoughts which identify the implicit nature of the component parts that make up common sense. In seeking the development of enhanced common sense, Watson's (2006) critical common sense is a helpful device, as is "stepped up sense" Rausch (2009 p 414) or the advanced common sense (Delaney, 2001) in identifying aspects of common sense that might be developed into a common sense leadership model.

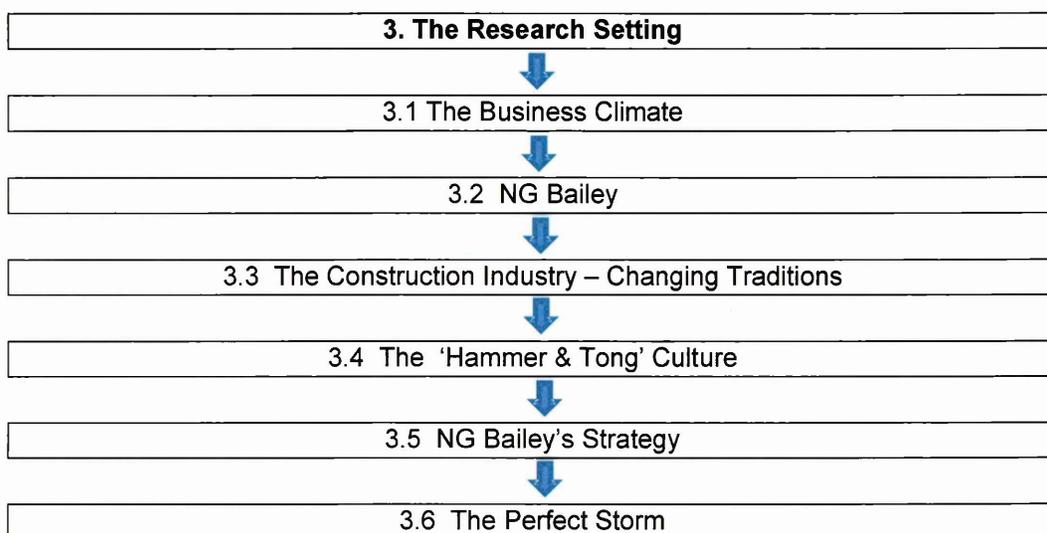
The importance of meaning and sense making in the development of common sense within the leadership process is also highlighted and the capability of the leader being able to make sense for followers is identified as a key attribute of common sense development. This ability to make sense for people is especially important during times of change (Kirton, 2003) especially within the context of delivering something new and different like a new business strategy.

However, from the literature we find no evidence that someone with an 'abundance' of common sense alone will be a great leader. Consequently, whilst common sense may be an important, implicit, taken for granted aspect of leadership (Ford, 1998) it requires further research to explore its crucial role in leadership action.

In the next chapter I outline the research setting, I explain the background to the company and highlight the challenges facing the company that prompted a call for common sense leadership.

3.1 The Business Climate

In this chapter the environment in which the research is conducted is considered. The need to consider the context within which the research takes place is crucial because, as we have seen in the last chapter, common sense and leadership may be context specific and if we are to understand the role of common sense in forming leadership action with NG Bailey, we need to fully understand its context and background in which the research took place. In line with the research process pathway:



Placing the research into a wider context, the world of work was changing: people were expected to work 'harder, smarter, and longer and more flexibly' to meet the ever-changing demands of customers, shareholders and stakeholders. Change was constant and the changes were fundamental, radical and dramatic. "Change has changed" and "discontinuous change is the defining characteristic of the post-modern world" (Hamel, 2002 p 25).

In short, a new world of work was emerging, a world that challenged all our old perceived wisdoms of business. For those in organisations, either as leaders or followers, the 'new' times were creating a 'melting pot of human emotions' which would require new approaches to leadership to help deal with the fear and excitement, delight and anger, stress and anxiety, passion and endless confusion associated with the post millennium workplace (Whitlam and Hale, 1997 p2).

Unsurprisingly, with all the challenges and changes facing business there was a call for a new a way of understanding the role of leadership (Drath and Palus, 2001). For that reason; according to Spolestra; a 'new common sense is emerging' (Spolestra, 2007) as organisations sought a 'back to basics' approach to management.⁷

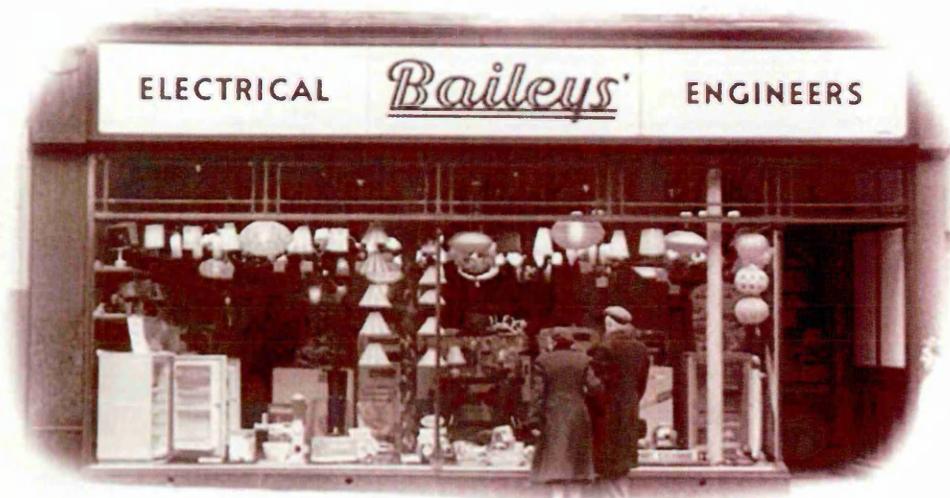
In dealing with the perceived employee 'confusion', was the role of the leader then, as Drath and Palus (2001) claim, to help individuals 'deal' with the turbulent and challenging times, bringing sense and meaning to their existence (Hale and Whitlam, 1997) or is it that, as Bennis (1991) notes, the 'leader creates meaning' for followers, making sense of the turbulence and as we shall see the need for common sense during a period of unprecedented change was required at NG Bailey.

⁷ At the time of writing, March 2009, according to many commentators, the UK economy is experiencing the worst recession in over 100 years. Unemployment is heading towards 3 million, and many companies are 'cost cutting' and reducing their overheads by cutting back on none core activities.

3.2 NG Bailey

NG Bailey is a family business established in 1921 by Noel Bailey. Over the past 80 years the company has grown from one retail shop selling electrical items (see Picture 1 below) in Leeds, to the UK's largest privately owned electrical and mechanical engineering construction company with a turnover in excess of £600m (2008/2009) and over 4,000 employees. (NG Bailey, Members Review, August 2009). The company, which is based in Ilkley, West Yorkshire is 'primed for further expansion' and growth and ultimately would like to double its size by 2015.

From my observation of the company it seemed the leaders at NG Bailey approached their responsibilities from very different perspectives (some clung to command and control; some pointed to style as critical while others were at least "aware" of "new leadership"). However, it seemed to me that NG Bailey was, like many organisations, trying to find their footing in the "new" business world.



N.G. Bailey, Leeds in the 1950's

Picture 1 - NG Bailey first retail premises

In 2003 the company appointed a new Chief Executive Officer, a graduate, ex Cranfield MBA. The new CEO was a departure from the previous post holder, (younger - mid 40's, 'charismatic' and 'transformational') who was older and more, 'transactional and managerial' in my opinion. The new CEO developed an ambitious and far reaching strategy and vision for the company which was encapsulated in various internal documents and ultimately captured "A Strategy for the Built Environment" (March 2005). The title and thrust of the new strategy became a major change management activity and was internally branded as '*Leading the Way for a better life in buildings*' and required taking NG Bailey out of its 'comfort zone' (Board minutes, April 2005) Further evidence for this comfort zone can be found in the 'symbolism' of their grand Head Office building, Denton Hall. (See Picture 2 below)



Picture 2 – Denton Hall, NG Bailey Head Office

The symbolic nature of the Head Office is matched by other 'grand Head Office buildings', whilst one cannot fail to be impressed by the grandeur of the building and the interiors (which are maintained in immaculate condition- see fig 4 below).

Denton Hall was purchased by the company in the early 1970s and fully restored in keeping with its early 18th Century grandeur and Grade 1 National Heritage listing. 'Sleepy Hollow' as it was affectionately known in the company was in my opinion a symbolic representation of 'arrival' – in the classic 'rags to riches' story, the Bailey family signalled their symbolic 'arrival'. Although difficult to evidence⁸ it was a strong perception that the building was the physical manifestation of success, and it was a public and outward sign of the distance the family had travelled from their humble beginnings in Leeds.

Additionally, the acquisition of a further 'grand' Edward Lutchens designed building in Ilkley reinforced the families social position and power in the local community.

However, as we have seen from the literature review, the notion of leadership development is a relatively recent construct but accordingly, "leadership training is big business" (Pfeiffer, 1998). NG Bailey had acquired a good reputation for management training; building on the practices of management identified by Kotter (1990). The management training programmes sought to reinforce the role of the manager as a controller of resources. Historically, leadership was for the family and in the hands of senior family members only.

⁸ Based on information obtained from the Director of Learning and Development, who relayed a conversation, he had had with one family member.

The consequences for NG Bailey of this particular legacy were quite specific i.e. the perceptions of the Board (NG Bailey Board Minutes, August 2006) suggest that if the business was to survive then it had to change. It seems contradictory, that to survive, the Company had to return to the 'basics' but it also had to embrace the newer forms of leadership, it had to move away from, in my opinion, the old 'command and control' trait based leadership to a more inclusive form of common sense leadership.

If we were asked to answer the question - what would change NG Bailey the most? - the answer would depend on the circumstances facing the organisation at that time. A small number of senior leaders who understand and can articulate strategy and lead the process may be needed, or many good team leaders engaged at a local level would serve the best purpose. Clearly much depended on the position of the organisation. According to Clarke & Rickards (2006), "definitions of social constructs such as leadership are not absolutes but dependent on context".

The need for a new common sense approach to leadership grew out of the unprecedented levels of change facing the business. At the same time the notion of 'common sense leadership' emerged from conversations with managers and leaders within the business as some form of panacea to cure all of the current 'ills' and uncertainties.

The reality at the time was more likely that, the business didn't know what it wanted. It was clear it wanted to move away from a 'dictatorial style of leadership', a leadership focused on 'top down' communication, 'tell and sell'

management style, a confrontational approach to both internal staff and external customers but it wasn't clear what it should replace it with.

By virtue of this lack of clarity, and building on my initial interest in common sense leadership as highlighted in the Introduction I was able to formulate a proposal around an approach to leadership that was suggesting 'leadership is common sense' or is it a particular type or style of leadership that is synonymous with common sense and consequently more appropriate for the circumstances the Company was facing at that time. An uncomplicated, no nonsense, unfussy, straightforward, simple, practical approach that was encapsulated nicely by the phrase used extensively in the business at the time 'back to basics', or as I prefer, common sense leadership.

Either way at the start of the journey it was difficult to gauge exactly what the business needed and consequently the research undertaken was not only to be used as the method by which to identify the 'problem' 'common sense leadership' Either way the challenge was to find solutions to the pressing challenges facing the business that became encapsulated as a 'perfect storm' (EMT Board Minutes, April 2007).



Picture 3 – Denton Hall, internal view of the reception

Denton Hall also served another key purpose for the business. It acted as the Management Training Centre. Here, managers attended 'off the job' training courses and were 'taught' how to manage. However, in discussion with David Wolstenholme, Director of Learning and Development, (January 2006) the agenda for the Management School was beginning to change and if David had had his way the name and ethos of the Hall would have been changed to the Leadership Academy, to more accurately reflect the evolving business strategy

and need for leadership development as opposed to traditional management training.

The appointment of the new CEO introduced a period of unheralded change. The changes which were taking place in NG Bailey were in response to both external and internal forces. The market conditions were changing, which in turn were leading to the need to transform the company. Before outlining NG Bailey's strategic response to these external conditions (including its revised value proposition, and the change to its business model) consideration of the other issues and challenges are addressed.

3.3 The construction industry: changing traditions

The construction industry had been relatively slow to adopt new methods of working in comparison to other large sectors of the UK economy, such as retail, and manufacturing. (Schweizer, 2005)

The two most important aspects of the construction industry were customer specificity in the final product, and the involvement of a number of value-adding organisations to bring the product or building to life. In my opinion, the customer wielded great influence on the physical aspects of the final product and on logistics (delivery dates, length of project and so forth), often selecting the contractor, specialist suppliers, and materials suppliers, meaning long term partnerships and coordinated action across the supply chain were vulnerable to disruption. The industry was dominated by competitive tendering and it is difficult to change people's attitudes. The tendering process encouraged a low price and low cost solution.

NG Bailey was traditionally a second tier subcontractor in the construction industry, in my view, making its name and reputation by offering mechanical and electrical subcontracting to first tier construction companies managing building projects. The construction market it could be argued had been dominated for many years by a particular business model (Schweizer, 2005). The client would put out for tender a building project, which would be responded to by a relatively small number of lead contractors. As the main criterion for selection of the contractor would be cost, this led to a set of consequences which were destructive of value for the client and the subcontractor, and potentially huge risk for the main contractor in large construction projects where the future of the company was often on the table.

Main contractors, having cut initial proposals to the bone to compete for business, would look both to find as many gaps as possible in the contract to charge extra time for, and also squeeze the margins of smaller subcontractors, like NG Bailey, all in order to make a reasonable margin on a project. The objective of the clients, the contractors, and the subcontractors would therefore be completely divergent in a zero-sum search to extract the most value from the project.

3.4 The 'Hammer & Tong' Culture

NG Bailey therefore had developed a strong reputation in a particularly tough business environment characterized by fighting for one's corner and a lack of trust of all external parties, described by one manager as a "hammer and tong" culture. Evidence of this approach was anecdotal although many of the people interviewed for the research took pride in re-telling stories of how the company had succeeded against the odds and 'screwed' their competitors to get the best

deal, A family-owned business dating back 80 years, structurally the company had evolved a number of relatively independent business units identified by their technical speciality. These Divisions developed their own business lines and clients independently and sourced the work from within their own department with little interference or support from either the group centre or other units.

These units developed their own support structures, and conceived of their role as a supplier of products in a specialized part of the construction industry.

Maintenance work – delivered following the completion of a construction project – was historically considered to be a poor relation of the main areas of construction expertise and a relatively small part of the company's revenue.

However, NG Bailey's culture also appeared to reflect some of the traditional characteristics of paternalism one might expect in a long-standing family business and which belied the "hammer and tong" approach to strategy. Certainly, internal hoarding of information in order to protect one's own knowledge of contacts and local markets had historically been "rife", driven by the independence of business units and the need to maximise local business opportunities – sometimes at the expense of better placed internal providers.

However, the nature of the engagement of employees with the company had generally been one of long service, with good benefits and a strong sense of loyalty to the company and deference to the family and other members of the Senior Management Team. So much so until employees of the group were

referred to as 'members' which implied 'membership' of the extended family or 'club'.⁹

3.5 NG Bailey's Strategy

Several trends had been observed by NG Bailey's senior management that led to a fundamental re-evaluation of the old business model; the convergence of those trends referred to internally as "The Perfect Storm" was captured in a "Strategy for the Built Environment", (March 2005). The first was client -driven. Some companies, highly influential in that they had a high demand for construction projects, took the lead in driving a change to the business model. For example, British Airports Authority in the late 1990s, restructured the nature of the construction industry by forming a consortium of contractors who worked in partnership to build Terminal 5, Heathrow. Those partners who took the chance of participating – and were successful in the selection process – found themselves working together toward the same long-term objectives for the first time. This partnering process was then replicated by others in the construction industry e.g. Bechtel, AMEC, Alfred McAlpine, Kvaerner and Skanska who used similar partnering techniques on projects in both the private and public sector. This development meant NG Bailey had to adopt a new commercial model based on partnering, risk sharing and collaboration. I suggest this new commercial model made sense to all parties, and therefore it could be argued augmented a new common sense way of conducting business.

A second driver of the transformation of the construction business model had been the increasing public, and legislative, interest in the social and environmental impact of a building. It was no longer sufficient for construction

⁹ Employees or 'members' as NG Bailey preferred, were surveyed annually for their opinions and results supported the paternalistic culture

companies to end their interest in a building the moment it was handed over to the client. Construction companies were being forced to take an interest in the long term use of a building, including the impact and specific needs of its users and the way the building “related” to its environment. (Schweizer, 2005)

Providing an effective response to these political, economic and social changes had been the driving force behind the transformation of NG Bailey. To begin with there was a clear evolution, (at least on paper), in the value proposition offered by the company; from a supplier of electrical and mechanical products and expertise to the construction industry on short term contracts, to a company which, in their terms is “For Life in Buildings”. Instead of the value offered to a project stopping at the opening ceremony, and maximized therefore only over the period of the construction, the value offering had become a 25-year combined construction and maintenance offering.

Knowledge of the particular requirements of a client had moved to centre stage, in order that the installation both reflected their needs, often sector specific, and made long-term maintenance value adding both for the client and for the company.

The Board had also signed off on a global target of an increase in profit margin from 2.5% (around the industry norm for a construction industry subcontractor) to 5% over a five year period.¹⁰ This target proved very difficult to reach. The company was already in the fourth year of this period and had not so far made substantial progress toward the increase in margin; the need to meet such an

¹⁰ Various Board Minutes and presentational material evidence this requirement

ambitious commitment was therefore arguably an increasingly important and key driver of the transformation taking place in the company.

3.6 The Perfect Storm

That “perfect storm” required a rethinking of the business model of NG Bailey and the leadership response needed to reflect the new world of work , recognising that continued reliance on short term electrical and mechanical engineering construction contracts with low margins was very high risk in that environment.

In developing the new model there were two major elements: Firstly, the ultimate aim was to restructure the business to provide an integrated offering; integrated, that is both in its ability to offer a range of installation services to the same client in the area of its core expertise; and over time, to be able to offer the necessary maintenance of those services. Secondly, the value offered by the company would also become sector specific; that is, the company had and would develop construction and maintenance expertise in a particular field in order that the requirements of that sector could best be built into the offering.

NG Bailey was at a crossroads: the leaders and owners of the business faced a conundrum in so far as “were they a family business with some professionals, or professional business with some family in?” The formal and informal role of the family and the paternalistic values which have historically defined the company’s culture which have been the solid ‘bedrock’ of the company were increasingly seen as blockers to change by the new CEO and Executive Management Team. From the perspective of its competitive landscape, this transformation of the company would entail NG Bailey moving to a different position on the value chain.

The implementation of the transformation at NG Bailey began with prolonged discussion at the level of the Executive Management Team (EMT), but started in earnest at the end of 2005. The EMT itself was a new creation, introduced by the CEO following his arrival at NG Bailey, and was itself symbolic of the move to internal integration and closer central control. There appeared to be three key elements to the transformation plan. First, The EMT had translated the “grand strategic vision” (for life in buildings) of NG Bailey into 6 “imperatives” or “strategic themes”, as follows:

1. Diversification, move into new markets and expand their product offering to new customers.
2. Enhance specialist construction, horizontal integration of specialist sub-contractors widening the product and service offering.
3. Develop strong ‘Facilities Management’ proposition, take the business into the life cycle of the building, ensuring annuity longer term revenue.
4. Develop & leverage strategic special relationships, work collaboratively with a number of chosen partners.
5. Customer-focused organisation, become customer aware and increase understanding of the customer relationships and develop a ‘marketing’ led market segment approach.
6. One NG Bailey, work together, break down internal barriers,

Second, “various members of the EMT were given accountability for delivering against [the six imperatives], The third element of the plan was referred to by NG Bailey as “the Six Ways”,(NG Bailey, EMT Minutes) a set of values – oriented statements linked to the overall vision of “for life in buildings”.

The 6 ways were:

Leading the way by working together

Leading the way by being focused on our customers

Leading the way by always improving

Leading the way by being committed to the long term

Leading the way by delivering sustainable solutions

Leading the way by maximising the potential of our people

In describing the people and leadership challenges in my opinion an “integrated model” incorporating the following was required:

- Climate, which requires interventions in three main areas: on behaviour, on culture, and on competence.

Talent, through the development and assessment of which you can “influence what future talent will do”

The process according to the CEO would “enable people to make the right kinds of choices or decisions in the business, to be firm about it, and to know why it is the right decision”. (NG Bailey, EMT Minutes, September 2007)

Furthermore, the culture “we’re looking at the concerns of the people areas we’re going forward”; and through a major engagement initiative, “taking the strategy and bringing the strategy to life” for individuals so they can engage with it and start to see what it means for them.

Consequently, the leaders needed help in bringing the story to life as employees needed to be actively ‘engaged and connected’ if the new strategy was to be

successful. The requirement required a new form of leadership: a leadership based on engagement, shared meaning and the wider participation of all members of the company.

In short, NG Bailey needed to engage its people in delivering its business strategy and plan. The business and its people had experienced some changes over the past years. But there was more to come and whilst there were no particular signs of change fatigue a number of past 'initiatives' had not delivered long term benefits. Consequently, based on the annual employee satisfaction survey results it was recognised by the Executive Management Team that they needed to work harder (or smarter) to involve and engage everyone in delivering the changes. (EMT Minutes, September 2007)

In introducing change, the leaders needed to help the employees deal with it from a personal perspective (EMT Minutes, September 2007). The leaders themselves were relatively inexperienced in leading change and ordinarily had no formal understanding of the sense making process or of their role specific in helping their followers deal with change.

However, a 'story telling approach, required incorporation of 'meaning' and 'understanding', and a further level of knowledge to understand the sense making approach itself which lay at the heart of storytelling, meaning-making (Weick, 2005). With this in mind a number of interventions were required which collectively would aid the Executive Management Team in their task. Namely, it was felt by the Executive Management Team that the business needed to:

- Develop leaders with the capacity to map the business strategy (for life in buildings) into a simple compelling journey which engages and supports all employees during and throughout the whole change process by using narrative and storytelling. Essentially developing a common sense approach.
- Develop the leaders to help the company develop the 'vision' of being an employer of choice, by dealing with change sympathetically and empathetically.
- Develop the leaders to make the journey memorable through interesting and imaginative interactions at all levels so that it becomes 'common sense'.
- Develop leaders to train and equip the employees at all levels to deal with change.
- Develop the leaders to enhance their facilitation and communication skills so that messages are or appear to be credible and authentic.

Improving engagement included developing a vehicle for enabling the leaders to build on going communication based around common sense solutions.¹¹ To encourage ownership by the wider leadership team; and to create an appreciation for themselves (so that they understood the role they played) the top fifty 'leaders' attended a workshop on the storytelling process.

¹¹ The measurement of engagement utilised the annual members' survey.

The change agenda was directly linked to behaviour change. It was clear, from the anecdotal evidence and informal feedback, the Leaders needed help in bringing the new ways of working to life, so that the new behaviours became an integral part of everything they did (in essence the new common sense, taken for granted).

Summary

In summary, back in 2003, the growing recognition of fundamental changes to the construction industry from both within the Family and wider non-executive population of NG Bailey's Board culminated in the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer. A Chief Executive, very different to his predecessor in both outlook and leadership style, but one the Board and Family hoped would lead the business through the tremendous changes taking place in the sector. His appointment facilitated an internal strategic debate which culminated in the development of a new strategy – "For Life In Buildings". The new strategy built on external changes taking place both within the construction industry, and challenged the company internally to move out of its perceived 'comfort zone'.

The development of a new strategy required a new approach to business. Managers and leaders across the business 'had' to change. The historic 'hammer and tong' approach would not, according to the Chief Executive, 'succeed' in the future. Therefore, internal drivers were developed to support and reinforce the need for change. An internal engagement strategy was developed - Leading The Way - to assist managers and leaders in their journey.

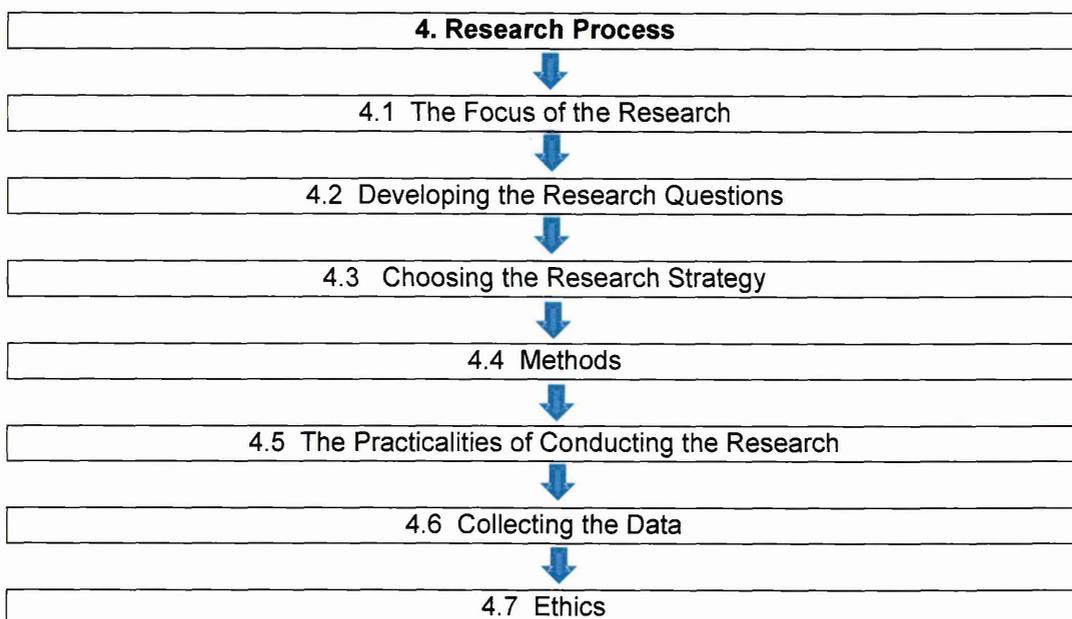
The requirement to change required, in my opinion, a new method of common sense leadership and a revised approach to leadership development as the traditional 'top down' trait based approach to leadership development was perceived as failing. Consequently a new approach to leadership development was sought, one in keeping with the "no frills, back to basics" (NG Bailey, Board Minutes, April 2006) common sense approach. An approach that would build on the history and heritage of the company but one that would also 'simplify' and provide a 'common sense' approach. In short: Common Sense Leadership.

In the next chapter, I consider the contextual implications for the research. Firstly, the environment in which the company operated was experiencing unprecedented levels of change, and the traditional approaches to leadership (command and control) were deemed by the Chief Executive to be 'failing'. There was a willingness (at least within the Executive Management Team) to try something new. In my opinion, a culture based on a practical, task focused common sense approach to leadership, which was not overly theoretical, based on common sense. However, to justify this approach required me to include the field work.

Chapter 4 - Research Process

In this chapter, I intend outlining the process of enquiry, and in intend using the outline from Robson, (2002) in that this chapter will cover the following aspects of the research: the focus; the research questions; the research strategy; the methods deployed in undertaking the research, the practicalities of organising the research group and holding the interviews, collecting the data (pxxi-xxii) and the ethics of undertaking the research. In the next chapter I deal with the data analysis.

In placing the chapter into the wider research pathway:



4.1 The Focus of the Research

The primary focus of the research builds on the leadership and common sense literature reviews outlined in Chapter 2, and hopes to gain an appreciation of common sense and leadership (and all its component parts) within a specific context of a large family business. From this context it is anticipated a model of

'common sense leadership' will evolve. A form of leadership which ultimately would inform future leadership research and practice and provide an alternative more simplistic common sense view of leadership.

4.2 Developing the Research Questions

In Chapter 1 I identified both the background and starting point of the research; I also offered an initial view as to the overarching research question. In attempting to define the scope of the research object, "it follows logically that the first step is to define the basic research question itself" (Pandit, 1996). Initially, I found that I could only loosely describe the research question because my initial thoughts were based on a 'hunch' of current understanding – based on my previous experiences, knowledge and insight. This is quite normal, according to McAuley (2001 p 6) as the researcher "inevitably brings something of their objective and subjective selves to the feast {and} in doing so they also bring an intellectual pre-understanding.

As I explained in the introduction, it was during a senior management meeting that I first became 'conscious' of the possible research question. Following, the literature review, I found a 'gap' in the leadership literature. In reviewing the literature surrounding common sense I came across the view common sense is both 'developable', (Delaney, 2001) and 'critical' (Watson, 2006). Consequently, I connected the two main themes (leadership and common sense) to see whether my key aim of a leadership process based on back to basics, common sense principles could be developed.

Recognising that “a research project is built on the foundations of its research questions” (Blaikie, 2000 p58) and consequently with this in mind, the research will primarily concentrate on answering the following overarching specific or grand tour question: In what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership actions? It is hoped that by peeling back the various theories of leadership (trait, style, contingency, new leadership), we can reveal a form of leadership grounded in common sense principles.

Creswell (2003) recommends that a central question like the one above is established, and initially it pays to keep the central question specifically broad so as not to limit the scope of enquiry. Therefore, in forming the central research question: - In what way might common sense inform leadership action? I utilised the literature review and earlier studies of common sense in the workplace to formulate the question.

From this central question, I developed additional sub questions that would be specifically explored in the interviews; I proposed incorporating some of the questions used by Gerber (2001) with supplementary questions to reflect the leadership aspects his research study did not tackle. In developing the sub questions, Creswell (2003) recommends that no more than between five and seven sub questions are posed. In developing the sub questions I wanted to ask questions about:

- What people understood common sense to be?
- How have they experienced common sense in the workplace?
- How have they seen other people use common sense in the course of their work?
- What constitutes good leadership?

- How might a leader's common sense differ to followers?
- How has common sense changed or evolved?

I shared the initial questions with my academic supervisors to obtain a view on the validity of the questions. I deliberately chose 'open' questions and focused on 'how' and 'what' questions specifically as according to Blaikie,(2000), these types of questions illicit descriptive answers and are specifically directed at "discovering and describing characteristics of social phenomena" (p60) Additionally, I ensured the questions were clear, specific, answerable, substantially relevant, interconnected in that they related directly back to the central question and lastly they were substantially relevant to help me answer the central question. (Robson, 2002, p59).

In establishing the research questions and given the nature of the research being undertaken I now need to consider the appropriate research strategy that enables me to start with my area of study i.e. common sense leadership and find an appropriate research strategy that allows the theory to emerge from the data. In the next section, I discuss the chosen research strategy and my underpinning methodology.

4.3 Choosing a Research Strategy

In this section, I explain my approach to the research, consider the alternative approaches that I could have used, and explain why I didn't think they were appropriate for this particular type of research, which I would categorise as 'subjective and interpretative'. I justify my research strategy and deal with some of the challenges and how I overcame them. In determining research strategy I

am using the definition as defined by Bryman & Bell (2003) in so far as the research strategy refers to the “general orientation” in which the social research is conducted. (p573)

I propose taking a “general inductive approach” (Thomas, 2006 p238) an approach described by (Bryman & Bell, 2003) as a useful, straightforward strategy when dealing specifically with social research. In describing the process I will be following I am particularly keen to outline the procedure that I will be following specifically given the fact I will be generating a significant amount of qualitative data. The approach will involve me trying to seek “universal explanations of the phenomena” under study (Bryman & Bell, “2003 p 567) by collating data until no cases that are inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation of phenomena are found. In undertaking the process, I will be looking at how the data is reduced, how it is displayed and the process by which the conclusions are drawn from the data and taking as the primary activity the analysis of the raw data and turning in in to categories from which a model or framework can be developed. (Thomas, 2006)

The nature of the research question according to Grint (2000), a question which sees the construct of common sense informing leadership actions requires an interpretive approach to make sense of the phenomenon. Consequently, in adopting a particular inductive approach I need to acquire a lot of data. By undertaking this type of research I am connecting with the ‘real’ world and gathering data to interpret. What I feel, think, and have awareness of and give meaning to the question, and are essential in *my* research. McCotter (2001 p 3) notes “theories are human constructions, they are derived from information which people collect by seeing, hearing, touching, sensing, smelling and feeling”. I am

an integral part of the process. Consequently, I needed to find a research strategy that met my internal drivers to produce a quality, rich, credible and authoritative piece of research.

It could be argued that I could have followed a quantitative/positivist approach and in doing so, set out a hypothesis and, consequently, collected the 'hard evidence' and produced the 'facts' that test, verify, and proved my assumptions to be true or false. Once I had collected the facts, I would have been able to 'verify or falsify' my theory and prove the existence of the particular phenomenon. In my past, I believe I would have utilised this type of approach, but given the complex nature of the research questions and the subjective nature of the subject matter I didn't think this type of 'hard approach' was either appropriate or would have worked.

I felt justified in taking a qualitative approach, as Easterby-Smith (2002 p 3) acknowledged that in the past "much attention has been given to describing, coding and counting events often at the expense of understanding why things happen" (p3). In essence, this is still the position today for many researchers, as the positivist paradigm remains dominant, specifically in the natural sciences but because my research topic area was not in the natural sciences I didn't feel any compulsion to use a positivist or quantitative approach.

However, I believed that by interpreting my data I would achieve a greater understanding of my research area and, as Van Manen in Easterby-Smith et al (2002) explains, the "aim is to construct an animating, evocative description of human actions, behaviours, intentions and experiences as I meet them in the life world". In scene setting, I need to explore 'the common sense of the leader and

follower' from the subjects perspective, and investigate the construct within the life world, to see if behaviours, experiences, and intentions can be accounted for.

In the next section I turn my attention to the Research Process itself, explaining the methods deployed and the process by which the data was gathered.

4.4 Methods

Given the nature of the phenomenon under investigation and the subjective nature of the construct, I needed to deploy appropriate methods which facilitated the collection of appropriate data. In many ways, the challenge is in understanding the nature of the question: In what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership action? It is a highly subjective question and one I find it is technically difficult to see how I could prove the existence of such a 'characteristic' by using purely quantitative or empirical methods, assuming that empirical methodology is based on the results of observation or experiment and the consequential interpretation of these results.

Consequently, I chose a method that enabled me to both illuminate the themes identified in the literature and draw out potentially new themes. Given the nature of the research question, the process of gathering data was predominately by interview.

Interviews are a great way of generating data, and are remarkably flexible in that they can be conducted at almost any time and in any place. According to Bryman & Bell (2003) they are the most widely deployed method of gathering data in

qualitative research. Whilst the interviews were predominately semi-structured, I initially built in structure so that interviews were guided and more meaningful.

To help with consistency, I initially developed a script, (See appendix 1) but very quickly found I didn't need it. What the script enabled me to do was provide pre-thought to the type of questions I wanted to ask. However, after the initial interviews I dropped the script and used it only as an aide memoir. Dropping the structure gave me the confidence to roam wider and follow up more deeply.

Choosing to use interviews as a means of gathering data was a relatively easy decision for me. As a very adept interviewer, due to more than 20 years of recruitment interviewing I had very little to fear about conducting the interview. My experience enabled me to put the participants at ease so that they opened up and felt able to say whatever they felt appropriate. I acknowledge, recruitment interviewing is different to research interviewing, but many of the core skills are the same for example, i.e. listening, empathy, asking open questions, encouraging people to speak and expand on their answers.

Using semi-structured interviews also allowed me the flexibility to change the format of the interviews as I went along. On a number of occasions, I let the conversation flow outside of the topic area and, as a result, some new themes emerged, which I was able to incorporate into later interviews.

In the next section I deal with the practicalities of undertaking the research.

4.5 The Practicalities of conducting the Research

In this section I deal with the practicalities of conducting the research, I explain the necessary background activities I had to put in place to undertake the research. I also identify the research cohort, the steps I had to put in place to encourage the chosen cohort to be interviewed. I also deal with the practicalities and challenges of being an internal researcher and how this facilitated organising, recording, and transcribing the interviews.

In choosing my research group, I initially selected a group of 'middle and senior' managers. I chose this group because it was easier to gain access to them, as I was part of the group, and I had senior sponsorship for the research (The Chief Executive Officer), which opened doors that may have been closed to an external researcher even with his support and sponsorship. I later extended the research group to 'non' leaders.

Selecting an initial group of 20 senior managers and as a member of this group posed particular challenges, because each member of the group is a 'senior' manager, operating at the Board level or one below. Members of the group were, predominately, white males and many of the group had been with the company a long time (the average tenure was over 10 years). I think this is important because as we saw from the literature review many of the earlier trait based views of leadership were predominately based on this stereotypical view of managers – i.e. white male, middle aged and middle class. This was another reason why I widened the participation group.

Burgess (1995) indicates the potential problems that may arise from such internal researcher arrangements, in such circumstances where the research is sponsored by a specific individual, and being loyal to them may hinder the researcher from being honest and open. In my case I ensured I kept my sponsor aware of the process, but I didn't come under any overt pressure to amend or change my findings or results. Furthermore, according to Johnson and Duberley (2000) an external researcher may have been viewed with suspicion, and consequently they would have had to work harder to develop trust with the chosen cohort.

Smyth and Holian (1999) suggest insider researchers are often in positions of power and authority, either informally or formally, that put constraints on, provide opportunities for access to people for additional information. In my case, I was aware of the sponsorship, and I do not think I let it hinder or distract me from my research question of in what way might the concept of common sense inform the leadership actions. However, I think it helped me gain access to some family members and specifically non-Executive Board Members who might otherwise have been reluctant to meet with me. Additionally, I acknowledge my perceived position of power within the organisation which enabled me to determine more freely who I interviewed. My requests for a meeting with employees were difficult to reject given my seniority and the CEO's sponsorship, however, I never gained the impression that they were reluctant to meet and more importantly share their honest views with me when we did.

Insider researcher status according to Smyth and Holian, (1999) is significant because biases and assumptions are likely to stem from it. However, Finley (1998) argues that the term 'bias' implies an unequivocal reality that can be

distorted by subjective interpretation, and that the alternative view of multiple realities , should positively embrace subjectivity rather than reject it as bias.

This required me to be 'reflexive' and to consider in more detail my impact on the research. "Once I abandon the idea that the social character of research can be standardised out or avoided by becoming a 'fly on the wall' or a 'full participant' the role of the researcher becomes clear. He or she is the research instrument *par excellence*. The fact that behaviour and attitudes are not stable across contexts and that the researcher may play an important part in shaping the context becomes central to the analysis. Indeed it is exploited for all its worth" (Hammersley and Atkinson as quoted in Johnson and Gill, 1997p115). Thus, by being open, different but no less interesting data emerged and this data still required interpretation.

Griffith (in Burgess, 1995) counters these issues by taking a much more utilitarian approach and proclaims the benefit of insider research and I would agree:

- Being on site and the effect of this on time restrictions and access to sources of data. In my role I had an office in which to conduct the interviews so that all the interviews could take place on site.
- Knowing the programme and those involved with it in relation to identifying sources of additional data
- Being a familiar figure within the organisation which is likely to reduce the element of suspicion surrounding the researcher and hence increase the flow of data

I did consider widening the focus of the research to include external companies to NG Bailey, but given the complex nature of the company and the subject matter, I decided against it. I also thought I could gain sufficient insight into the phenomenon from the chosen cohort. However, as I explained earlier, I did widen participation of the group to ensure I obtained non leader views as I was concerned that potentially all the people I had initially planned to interview might consider themselves as leaders.

I made it my goal to understand the research topic from the participants' perspective and on a practical level shared, in advance, my proposed questions to reduce any residual fear of the process the interviewee might have. Some participants felt threatened by the process, I think fearing there was a 'hidden' agenda or motive behind the research. Consequently, the sharing of the questions before the interview helped settle down the participant and demonstrated to them that they had nothing to fear. It also provided for the more consciousness the opportunity to do a little preliminary research for them.

Using an open approach was made much easier by gaining the support and sponsorship of the Chief Executive. He 'sponsored' my research and laid the way by writing to all the senior management team under review, letting them know what I was doing and 'encouraging' them to help. In reality, I wrote the letter for the Chief Executive and he sent out the letter for me but by putting his name to it he sponsored the activity and essentially made it very difficult for people to turn me down.

It could be argued that one major negative affect of using this approach is that the individuals felt compelled to meet me and feared for their jobs if they did not.

Given the timing of the interviews and the senior managers most recent experience their concern is not unreasonable as any out of the ordinary event could be deemed threatening without careful handling. Consequently, I had to manage all participants very carefully to avoid them feeling unnecessarily nervous about either the process or their role in it – especially given my role with the company.

I needed to be careful not to waste the interviewees or my time and many of the interviews took place either at the end or start of the business day fitting in with other business commitments. I did not go through in any great depth the format or structure of the interviews, other than to say I took great care in conducting the interviews, allowing plenty of time (I initially estimated each interview taking 20 - 30minutes, but some took significantly longer and the longest about 2 hours). All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

4.6 Collecting the Data

Undertaking a predominantly interview-led process, I had to ensure each interview was recorded, and later transcribed. All of the interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word in a common format to aid analysis. This process generated the bulk of data. Also as a senior manager within the business I took advantage to record my observations during the various meetings I attended, so that informal data could also be gathered and whilst I didn't necessarily always take formal notes, I often reflected on the meetings and captured the essence of the meeting after the event in my personal notes.

In addition to the formal interviews, I carried out informal interviews via a technique recommended by van Manen (1979) in Bloodgood (2000) and employed 'hold outs' by informally interviewing other members of the company as I went along to 'sense check' and clarify my thoughts. This became a major feature in clarifying my thoughts, especially as many people in the business knew I was doing the research and often asked me how it was going. I captured these thoughts in my day to day note pad, and the notes formed part of my wider information sources.

Additionally, as part of the process, I attended internal management conferences and obtained additional information by observing participants in meetings and in their day-to-day working environment. I kept informal file information throughout the research process, keeping notes, personal reflections, and other related information (I deal with the ethics of this type of behavioural observation later in the chapter). In keeping all the information in one place, I built up a stockpile of data, including: all the transcripts of the interviews, meetings notes, board minutes, internal documents, annual reports, staff survey results, and my personal notes, which I periodically revised and reviewed.

4.7 Ethics

Ethical dilemmas are highlighted by Johnson and Gill (1997) who argue that perhaps the group under study might behave differently if they know they are being observed and, in essence, bias the outcome. To counter this concern, I was generally open with all the participants and, in essence, found myself on some occasions acting as a 'participating observer.' Alvesson and Deetz (2000) call it 'partial ethnography', in that I selectively choose the settings that warrant

investigation and thereby eliminate the need for covert activity. I openly explained my requirements and motives to all participants and personally, I felt more comfortable with an open approach.

However, it could be argued there are negatives to such an approach in so far as participants only tell you what they think you want to hear and they may also behave differently just by knowing you are watching. (Alvesson and Deetz (2000). Therefore, on some occasions, I attended meetings where my research was not explicitly discussed. I couldn't personally distance myself from comments made that might have an interest. Therefore, I found myself listening out for the occasions when people mentioned within the context of the meeting aspects of either leadership or common sense. On these occasions, I kept my thoughts to myself and recorded the comments in my personal notes of the meeting.

As I explained earlier in the chapter, all interviews were recorded and full transcripts of the interviews were produced. I put in place 'member checks' (Thomas, 2007) so that the participant could check what had been transcribed predominately for accuracy but also to ensure agreement or disagreement of the text. (Searle, 1999) For ethical reasons and issues of trust, I was careful during all the interviews not to leave the recorder on after the interview (honest and openness) had finished. This was more for my integrity being thoughtful that something might get said after the recorder had been turned off. On a number of occasions, when something was said that I would really like to have recorded, the participant would agree for me to turn the recorder back on and capture an 'end note'. Overall however, nothing new came out after I had turned off the recorder.

Having personally accepted the requirement on ethical grounds to be honest and open with my participants, I also feel the need at this point to make sure I cover the confidential nature of the research. I did not want to be secretive, but I did want the participants taking part in the research to feel confident in the security of knowing that I retained the information in a private and confidential way and for that reason I have not published the names of the participants so that no individual contribution can be identified.

I had to be personally credible and trustworthy at all times. One way in which I did this was not to talk about the individual meetings with other participants. I also reassured all the participants at the start and throughout the process of the confidentiality. My credibility and trust was also enhanced by my good reputation, my longstanding with the company, and my actual role within HR attributed a position of wider trustworthiness. However, it could be argued that an external researcher would have been able to offer a level of confidentiality above an internal researcher in so far as they do not have day to day interaction with the participants during and after the research.

Being open with participation, however, did still bring additional challenges, trust still needed to be established with the participants. In developing trust, I provided appropriate and regular updates to all the participants. After each meeting, I transcribed the notes, sent the interviewee a copy, and asked them to clarify anything they with which they had a problem. I didn't share with them my interpretations although on a number of occasions I had to go back to ask them to clarify their answer so that it was clear exactly what they meant by their answer.

I took to periodically reviewing the information as my knowledge of the research question deepened, during the review process, I removed and confidentially destroyed information (shredding it) that I no longer considered relevant. However, I kept all my interview transcripts, notes, and feedback on my draft chapters, revising, editing, and incorporating the revision at each stage of review. Additionally as a senior manager within the organisation, I made notes of conversations and personal records and kept my note books which assisted the data review process. Therefore, although I relied heavily on the data which emerged from the semi-structured interviews, secondary sources were also important and considered extensively

Summary

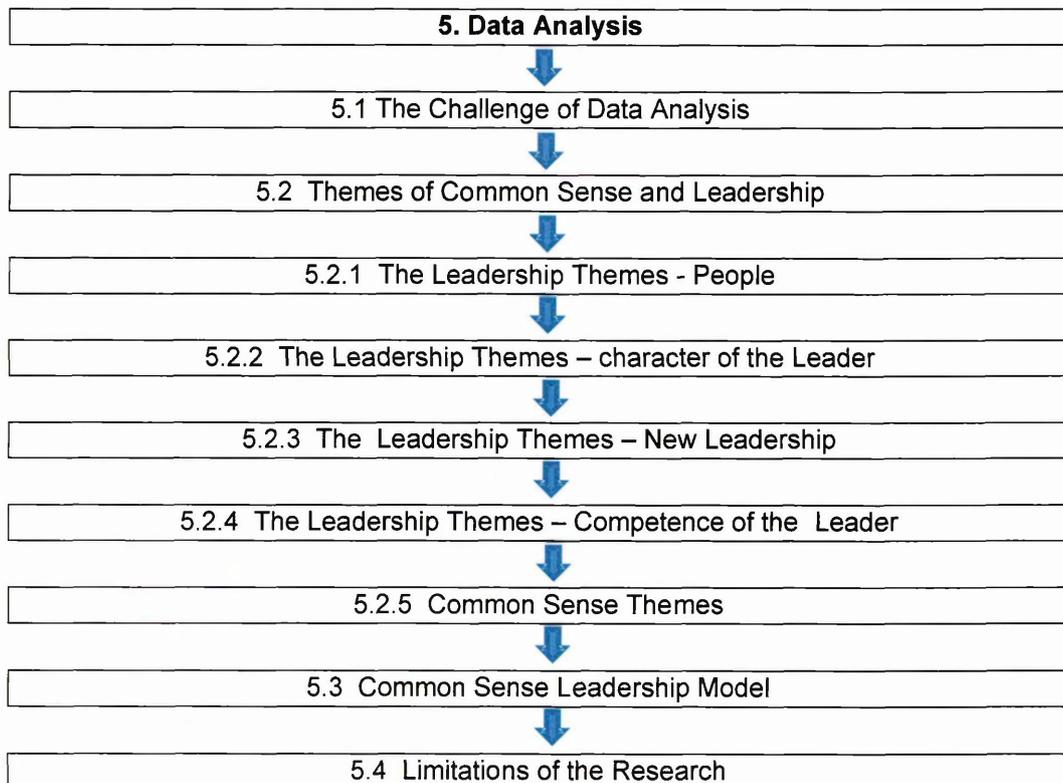
In the chapter, I set the focus for the research, highlighted my preferred research strategy based on a general method of analytical induction. I outlined the method of data collection, and I explained that I intended to predominately use semi-structured interviews as my primary method of investigating the phenomenon. However, I was able to draw on a significant amount of 'secondary' data including Board Minutes, Annual Reports, internal meeting notes and general internal documents. All were reviewed and although the majority of my data came from the interviews, the secondary sources should not be overlooked. Finally, in the chapter I discussed some of the ethical aspects of undertaking the research which I had to consider.

In the next chapter I deal with the research data, and the evaluation process that led to the establishment of the Common Sense Leadership Model.

Chapter 5 – Data Analysis

In the last chapter I outlined the research strategy I would be following. In my opinion given the subjective nature of the research questions I needed a form of data analysis based on general analytical induction (Thomas, 2007). Analytical induction is an approach to the analysis of data in which the researcher according to Bryman and Bell (2003) seeks to find “a ‘universal’ explanation of phenomena by pursuing the collection of data until no cases that are inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation are found” (p 426) Consequently, in this chapter I turn my attention to the task of analysing the data and showing how the data was condensed into the various categories and themes that ultimately became encapsulated in the common sense leadership model.

In putting the chapter into the wider research pathway, the structure of the chapter covers the following:



5.1 The Challenge of Data Analysis

In setting out my research approach, I did so from a tentative 'realist' ontological position, as far as I believe the world exists independent of me, but I am an integral part of that world and, as a result, can only interpret the world from my subjectivist epistemological perspective. Consequently in this section I deal with the challenges of interpreting the data, my research is my interpretation of the information gathered. It is my interpretation of the field notes, the interview transcripts, my personal observations, and reflections. For that reason, I do not claim a universal truth to my research but I do believe I gained a real insight in to the leadership process within NG Bailey.

Undertaking a predominantly interview-led process to gather the data, I had to ensure each interview was recorded, and later transcribed. Each transcript was transcribed in the same format. In interpreting the data, I was very keen to 'hear' or 'present' or 'be true to the voice' of the participant in transcribing, reading, re-reading and reviewing the transcripts. I was very pleased to 'hear' the individual respondents' authentic voices come through. Listening to the interviews with the transcripts, I think I captured the feelings, passion, emotions and humour of the participants. On review I was surprised how often I laughed during the interviews.¹⁴ We laughed mainly at 'small things' but many interviewees gave examples from their experience of 'poor' common sense which they purported to be true.

In undertaking an interpretative approach to data analysis, Cassell and

¹⁴ One interviewee told the story of asking new recruits (mainly young people straight out of school) to go to the stores department and ask for a 'long stand'. The individual would be kept waiting about half an hour and then told to go back to his boss and tell him he'd had a 'long stand'.

Symon (2004) point out that familiarisation with the data is imperative.

Consequently, I immersed myself in the data. It is essential, according to them (Cassell and Symon (2004) that the researcher is thoroughly familiar with the data, which involves a form of immersion in not just reading and rereading the interview texts, but also listening to the interviews repeatedly and for the “paralinguistic” information, such as hesitations or nuances within the speech. This was particularly illuminating when you realise how often we use ‘pauses’ before answering. To aid the analysis, I printed all the transcripts on A4 paper, ‘landscape’, with half the sheet blank so that I could write my notes and comments on the right hand side of the paper.

Pauses were captured, using dots to highlight thinking time, see the examples below of transcripts (see figure 4, below) highlighting both long and short thinking time and what I interpreted as a concern or hesitation at answering the questions. I interpreted the coughing as nervousness, and as a further mechanism for delaying a response to the question.

Figure 4 below, highlights examples of answers to the specific questions asked during the research interview.

Q What people understood common sense to be?

R "it's probably about doing things naturally...not having to ...think about something and put a lot of effort in, is almost instinctive"

Q How have they experienced common sense in the workplace?

R "D seems to have common sense, he all ways seems to be able to get the crux of a problem and he always seems to deal with problems so effortlessly. It's sickening really, I spend ages trying to work out what to do and he seems to find the job so easy"

Q How have they seen other people use common sense in the course of their work?

R "... that's a tough one, my understanding of common sense is ..., it's just there, I suppose I take it for granted and I am not sure I could give you an example"

Q What constitutes good leadership?

R "Two things really. Firstly, because there is a such a lot being talked about within Bailey, I've got a certain viewpoint from the training courses and all the training that I have had....The second thing is a bit blurred in my mind but its leadership with a small 'l' which is all wrapped up with the culture to me. And I see good leadership first hand in that P gives really clear direction, and he has a really strong vision of the future"

Q How might a leader's common sense differ to followers?

R " I am not sure it does to be honest, although I suppose I could give examples when I have seen someone attend a tendering meeting unprepared and to me that is just stupid, I am not sure its whether its common sense to turn up at an important meeting unprepared, it certainly looks unprofessional.. in my opinion anyway"

Q How has common sense changed or evolved?

R "I am not sure it has, although I think I have good common sense because as I get older I seem to make less mistakes"

Figure 4: Examples of data transcripts outlining answers to the specific research questions.

Next, I went through each transcript again and this time identified key words, while paying attention to the 'length of answers' to gain an appreciation of

'participant involvement'. This process of immersion helped me get a real sense of how involved the participant had been throughout the process. During subsequent re-readings, I focused on the particular questions, with reference to my research questions and sought to bring forth particular ideas or categories.

I analysed each interview in turn and constructed categories and descriptions using a form of general analytical induction. (Thomas, 2007). The process effectively involved reducing the large volume of data into a meaningful amount, by reducing the data with each review. The research, in that sense, is seeking to understand subjective meanings and make sense of the way leaders and followers make sense of their world within a specific context. This, according to Gadamer, (1997), is the very problem interpretive or hermeneutic approaches to research seek to solve, in so far as "meanings are not immediately understandable but require interpretative effort" (pXII). In my research, I interpreted the answers of the participants by initially codifying their responses into specific categories, from these categories, a number of themes emerged. From the themes, I was able to pull together a number of specific groups headings.

It was evident that after a number of interviews, the themes and categories 'blurred' and became remarkably similar. However, the struggle to interpret my data in a logical, sequential fashion was resolved as best as I could, by initially clustering the themes in descriptive ways and latterly by building on the theme of common sense leadership.

From the transcripts, I reviewed the individual segments from each of the interviews looking for common threads, I did this using a spread sheet, copying

and pasting from the transcripts the different segments, phrases, sentences or words under similar threads. This was initially very challenging as I ended up with a long list of categories and consequently in order to reduce the number I had to re-review each of them with intention to reduce the number by removing any redundant categories and by overlapping similar threads.

Figure 5, below, shows the actual process I followed.

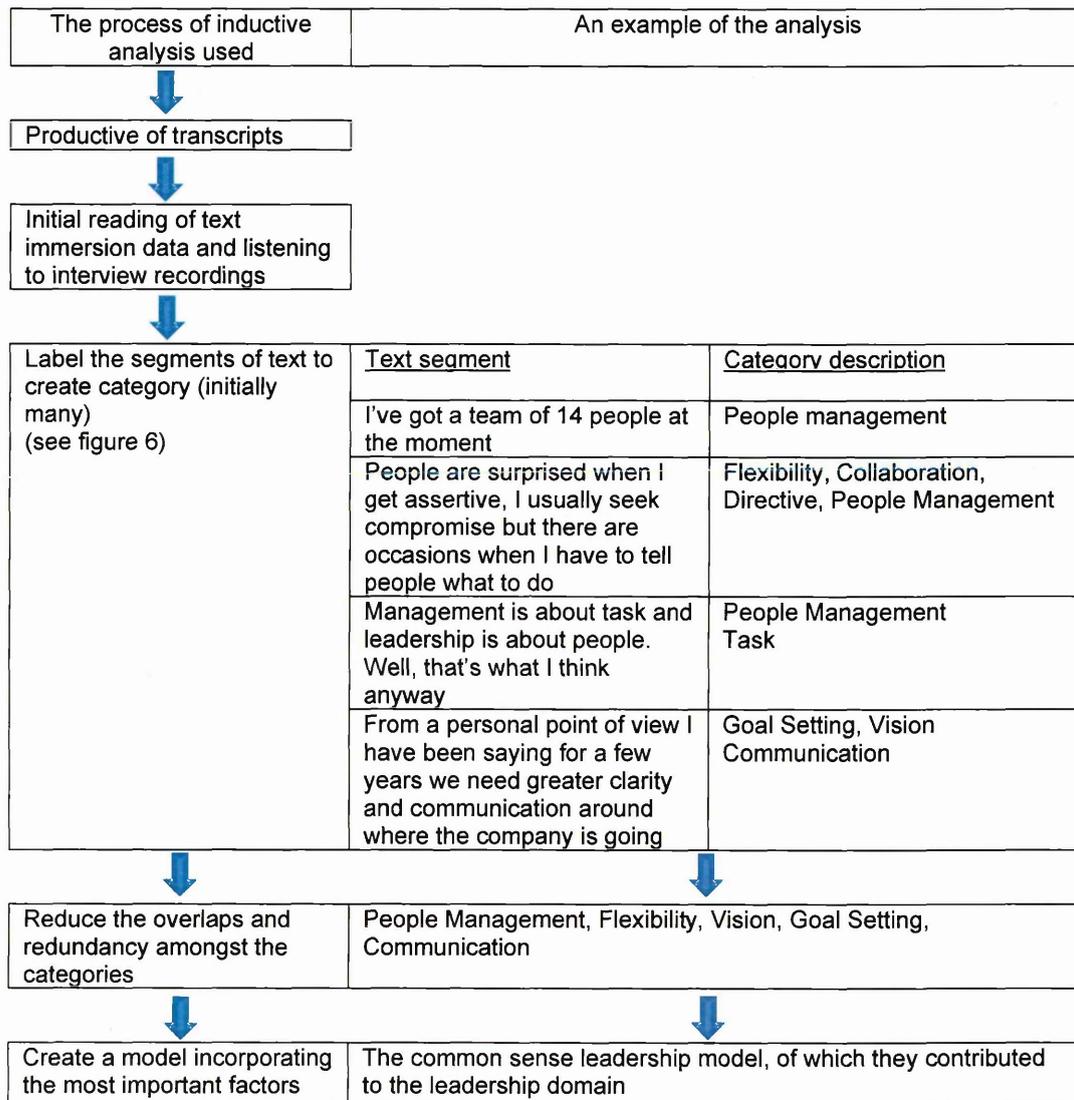


Figure 5: The Process of Analytical Induction (adapted from Bryman & Bell, 2003)

Although the process flow would suggest a linear and straightforward process in reality this was not the case. It required many revisions and it only ultimately came together when I had concluded all the interviews. Initially the volume of data posed challenging as I sought to condense pages of data into the different categories.

Figure 6 below shows the long list of categories initially drawn from the transcripts.

Contextual	Business Strategy	Networking skills
Time bound	Empathetic	Relationship building
Motivational	Service orientation	Commercial and financial expertise
Vision	Organisational savvy	Analytical skills
Trusting	Political	Assertiveness
Self- confident	Influencer	Humility
Self- control	Conflict management	Communication
Conscientiousness	Collaborator	Set example
Adaptability	Customer focus	Sets expectations
Coping with pressure	People focus	Coaching skills
Listening	Strategic Management	Feedback provider
Presentation skills	Business Development	Delegation skills
'Personality'	Skills	Uses initiative
Seeks solutions	Intuition	Conceptual thinking
Praises	Drive	Wisdom
Common sense.	Time management	Forward thinking
Practical	Results orientated	Interpersonal awareness
Honesty and integrity	Problem solver	Critical information seeking
Ambition	Sees things differently	Values driven
Supportive	Visible and approachable	Tenacity
Team Player	Walks about	Courage
Gravitas		Independence of thought
Flexibility		
Self- Development		

Figure 6 – Long list of categories, identified after initial transcript analysis

5.2 Themes of common sense and leadership

Having explained the process I followed to review and reduce the data, now let us turn in more detail to review the aspects from the research and draw up descriptions for each of the two themes: leadership and common sense. I add a caveat, in that the nature of the themes are deliberately 'vague' around the edges. This 'vagueness' is essential as some positioning of each of the categories are open to interpretation and overlap. Consequently, I may have placed something in one theme which could equally have been placed in the other. For example, a category based on 'flexibility' could fit equally as a component of leadership i.e. to be flexible or alternatively it could be an inherent quality of common sense. In this particular instance, I choose to place it under leadership as the respondents emphasised the point that leaders needed to be flexible to get the best out of people and situations.

5.2.1 The Leadership Themes - People

The interest in new forms of Leadership is evident from the research, I suppose it was to be expected that many of the respondents would refer to transformational leadership in some form or another as the appeal and interest in this form of leadership as we saw in the literature review, has boomed" (Bass & Avolio, 1993, p50) over the past 20 years, becoming predominant in the leadership arena.

Specific examples equated to:

"Leadership is about people, making things happen and often getting people to change what they do and the way they do it"

“Somebody who is good at inspiring, motivating..... bringing on a team is considered a leader especially if we know something has to change”

“The leaders who have sensitivity towards people, and can reflect their concerns are much better at managing transformation as they seem to involve their staff and get them involved in the change”

There was also a very strong thread around the need for leaders to support followers.

“I feel very supported in everything I do, I know I can trust A”.

“I think it’s important to get your boss’s support for what you want to do”.

One respondent also commented on a more personal note; the need for support –

“I got divorced last year and I really appreciated D’s support, he was very supportive and really helped me”.

Taking account of the literature review, transformational leadership in summary is a process that changes and transforms individuals and is heavily associated with the personality of the leader and his/her ability to get on with and influence followers and again there was plenty of evidence to support this view of leadership.

“I think the CEO is really inspiring”

“I like M, he comes across as a real people person”

“my boss is a good leader, he motivates me and always has time for me, especially when I have problems”

“I hadn’t really considered this before but I like my boss, he works really hard, always has time for me and over the past couple of years has encouraged me to develop my management skills”

At its core transformational leaders influence followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected. It is also a process that often encapsulates charismatic and visionary leadership (Bass, 1985) and places firmly the leader at the centre of the process. This approach was reflected by many of the participants:

“M (the CEO) has a real vision for where he wants the company to go”

“At last I think we know where we are going, over the last few years we have stagnated and without a vision for the future we would still be stuck doing the same old things and clearly we need to do some new things if we are going to survive”

“I am really excited about the future”

“it’s only when you look back and realise how much has changed, I was only thinking the other day how many people have actually left the company in the last few years and I am sure that is because they couldn’t cope with the massive amount of change we have had to cope with”

“the strategy that has been put in place really explains where the company is going and I am really pleased to be part of it, I am looking forward to implementing my part of the vision”

According to Goffee (2000) to bring a vision to life requires a deep connection with followers. Connection is the attempt by an authentic leader (Goffee 2000) to really connect with followers, and one of the

elements of this connection seems to be the ability to 'tell a story' and the ability to use 'metaphor' as a meaning making device. From the research, despite asking them to, I was surprised at the inability of most of the interviewees to tell a story.

"I do not have any stories"

"I am not sure I know any good stories about the company, let me come back to that one"

"my favourite story, not sure I have one"

It was evident that their story telling capabilities needed developing and although a number of respondents used metaphor. One respondent recalled the Covey (2004) "wrong jungle example",¹⁵ in clear recognition of an earlier training course he had been on.

From the research, it is clear that the inability of the 'key or senior' leaders to connect in a meaningful or common sense way disrupts the development of shared meaning, and hinders the development of shared understanding. The evidence for this is based on:

"We do not see them (senior management) very much and when they visit site they do not talk to us"

"I do not think Mark would know who I am"

¹⁵ In explaining the difference between a manager and leaders, Covey describes the manager as the individual who, whilst the employees are chopping through the dense jungle, organises and arranges the pace of work, the leader on the other hand has the ability to rise above the jungle floor above the tree tops to see, despite their best efforts, they are actually in the wrong jungle.

“the management team never get out of Denton, I have only seen them once in the past two years”

Consequently, ‘people do not believe what they’re told’ they seek and need “authenticity,” “more consensus” “let people see who they are – a real person underneath”, “someone I want to follow”.

The excerpt from the transcripts highlights the view regarding the relational aspects of Leadership. As the respondents commented “what’s the company going to give me in return”, “what’s in it for me” “at the moment it all seems to be about take, what about the give in return, I haven’t had a pay rise in two years”

Since 2001, one third of all articles in *Leadership Quarterly* have focused on transformational and charismatic leadership and so consequently, one might expect practicing managers to demonstrate a level of interest in this form of leadership as explained by further excerpts from the transcripts highlight the importance of liking your leader and the impact personality has on the relationship.

“I wouldn’t work here if I didn’t get on with A, he has a very good personality. I really like him, he makes work fun”.

“I hadn’t considered M’s personality before now, but I suppose you would say he is charismatic”

“I like my boss.”

“I am not sure you need to be liked to lead but I think the relationship with my team is really important. I think they like me, I hope they do – I like them”.

However, when dealing with charisma the jury is still out.

“Charisma, I suppose you could say M is, although he is probably the only one”

Although there was evidence of the contrary view:

“Richard Branson is charismatic and we do not have anybody like that here”

“I am not sure we have anybody here with charisma”

The majority of interviewees told me that they had been exposed to management development in one form or another with NG Bailey and the answers reflected this investment in management training.

“when I joined the company, I was always at Denton doing various courses”

“I have just finished my project management training at the Hall (Denton) and I am really looking forward to the next module”

“I think the trainers at the Hall are exceptional, David and Graham are really inspirational and have helped me enormously”

Interestingly, there was a high number of respondents who referred specifically to ‘management’ training as opposed to ‘leadership’ training,

and some respondents were very unclear about the difference between the two.

Later, in reviewing the Company's Management Leadership training material the predominance of 'transformational' models was evident. One respondent actually commented in prefacing her answers:

"lots of the training courses talk about leaders and they have a certain transforming viewpoint".

Consequently, I would have expected many of the respondents to have at least some form of appreciation of this form of leadership, but interestingly because of the emphasis of people management within the 'transformational' forms of leadership, a number of the respondents didn't see themselves as 'leaders' or they deliberately reduced the importance of leadership within their role.

"Leadership is not a big part of my job" claimed one respondent because "he didn't have a large number of people reporting to him", and to him "leadership was all about managing people".

"I do not actually think of myself as a leader, I am a manager and I am not sure there is any difference"

When I questioned these views further, I think an interesting aspect of leadership emerged, in that according to the respondents, leadership primarily was about 'leading people' and consequently if you didn't have any people to lead you couldn't be a leader. Although, they went on to say that the people without teams could play an alternative role and perhaps offer a "different type or form of leadership, setting an example for others

to follow, in acting as a role model for the values” for example. This point of leaders needing people to lead was reinforced by a number of respondents in so far as they saw “the leader has to work with people, however large the number of reports”.

Although respondents did comment on the influencing aspects of leadership,

“the new way is about influencing”

“my boss never tells me what to do, although he does encourage me down certain paths”

“Andrew listens to my ideas, and we discuss between us the challenges we are facing, I like the fact we do not have problems anymore only challenges”

“My boss is really good at coaching, he helps me if I do not know what to do and he sets a great example although he works later than me and I am not sure he should work so many hours it can’t be good for his health although I think it’s a hangover from the past”

Many respondents also acknowledged this shift in leadership behaviour over the years they had worked there:

“in the past people tended to just do as they were told” and “leadership was about telling or directing”, or put another way “leadership is about being led” suggesting little involvement with the leader and the passive involvement of the followers.

One of the respondents recalling the founder of the company “he needed to be a dictator to get things done... it was almost the force of his personality and the way he behaved and the example he set that set the tempo of the company” but reflecting the shift in thought “but then we made a big step forward” when the leadership moved from an “authoritarian dictatorial style to a more delegative approach” or as one respondent noted “It seems to have moved from an autocratic style to a more touchy feely style” which was increasingly relevant in the personality of the individual and the ability to relate to the relevant group of people.

I think this need to communicate their values, aligns very nicely to the desire to connect with followers in a compelling way. Consequently, that requires within the leader a level of sense making, on behalf of followers so that any story told to engage them becomes part of their shared understanding and common purpose.

5.2.2 The Leadership Themes – Character of the Leader

Character, as defined by Hybels (2002) suggests, is the capacity to endure and survive, to overcome and keep going in the form of adversity but to do so in such a way that honesty and integrity are maintained. A strong theme from the interviews is the need for ‘values’ and strongly held beliefs. In particular, the respondents highlighted the growing importance of values, “ historically we used to be run as a set of fiefdoms....the businesses were run by these ‘barons’ and if they were making money they could get away with anything” . Increasingly, the leader needs to “have confidence to communicate their values, and be willing to stick up

for them” preferably in “short, sharp simple sound bites”, a statement I took to mean in common sense ways although it could have alternatively been an aid to improve communication.

From the research a number specific character traits were mentioned regularly:

“resilience, and tenacity”,

“idea generation”,

“critical thinking”,

“good decision making”,

“problem solving”,

“positive attitude”.

“N is a very honest guy”.

“I trust M”.

Interestingly, a number of respondents when commenting on the need for resilience believed

“this is something you are either born with or not” which may have some resonance with trait-based approaches to leadership.

The characteristics of leadership, are reinforced by many of the respondents who had a strong belief in traits, qualities, pre-dispositions and many of the respondents focused heavily on the specific ‘characteristics’ of the leader. The research highlighted the following characteristics such as:

Intelligence - “my boss is really bright”

Resilience – “we have had to overcome many problems in the past few years, it is really frustrating as things do not seem to be getting any easier and you just have to keep going”, which requires inner strength.

The question of trust was very interesting and highlighted a real divergence of thinking insofar:

“my boss does not trust me”

“the level of trust has really gone down, years ago we were left to do our jobs, whereas today he is always checking on me”

As opposed to:

“I am given so much freedom to do my job, he must trust me”

“I trust M to get it right in the end”

5.2.3 Leadership Themes – New Leadership

The research offered further surprises in that many of the more recent approaches to leadership were not evidenced, despite a preponderance of transformation examples, there was no evidence of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1991) for example and only limited reference to more recent leadership theories about humility and Level 5 Leadership (Collins, 2001).

The transcript below highlights one respondent’s views of almost ‘servant like’ leadership (Greenleaf, 1991) “it is better to serve”. No-one explicitly mentioned ‘followers’ specifically although there was evidence of the ‘led’ and there was only limited discussion on the leadership process as an interaction between the leader and the followers. I am left with the thought that despite a large and growing academic and literary debate on

leadership that encapsulates 'leaders, leadership and the leadership process', the majority of practicing business leaders/managers still hold the view that leadership is solely about the leader, and their actions.

Additionally, the sense of evolution in leadership thought was not evidenced, in so far as past ideas about leadership are not discarded as quickly as perhaps we might think. The enduring nature of trait-based leadership is a testimony to its persuasiveness and an acknowledgement that some management 'fads' are just that - 'a fad'. It seems that all forms of 'leadership' are still evident from the research and relevant and like New Leadership are encapsulated by evolution and the attempt to incorporate common sense in the leadership wrap found resonance with the respondents.

The relevance of this for leadership within NG Bailey is that this 'lag' in 'leadership thought' means many of the more recent leadership forms are untried and untested within a 'real' business setting. To many of the respondents, leadership heavily reflected the culture:

"leadership is all about the task, getting the job done and so long as we get the job done he does not complain"

"there is no difference between a manager and a leader, not in my world anyway – it's all about getting the job done"

"I think leaders are born, especially if your name is Bailey"

"to be a leader in this business it helps if your name is Bailey"

Consequently there is a tendency to stay with the 'tried and tested' methods of leaderships which culminates in the on-going use of

'command and control' 'top down' 'leader centric' approaches despite some evidence to the contrary.

The research highlighted the need for individual vision – an element of new leadership. In expanding on the need for vision, it became clear that many respondents acknowledged the need for “a vision” of the future state, as one respondent noted “people need to know where they are going”. However this explicit articulation of the need for a ‘vision’ of the future highlighted the need for communication and “selling” skills as one respondent expressed it “we have to grab their attention” and “enthuse” them i.e. the followers if we are to achieve anything.

In most cases, the nominated visionary leader tended to be the most senior leader, and most respondents made reference to the Chief Executive. A point highlighted by a number of comments regarding his leadership style “if only the CEO would tell us his vision we can then get on” or “I report to the Chief Executive and he’s got a certain amount of vision”

Maybe surprisingly, I found no evidence within NG Bailey of leaders developing ‘vision building skills’ and this is probably because everyone looks to the CEO for their vision.. It seems according to the research and literature, ‘having a vision’ is a core requirement of leadership but it seems, implicitly transformational leaders have the capacity to build common visions without being taught how to do so. As one respondent put it, leaders need to “build the vision in the first instance.” For example one of the respondents quoted, “If you want to build a ship, do not drum

up men to go to the forest to gather wood, saw it, and nail the planks together. Instead, teach them the desire for the sea".¹⁶ Antoine de Saint-Exupery.

I believe the above quote encapsulates very nicely the appeal of vision and the selling of a compelling and inspiring picture of the future but it gives no indication of how individual leaders can develop this capability. Essentially, if you want to be a leader you "have to have a personal vision" of where you want to go. One respondent put it like this – "you need a vision of where you are going and how you are going to get there. But, what if you do not have a vision, how do you develop one? In answering this question, we need better guidance. However, even if you do have a vision, how do you disseminate it and gain follower commitment to it?

According to Hybels (2002), when discussing vision, he claims the leader must "embodying it, personifying it, and by living it" (Hybels, 2002, p 38). Hybels guidance is helpful, but do we see any of these vision attributes in NG Bailey?. From the research, I think we can see some evidence of 'visionary awareness' and 'vision' articulation, (the Chief Executive spent time communicating his vision – but maybe not enough). This was evidenced through the research by a number of respondents referring directly to 'M's vision', or 'M's plan'. However, I do not think I found any

¹⁶ I subsequently found the quote from Antoine de Saint Exupery, (Pfeiffer and Sutton, HBR, May-June, 1999)

evidence for 'vision embodiment', and critically the respondents didn't feel that the Chief Executive embodied the vision.

"It's all right for M to go on about change but I do not see much change at Denton Hall"

"It's all right for them; they say one thing and do another. I know for certain that some of them still do..."

"they are the leaders but they do not agree and the company is struggling"

"I do not think the plan will work, we have been here before and last time it didn't work either so there is no reason to believe it is going to be any different this time a I do not think M will be here in two years' time"

Consequently, I think there was an incongruence between the espoused vision for 'a new transformed NG Bailey' and the actual feelings of the respondents to the espoused vision. In arriving at this conclusion, the data identified the mismatch between the two elements in a number of ways: they didn't believe or necessarily trust the CEO, and other managers openly disagreed with both the strategy and the CEO and offered openly alternative visions of the future.

"I do not think M knows this industry"

"it will go back to the way it was when M leaves, you mark my words, I have been here before. The family always wins in the end and no doubt they will go back to the old ways when he has left"

"N is biding his time; he does not agree with the new strategy and is just waiting for it to fail"

“We haven’t discussed the elephant in the room yet and no doubt when everything settles down the ‘family’ will ...”

5.2.4 The Leadership Themes the Competence of the Leader

The final theme that emerged heavily from the data is about the competence of the leader, many of the respondents commented on their leader’s competence and overall capability:

“A is very good at his job”

“I have learnt a lot from B, he really knows the job inside out, but he should he has been here for years”

“A key aspect of the job is tendering and A seems really good at analysing the information we have to put into the tender documents”

“I have already said A is really good at tendering, but he is also really commercial, he knows lots of people and seems to spend a significant amount of time out of the office networking”

The reference for the need to be commercial and the use of networking was also raised by a significant number of participants:

“the leader’s role in this business is about getting the deal done and that means being ‘cute’ and knowing how to cut a good deal”

“A worked for me, he has really developed a commercial edge, he knows how to negotiate a really good deal”

“commercially, I think M is very astute”

“he knows a good deal when he sees one, although to be fair, he wouldn’t have survived this long in the company if he didn’t”

When it came to networking, it was raised by a number of respondents, specifically around developing new business:

“it helps if you have a good network”

“During the summer there are still opportunities to network, I often get invited to corporate golf days and it pays to network as you never know who you are going to meet”

“Networking is crucial in my role”

“I previously didn’t spend much time on networking, but more recently I have started to attend more conferences and exhibitions, it not only helps me keep up-to-date with the goings on in the industry but I also get to meet lots of other people from other companies and our competitors, so I get to know what’s going on”

One aspect of the competence of the leader which could equally have been placed under the People theme is the importance of listening. I finally chose to place it under the Competence section as I thought, based on the transcripts, the respondents were thinking ‘listening skills’ were important and consequently, whilst they are an important aspect of relationship building and connecting with followers, in this context I believe the respondents viewed listening as a core competence of good leadership. The following comments exemplify my view:

“N listens to what you say”

“God gave us two ears and one mouth, and I wish A would use them in that proportion, he just does not listen to me”

“listening to me is the core skill of a good leader”

“I think listening is one of the most important things”

The research setting and initial thoughts based on the literature suggested to me the nature of the leadership challenge within NG Bailey would be one of movement from a 'task' focused culture to 'people' centric approach. However, the respondents paid little attention to theories about leadership; in practice. The data highlighted the strength of traditional thinking around leadership and the desire for 'strong' leadership' providing 'direction'. As one respondent put it "leadership is about getting the best out of people to achieve the task".

In dealing with this progression and movement, the literature review suggested, from the early Great man approaches through evolutionary changes towards more inclusive forms of leadership. However, this progression of leadership thought in practice is not actually evidenced in my research. There is strong evidence to suggest societal changes and the growth of individualism over the past 50 years or so have influenced leadership approaches, but surprisingly 'newer' approaches to leadership are relatively absent i.e., Servant (Greenleaf), Spiritual (Hybels), Level 5 (Collins). Although there is plenty of evidence of transformational leadership.

So far from the research I have identified four key themes of leadership, based around, in summary:

- People, incorporating the relationship aspects, the need to support followers, the need to be visible and also to have personality

- Character of the leader, specifically focused on trusting your leader, setting a role model based on a hard working ethos and demonstrating good leadership by being flexible.
- Competence of the leader, including being commercial, using networking and analytical and understanding detail.
- Aspects of New leadership, incorporating aspects of personality to show warmth and charisma whilst offering a clear vision of where the company is going, and being articulate at coping and dealing with change.

5.2.5 Common Sense Themes

The research, like the literature, encapsulates a wide definition of leadership, but despite a number of books (Ford, 1998. Fulton, 1995). (Cain, 1997) being released on common sense leadership they tend to be either an appeal to a neo-Conservative management doctrine, around stability, status quo, or more to do with practical advice (Ford, 1998. Fulton 1995) (Cain, 1997). With one or two exceptions, (Watson, 2006, Drath and Palus, 1994), as we saw, the concept and construct of common sense predominantly is silent in the leadership literature and may have been so in my research if I hadn't asked the specific questions about the role common sense plays in the leadership process.

In reviewing the interview data on common sense, it emerged that to many of the participants it is a core Implicit element of the leadership process.

“I think its prime”

“not having to put a lot of effort in”

“I do not really think about it, but I suppose it’s probably important”

“A lot”

“a very big role”

“good leaders are gifted with”

“quite simple common sense things”

“Common sense is a gift, you either have it or you do not”

“to me common sense is an understanding of what you do with an awareness it has on others”

“what does common sense tell me” “ am I being reasonable here” “check from a common sense perspective” “push the chair back and think before you act”

Many participants highlighted the association of common sense with good decision making and wisdom. In the context does this decision:

“feel right to me, that’s how I use my common sense”

and is heavily aligned with intuition and wisdom, the ability to effortlessly form opinions make decisions on ‘gut instinct’

“I often make decisions which intuitively feel right”

“applying common sense”

“no one had the sense to push their chair back”

Additionally, some participants highlighted the nature of common sense as a non-academic quality – and concentrated on the practical aspects or pragmatic elements of common sense.

“I think you are born with it and some people definitely do not have it, especially graduates, they might have a degree but some of them do not have common sense”

“an area business schools do not touch on”,

especially when talking about graduates:

“they know all the theory but have no common sense” – consequently link to experience, “about not making silly fundamental mistakes” “this person is very technically minded, but they have absolutely no common sense” “common sense as preparation “ although may be experiential not turning up to a meeting prepared, is just plain stupid”

Many respondents also highlighted the practical explicit nature of common sense, it is:

“practical, getting on, doing”

“something’s I think are common sense may not be to someone else – like changing a car tyre is common sense to me but it may not be to you”

“down to earth”

“practical”

“level headed and not got their heads in a cloud”.

What I think this tells us is that there is a perception from many of the participants that common sense is an essential, practical aspect of life and that there are potentially a group of people who do not overtly demonstrate common sense, these prejudices seem to be evident against graduates or often a misguided judgement around people of academic intelligence not having common sense.

In relation to questions around the possibility of developing common sense the answers surprised me in that the views were contradictory:

“I do not think so”

“I have always had common sense”

“I think it develops with age, you know as you get older”

The comment about age reflected a number of respondents who firmly believed common sense improved with age:

“You need experience”

“Common sense is about life, the older and more exposure you have to deal with problems”

“My dad always said “what would granny do?””

In some aspects, the stereotypical view of graduates lacking common sense is supported by the dominant discourse within NG Bailey at that time. As a practical, hands-on business, there was no requirement for “theoretical” or academic people, as graduates were perceived (on reflection, I am surprised they sponsored the DBA). This reflected the views of many of the senior managers within the Organisation, who did not have degrees and consequently didn’t think you needed one to be a leader. To them, it was all about ‘practical, hands on experience’. To them experience meant “starting off at the bottom photocopying” and working your way up the company ‘the hard way’.

Some of the respondents were functionally from a project or construction background and had ‘worked their way up’ the organisation. However, the chairman had a very different approach, in that he clearly recognised

individuals could come from various backgrounds and what mattered to him was the core underpinning skills of the individual. He referred specifically to a recent role he had taken on himself “I know bugger all about the FSA¹⁸ and therefore I am learning as I go along” but even so you do need a basic understanding, not necessarily all the details, “you have to know enough ... and with a good dose of common sense you get by in most situations”

However, the research suggests what I have interpreted as common sense may actually be the consequence of the socialisation process, i.e. what I experienced as I grew up. Therefore, my response to a particular situation is based on previously learned activity and consequently according to the research it may or may not be possible to develop a generic competence of common sense because our common sense is an essential part of our humanity – it’s who we are.

Therefore, the key to success may lie in reflection and in giving people the skills to reflect on past activities so that they can gain the most benefit from their past experiences and learn from them. Zwell (2000).

Additionally, by affecting the act of reflection as a common sense developmental trait, we may enhance experience as practitioners reflect more critically on their past endeavours, learning from past mistakes.

On reviewing the data, one aspect came through in relation to age based experiential common sense. Unlike the age specific common sense experienced by Delaney (2001) in that each generation has its own

¹⁸ Financial Services Authority – recently he had taken a non-Executive role with a financial services company.

common sense, my research would suggest common sense is something the participants thought improved with age.

From the research, there is clear evidence that common sense is linked to age and life experience:

“as I have gotten older, I think my common sense has improved”

“it has definitely improved with age, when I was younger I used to make silly mistakes but I have been doing this job for five years now and I do not make them anymore, I am not sure whether this my common sense improving with age but I feel like I know more”

“I wish my teenage son had common sense”

Furthermore, common sense is evident in every person (Delancy, 2001) and consequently the challenge facing NG Bailey and the individual leader is therefore really about how do ‘I’ develop my ‘common sense’.

The answer to this must be based on providing a means of gaining additional experience and providing the reflective skills that enable better reflection on the leadership issues.

Further comments on age based common sense, “as I get older and with more experience it {leadership} becomes easier”, in challenging this comment, the respondent explained that from his perspective “leadership is about credibility, and followers want to feel that you have been there before and ‘got the tee-shirt” he went on to explain “experience allows you to test things against past event and mistakes” or in a similar vane another respondent said when talking about graduates* ”many of them know the theory but they’ve no common sense” clearly linking age, (most

graduates are young compared with NG Baileys leadership population and those interviewed) and experience with a lack of common sense. However, they went on to say that they “may have leadership potential”, which may be fulfilled in time with age and experience.

The comments reflect the reliance on gaining common sense by experiencing different situations, and chimes with the work of Hybels (2002) “One of the advantages of experience is that it provides veteran leaders with a ‘pain file’ of raw edged memories” Hybels, P176 “I take an unwritten pain file with me wherever I go” Hybels P178 – the idea of developing a pain file, learning from past mistakes, taking time out to collect the stories to aid experience.

In summary, the research highlighted the fact common sense is an implicit aspect of leadership, it underpins everything we do but more importantly the experience of life and development of the ‘pain file’ (Hybels, p178) as an essential aspect of leadership and lastly the practical pragmatic aspects of common sense are brought through.

5.3 Common Sense Leadership Model

In trying to understand how each of the themes contributed to the picture of leadership and additionally how they might fit within a Common Sense Leadership model. I developed the following model which encapsulated my findings:

Common Sense Leadership				
People Management	Character of the Leader	New Leadership	Competence of the leader	Common Sense
Relational Supportive Personality Visibility	Trust Hard Working Good Listener Flexibility	Visionary Charisma Change-orientation	Analytical Commercial Networking	Practical Experiential Common Sense Wisdom

Table: Common Sense Leadership Model

In developing each section, I noticed that not all the categories fitted 'neatly' into a particular theme. In some cases they could equally fit into more than one and in determining where to place the category was in reality challenging. If I really couldn't decide I revisited the transcript to try and reinterpret the meaning of the respondents and then I used my best judgement based on over 20 years' experience working in the management and leadership field to determine which theme they should be placed in.

This model of leadership encapsulates the evolution of leadership thought. From the literature reviews, I identified the core themes associated with leadership – Trait (based on the leadership characteristics), Style (based on the leader's ability to adapt) and Contingency (based on the ability to marry the leader characteristics within a specific context) and New leadership (incorporating vision, mission, charisma and transformation) (Bryman, 2006). The model also highlights Common Sense as an aspect of the model along with the capacity to be practical and consequently the model encapsulates experience. Together the 5 themes form the Common Sense Leadership Model suggest that common sense does inform and have a role to play in the leadership process.

In turning to the practical application of the Common Sense Leadership Model and in building on the above. I considered whether it would be possible to

develop a competence of common sense leadership. One that could be applied equally in all leadership situations, I considered, despite my reservations using the model of common sense leadership to develop a specific competence and the possibility of whether a competence of Critical Common Sense (Watson, 2006) could be developed on the back of the research findings. A critical common sense competence based on providing individuals with the appropriate skills, thoughts and behaviours that would enable them to exhibit 'stepped up' (Rausch, 2009), 'advanced' (Delaney, 2001) or 'critical common sense' (Watson, 2006). The development of such a competence could possibly be described as a 'overlay or underpin' that captures the behaviours, emotions, thoughts expectations, values and beliefs, Israel, Whitten, Shaffran (2000), or more appropriately, making the implicit explicit.

In accepting the research position that the development of a Common Sense competence is not feasible, I am also respectful of the failings often associated with competence in so far as:

- The reductionist nature of competences is inadequate in dealing with the complexities of the real business world.
- The general nature of competences means that they are not sensitive to specific situations or settings, tasks or individuals.
- They predominantly focus on past performances rather than as a predictor of future behaviours.
- They tend to exclude subtle factors, interactions and situational factors.
- They create a limited and mechanical approach to learning.

Consequently, in rejecting the possibility of developing a competence of Common Sense Leadership, I am left with the model which encapsulated the aspects of leadership and common sense to create a new model of leadership, incorporating the elements of common sense based on experience, practice and common sense itself.

As we saw in the literature and predominately supported by the research it is possible to conclude that there is emerging a degree of consensus that leaders are 'born and then made' but an individual's full potential cannot be realised without opportunity and regular training (Higgs, 2003). This regular training should incorporate an element of experiential learning to incorporate the common sense aspects of the model i.e. learning by doing whilst at the same time providing time for learners to reflect on their learning so that the implicit elements of common sense could be considered specifically when dealing with problem solving.

However, in contributing through practice, the Common Sense Leadership Model aided the change process in NG Bailey by ensuring any interventions for 'leading the way' was kept uncomplicated, practical, simple and compelling. Interventions to support the shift in strategy resulted in changes in practice as managers and leaders paid more attention to the Common Sense aspects of their role and deliberately tried to keep things simple and uncomplicated.

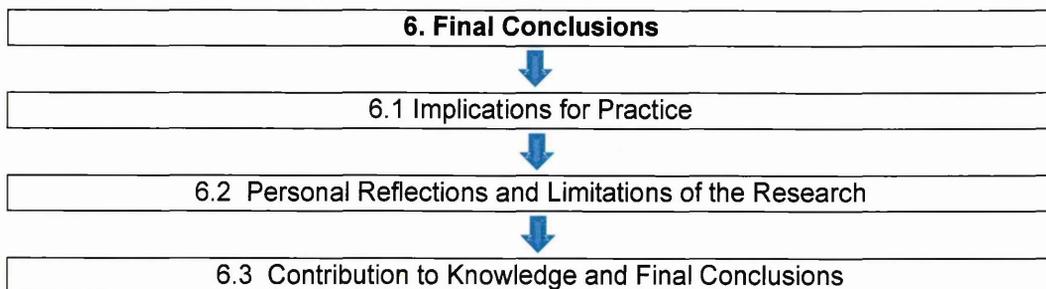
In essence from the research the pain of past mistakes can be a very effective teacher, and leads us again to recognise the significance of past experience in leadership. It seems when approaching leadership from a common sense perspective, the need to have encountered and overcome past obstacles is an

essential element. Consequently, it seems, the best leaders learn from their mistakes and this need to learn from our past mistakes is an essential element in the development of common sense and is evident in both the literature and the research.

In the final chapter I draw the conclusions of the research together, explain how the research was used to help NG Bailey transform their leadership approach, I also consider the limitations of the research and offer my personal reflections on the journey and finally consider the contribution to knowledge from both a personal and professional perspective.

Chapter 6 – Final Conclusions

In undertaking the research, I am mindful in concluding that I carried it out via a robust process, and throughout the thesis I have highlighted each stage via a process pathway. I have used the process pathway at the commencement of each chapter to clearly signpost the next steps but at the same time it acts as an overall map of the terrain covered on the journey. In this chapter we deal with:



In the introduction, I referred to the research process as a sea journey and maintaining the nautical metaphor as I seek to reflect on the research and draw out the final conclusions, it feels like I am 'dropping anchor.' In this final chapter, I aim to bring credibility and authenticity to the research. In bringing credibility to the research outcomes, I show how I think the research answers the original question (In what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership action? And in answering the question I show the conclusions from the research align with the original question and in answering the research question I bring my concluding thoughts together. Additionally, I look at the limitations of the research and consider the implications for practice on a personal and professional perspective. Finally I offer my personal reflections on conducting the research.

6.1 Implications for Practice

As the Group Head of Talent Management, and part of the HR Leadership Team a significant part of the value HR was adding (according to the Chief Executive) to the change process within NG Bailey was to lead a company-wide development agenda for its managers. The research results and the common sense leadership model were used as a mechanism to help instil new ways of working.

The overall results of the review suggested NG Bailey's long term strategy would demand strengths in identified key areas – encapsulated by the Common Sense Leadership Model. These were the areas of capability found most wanting by the Executive Team who were thus equipped with the information they needed to resource and develop their current and future leadership population.

As discussed in Chapter 3, NG Bailey had had a strong task orientated, 'command and control' culture. In the past their culture suited a type of directive leadership. In developing the new strategy, there were major implications for the employees. In the future, the employees and leaders would need to modify their behaviours and ways of working in order to successfully deliver the new strategy by working together to ensure the future success of the company.

The research had supported the belief that leaders would need to engage with their followers in innovative, creative and new common sense ways.

The nature of the challenge facing the leadership team at that time reinforced by the research can be characterised as follows:

- The shift from a 'transitional', trait/style based leadership to a more embracing socially constructed common sense form of leadership.
- Moving from a hierarchical structure to one which required more flexible and trusting relationships based not on an individual's position or power but mutual respect and solid people management practices.
- Reactive, project-based work to pro-active customer-relationship based activities, focussed on giving the leaders the necessary competencies to enhance their networking, commercial and analytical skills.
- Single bottom line focus to multiple bottom lines (not just multiple profit and loss but different bottom lines such as Customer Satisfaction, Environmental etc.) a more balanced approach to performance

Whilst I accept the new drivers paid little attention to the wants or needs of followers, and represented a unitary view of the leadership process, they also significantly represented the elements of the Common Sense Leadership Model.

Furthermore, the Chief Executive, in order to bring about change believed a new form of leadership was required. A form of leadership based on the findings of my research based sound rationale judgement or common sense. This new form of leadership was enshrined in one of the new ways of working – 'maximising the potential of our People'. (Leading the Way- Internal management Guide)

To be successful, the Executive Management Team would need to apply their common sense and:

- Create a compelling and inspiring 'story' to enthuse their followers to accept and embrace the necessary changes and to avoid follower dissatisfaction
- Provide meaning for followers, making sense of the turbulent and changing times, essentially doing their best to communicate and engage and form relationships with followers using the power of common sense to powerfully connect with followers.
- Ensure that all the 4,000 plus employee group were actively engaged and involved in understanding the need, nature and ramifications of change
- Demonstrate the required openness and involvement commensurate with the core values of Respect ,Integrity, Innovation and Excellence

To achieve these aims the leaders of the business needed their awareness of the sense making process raising, and with this new awareness they would make sense of the new strategy and share it with their followers in such a way that made sense (common sense). In reinforcing the need for change the company developed an approach that was emotive, powerful, creative and memorable both from a business perspective and an employee's. Helping employees cope with change was challenging and consequently the Board decided the best way to achieve it was by adopting the 'story telling' approach – an approach that would see leaders develop to understand their role in the 'sense making' process as they learned to tell stories that connected individual understanding with corporate requirement. At the same time the leaders were encouraged to simplify the story so that it was readily understandable, and as such the new business strategy was 'common sense'.

Consequently, in addition to the initial 'storytelling workshops' further substantial investment in the development of the leaders was needed. It was also recognised by the Executive Management Team that they understood that some employees would be sceptical and that there is a hierarchy of knowledge within the company but employees needed to make sense of the changes for themselves.

The main benefit of this new common sense approach for the employee was that it would hopefully speed up the communication process, and to ensure that messages reached all employees across the company. Additional benefits would be the reduced anxiety due to a shorter communication process, and increased confidence gained from understanding how their work contributed to the company's goals. This final point assumed that the employees would be interested in the company's goals and does not take account of any 'political' factors that might contradict this view.

Consequently, I believe the development of the Commons Sense Leadership Model had a major input on the transformation project which took place within NG Bailey during 2007 and heavily impacted professional practice within the company.

6.2 Personal Reflections and Limitations of the Research

Many of the limitations of undertaking this type of qualitative research are not unique to my particular research, there may be concerns about the size of the sample interviewed, my initial choice of whom to interview along with the subjective nature of both the interview questions and the subjective/interpretive approach to analysing the data.

Critically, in leaving the organisation in August 2008, I found a 'liberation' in that some of my concerns around being 'participant' were removed and although I acknowledge my 'participation' in the data collection and data analysis, in leaving the Company I no longer felt constrained nor afraid to constructively criticise. Prior to leaving the company, I had some concerns about sharing some of the thoughts and comments I had captured because they could have had 'consequences' for my career. However, since leaving the company these concerns have dissipated but had I stayed working for the company I may not have been as honest and frank with my conclusions.

In considering the impact the research had on me as an employee of the company, I am also aware that other participants may have equally had concerns about participating in the research, fearing repercussions. To minimise their concerns, I had offered all participants the opportunity not to participate and strict confidentiality around their involvement, but clearly one of the limitations of this research is based on the honesty of the participants and their willingness to impart their knowledge, which I think they did, but I have no way of knowing with certainty.

However, in setting out to discover what the leaders actually did I worked within an environment that on reflection was highly 'political' and dominated by the family personalities and again I have no knowledge of interference behind the scenes, but clearly some family members were uncomfortable with the research and probably only told me what they thought I wanted to hear.

On reflection, the 'political' nature of the research may have had an impact on the outcome of the research despite my best endeavours to minimise the political

aspects. In particular I had to overcome the concerns and political sensitivities of some family members who felt the research was an intrusion in to 'their' business and without the support of the Chief Executive Officer the research would probably not have been possible and would definitely not have been possible to someone from outside the company.

A further limitation on the research could have been that as a member of the peer group being researched, I had initial concerns that I would not be able to see the 'taken for granted' that potentially 'outsiders' are best placed to observe.

However, I endeavoured, I accept, I found it difficult to completely distance myself 'objectively' from the process. However, this is not necessarily a bad thing, acknowledging, I was part of the process and it would be artificial, in my opinion, to try and separate oneself from the research process.

I also acknowledge the limitation that the data can never be 'pure' and one cannot avoid the possible political implications of the material because, "interviewees are not truth tellers but {act} as politically conscious actors" (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000: 195). Considering this, the interpretation of the data and the understanding of my prejudices it was crucial to avoid bias which I believe I did by reviewing and re-reviewing my data. Although, I cannot discount completely my influence on participants and it is possible they only told me what they thought I wanted to hear which clearly is a limitation of undertaking this type of interview led qualitative research.

On reflection, having left the Company, this highlighted one of the challenges and limitations of being an 'internal researcher' as I probably didn't probe as deeply as possibly an external researcher might have. Although, to counter balance this I

doubt an external researcher (had they been permitted to conduct the research) would have been given access to some of the individuals.

I interpreted their world via the texts I produced, and clearly for me the art of any interpretation is to try and discover the hidden meanings behind the text and “subjective intentions of the author” (pXII), in so far as I strived to understand the world by extricating myself from it, this is particularly difficult when you are an integral part of the group under investigation. I shared the history and heritage of many of the participants and found it very difficult to subconsciously extrapolate myself from my past. However, it could be argued this is not necessarily a problem as Gadamer (1997) notes “the past has truly pervasive power in the phenomena of understanding” (pXV) as far as the past is an integral part of us and, consequently, if I did bring my historical prejudices to bear, I had an obligation to constantly assess them and my biases to ensure they are acknowledged and accounted for. I think, I did this by being honest with myself and acknowledging within the text specific times when I was overtly aware of my prejudices.

Consequently, a further limitation of the research is in recognising my unique position, and the ability to be ‘theory neutral’ in analysing the data wasn’t possible. I fully acknowledge I am part of the process, and I recognise my part in it. However, I do not think the research outcomes are any less credible, in fact I think they are more authentic because ‘I’ lived through them and consequently they have added to my personal knowledge and it has contributed to me becoming a better leader as I have taken on board the results of the research and started to use reflection more judiciously, consider at every opportunity how things can be simplified to make things easy for my team mates and colleagues.

On reflection my prejudice¹⁹ may have hampered open and honest dialogue in some interviews, although in reviewing the transcripts I do not think I allowed my prejudices to emerge. However, subconsciously, I may have treated these interviews differently and I know on one occasion I was more 'reverential'²⁰ and accommodating and with the benefit of hindsight I should not have been.

On a personal level, in undertaking the research, I met and overcame one of my key concerns which was having the confidence to start and the tenacity to finish a major piece of post graduate research.

I also accept that there were alternative approaches that I could have adopted. However, in conclusion, I choose the process I felt most comfortable with. In doing so, I accept that a different researcher could have chosen a different methodological approach and possibly reached different conclusions. In concluding the process aspects of the research, I do not believe I arrived at a position where by my initial 'thoughts' / 'hunches' around Common Sense Leadership, which via the research process, became substantiated into the Common Sense Leadership Model are universally accepted as an unquestioned truth. I do however; think my conclusions are credible and authentic. If you, the readers, are able to say "that makes sense to me" then I have achieved my aim.

¹⁹ I come from a humble working class background, my father was a dock labourer and he died when I was very young. Consequently, growing up in the 1970's money was always tight. I lived in a council house on a large housing estate in East Hull. Growing up in these circumstances was very challenging as the family 'coped' and survived. I believe growing up in these circumstances prejudiced me: I am anti-privilege, critical of people who are arrogant, thinking they are better than they are.

²⁰ Since leaving the organisation, I can be more self-critical, I was probably over reverential to the senior family members

I accept I had a pre-understanding of my position but I also had the inquisitive approach needed to explore further. On reflection, I do not think I undertook the research in a 'sequential and methodical' way, one step consequently did not lead to another, but rather more like – for me - a turbulent roller coaster ride. I skipped between the whole and the details, understanding and pre-understanding. Easterby-Smith (2002) helpfully points out "it is unwise to conduct research without an awareness of the philosophical and political issues that lie in the background" (p3). For this reason, I offer my personal view given that I believe management and research is a social and political activity and one in which I played a central part. After all the Common Sense Leadership Model is my creation, based on my research and highlights, I think persuasively that in answering my research question, in what way might the concept of common sense inform leadership actions then I think I have answered the question, that it can and does, both at an implicit and explicit level. Common Sense is an essential aspect of leadership.

I do not think I forced on to my research pre-conceived concepts or ideas, Gummerson (2000) although I would accept my interest in both leadership and common sense inherently shaped my research. Furthermore, I do not think I forced reality in to my ideas about 'Common Sense Leadership' to the degree that "reality became distorted rather than explained" (p62). As clearly, by following the interpretive approach, I used an inductive process that allowed the "real world data to emerge" (P63), and subsequently the emergence of concepts, categorisations, and constructs which enabled me to assess my pre-understanding of 'Common Sense Leadership' against the 'real world data' by using inner reflection and ultimately arrive at a position whereby the Common Sense Leadership Model emerged.

6.3 Contribution to Knowledge and Final Conclusions

In offering some final conclusions I accept the literature can only ever be 'good enough' as it would be impossible to review all the possible material available. (On checking the internet today (20 June 2011) there were over 443, 000,000 entries on leadership on Google alone (a fourfold increase from March 2010) and one could never read and know all the material and clearly not all of the material is credible anyway.) However, the research question allowed me to overlay the literature around common sense and leadership which ultimately enabled me to develop a model of common sense leadership based on a definition of common sense which ultimately highlighted the point that common sense can and does inform leadership action. At an implicit level it underpins everything we do and at an explicit level I have formed a view that common sense is an essential aspect of leadership, a form of leadership which requires experience, pragmatism and common sense. Consequently the development of the Common Sense Leadership Model encapsulates and combines both areas of research: leadership and common sense.

You are then left to conduct your own "thought experiment in seeking to transfer the lessons learned from the setting encountered in NG Bailey through the research text into your own personal experience." (Searle,1991:41) I think I succeed in bringing credibility to the research by arguing Common Sense is an integral aspect of leadership, albeit one that it has taken my research to 'make explicit' and bring to a wider audience.

It seems that, "it is easier to believe in leadership," (Gronn, 1995, P6) than it is to define it. Consequently my Common Sense view of leadership is, I believe, as valid as others partly because there is no universally accepted definition of leadership, but also because of the rigorous research process which I followed.

I think I have contributed to knowledge in this area by highlighting again the importance of the complete picture of leadership incorporating the different elements and historical theories of leadership. However, it is right to conclude that the concept that leadership is evolving from the research. Societal changes are and have warranted an appeal to lead rather than manage and consequently the appeal of the Common Sense Leadership Model as a mechanism to support this process is acknowledged in the acceptance by NG Bailey of its use in their transformation process.

In addition, through my research, I would assert the Common Sense Leadership Model encapsulates aspects of both management and leadership. From my research I concluded that if you ask leaders what they actually do, they seem to spend a significant amount of time, energy and effort on activities typically identified as managing: planning, organising, checking the budget and consequently it is very clear from the research that the divide between leaders and managers is very narrow.

However, the task versus people debate was relevant to NG Bailey only because of the particular context within which the company operated. With this in mind, it is a helpful concept simplistically describing the change required from to move from one type of organisation to another. It does, however, fail to take account of the underlying mechanisms and complexities involved in making such a shift .

From the research however, despite the history and heritage, there seems to be a growing consensus that “leaders are born and then made” or, as one respondent noted, “you have to have the basic kit bag within the person”.

Consequently, the nature of leadership development has taken the approach that if you start with ‘good material’ then you can develop the capacity to lead, in so far as capacity acknowledges a certain requirement for the appropriate:

Knowledge, Skills, Attitude, Traits and Beliefs. Therefore, the Common Sense Leadership Model will form the basis of future development at NG Bailey and will be used to develop leaders ‘holistically’ taking into account all the aspects of Leadership. However, having left the company I cannot be certain they have continued to use the model, however, I continue to use it.

Consequently, leadership within NG Bailey is a ‘melting pot’ of all the past theories. We might have been led to believe that some of the past theories have fallen out of favour however, in practice and from my research as I have said already, they are still very relevant and consequently the Common Sense Leadership Model encapsulates elements of past traditions whilst at the same time introducing newer (Common Sense) elements and turning, possibly implicit thinking, around Common Sense explicit, which, has to be as a contribution to knowledge and practice as practicing managers become more aware of the ‘taken for granted’ shared meaning aspects of common sense, but additionally start to simplify their leadership approach using practical, uncomplicated, simplified process or systems that aid engagement with followers.

At the start of the thesis I outlined my view that the world of work is changing and these subsequent changes are bringing fresh problems. People are expected to

work harder, smarter, longer and more flexibly to meet the ever changing needs and demands of customers, shareholders and stakeholders. Change is constant, and the changes being made in my opinion are fundamental, radical and dramatic. In short a new world of work is emerging that challenges all the old perceived wisdoms of business. In the more recent past, we have seen the global economy in crisis and as Whitmore (2009 p31) highlights "it is clear that many of our leaders urgently need to develop new qualities as the turmoil of recent years has highlighted the inadequacy of those in leadership positions". Consequently, I think the Common Sense Leadership Model identifies a leadership criterion for future leaders that will equip them to cope well with the uncertainty and future challenges as they make sense of the world.

Additionally, even prior to the current economic recession, according to Spolestra (2007), the business world required a 'new common sense'. The traditional hierarchical structure that gave power and control to a small leadership elite is being dismantled, and is being replaced by a new 'employee employer' relationship. In addition, the old 'rules' are being dismantled and a new business model is emerging. NG Bailey is not immune to these challenges. I highlighted the challenges facing the organisation as it 'transforms' itself from a 'task-focused' culture to a more engaging and people-focused company; a change which requires a change in leadership approach.

The Common Sense Leadership Model addresses these external challenges and incorporates the requirements to deal with them and on a personal level and adding to my professional knowledge, I have incorporated the common sense elements when dealing with change and it has helped me explain challenges more simplistically and consequently convey often difficult concepts in an

appropriate manner that help followers engage with the change by giving them a greater clarity of the problems and challenges the company faces.

In the future, if NG Bailey is to maintain its predominant position as a large successful family business then it must embrace its new strategy – “for a better life in building”. With this in mind the leadership needs to develop communities, formed around the shared values. Even in the current economic climate, organisations are being challenged to offer more than ‘just a job’ and if they are to be successful people will need to create a higher degree of meaning in their work. The role of the leader in supporting this ‘management of meaning’ is critical. Once again, I think the Common Sense Leadership Model supports this ambition as leaders become increasingly aware of the context within which they are working and the role common sense can play in solving problems - just by taking ‘time out’ and reflecting on problems before ‘jumping in’ with the solution.

At the core of the research question is the belief that ‘good or great’ leaders use common sense to great advantage, they have a ‘sense of leadership’. The ‘great’ leader uses common sense in problem solving, decision making, establishing meaning, and consequently in everyday local or living leadership (Binney, et al, 2005). From the research and the literature, it is evident leaders engage in a leadership process that almost typifies great leadership as a common sense process (to the observer, it’s uncomplicated, simple, straightforward and right most of the time) (Hybels, 2002) and yet probably these self-same leaders face many questions or dilemmas for which there are no easy answers and the Common Sense Leadership Model itself encapsulates Common Sense and seeks to find solutions in a practical and uncomplicated way to the challenges facing business leaders today.

As more leaders become aware of the Common Sense Leadership Model and consequently the role Common Sense plays in leadership, they will develop if they take account of all the aspects contained within the Common Sense Leadership Model greater awareness of what it is takes to become a better leader. Leaders deal with ambiguity every day, and yet when you observe or experience this form of Common Sense leadership you cannot fail to be impressed. (Hybels, 2002) They make it look so easy, despite the complexity and ambiguity they seem to get their decisions right more often than not and it could be argued when you experience this form of leadership, they seem to 'flow' with an almost 'sixth sense' intuitively finding the right solutions to the multitude of problems they face on a day to day basis. (Hybels, 2002)

This shift is the activity of the leader, and the leadership process must, in seeking to introduce a Common Sense Leadership Model of 'Common Sense Leadership', build on the past. It is important to understand how we 'make sense' of the organisation and how leaders make meaning. I believe the research added to the body of knowledge within the specific field of 'new leadership' and to the practice of leadership within NG Bailey.

And finally, as I reflect on the outcome of the research, I am reminded once again of the nautical metaphor. Over the past few years I have developed significantly as a leader and over the past year, my experience, knowledge and competence have developed and grown but at my core, what makes me a leader, is common sense and consequently by applying all the parts of the Common Sense Leadership Model to myself I will continue to develop and grow.

On a final thought and maintaining the metaphor, the following poem from 'Some Common Sense about Leadership' (Ford, 1998) sums up the journey: -

“There’s no thrill in easy sailing when the sky is clear and blue.

There’s no joy in merely doing things which anyone can do.

But there’s great satisfaction that is mighty sweet to take.

When you reach a destination that you thought you couldn’t make.”

Anon
(Ford (1998))

Appendix 1 – DBA Research Questions

I am going to ask you a number of questions about leadership and what it means to be a leader within NG Bailey. The research is part of my doctoral research into common sense and leadership development. To ensure I capture your full answers I will be taping the session and afterwards I will be producing a typed transcript which I will be happy to share with you so that you have the chance to confirm understanding.

The information will be used to develop my research and will also shape possible future leadership development within NG Bailey. However everything you say will be treated in the strictest confidence.

The interview will last a maximum of thirty minutes. I will stop the meeting at that time.

Before we begin:

Do you have any questions?

For the tape, please introduce yourself; please state your name, role and length of time with the company and tell me about your recent responsibilities within the group?

In your opinion, what does it mean to be a leader in NG Bailey?

In your opinion, what constitutes good leadership?

What do you understand common sense to be?

How have you experienced common sense in your work activities?

How might your common sense differ from your managers?

How have you seen other people use common sense in the course of their work?

In your opinion, how has your common sense changed or evolved?

I would like to thank you for helping me with the research and I will pass back a copy of the transcript when I have typed it

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