Assessing changing identities of Middle Leaders within an expanding Academy Trust

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Assessing changing identities of Middle Leaders within an expanding Academy Trust

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Abstract:

Responses to internal and external accountability measures and the coexistence of accountability, autonomy, and trust and their subsequent impact on middle leaders’ identities, form the research questions for this small-scale, mixed-method case study. Sensemaking theory is used to investigate and encapsulate the shifting roles and identities of subject middle-leaders in an expanding UK academy within a developing Multi-Academy Trust. Descriptive narratives reveal that accountability is necessary and can coexist alongside autonomy and trust in contemporary educational organisations. However, trust is the most valuable commodity for the sustenance of professional identities in these complex social systems.

Keywords: trust, academy, accountability
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The UK school system has undergone a great deal of organisational and structural change within the last decade. The first publication in six years of The Department for Education’s White Paper for Schools, in March this year, lays out the government’s future ambitions (Department for Education, 2022). This document emphasises the target for all schools in England to become grouped and networked within larger Trusts by 2030. My research examines these changes through the lens of experienced middle leaders' identities in a typical secondary educational setting.

The context is a large, oversubscribed, rural 11-18 academy within a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) situated in the North of England. As Head of Art, I lead the curriculum and three classroom teachers while managing the department. The MAT comprises another smaller secondary academy and a Further Education college. Since amalgamating two small, rural comprehensive schools ten years ago, the academy has grown to double its capacity.

The Trust recently appointed a new academy Principal, three members of the senior leadership team (SLT) and assigned a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) overarching the two academies. The governing body and CEO provide the academies' strategic running, allowing Principals a certain level of local autonomy in the day-to-day operation of their organisation. However, this MAT is in name only. Earlier attempts to network the two academies failed, resulting in analogous but autonomous organisations. Subsequently, plans are in place to incorporate additional schools, expanding into a more extensive networked MAT. This contemporary organisational structure evolved over ten years with the introduction of academisation, echoing many English secondary schools.

Global policy influencers such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) view school autonomy as fundamental to raising attainment and school improvement (Keddie, 2017). School academisation promised a decentralised system, allowing schools to plan and adapt to local needs by controlling finances, staffing
and curriculum. However, Skerritt (2020) argues that this has created a paradox within organisations. With increased school autonomy comes greater control, enhanced monitoring and increased accountability.

Heads of Subject are within middle leadership, bridging the senior and classroom hierarchical layers. The ‘middle’ describes a static location. However, in recent years, the middle has become a less definable, fluid concept as national growth and scaling-up of MATs have added a super-senior structural layer of executive leaders (De Nobile, 2018).

Middle leaders are generally responsible for other staff, budgeting, performance management, managerial work and areas of curriculum and policy. They are both prominent and integral to those who teach, focusing on the core business of teaching and learning. This dual position of teacher and leader compounds the intricacy of this multifaceted role involving complex tasks and relationships (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2021).

De Nobile (2018) and Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer (2021) describe ‘the middle’ in the traditional sense as a relational and structural sandwich, with the work of the middle leader often dispersed and distributed from the top down. However, Sir Michael Wilshaw, former Chief Inspector of schools in England (Ambition Institute, 2014), stated that middle leaders were the “engine” of the school and the most fundamental area of leadership.

Reinforced by the current focus on the knowledge curriculum, this analogy of the organisation as a vehicle driven by the senior leadership equates with the central premise of overhauling the English inspection structure. The most recent reincarnation of The Office for Standards in Education’s (OFSTED) Education Inspection Framework (EIF), introduced in the UK in 2019, takes a centre-out approach, replacing the top-down organisation of previous inspection strategies (Ofsted, 2019). The inspectors first examine the mechanical core of the organisation, looking for evidence of driving proficiency.

Curriculum leaders like myself are placed under the spotlight. Foucault (1977), writing about discipline and punishment, refers to how this central, panoramic view provides the
power and control of all-around scrutiny. Schools are environments of ongoing educational reform, causing leaders to juggle demands, responding with incremental processes of constant adaptation and adjustment (Balogun, 2001). The use of authority increases the depth and regularity of accountability procedures, maintaining an overview of the quality of middle leadership, aiming to gauge levels of trust in the staff and mitigate risk. My role translates and integrates these procedures and expectations through the department and to the classroom level (Busher and Harris, 1999).

I began this research with a narrower focus on the impact of the new inspection framework on middle leadership. However, questionnaire feedback and recent academic research point to a more widespread, global political discourse. The impact of the autonomous school, along with structural shifts, is causing middle leaders to re-establish their identities (Ainsworth et al., 2022). I decided to take a broader view in line with current thinking (Ehren and Baxter, 2020; Constantinides, 2021; Ainsworth et al., 2022), examining the impact of academisation on this leadership level within my evolving setting. The intricacies of their role make it inseparable from internal and external influences.

The central theme explores accountability through monitoring. Each aspect I examine is finely balanced as identity is immersed in matters of power and trust. For leaders to remain agentic and empowered, they require a clear understanding of 'self'.

**Research Questions:**

**RQ 1:** What are middle-leadership's responses to internal and external accountability measures?

**RQ 2:** To what extent do accountability, autonomy, and trust coexist in contemporary secondary practices?

**RQ 3:** How have these internal and external demands impacted middle leaders' identities?

While leader identity, although under-researched, is not a unique research phenomenon, the context of the shifting and expanding political and educational landscape make this
area particularly relevant. These questions do not necessarily look for solutions but aim to apply a sensemaking process, providing insights into how individuals interpret ambiguous events and environments (Shaked and Schechter, 2018). These findings will be shared amongst the middle-leader community of practice in my setting (Wenger, 2015). Their roles as policy interpreters provide a unique lens. While embedded in this social context, I aim to explore how these leaders interpret and construct meaning within this complex environment, enabling them to make sense of situations while effectively powering their departments through uncertainty and disruption (Shaked and Schechter, 2018).
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 Introduction

English educational environments have changed dramatically over the past decade with widescale academisation. These changes are documented and evidenced in a vast amount of current literature on the subject. I considered organising the evidence into three eras of pre-academisation (2000-2010), transitioning (2011-2016) and post-academisation (2017-onwards). Instead, I created a thematic review to compare and highlight how these changes impact middle-leader identities.

At the start of my study, I considered gaps in shared knowledge around my research questions. However, the knowledge base, particularly around middle-leadership accountability, is so relevant and contentious that several papers have since been published. This increase highlights and reinforces the relevance of these issues, enabling me to contextualise this small-scale investigation, located in one setting, gauging the prevalence and potential for replication and expansion within other longitudinal studies.

2.2 Multi-Academy Trusts

The Department for Education (DfE, 2021) sets out its vision for a ‘strong’ network or ‘family’ of schools to motivate and incentivise school improvement whilst explicitly raising standards to eradicate underperformance. Ehren and Godfrey (2017) advocate that intensifying government policies can bond stakeholder groups to construct a governance network and ultimately create a self-improving system. This trend is exemplified in England’s Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) model.

Academy Trusts are chains of publicly funded, independent schools. Each trust is strategically governed by a board of Directors who hold the executive leaders to account. The Academies Act of 2010 encouraged high-performing schools to become academies with the incentive of increased freedom and autonomy and, fundamentally, the ability to opt-out of the National Curriculum (Courtney, 2015). While, nevertheless, ruled by law in areas such as special educational needs, admissions, and exclusions, academies were considered to have greater freedom and autonomy in other aspects of
leadership. The size of the MAT and their sometimes-widespread geographical boundaries necessitate a centralised administration system for policies and finance, encompassing the whole trust. The government’s ambition is for all academies to become part of a more comprehensive, system-based organisation (Ehren and Godfrey, 2017).

However, within the first few years of the MAT rollout, there were concerns regarding student performance and behaviour. The Department for Education (DfE) responded by holding Trusts more firmly to account (Ehren and Godfrey, 2017). While tightening up the monitoring and evaluation systems, the DfE (2021) also specified the necessity for research and knowledge-building around the curriculum and pedagogy. Expectations were set regarding classroom culture, consistent behaviour systems, professional development, teacher training, better implementation of itinerant staff and improved staff work-life balance. Inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) (2019) precisely monitor and evaluate these aspects in their recent Education Inspection Framework (EIF), arguably, re-constraining leadership control. However, worldwide policymakers advise that school autonomy, balanced with accountability, leads to improved outcomes (Shaked and Schechter, 2017). Many school leaders justify this loss of autonomy as a necessary trade-off for the benefits of being within a MAT (Ehren and Godfrey, 2017).

However, Skerritt (2020) stresses that the Headteacher is ultimately accountable. If schools are underperforming, the Head can be removed or replaced. In exceptional circumstances, there is even the threat of closure. Therefore, it is very much in the Headteacher’s interest to maintain internal control, using monitoring, supervision, and knowledge through data gathering.

2.3 Systems Theory and the Creation of Networks

MATs exemplify systems theory, with academies as interrelated parts of a cohesive group. Shaked and Schechter (2017) emphasise that systems thinking concerns the interrelationships between the parts as entities, rather than the components themselves. Each element has the potential to impact others, thereby requiring a constant state of adaptation. This approach can be implemented to cope with real problems and complex structural changes in fast-paced organisations. Complexity theory is one of the branches of systems thinking, epitomised in contemporary English schools with their
multidimensional, non-linear, and unpredictable systems. The strain between horizontal and vertical relationships creates tension. The middle leader is torn between the expectation to acquire a whole-school perspective by implementing policies that comprise the concerns of the entire system and a more insular departmental focus and loyalty (Bennett et al., 2007).

Pont and Hopkins (2012) and Bush and Glover (2014) posit the advantages of schools using system theory to network, an argument also backed by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). They endorse schools joining, collaborating, cooperating, and sharing knowledge for improved performance. This organic system employs leaders as change agents with clearly defined objectives, streamlining and empowering organisations. Pont and Hopkins (2012) advocate that a distributed leadership style within these networks enables flexible delegation. They claim that spreading leadership away from an elite few while supporting organisational sustainability builds a system more significant than the sum of its parts. The analogy of a successful system would be that of a living organism in a symbiotic relationship with its surroundings, filtering resources. These inputs and outputs include finances, information, knowledge, expertise, ideas, resources (including staff) and technology. The aim is to maintain the balance of interdependence while working towards a common goal.

Though many examples of school networks are successful, the experience within my research context, to this point, has proved less sustainable and idyllic. Six years ago, the MAT was formed, incorporating a neighbouring academy known for its challenging catchment area, staff recruitment issues and underperformance. The Trust sponsors saw this as an opportunity to coach staff. Reciprocity of equals through horizontal networking would; they were convinced, lead to improvement by osmosis. Instead, staff in both academies responded to the imposed agenda with antagonism, low morale, underhand micropolitics and poor group dynamics, protecting their jobs and power.

Moore and Kelly (2012) studied the tensions in power relationships created through networks. The business of education fosters a top-down authoritarian form of control. Power can be normative, using inducement, remuneration, or coercive to suppress
While power uses the effects of authority, influence can be used positively and negatively in a more multi-directional form through formal and social networks.

Hatcher (2012) argues that although the horizontal structures of networks should, in theory, encourage commitment to the common good, control through overarching government agendas remains. Accountability and competition resided with the Heads of Schools and Departments in their academies, removing any incentive to support or upskill our competitors. Moore and Kelly (2012) state that change within the member organisations alongside external pressures has the potential to disrupt the network structure. The breakdown’s remnants created complex barriers (Hatcher, 2012; Woods and Roberts, 2019). Power dynamics and relationships have a critical impact. In this situation, power became coercive and punitive, and trust was calculative until the alienated climate made the situation unsustainable. A successful network needs incentives to adhere the parts.

2.4 Middle-Leader Identities

This emerging global inclination towards decentralisation encourages school-based development and innovation, particularly around the curriculum, requiring subject-based middle-leaders to become effective change agents (Shaked and Schechter, 2017).

The work of the Subject Leader demands an element of both leadership and management. While it can be agreed that both are integral to successful organisations, they are multifaceted and disputed concepts (Lumby, Foskett and Fidler, 2005). Disparity as to whether leadership encompasses management, has a superior position or what are, as O’Leary (2016) claims, profoundly distinct views with nuanced differences remains objective. Within the context of a subject leader, management is the day-to-day running of the department, looking inwards, gaining trust, being accountable, optimistic, and visible. Conversely, leadership is outward-looking and more people-centric: shaping goals, motivations, and actions. De Nobile (2018) clarifies that as the authority of schools has devolved, the terminology changed, taking Heads of Department from ‘middle-management’ to be renamed ‘Subject/Middle-Leaders’. The formal leadership required
at this level is distributed, interpreting and implementing the senior leadership’s agenda with the teachers they lead. Mulford (2005) identifies that distinguishing the impact of each aspect of leadership can be challenging. Craig (2021) affirms that the current UK system’s growing complexities lead to a reconstruction of middle-leadership practices.

Bushier (2005) stresses that agency development relies upon forming professional identities. Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) stipulate agency as something you achieve instead of own. It is built on personal and professional experience. The possession of self and role-identity is vital for embracing the culture and climate of the school and integral to the work of the middle leader. Briggs (2007) explains that identities are formed contextually. Self-perception and self-worth are socially constructed through personal interactions, forming a professional identity. Schoen and Teddlie (2008) refer to this as Professional Orientation in their dimensions of school culture. The word ‘orientation’ denotes deeper psychology involving attitudes, perceptions, and goals. There is a need to embody the role and become integral to the school’s culture.

Bushier (2005) asserts that because school communities are organised through a continual dialogical process involving social, political and personal perspectives, leaders become entangled in issues of power. Power transactions are not necessarily determined by the authority of the position, as power is formed through the interaction of work-related selves, developing knowledge of others, and entailing moral decision-making. The use of power is capital for allocating people and resources; it is entrenched in tenets of trust. This moral authority can promote unity and strength (Bushier, 2005).

Seventeen years ago, Bushier (2005) studied Department Head’s identities within critical functional aspects of their work. These roles were: developing and sharing a vision, aspects around the use of power for change, mobilising staff, coordinating the department, mediation and being a teacher role model. However, I would maintain that in my experience since then, the middle leader’s role has become far more extensive, going beyond the ‘Janus-faced’ (Bushier, 2005, p.148), context-relevant, centralised, vertical viewpoints of classroom practitioners and leaders. The Middle-leader’s work of mediating the demands of stakeholders, accounting for values and beliefs described by
Bushar (2005), has taken on a horizontal dimension through the networking of organisations. Therefore, I argue that contemporary middle leadership now demands a boundary-crossing multiplicity of selves. These borders were once clearly defined by physical walls dividing contexts with Senior Leaders as sentries. DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2005) rationalise organisational boundaries as social constructs of inclusion and exclusion, extending beyond the confines of organisational structure to the edges of operational limits, becoming permeable and impalpable. Briggs (2007) identifies that this complex nature of expanding and networking contemporary education environments can create a sense of flux, forming a lack of understanding of one’s identity amongst other role holders.

With the impact of a decade of emphasis on performativity and accountability (Holloway and Brass, 2018), alongside a more recent focus on a rich curriculum, it could be argued that the subject leader has become a critical mediator, influential in the drive to meet market-led school improvement targets (Ainsworth et al., 2022). When middle leaders at the heart of the school’s change process, rooted in values and practice, are likened to an engine (Shaked and Schechter, 2017), there is perhaps a need to cultivate and empower them. Their ability to make innovative strategic decisions has the potential to benefit the MAT through interconnected practice and training across multi-school groupings (Ainsworth et al., 2022). The Principal, enshrined in the school structure, is the essential factor in empowering or devaluing these leaders. Shaked and Schechter (2017) state that the aspects facilitating middle leaders to perform are those of a recognised leadership position, capacity, support, and interpersonal collaborations between themselves and senior leaders. Bushar and Harris (1999) argue for all levels of staff involvement in decision-making and policy formation, particularly those on the front line. However, Ainsworth et al. (2022) argue that high levels of surveillance and the constant threat of inspection constrain rather than encourage innovation. These leaders are positioned as department gatekeepers, negotiating the policy landscape between teachers and senior leaders.
2.5 Middle-Leader Sensemaking

Shaked and Schechter (2018) state that responding to change involves interactions blending personal values with those of colleagues while immersed in school culture. Although middle leaders bridge leadership and teaching, it was noted that they tended to prioritise their classroom identities over those of school leaders. Mockler (2011) recognised that these selves adapt, sustained by a performative storytelling narrative, constructed as their careers evolve, forming a dynamic professional identity. Ascertaining and conceptualising leader identities amidst complex organisational change, according to Shaked and Schechter (2018), can be achieved using sensemaking. Making sense of external policies leads to the potential for altering local practices.

2.6 Autonomy, Accountability and the Panopticon

Ehren and Baxter (2020) advocate the need for systems where administrative accountability does not stifle autonomy. One of the dominant external influences within education systems globally is governmentality. Applying a market-based rationale to the public sector to quantify performance creates a conflict of values generated by diverse stakeholder demands (Hartley, 2007; Kelly, 2009). Bogotch (2014) argues that tensions formed by countries publicly publishing students' results as a trade-off for high levels of autonomy in resource allocation, balance knowledge and power. Influential agents like the World Bank and OECD promote this model of performativity linked with accountability, with schools in the United Kingdom reaching the highest levels of results-driven accountability and autonomy (OECD, 2011). However, while this capacity to measure and compare appeals to politicians, its application to the education sector, using judgements and comparisons, provides a means of control (Ball, 2010) and cannot create the beliefs and behaviours necessary for success (Fullan, 2001).

Ofsted is a UK government department that inspects the quality and performance of educational institutions, reporting their findings directly to Parliament. They reflect government shifts while tackling the latest politically perceived, dominant societal and educational issues. The inspection agenda permeates school culture. School leaders become mediators in a constant cycle of brokering government policy while buffering the effects of constant change to maintain stability in teaching and learning (DiPaola
and Tschannen-Moran, 2005). Tensions emerge as leaders try to satisfy Ofsted’s requirements while meeting the needs of their school and the wider community (Hatcher, 2012). Sanctions are both material and symbolic. Published feedback informs parental choice, potentially impacting student and teacher recruitment, reducing funding, and lowering teacher quality, fuelling a potential downward spiral—these pressures influence leadership strategies and decision-making (Colman, 2022).

An internal ethos of conformability develops, aiming to sustain a perpetual state of Ofsted readiness. Skerritt (2020) highlights the contradiction around school autonomy through devolved governance. The levels of risk associated with whole school accountability have generated the necessity for senior leaders to maintain a perpetual overview, thereby increasing the need to control teachers’ work through heightened monitoring techniques that many researchers have compared to surveillance (Courtney, 2016; Page, 2017; Perryman et al., 2018; Skerritt, 2018). Accountability is considered a central policy solution designed to improve standards, academic excellence, and equity, enabling politicians to justify its benefits for future generations (Skerritt, 2020).

The study of surveillance has employed somewhat dystopian metaphors which permeate the discourse: George Orwell’s ‘Big Brother’ and the more prevalent model of 18th century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s all-seeing prison design as explored by Foucault (1977). Foucault (1977) applied the architectural Panopticon (deriving from the Greek “all-seeing”) as a metaphor for a modern disciplinary society. He argued that the idea of a cylindrical shape with 360-degree outlooks gave prisoners an impression of constant visibility, observation, and scrutiny. This power ritual creates a pliable workforce (Foucault, 1977). Perryman et al. (2018), Page (2017) and Courtney (2016) debate whether the contemporary panoptic theory has evolved with the aid of new technologies, extending beyond organisational structures, creating alternative frameworks of a Panopticon in a post-panoptic society which is more about control than discipline (Galič, Timan and Koops, 2017).

Skerritt (2020) identifies three overlapping accountability methods used to drive monitoring and surveillance. Firstly, the traditional top-down observations, performed by
the SLT, then horizontal peer observations form a mechanism for coaching within departments and across academies and, finally, intrapersonal, data checking, analysis, self-reflection and self-surveillance (often using digital recording). Visibility is normalised as teachers continue to be watched in many ways by numerous people. This constant, multi-directional surveillance has the potential to control outcomes and behaviours (Skerritt, 2020).

Woods et al. (2021) assert that accountability is a condition of autonomy, and transversely, autonomy must be therefore accountable. At the same time, Ehren and Godfrey (2017) argue that accountability within large networks can be problematic. The dispersed and ambiguous nature of these organisations, with shifting targets and conflicting stakeholder expectations, can lead to compromises between collaborators with differing social, political and economic ambitions. Traditional, top-down accountability procedures and complex overlapping systems can conceal the source of issues and leave partners wary of being held to account for something out of their control. Skerritt (2020) states that where accountability and surveillance are prominent in English MATs, the pressure intensifies through top-down control and increasing workloads.

Parker (2015) clarifies that autonomy is a concept connected to one’s capacity and power to act in a specific context. It is a learnt and, therefore, constantly evolving notion. MacBeath (2012) asserts that the impact of diminished autonomy contributes to de-professionalisation, as it is fundamental to motivation and job satisfaction.

2.7 Trust
Throughout this analysis, one aspect dominates that of trust. Trust is an essential leadership attribute, especially in the educational domain. Ehren and Baxter (2020) state that there are three dimensions of trust within a school context; competence, benevolence, and integrity. Trust underlies the work of the teacher, working at all levels; the micro-level of interpersonal relationships with staff and students, through to the (Meso) organisational level, beyond the gates and into society (Macro) and even on a global level (Bottery, 2004). Leaders need to appreciate the impact of trust and how the dynamics of moving
through the trust continuum can be perceived as promotion or demotion, impacting self-esteem and motivation.

Bottery (2003) maintains that trust between governments and educators is significant. Moral purpose consists of values, ethics, and qualifications intrinsic to professional teachers, meriting an anticipated level of instant trust that accompanies the role. Bottery (2004) argues that the teaching profession appears to be afforded only calculative trust, positioned at the lower end of the trust continuum, where the risk for potential harm is considered high. Morale is negatively impacted in a profession that feels distrusted or undervalued by those who govern its practice. The impact of one aspect of this quantitative trust calculation is the inspection schedule, which is prominent and influential in English schools (Perryman et al., 2018).

General trust is essential to facilitate change and improvement, allowing critical reflection and professional development (Busher, 2005), while relational trust has the power to bind the department (Grootenboer, Edwards-Groves and Rönnerman, 2020). However, Busher (2005) identifies that the transfer of governance towards an autonomous, self-improving system, fortified by monitoring and surveillance, could be regarded by employees with suspicion as perpetual betrayal.

Ehren and Baxter (2020) state that accountability and trust, while contradictory, are needed to create capacity for change. Accountability using high-stakes measures aims to build an account of trustworthiness. These accounts elicit power to either build trust or destroy it. The idea of instant trust is appealing. Brady (2021) hypothesises whether trust and integrity need to be inherent features built over time. She suggests the possibility of teachers being trained to present measurable evidence, thereby creating artificial performance-based trust. Scott Webster (2018) affirms that uncertainty can be a source of risk within these large organisations, with employees treated with suspicion. Due to the complexity and time needed to form trust while mitigating risk, he proposes the need to replace trust with confidence, thereby avoiding problematic, emotional investments involving earning and winning. He proposes that having confidence rather than trust may
prove more efficient. Nevertheless, I would contend that trust is required to facilitate confidence in someone.

2.8 Conclusion

The last decade spawned several coinciding and intersecting critical incidents within the education system. Academisation promises autonomy by necessitating greater accountability, highlighting similarities with the central panoramic view in the changes to the latest inspection framework discussed by Perryman et al. (2018). In contrast to the traditional top-down inspection system, the recent government focus on curriculum has impelled the Subject Leaders to take centre stage as inspectors' initial points of contact, thereby initiating and cultivating centre-out surveillance. My research takes a snapshot of the perception of these middle leaders' professional identities as they negotiate and balance accountability, autonomy and trust against the backdrop of an expanding, networked system (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

[3368 words]
Chapter 3: Research Design

My role in this research as Subject Leader within middle leadership placed me in a central position as a ‘practitioner researcher’, investigating my practice as described by Burton and Bartlett (2011). They state that all social research should be influential, focused, positional and political. From within the research, I applied my knowledge of the organisation, allowing me to explore the subject in depth.

3.1 Philosophical Framework

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) explain that the nature of reality falls into ontological assumptions contingent upon the object’s relationship with the subject. Identity is in flux with society, creating meaning through personal interaction and shared experience (Grix, 2002). Where personal identity would be subjective, unique, and individual, professional identities are a construct of context, culture, society and politics. They are a consequence of personal actions and interactions (Briggs, 2007). I aimed to capture and conceptualise beliefs through my research questions, producing a snapshot of middle leaders' identities within this evolving context. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) identify this subjective position as anti-positivist, where individuals with diverse and multiple views voluntarily and proactively make sense of events and co-construct meaning using a constructivist ontology.

Epistemologically, this study comes from the point of many realities, building an understanding of the human experience from personal perspectives. Waring (2017) establishes that direct knowledge is inaccessible. Instead, accounts and observations provide signs of the phenomena. Knowledge then needs to be built through a process of interpretation. The conventional terminology for this viewpoint is the interpretive position. The investigator and investigated are interactively and inherently linked through a transactional process of creating and shaping (Grix, 2002).

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) warn that when researchers link theory with data, aiming to ascertain a fundamentally universal theory, they risk further distancing from reality toward theoretical abstraction. Likewise, when researchers interpret reality,
allowing theory to emerge, solid and dependable data must be at its centre. The data generated from this study is current, relevant and purposeful. Although not readily generalisable due to both scale and methods, it links with current theory and helps form context-relevant knowledge. The constructivist paradigm formed my basic assumptions, creating this study’s theoretical framework.

I adopted an interpretive methodological approach informed by social constructivism. This approach allowed me to explore these middle leaders’ experiences, motivations, and understandings. I collated middle-leader perceptions and narratives around the interrelationship between accountability, autonomy, and trust within academisation, leading to sensemaking around the influences that formed subject middle-leader identities.

3.2 The Design Frame

Case study research is embedded in the interpretivist paradigm. Yin (2008) and Thomas (2019) explain that a case study focuses on a phenomenon, examined in depth, from different perspectives, within a particular setting and in a real-world context. Thomas (2019) emphasises that a case study creates a design frame to explore the individual’s relationship to the events. The realisation that transactions within social sciences cannot be neatly separated from one another and viewed in isolation makes this a growing design frame for researchers. It can take on different perspectives and viewpoints within the uniqueness of the context. Burton and Bartlett (2011) distinguish critical differences between research for theory and practice. This contextual research project designated case study as the most effective method, allowing the use of situated knowledge to interpret events, making connections between others’ experiences and my own, seeking links, having insights and making connections (Thomas, 2019). My research questions matched this case study approach as they aimed to capture intricacy and insight through embedded social truth (Coe et al., 2017).

Case studies are a principal means of inquiry for researching issues subject to intense political scrutiny (Coe et al., 2017). However, Cohen et al. (2018) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) debate as to which research area case study sits: the method, the process, the
methodology, or whether, as in this example, it encompassed the entire research design and strategy providing the framework my study required. While boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not always clearly defined, Yin (2008) advocates that the case study is suited to these blurred boundaries with a mixed-method approach.

Thomas (2020) acknowledges that there is a trade-off for the rich, in-depth narrative a case study has the potential to provide, with the lack of capacity to generalise from a context-based sample to a broader population. Gomm, Hammersley and Foster (2011) argue that a lack of generalisability and relatability results in limited applicability, making this approach hard to justify. They question the value of the research if it cannot be applied to other contexts. As the cases are usually anonymised, they can lack relatability and inherent interest when read in isolation. However, Burton and Bartlett (2011) argue that these situations are where case studies’ strengths lie. The information gleaned from this study is a valuable insight and sensemaking knowledge base to extend and build a professional subject leader community of practice. Allowing leaders in my context to collaborate, strengthening this area of leadership horizontally as my MAT begins a process of reconciliation to re-network (Watson, 2014).

Both Huberman and Miles (2002) and Coe et al. (2017) warn to be mindful of the risks when working within the boundaries of a case study. Issues around reliability and validity through inaccuracies, consciously or subconsciously, can distort meaning. While case study findings are not directly transferable, transparency provides an account of procedures, rationale and an audit trail someone could pick up and extend, thereby checking validity (Mears, 2017).

Yazan (2015) states that while the case study design is not formulaic, it must be logical. My narrative, mixed-methods case study blends explanation, exploration, description, and analysis (Thomas, 2019). The case is the subject located at the heart of the study (Yin, 2008). The object is the theory that the subject illuminates (Yazan, 2015; Thomas, 2019). My subjects are the middle leaders (within an academy in a MAT), and my objects are their identity formations. The object emerged and solidified as the process proceeded, thereby
creating the core study and analytical frame of a credible, multifaceted evidentiary base (Thomas, 2019).

### 3.3 Methodology and Research Approach

The methodology offers a way of gathering information and insights, focussing the line of enquiry (Grix, 2001). My research questions and ontological and epistemological assumptions indicated the methods and instruments to consider (Grix, 2001). The qualitative methodology employed inductive enquiry suited to educational research (Creswell, 2011). It captures individual thoughts, explanations and feelings, maintaining a sense of meaning and process (Given, 2012), presenting equally valid accounts from diverse perspectives (Huberman and Miles, 2002).

Garvis (2015) endorses the application of interaction theory, allowing the researcher to shape and interpret explorations and shared self-experiences, forming a collective narrative truth. However, as the role of researcher placed me integral to the study, ethically and in terms of validity, I needed to maintain the premise of the participants' views through the lens of their own (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016), particularly where interpretations conflicted (BERA, 2019).

I then considered the benefits of a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative aspects and taking advantage of each paradigm's strengths (Briggs, Coleman and Morrison, 2016). Creswell (2011) states that defining mixed methods is controversial. In its simplest terms, it combines two or more methods but can be seen as a distinct methodology with its distinct vocabulary and techniques. It may be applied to different stages in the process, from a philosophical position to inferences and interpretations.

I used mixed methods, dominant in qualitative data, with thick descriptions, allowing an element of triangulation (Biesta, 2017). I followed Stentz, Plano Clark, and Matkin's (2012) convergent, parallel design with qualitative and quantitative methods applied concurrently, then mixed, to help develop a complementary picture of a phenomenon. They state that researchers argue there is a balance between what is lost and what is gained in mixed methods to develop a more complementary understanding. While
quantitative methods such as surveys give the ability to understand leader approaches, qualitative case studies can be used to support discoveries within leadership theory. Stentz, Plano Clark, and Matkin (2012) advocate the use of both methods combined to present a more in-depth analysis while addressing a broader range of research questions.

There is, however, disagreement that these two ontologies are so disparate that they cannot mix, creating opposing views (Coe et al., 2017). Denzin (2010) calls for stricter paradigm boundaries to prevent distortion. Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) state that a constructivist researcher is most likely to rely on qualitative data or blend qualitative and quantitative research methods through a mixed-method approach.

3.4 Complexity Theory and Research

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) assert that schools are now so complex that it is more challenging to deduce findings. Regine and Lewin (2000) stipulate that these systems have come about through technological advances and are beginning to replicate digital webs. Systems theory is exemplified in my context, where establishing relationships and making causal connections within this dynamic network is challenging as events do not occur in isolation. My contextual organisation has grown and spread beyond one holistic viewpoint. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) state that the system takes on its own identity and becomes self-sufficient. While the academy has recently undergone the stresses of complete senior leadership change and restructuring accompanied by vast employee turnover, the system survived.


3.5 The Sample

Stentz, Plano Clark and Matkin (2012) discuss the challenges in studying leadership as a layered, socially created structure. I situated my research with the subject leaders within middle-leadership, where Subject Leaders are a subset alongside pastoral Heads of Year
and student achievement focussed Year Managers. Although the organisation is expanding, the curriculum disciplines and the number of Subject Leaders remain static. At the same time, the quantity of teachers these middle leaders manage has at least doubled within the past decade. The subject departments consist of the three core subjects: maths, English and science (The Core); the English Baccalaureate subjects, which extend The Core into humanities, languages, and computing (The EBacc); then the Open Subjects make up all fourteen disciplines with their respective Subject Leaders. As a result, the initial field of this study was narrow.

Additionally, I did not anticipate a complete overhaul of the leadership team, mid-year and the unprecedented staff turnover that followed. Some participants left the organisation mid-study. Although they were replaced, the new staff were generally younger and lacked the lived experience of recent changes I felt was necessary to build the required knowledge base. This changing demographic became apparent while analysing the quantitative data in preparation for the qualitative study. When looking at trust and accountability, selecting participants who managed teachers and had the experience of the academy’s evolution was essential to contextualise and narrate their story.

Mindful of the scale of this investigation, with a maximum of fourteen participants, I used two methods to answer the research questions. Due to the issues explained above, much of the quantitative data became exploratory work (Tymms, 2017), a plausibility probe (Thomas, 2019) presenting an overview of trends across Subject Leaders, identifying examples of opposing views but highlighting the need to select participants based upon their time served. This knowledge allowed me to readdress the research questions and carefully select participants before undertaking the qualitative aspect of the study. I selected Subject Leaders I knew to have experience across the different subject areas of the Core, Ebacc and Open groupings aiming to present breadth and depth.
3.6 Data Collection

All subject leaders were sent a digital survey to collect quantitative data (Appendix A). This survey instrument gathered leaders' views about academy quality assurance and accountability, exploring perceptions of their impact on autonomy, agency, and creativity. I asked whether the systems enable them, as subject leaders, to gain powerful, actionable, deep knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their department or whether quality assurance methods are solely to provide Senior Leaders with a preemptive overview in anticipation of inspection. I also questioned them about levels of monitoring and surveillance. Burton and Bartlett (2005) and Pring (2015) explain that the wording of a questionnaire is the secret to its success. Each question needed purpose and structure with specific, precise language, affording no room for ambiguity. I used branching within my questions to separate teachers with the most experience and draw upon it. I employed a range of open and closed questions using online survey software, mixing positive and negative views while taking care not to control the agenda and unwittingly introduce bias (Burton and Bartlett, 2005; Tymms, 2017). These questionnaires were anonymised at the source concealing the identities of the participants.

These fact-finding questionnaires provided an overview of the distribution of views, providing a snapshot in time. I analysed the descriptive statistics using a spreadsheet and the essential analysis tools within Microsoft Forms (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). While this quantitative method offers comparability, it can lack the function to capture the variety and depth of beliefs, values, understandings, and thoughts; the transactional qualities needed to explore complex social and emotional issues accurately.

(Mears, 2017) explains how every lived experience is unique to the individual. The root of interviewing is the need to understand the meaning the individual has made of their experience. There is a need for information-rich cases. The interviews were performed as a collaborative activity with a two-way exchange limiting any power differential. Consent forms were explained and signed (Appendix B). Interviewees were sent digital copies of the questions to allow them to formulate their thoughts (Appendix C).
I organised five semi-structured interviews with selected, experienced middle leaders. The sample consisted of 1 male and four females, ageing between 36 and 52, across subject specialisms in the Core, EBacc and Open areas. All names and subjects have been changed or omitted to protect anonymity.

Interview questions were designed to set the context, opening avenues for response to explore the relationships between accountability, autonomy, and trust, over time and from a range of views, with ambition for depth, not scope (Mears, 2017). These interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each; they were recorded and transcribed. The structure of each interview involved main questions around headings of Leadership Role, Accountability, Autonomy and Academisation, and finally, there was an extensive section on elements of Trust. The first section explored the leader's roles, how many staff they were responsible for and how their position had evolved during their post. Then, I inquired about external and internal accountability methods aiming for insight into how they, as leaders, had adopted and processed their functions within the changing context, and finally the implications that this had on levels of trust.

3.7 Data Analysis

Through iteration, transcripts from interviews and survey data were analysed to identify key themes and patterns. This inductive approach allowed significant themes to emerge. These themes were then applied as codes. I used a software package to help organise and highlight the codes, allowing me to group themes and patterns and create a thematic map using mind-mapping software to look for links. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis phases, from transcribing to reporting. I used voice recognition software to transcribe while familiarising myself with the data and form the initial interpretation. I used coding software to allow themes to emerge, which captured and summarised the data.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Hammersley (2017) notes that as research ethics are already analogous to those expected of education professions, ethical considerations distinctive to research need to be considered. My research interrogates adult colleagues in their workplaces. Full ethical
clearance was sought and granted from the academy (Appendix D), initially from a senior leader gatekeeper and then the new Principal, following the leadership restructure. Discussions around the topic and research questions have been had without raising concerns.

I maintain the anonymity of the participants and the organisation (Burton and Bartlett, 2005). Individuals' informed consent was sought. With each instrument used, the terms were explained clearly, with an option to withdraw consent at any time (Mears, 2017; BERA, 2019), maximising benefits while minimising risk. Each participant received a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview with a list of questions clearly stated, clarifying focal points for discussion so they could consider their views in advance (Mears, 2017). One interviewee even prepared their answers in written form to ensure they put their points forward clearly.

Specific consideration has been given to privacy and safe data storage using the latest security protection. In reporting the data, all identifying information has been removed.
Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis

4.1 Introduction

I began this research at a pivotal time in both the academy and MATs development, with the retirement of the original Academy Principal, the introduction of a CEO, followed by the recruitment of a new Principal mid-year and subsequent leadership restructure. Positions within the middle leadership were redesignated, with all employees holding leadership responsibilities issued with renewed MAT contracts. The middle leadership level was brought into line, making all subject leaders equal as Heads of Subjects. This exercise aimed to initiate a replicable structural model across all MAT academies.

4.2 Research within a changing environment

These changes impacted my research focus. At the start of the year, there were 14 experienced Heads of Subject. Mid-year, there was a high level of staff attrition. My survey responses from May reflect these changes (see Fig. 1).

From a potential sample of 14 Subject Leaders, I had eight responses. Spillane et al. (2002) state that to understand change, middle leaders, need to rely on prefabricated cognitive frames grounded in past experiences. Therefore, I deemed experience in the role to be necessary. Only three of these eight respondents had experience allowing them to comment on changes over time. My questionnaire included branching questions. If a respondent answered that they had three or more years of experience, they were presented with further questions regarding their views around these changes. Therefore, within my quantitative evidence, \( n \) varies from 8 (number of returns) and 3 (number of teachers with durational experience). These data were anonymised at source. However, while limited to three suitable Subject Leaders, each represented a different curriculum area (Core, EBacc and Open).
For the qualitative aspect of this research, I approached five subject middle-leaders who had led their subjects for many years and worked in different areas of the curriculum (1 Core, 1 EBacc and 3 Open). Interviews were initially structured but took on a more conversational quality with the need to question certain areas in more depth. Pseudonyms were assigned to all interviewees.

4.3 The impact of internal and external accountability

In the past, due to performance measures, Core subjects (maths, English and science) appeared to hold greater value and a more privileged and valued position within the hierarchy. With restructuring, these individuals were lowered to the equivalent level of all Subject Leaders; they experienced a status demotion. When asked whether external accountability systems had raised the profile of the subject, or its leader, one Core Subject leader replied:

*In years gone by, because Heads of Core were almost Associate Senior Leaders... in terms of what we were expected to do and the meetings we were expected to attend, I think, had that not happened, I would probably argue that I would have felt that way... but I don’t think my profile as a leader has been raised as a result. I think, if anything, it has lowered.*

(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

This view supports Briggs’ (2007) three elements that individuals use to construct their professional identity: values, location, and role. Ben’s place within the hierarchy is intrinsically linked to his perceived position within the school and has led him to question his importance within the leadership’s curriculum discourse. He explained how these structural changes had placed another subject specialist leader above him. This new Director of Subject role extended across academies within the MAT. Clarifying how this impacted his professional identity, he explained:
... ultimately, the leader who doesn't have the autonomy to lead certain parts of the curriculum ... that additional level, the Director level, reduces that sense of autonomy.
(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

This view was also reflected in the quantitative data. While the Core reported no change in status in response to changes in external accountability systems, the Open and Ebacc Subject Leaders conveyed a dramatic increase (Fig 2).

The three experienced middle leaders were then asked to consider the impact of the new inspection framework on curriculum accountability, leader autonomy, subject agency and value, over time (Fig 3). The Core leader recorded slightly increased accountability, slightly reduced autonomy, subject agency and no difference in subject value. Opposingly, the Open subject leader responded with a dramatic increase in leader autonomy and subject agency, with a slight increase in subject value and curriculum accountability.
Although the sample is small, there is an indication that the school improvement focus is shifting to align the subjects and their leaders. However, within the more extensive survey sample, including less experienced leaders (n=8), I asked whether the inspection framework raises the profile and importance of the middle leaders. Only a quarter of the sample agreed that it did (fig 4); of the eight, the two who agreed were in the less experienced category.

This was unanticipated. I had expected the new inspection framework to have played a part in raising these middle leaders' profiles, predominantly as it is focused on the curriculum.
4.4 Identity, accountability, and autonomy

All five participants interviewed referred to their identity in terms of their subject. Professional identity and subject specialism were inextricable (Briggs, 2007). Busher (2005) also noted this subject centrality in his research almost two decades ago. However, since then, school knowledge acquisition has seen greater political interest. Where subject areas have always held intrinsic worth to governments and school leaders, the National Curriculum, along with performance measures such as Progress 8 (ranking subjects) and the English Baccalaureate (EBacc), explicitly increase the significance of specific knowledge to both the individual and society, above others (Hardy, 2018). This disparity and consequential impact upon the subject, and subject leader, affect supposed values as discussed by Anne, head of an Open subject:

I suppose other subjects, where they are deemed more valuable in the EBacc and Progress 8, are probably handled quite differently. I think it is a shame because we should all count.

(Anne, Interview 2 June 2022)

There are a variety of measures within the accountability process. Quality assurance in book looks, learning walks, data analysis and deep dives (whole department monitoring) are performed internally, replicating external accountability procedures. Ehren and Baxter (2020) advocate the need for systems where administrative accountability does not stifle autonomy. When asked about levels of accountability, Claire, within the Ebacc subject group, stated:

I feel more accountable year on year, really. I don’t think I had any concerns over accountability early in my career...

(Claire, interview 3, July 2022)

This view was reflected in the questionnaire. All three experienced Subject Leaders agreed that curriculum accountability had slightly increased in response to the new inspection framework. However, when the questionnaire opened to include the less experienced middle leaders asking whether they agreed that this accountability was integral to the position, the response was near-unanimously positive (Fig 5).
Perryman et al. (2018) argue that cultivating educators in successful practice methods through accountability has become normalised. They explain that a persistent threat of inspection creates a climate of constant surveillance, with an inspection culture permeating the school. This readiness to react has the power to create an environment of normalised visibility. These norms are in constant flux, mirroring each inspection framework’s changing requirements and expectations.

Having witnessed increased routine monitoring in my setting, linked with new accountability procedures, I inquired whether scrutiny was excessive enough to be considered surveillance (Fig 6). This response included both experienced and new staff (n=8). Only one respondent agreed that there was an excessive level of scrutiny. These findings were also surprising, defying copious amounts of literature on the subject. However, here lies Perryman’s paradox: there is perhaps an element of normalisation, expectation and compliance. Ehren and Baxter (2020) concur that these performativity norms are strengthened and embedded in the identities of young teachers joining the profession, as they have been educated within the performative system. To the extent that teachers who hold alternative views can be seen as outdated or even inept (Ehren and Baxter, 2020).
Elaine, the oldest participant in the sample, observed that younger staff, as well as being a cheaper resource, were often more ready and able to accept new ways of working, having been inducted into the system from childhood.

I worry that older staff are leaving, or are being encouraged to leave, and are being replaced by young staff. Experienced staff are not being valued and retained.

(Elaine, Interview 5, July 2022)

However, it can also be noted that this response is typical. Perhaps ironically, Elaine was the only interviewee who consistently gave jaded responses whilst conveying a hostile demeanour.

One of the accountability measures replicates the Ofsted Deep Dive. During this process, inspectors gather evidence from various sources and triangulate their findings. The acceptance of monitoring and surveillance did not appear to remove the anxiety expressed by all of those interviewed. Hall and Noyes (2009) explain that teachers accommodate goals of successful inspections of their professional identities.

...subject deep dives... I think the accountability is massive because you feel that in my subject, the outcome is entirely on my shoulders. So, you are monitoring and being monitored in that sort of two-way process.

(Anne, Interview 2 June 2022)
Ben also acknowledged the reciprocal monitoring process and its benefits on the development of the school, subject, and teacher and subsequent use as a support mechanism. He went on to explain that these processes present a more acute understanding of strengths and weaknesses:

... there’s probably a better awareness of where we need to go, and I think as a result of that, the support that comes from SLT is probably also enhanced.
(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

While Elaine, in the Open subjects, stated:

I feel that now I’m constantly having to prove myself. You’re only as good as your last set of exam results.
(Elaine, Interview 5, July 2022)

This statement was particularly significant. While all middle leaders referred to the importance of student exam results as accountable measures, this leader inhabits them year upon year. The student results can engulf her professional identity, impacting her trustworthiness to improve. As a result, there is a risk of introducing supportive monitoring procedures impeding her autonomy. So commences the process of trust rebuilding. She described the process as analogous to a game of snakes and ladders.

Ben agreed that there have always been methods of measuring, both in-house and externally. However, he also alludes to heightened stakes:

... what we’re doing day-to-day is probably no different from what we’ve ever done...but in terms of what that means in the end, that often looks very different.
(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

All those interviewed agreed that accountability measures were heightened. Diane explained that she appreciated that the accountability made her feel empowered. While
voicing concerns about the fear of failure, all five participants also spoke positively about how they could ultimately see the potential benefits to the growing academy.

Now we’ve got concern policies and structures in place, and there is greater accountability and there is more structure. I feel that organically the results will gradually start to improve.

(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

Parker (2015) advocates that middle leaders are in the best position to make informed decisions about reform implementation; they require as much freedom as possible. With all the literature around accountability impacting middle leader autonomy, it was interesting that all but Ben justified that they now felt greater autonomy.

I think over the past few years, we have been given more and more ownership of our subject areas.

(Diane, Interview 4 July 2022)

Claire specified that she felt that the autonomy she experienced was related to Ofsted. Ben judged his lack of autonomy to be tied up in the changes within leadership, as opposed to the impact of external pressures.

Although the new leadership structure and the need to build relationships created a state of flux, all five interviewed had a positive outlook. Ben associated autonomy with the ability to pre-empt leadership needs.

...a lot of that leadership comes down to trust, and the trust people are willing to put in you. It takes time for new leaders, particularly senior leaders at the top (CEOs and Principal), to understand which staff members they can trust and to what extent. So, I think … in terms of accountability and autonomy, that the autonomy is drip fed back in a little, the more senior leaders get to know the middle leaders.

(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)
4.5 Trust

Trust was the most significant section of the interview. Participants were asked about the importance of trust within this expanding context. Diane discussed the two-way trust process formed over the past year within academy changes.

I think that teaching staff, looking up to us, trust us a lot more because of the way we are treated by our senior leaders.

(Diane, Interview 4 July 2022)

All five agreed that trust was vital and more important now than ever. Ben explained the value of trust:

Ultimately, without trust you’re not going to have those effective relationships, staff aren’t going to feel empowered, and I think you lose all credibility as a leader.

(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

Here Ben was referencing the general definition of trust as the inclination for the trustor to take risks based on an evaluation of the trustee’s competency, compassion, and integrity. Identity is founded on power relationships. Trustworthiness is vital to maintaining authority. Diane explained that being trusted empowered her with creative autonomy and reflexivity:

I think that you have to feel trusted, and you have to be shown that you can have a go and see what happens… you’re more likely to make it succeed rather than having something forced on you.

(Diane, Interview 4 July 2022)

Interviewees were then explained the stages of trust as illustrated by Bottery (2004). With the lowest form of trust as a calculative trust – calculating the risks involved to trust someone, followed by role trust – the amount of trust expected to be attached to a profession, then practice trust where suppositions about trustworthiness are confirmed, then finally identificatory trust, which is an intuitive, interpersonal trust that the author likens
to an orchestra playing in sync. All participants agreed that they felt high levels of trust in all directions within their teams. However, all agreed that trust was still under construction with SLT. However, supply staff and new teachers were the exceptions to the rule as the levels of trust needed time to manufacture and embed.

Time became a dominant theme concerning trust, as exemplified by Claire discussing reciprocal trust within her team.

*We’ve worked together for a long time. We’re quite an experienced team.*

*(Claire, Interview 3, July 2022)*

Claire stated that the relationship duration had taken her team to an identificatory level, as Bottery (2004) described. She explained that she was able to pre-empt their actions and hers. This level of trust meant that she knew her staff shared her agenda.

Elaine also emphasises the effort required to cultivate the trust continuum:

*I would like to think that my department trusts me implicitly. The new SLT, however, don’t know me well enough yet. I constantly feel that I have to prove myself to them and raise my level of trust.*

*(Elaine, Interview 5, July 2022)*

The three leaders with smaller departments of less than five full-time staff (Anne, Claire, and Elaine) rated reciprocal trust at the highest level. Larger departments, however, felt the need to monitor their staff more regularly,

*I think that would be a lot more difficult when they look at bigger teams like maths, English and science…*

*(Anne, Interview 2 June 2022)*

Ben discussed the association between identity and trust in a professional and personal capacity.
I think it depends on the scenario. There are different levels of trust ... I think, for example, as a leader in terms of offering advice and becoming a confidant and somebody that staff can speak to privately, they know any conversation that’s had is kept within that particular setting.

(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

However, he proceeded to explain that following on from those supportive discussions, sometimes of a personal nature, he would regularly find himself conducting difficult conversations with the same individuals regarding their professional performance creating a dichotomy with the potential for a breakdown in trust linked with integrity.

4.6 Challenges and Opportunities

Ben discusses this scaling-up. Where the previous smaller school had served the community, the new large, imposing building with high levels of security creates a visible barrier. Ben commented on this impediment separating the school community from the surrounding area, the missing sense of whole school/town community, created a distinct lack of belonging.

I think that the sense of community is lost because of the sheer scale of the school, and I don't think it's necessarily the fault of any individual. I just think that gets lost with the academisation.

(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

He noted that in the school community, the amount of time spent on accountability measures was perhaps detracting from the focus of the organisation, that of the students:

I think we probably can’t offer students certain experiences, for example, because curriculum needs and measurements tie us.

(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

Ben, Claire and Diane commented on improved communication chains from a top-down and more explicit direction.
... we can start to pre-empt what they're going to be looking for, and we can work towards it. It becomes less of a direction from above, and already we know what the expectations are. So, as you're working up and they're working down. I’d hope to think I’d meet somewhere in the middle.
(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

Here, Ben echoed the thoughts of all those interviewed as he described that the reorganisation of the leadership hierarchy had created a clear, top-down direction through communication. The newly strengthened and formalised middle-leadership layer removed barriers, making way for effective distributed leadership. Lumby (2013) discusses how this leadership style is all about allocating power. I would argue that prior to the recent reorganisation, power was dispensed in an ad hoc and sometimes chaotic style. All interviewed appreciated this more organised form of leadership and its positional power.

However, there was anxiety around the imminent reintroduction of horizontal networking across the two original academies with plans to bring the two schools in line. This expansion had the potential to create tension.

We have a very different cohort, a very different make-up of students, and as a result, a very different staff body. It’s very difficult to share good practices because of those reasons.
(Ben, Interview 1 June 2022)

### 4.7 Conclusions

This research took place against restructuring the Senior and Executive Leadership Teams with significant staff turnover. Contrary to my expectations, these findings create a positive narrative demonstrating pragmatism amongst middle leaders. Participants described monitoring and scrutiny, both internal and external, as necessary for improvement. While they admitted to a slight increase in anxiety-inducing accountability methods, they advocated them as a form of mutual support. Successful observations
heightened their leadership credibility. All described leader identity as their subject, their subject team, and the perceived value of their subject, internally and externally.

Trust was an important issue. Trust is crucial to middle-leaders as they are the interpreters of school policy, accountable for student outcomes, with the high-risk levels attached. Leaders explained how the accountability processes fed the trust continuum, which was then rewarded with levels of autonomy. Middle leaders are constantly sensemaking these actions and reflecting on their professional identities.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and implications

This small-scale research concentrated on subject-based, middle leaders at this academy’s heart, amid ongoing transformation. The shared narrative created an account of leadership responses to complex organisational change. During the research, the principal's replacement, the CEO's introduction, and the leadership structure’s reorganisation were followed by significant staff turnover, which impacted the whole school dynamic. This change, although distinct, was not separate from the motives of academisation, creating another layer of unanticipated complexity and the need for further adjustment and sensemaking.

Teacher/Leader professional identities are formed through an iterative sensemaking process, combining attitudes and beliefs in shared school culture, reinforced through social interactions (Shaked and Schechter, 2017). This narrative research process presents a collective identity intending to make these leaders more agentic within their subject leader community of practice (Wenger, 2015).

The accounts followed the academy's evolution, from its initial, futile partnerships to the present situation, at the cusp of ambitious plans for a robust Multi-Academy Trust family as described by the Department for Education (2021). Rather than enquiring directly about views around academisation, I applied a lens with three main areas of interest, using sensemaking theory to reveal how middle leaders construct their identities through action. Day (2002) states that reforms have a bearing on identity because they are cognitive and emotional and have the potential to create reactions that are both rational and irrational.

The first area of interest looked at responses to the internal and external accountability measures forming a growing proportion of the middle leader's work. Secondly, leadership autonomy considered whether middle leaders were agentic or were caught within a restrictive master, servant relationship. Finally, the trust theme held the most significant interest to the research participants but also demanded the most unravelling and sensemaking.
In contrast to the dystopian surveillance Panopticon and Post-Panopticon metaphors used by Courtney (2016), Page (2017), Perryman et al. (2018) and Skerritt (2020), my research revealed that, within my setting, middle leaders felt that these mechanisms were associated requirements of this leadership position. They reported that levels and forms of accountability have increased but acknowledged that the potential benefits to whole school improvement were justified. Most saw the process as supportive and positive. It was also necessary to initiate dialogue within departments and for senior leaders to fully understand their department’s strengths and weaknesses and respond with resource allocation.

It was challenging to distinguish and detach levels of autonomy amongst the restructuring of the leadership team. The newly formed team had implemented fact-finding accountability measures and executed new policies which constrained these leaders in the short term. The hierarchical layers were changed, prompting leaders within the Core subjects to re-establish their roles and positional identities. Autonomy is thought to be in a state of flux; in this instance, it was considered low. Contradicting literature around the impact of academisation and accountability methods impacting the leaders’ sense of autonomy, there was a consensus that the restructuring and the new Ofsted framework had removed management layers and increased capacity and power to act.

Throughout this research, the value of trust and its intrinsic and interrelated qualities are valued. Trust comprises competence, benevolence, and integrity. My findings reported high levels of trust binding departments. However, some areas within larger departments afforded less trust, mainly due to questions around capability. Trust is vital in contemporary organisations from a micro to a global level. We concluded that it could not be created (Brady, 2021) or simplified (Scott Webster, 2018), it is entangled in power issues and therefore needs to be built through careful, moral social interaction. Trust within middle leadership is strong. It is the glue adhering the social aspects of the organisation and its networks.

Busher (2005) states that personal schooling experience can influence the formation of teachers’ professional identities. Due to leadership reorganisation, my participants were
split between the original staff and those newer to the school, forming an interesting
dichotomy of staff indoctrinated into these systems and values as students. There was
greater acceptance and accommodation seen in staff newer to the profession.

Middle leaders must understand the formation of others’ identities and their own. Meaning
is created by people and shaped by power. However, this negotiation power relationship
is open to abuse within moral and value-laden decisions. The complexities around the
multiplicity of professional identities lie in the roles these leaders mediate between and
perform within various contexts. These performance arenas range from the theatre of
politics, which resides in school organisation and policy (this requires negotiation of
resources and the interpretation and implementation of the whole school policy and
vision), to the middle-leadership arena (within the community of other middle-leaders),
the departmental arena (including line-management, curriculum and subject vision), the
classroom arena – where the leader takes on a teaching role and the stakeholder arena
(which includes parents and outside agencies). The move to a networked academy adds
an extra horizontal identity dimension within this subject leader group.

The implications of this research demonstrate demands of the middle leader have
already changed with the academy’s expansion. The number of subjects has remained,
creating larger departments for middle leader accountability and a more significant
number of multi-directional areas with which to mediate. Spillane, Hallett and Diamond
(2003) state that the construction of leadership occurs through an interactive process of
human capital incorporating knowledge, skills and expertise, economic capital including
material resources and cultural capital described as ways of being. However, within these
complex systems, the social capital of networks and relations of trust enables middle
leaders to shift identities and negotiate change. Trusting and being trusted form the links
in the multi-academy network chain.

In the first week of this new year, I have requested to present these findings to the middle
leadership, intensifying the sensemaking discourse while establishing our identities within
the Trust. [965 words]
Postscript: Narrative Critical Reflection

Looking through my Personal Development Plan, one area dominates. Now that I can reflect, I realise how much progress I have made since the initial concerns. The issues all hinged around collecting qualitative data and my perceptions of the impenetrable social barriers I expected to encounter (Appendix E, example 6).

During the second year of my MA, I successfully produced a small-scale investigation using quantitative data through surveys. I planned to use a similar method in the final year for this small-scale investigation. However, as I began to draw up the research theme, it revealed my ontology was best suited to either qualitative or mixed methods. I was taken out of my comfort zone. To collect the qualitative data, I knew I would need to interview other middle leaders about their practices. I would need to ask for their time, a valuable commodity in education, particularly challenging in the summer term amidst exams.

Although I knew some leaders would be more than happy to offer the help, the scale of the academy and the lack of a cohesive professional community (a focus of this dissertation), meant that I needed to approach leaders whom I rarely meet. Within the subject grouping, I work in, colleagues are happy to offer help, which is quickly reciprocated, but we rarely step beyond this sub-community. Additionally, although I am a teacher and will readily perform in the classroom and work as a team within my department subject area where I feel confident, I am an introvert. The idea of requesting an hour of someone's valuable time to discuss a subject I am yet to qualify for also created a sense of imposter syndrome, the feeling of being a phoney, as described by Clance and Imes (1978).

Though the power equilibrium was balanced with leaders on the same hierarchical level, as explained in Chapter 4, the Core subjects have always appeared to hold more greater value and importance. Their leaders project this in their professional identities. It was these leaders I was most anxious to approach. I identified one individual would be able to present an experience that would contrast with others and present a more
comprehensive and balanced view. I had worked with him before academisation, so I knew that he would be able to offer a strong narrative.

Fortunately, I saw this target’s name on the dreaded daily cover list allocated to a challenging class of students at a time when I was available. I took the opportunity to barter and broached the subject with him. I would take his class for an hour in return for a chance to interview him. Surprisingly, he eagerly agreed.

The interview lasted over an hour. He was enthusiastic and open about his experiences, and I was very interested in his views which often challenged my assumptions. I collected the most data from this interview, and his views, experiences and observations opened further areas for exploration that I had not yet considered. The success of this interview built my confidence and spurred me to request time from the other leaders.
References:


System Reform: Global Perspectives in Comparative Education.


Catherine Kester, Module: E822 Masters Multi-Disciplinary Dissertation
EMA: Option SSI


Appendices
Appendix A: Questionnaire Instrument

Middle Leadership Responses to External Accountability

I would be so grateful for your help! I am currently studying on the Open University Masters in Education Leadership. I am collecting information to answer: ‘What are middle leadership responses to external accountability measures?’ as part of my small-scale investigation. The questionnaire is estimated to take less than 10 minutes. Information collected will be handled ethically, confidentially [anonymised at source] and stored securely. If you do not consent to participate: simply do not complete the questionnaire. If you would like more information, please contact me XXXXXXXXXX I would appreciate return by 13th May 2022. Thank you so much for your time!

* Required

1. What position do you currently hold in the academy? *
   - Head of Subject
   - Director of Curriculum
   - Curriculum Lead
   - Other

2. Are you classed as Middle Leadership? *
   - Yes
   - No

3. How many staff do you lead? *

4. Would you be (or were you) directly accountable for curriculum design within a Deep Dive of your subject? *
   - Yes
   - No

5. How long have you led your subject? *
   - Less than 3 years (go to question 7)
   - Over 3 years

6. What impact has the new framework focus on curriculum had on your... *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum Accountability</th>
<th>Dramatic Reduction</th>
<th>Slight Reduction</th>
<th>No Difference</th>
<th>Slighty Increased</th>
<th>Dramatic Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profile as a Leader</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Design (creativity and experimentation)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Dramatic Reduction</td>
<td>Slightly Reduced</td>
<td>No Difference</td>
<td>Slightly Increased</td>
<td>Dramatic Increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leader autonomy (self-government/independence)?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>agency (capacity to act/action) within your subject?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>subject's value within the academy curriculum?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>profile as a subject expert?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>empowerment?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experiences of surveillance and monitoring?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>influence on whole school policy and decision making around curriculum?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance and role within the Ofsted inspection process?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>budgeting requirements?</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Have you undergone an Ofsted inspection under the new framework (even if not specifically inspected)? *
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

8. Was your subject area a focus for inspection? *
   ○ Yes
   ○ No

9. Do you feel that your curriculum design reflects the core values of the school and the whole school curriculum intent statement? *
   ○ Yes
   ○ No
   ○ I am unsure of the whole school values

10. When leading curriculum change... *
    ○ I design and distribute the curriculum for my staff
    ○ I delegate parts of the curriculum design to my staff
    ○ We design the curriculum together as a department
Appendix B: Questionnaire Instrument (cont.)

11. Within the boundaries of the National Curriculum and exam specifications how much autonomy do you currently have for creativity in curriculum design and implementation? (1 = none, 8 = I feel I have a great deal of scope and flexibility) *
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8

12. How much control do you feel that you have over the staffing of your subject to meet curriculum needs? (1 = none, 8 = I am able to manage my staff effectively) *
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8

13. How effectively have expectations around the current EIF been communicated to you from senior leaders? (1 = I feel that I have had no communication around this, 8 = SLT have clearly communicated my role and expectations in this process) *
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8

14. How effectively do you feel you have communicated and mobilised your department to support your curriculum decisions? (1 = not at all effectively, 8 = I feel confident that they will justify our approach) *
   
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8

15. The current EIF raises the profile and importance of the Curriculum Leaders within this academy, *
   
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

16. I feel confident that I can justify my curriculum design, that I have shared my curriculum vision with my colleagues and I am happy to be accountable for the impact. *
   
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

17. I am anxious that the Deep Dive puts me and my department centre stage as OFSTED’s first point of contact. *
   
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree
Appendix B: Questionnaire Instrument (cont.)

18. There is a lot of pressure for a middle leader. The SLT is better placed to communicate the school’s curriculum. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

19. I don’t feel confident that I understand the bigger picture of the whole school curriculum view. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

20. I am the expert when it comes to my subject curriculum. I am happy to justify my decisions. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

21. I understand that this form of accountability is part of the position. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

22. I feel an excessive level of constant scrutiny, bordering on surveillance. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

23. I would benefit from more training around the expectation of the Curriculum Lead in relation to Deep Dive Inspections. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

24. I feel unprepared. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree

25. I feel a constant need to be “inspection ready”. *
   ○ Agree
   ○ Neutral
   ○ Disagree
Appendix B: Questionnaire Instrument (cont.)

26. The new EIF makes me feel empowered. *
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

27. The Inspection Deep Dive provides an honest and detailed snapshot of my department's effectiveness with regards to teaching and learning. *
   - Agree
   - Neutral
   - Disagree

28. I would be grateful for any other views you have with regard to the impact the EIF has had on your leadership and management.
## Appendix B: Consent Forms - Interviews

### E822 INTERVIEWS CONSENT AND ASSENT FORM

Please indicate YES or NO for each of the questions below and return the completed form by 12/07/22 to Catherine Kester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you read (or had read to you) the information about this interview?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has someone explained this interview to you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand what this interview is about?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you asked all the questions you want?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you had your questions answered in a way you understand?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you understand it is OK to stop taking part at any time?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will you have an adult present with you?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you happy for the interview to be audio recorded?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you happy with how your data will be stored?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you understand that your and any other real names as well as any identifiable information will be removed from what will be shared after the interview? YES NO

Are you happy to take part? YES NO

If you **do** want to take part, please write your name and today’s date

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>___________________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>___________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Interview questions (handout shared with interviewees)

Assessing changing leader identities within an expanding Academy Trust

RQ1 To what extent do accountability, autonomy and trust coexist in contemporary secondary leadership practices?
RQ 2: What are the perceived tensions and opportunities?
RQ3: How does large scale academisation impact academy leaders' positioning, creativity and agency?

Background:
1. Describe your position within the academy
2. How long have you led your subject?
3. Are you a middle or senior leader?
4. How many teachers do you directly lead?
5. Are you a leader, manager, or both?
6. Is there a difference?

Accountability and autonomy:
7. How do you feel your accountability has changed over the past 5-10 years?
8. Have you experienced enhanced monitoring of your leadership and of your staff?
9. Are you responsible for staff performance management?
10. Does accountability culture raise standards in your subject?
11. How much ownership do you have over the curriculum?
12. Do you feel you have greater autonomy as a leader since academisation?
13. Is much of your work distributed from the top leadership level down, or have you the ability to direct yourself and your team from a central subject level?
14. Are accountability and autonomy contradictory within this context?
15. Have the Ofsted Deep Dives raised the profile of the subject leaders?

Trust:
Levels of trust:
1 = calculative trust (balancing risk)
2 = role trust (level of trust afforded the profession)
3 = practice trust (trust is proven, an emotional connection)
4 = identificatory (analogy of members of an orchestra playing in sync)

16. What level of trust are you afforded from above/your staff?
17. What level of trust do you allow your staff?
18. Does trust matter in contemporary educational organisations?
19. Can accountability, autonomy and trust coexist?

Tensions and opportunities:
20. Where do you see tensions and opportunities within an expanding academy trust?
# Appendix D: Ethical Appraisal Form

## E822 Ethical Appraisal Form

**Masters: Education, Childhood and Youth**

NB: It should be noted that The Open University is unable to offer liability insurance to cover any negative consequences students might encounter when undertaking ‘in-person’ data collection. It is therefore very important that you follow appropriate research protocols which should include seeking Gatekeeper permissions to undertake any data collection within your setting and adhering to ethical principles for the safety of yourself and your participants.

Because ethical appraisal should precede data collection, a completed version of this form should be included with TMA02 for those developing a Small-Scale Investigation (SSI) and as part of the EMA submission for those completing an Extended Literature Review and Research Proposal (EP) form of the Dissertation.

Fill in section 1 of this document with your personal details and brief information about your research. For section 2, please assess your research using the following questions and click yes or no as appropriate. If there is any possibility of significant risk please tick yes. Even if your list contains all “no” you should still return your completed checklist so your tutor/mentor can assess the proposed research.

### Section 1: Project details

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a.</td>
<td>Student name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b.</td>
<td>PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.</td>
<td>Project title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>Supervisor/tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.</td>
<td>Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f.</td>
<td>MA pathway (where applicable)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix D: Ethical Appraisal Form (cont.)

**c. Intended start date for fieldwork**
- 08/03/22

**d. Intended end date for fieldwork**
- 20/07/22

Country fieldwork will be conducted in
- **UK**

**e. If you are resident in the UK and will be conducting your research abroad please check [www.fco.gov.uk](http://www.fco.gov.uk) for advice on travel.**

---

**Section 2: Ethics Assessment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your proposed research need initial clearance from a ‘gatekeeper’ (e.g. Local Authority, head teacher, college head, nursery/playgroup manager)?: Deputy headteacher acting as ‘gatekeeper’ and has signed relevant documents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you checked whether the organisation requires you to undertake a ‘police check’ or appropriate level of ‘disclosure’ before carrying out your research?: <strong>Police check not required</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you indicated how informed consent will be obtained from your participants (including children less than 16 years old, school pupils and immediate family members?)? Your consent letters/forms must inform participants that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time?: <strong>Using adapted consent forms from the OU course website.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will your proposed research design mean that it will be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge/consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people in nonpublic places)? If so have you specified appropriate debriefing procedures?:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

1. You must agree to comply with any ethical codes of practice or legal requirements that may be in place within the organisation or country (e.g. educational institution, social care setting or workplace) in which your research will take place. If required an appropriate level of disclosure (‘police check’) can obtained from the Disclosure and Barring Service (England and Wales), Disclosure Scotland, Access NI (Northern Ireland), Criminal Records Office (Republic of Ireland), etc.

2. This should normally involve the use of an information sheet about the research and what participation will involve, and a signed consent form. You must allow sufficient time for potential participants to consider their decision between the giving of the information sheet and the giving of consent. No research should be conducted without the opt-in informed consent of participants or their caregivers. In the case of children (individuals under 16 years of age) no research should be conducted without a specified means of gaining their informed consent (i.e., in the case of young children, their assent) and the consent of their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This is particularly important if your project involves participants who are particularly vulnerable or unable to give informed consent (e.g. children under 16 years, people with learning disabilities, or emotional problems, people with difficulty in understanding, or communication, people with identified health problems). There is additional guidance on informed consent on the Masters Education and Childhood and Youth website under Project Resources.

3. Where an essential element of the research design would be compromised by full disclosure to participants, the withholding of information should be specified in the project proposal and explicit procedures stated to obviate any potential harm arising from such withholding. Description or covert collection of data should only take place where it has been agreed with a named responsible person in the organisation and it is essential to achieve the research results required, where the research objective has strong scientific merit and where there is an appropriate risk management and harm mitigation strategy.
### Appendix D: Ethical Appraisal Form (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does your proposed design involve repetitive observation of participants, (i.e. more than twice over a period of more than 2-3 weeks)? Is this necessary? If it is, have you made appropriate provision for participants to renew consent or withdraw from the study half-way through?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you proposing to collect video and/or audio data? If so have you indicated how you will protect participants’ anonymity and confidentiality and how you will store the data? Interview recordings = data stored on hard drive with password protection.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your proposal indicate how you will give your participants the opportunity to access the outcomes of your research (including audio/visual materials) after they have provided data? Participants will be able to access the transcripts to check for accuracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you built in time for a pilot study to make sure that any task materials you propose to use are age appropriate and that they are unlikely to cause offence to any of your participants? I plan to pilot the questionnaire to check for functionality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is your research likely to involve discussion of sensitive topics (e.g. adult/child relationships, peer relationships, discussions about personal teaching styles, ability levels of individual children and/or adults)? What safeguards have you put in place to protect participants’ confidentiality?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your proposed research raise any issues of personal safety for yourself or other persons involved in the project? Do you need to carry out a ‘risk analysis’ and/or discuss this with teachers, parents and other adults involved in the research?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will financial inducements (other than reasonable expenses and compensation for time) be offered to participants?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will the study involve recruitment of patients or staff through the NHS or the use of NHS data?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answered ‘yes’ to questions 12, you will also have to submit an application to an appropriate National Research Ethics Service ethics committee (http://www.nres.nhs.uk/)

---

1 Where participants are involved in longer term data collection, the use of procedures for the renewal of consent at appropriate times should be considered.
### Appendix E: EMA Reflection Evidence Grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Feedback received, targets achieved, and areas of development worked on</th>
<th>How did this shape my dissertation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Knowledge and understanding** | Example 1: Research methods and ethics  
TMA 02 feedback: ‘It will be important to draw on the research methods literature in greater depth to examine the issues related to research ethics.’  
Example 2: Making Multiple References  
EMA Draft 1 feedback: When you make a statement there is no need to insert multiple references. Decide on what you consider the most important and relevant one.  
Example 3: Use valid evidence, avoid anecdotes and personal views  
TMA01 feedback: Where is the evidence? It cannot be anecdotal but instead needs to be from reputable studies.  
TMA02 Language – again this is an opinion – you need to phrase the rqs so that they are as neutral as possible.  
Example 4: Establishing a purpose for the research  
TMA01 feedback: It would have been great to read about your personal motivation in choosing this research topic.  
Example 5: Collecting data within a changing setting  
1:1 Feedback discussion with tutor: anxiety around hosting interviews, negotiating time and the balance of power – imposter syndrome.  
TMA02 feedback: You have here explained that you will undertake a survey. I wonder why only such a small number if you intend to draw any inferences in a numerically valid way? | I spent longer focusing on the ethical considerations, revisited the sections in the course materials and read more widely.  
Re-reading the original texts enabled me to pick out the dominant ideas and attached to each author. I selected the ones that were most relevant.  
I used my PDP notes as a reminder to do this. I read though every draft looking for bias without clear evidence, then looked to make sure I was presenting a balanced, neutral argument. I revisited my research questions considering this feedback.  
At this early stage I was unsure of my motivations. By reading and applying my views while immersed in the setting. I have given this more consideration.  
My dissertation is about the expansion and the lack of community and the establishment of identity amongst these leaders. Ironically, it was these issues around power and position that caused issues with data collection (discussed in the postscript).  
However, I overcame them following discussions with my tutor. Unanticipated staff turnover also left me with fewer leaders with which to gather data.  
I am conscious that I now use both a readable format and one that transfers easily between across platforms. With an art background I have found the rules around presentation limiting and sometimes frustrating. |
| **Critical analysis and evaluation** | Example 6: The presentation of appended documents  
TMA02 feedback: I was disappointed that you did not present the Interview Questions and the Research Schedule sections in a readable format.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| **Links to professional practice** | Example 6: The presentation of appended documents  
TMA02 feedback: I was disappointed that you did not present the Interview Questions and the Research Schedule sections in a readable format.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| **Structure, communication, and presentation** | Example 6: The presentation of appended documents  
TMA02 feedback: I was disappointed that you did not present the Interview Questions and the Research Schedule sections in a readable format.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |