

The View From the Top

A Study on Educational Leadership in Roman Catholic Schools in Malta

Volume 1

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ABSTRACT

THE VIEW FROM THE TOP

A STUDY ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALTA

This Research studies leadership in Roman Catholic primary and secondary schools in Malta. The study takes a grounded approach in order to investigate what it is like to be a headteacher in a church-run school, through an exploration of attitudes, behaviours, leadership styles and managerial skills and approaches.

The initial phase of the project involved interviews with ten Roman Catholic school headteachers (five primary and five secondary). On the basis of these interviews a questionnaire was constructed, focusing on what had been identified as the key issues. The questionnaire was then distributed to the Heads of all Roman Catholic schools in Malta (forty schools).

The findings of the study give some privileged insights into the perceptions and experiences of church school Heads, providing information about positive and negative aspects of the job, indicating areas where organisational and / or administrative changes would be helpful and also highlighting areas for further headteacher education and training.

DEDICATION

TO

OLIVIA AND FRANCO

YOU ARE

MY REAL SCOPE FOR LIVING

MY PRIDE AND JOY

YOU LIGHT UP EVERY MOMENT OF MY LIFE

YOU MAKE LIFE WORTH LIVING

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My heartfelt thanks go to the following people who have encouraged me, guided me and helped me during the four years of my Doctoral Studies.

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Introduction

INTRODUCTION

“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the cat.

“I don’t much care where. . .” said Alice.

“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the cat.

(Alice in Wonderland, Lewis Carroll, p.54)

That leadership is important is a fact and many people realise and are aware of this. For this reason, there is a lot of interest in what might be the ‘best’ ways of managing and leading an organisation, and this is evident from the amount of literature written on the subject, and from the prominence that organisations are giving to the notion of leadership.

Leaders in contemporary human service organisations are being confronted by external and internal challenges and expectations that make demands on their time, expertise, energies and emotional well being. Leaders are increasingly being held accountable for their performance and they are expected to abide by moral and ethical principles in their practices and relationships (Taylor, 1991; Starratt, 1993; Terry, 1993; Duignan and Bhindi, 1997).

In the educational field, school leaders are important and their leadership is perceived as crucial to the success or otherwise of their institution. Success is measured not only through good and better examination results, but also through the personal and social skills that students acquire during their course of studies. It is also a fact that managing and leading a school is a complex job

because educational leaders are carrying much more on their shoulders than they ever did (Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach, 2002). While leaders have to respond productively to these pressures, in many human service organisations there is a constant shift in attention to people-oriented issues and this is calling for the transformation of managers and administrators into leaders who focus more on the individuals who form part of the organisation (Little, 1997). At the heart of these 'people issues' are values and ethics (Karpin, 1995; Ryan, 1997). There is also a rising concern with the "paralysis of moral patterns of life" (Pirsig, 1992, p. 357) and a desire to reclaim the moral, ethical and spiritual domains of leadership (Hodgkinson, 1991; Covey, 1992; Sergiovanni, 1992; Conger and Associates, 1994; Duignan, 1997; Handy, 1997).

Albeit there are aspects of educational leadership that are significantly crucial for the success of the organisation, some of these aspects have not been extensively researched (Foster, 1989; Dillard, 1995; Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell and Capper, 1999). Among these are the moral and spiritual dimensions of effective school leadership, also the ability of the school leader to understand and assess how complex social forces impinge on schools.

Leaders embark on a series of strategies all aimed at influencing the technical processes within their schools hopefully with the result of accomplishing desired and intended goals for their organisation.

Although education authorities and educational leaders are giving more attention to leadership as an effective tool towards the solution to the problems that education is facing, there is still a lot that needs to be understood about effective educational leadership (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). The present growing focus on educational leadership is the result of several larger trends: primarily the outcomes of schooling are being far more examined and scrutinised and consequently there is stronger interest in how, and to what extent, school leaders can influence these outcomes; secondly the contexts for educational leadership both within schools as well as in the larger social political and economic environment, in which schools are enshrouded, are becoming more complex and thus presenting new challenges for educational leaders; thirdly, results from research in the educational leadership field are providing more justification for putting more focus and attention on leadership.

Educational leaders have always been regarded and held accountable for their school's health, including fiscal and political matters as well as the instructional programme. In such times of increasing regard for student learning and holistic development, educational leaders are being held more accountable than ever not solely for the structures and routes that they establish, but also for the performance of those under their charge, mainly students and teachers. And now educational institutions have much greater technological capacity for assessing school outcomes and possibly tie them more directly to teachers' and school leaders' performance (Marsh, 2004).

The increased focus on student achievements has aroused the search for knowledge about the types of leadership that do help in improving teaching and learning, under the premise that academic success depends on a great extent on the capacities of school leaders (Murphy and Datnow, 2002). The heightened importance to student outcomes is not only bringing about an interest in the technical aspect of leadership but is also eliciting attention to how school leaders provide moral, political and intellectual leadership to a system that may be going askew (Hallinger and Heck, 2002).

Consequently, there has lately been a voluminous and ever-increasing research and literature on the nature and effects of leadership (Bass, 1997; Yukl, 1994; Stoll and Fink, 2001; Leithwood, *et al.*, 2002; Foskett and Lumby, 2003; Lingard, Hayes, Mills and Christie, 2003; SORL, 2003; Bottery, 2005; Bush and Middlewood, 2005; Coleman and Earley, 2005; Fullan, 2005; Bush and Bell, 2006; Bush, 2007; Hartley, 2007). All this evidently concludes that leadership matters and is important. It also implies that the changing needs of educational systems can be met, at least partially, by improving leadership capacity and practice. Moreover, ever-increasing evidence that links leadership to organisational performance and success (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Bennis and Nanus, 1985; De Pree, 1987; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Bush and Bell, 2006), together with more disciplined normative theories about leadership (Sergiovanni and Moore, 1989; Senge, 1990; Hartley, 2007), seem to accentuate the prominence and worth that leading an organisation has.

Consequently many studies seem to intensify the search for valid and viable forms of leadership (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003).

Some scholars argue that being fascinated about leadership reveals the human desire to be in control of one's situation. It could also prove to be a convenient way of explaining unexplainable events; or maybe leadership is a hoped-for "panacea" for problems that resist simple solutions (Pfeffer, 1978; Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985; Bass, 1990; Gardner, 1990; Maxcy, 1991). All these factors have generated a highly charged environment for practice, policy and research on educational leadership.

There are a number of ways how to look at and understand leadership, drawn from rationalist and non-rationalist paradigms, including complexity theory and chaos theory, institutional theory, political theory, or critical social theory (Scheerens, 1997; Wheatley, 1999) and I am aware of their valuable contribution in the study of leadership. Yet for various reasons that are clearly explained later on, for my research I decided to take a grounded approach to understanding, making sense of and ultimately building my theory through data analysis and conceptual development.

IMPORTANCE OF TOPIC

The dominant principle of an organisation has shifted, from supervision and management in order to control an enterprise, to leadership in order to bring out the best in people and to respond quickly to change.

(Naisbett and Aberdene, 1990, p. 20).

The notion of leadership in modern management is being given great prominence due to the belief that a good leader makes a great difference in any institution (Howell and Frost, 1989) and because high quality school leadership is crucial to school effectiveness (Trotter and Ellison, 1997). Managing is not enough: “what is needed is leadership to help people achieve what they are capable of, to establish a vision for the future, to encourage, to coach and to mentor, and to establish and maintain successful relationships” (Carnegie, Levine, and Crom 1995 pp. 15-16).

Over the last twenty years, the concept of competent leadership has been central in human resource strategy (Wigfield, 1996). Competency is perceived as “an underlying characteristic of a person which results in effective and / or superior performance in a job” (Klemp, 1980, p. 30) and as a “motive, trait, skill, aspect of one’s self image or social role, or body of knowledge” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 56).

Whilst competence and competency are fundamental elements in any organisation, at all levels, they are even more indispensable in people who are leading the organisation. Since leading entails increased levels of influence,

impact and control, the cost of incompetence naturally becomes progressively greater, the more senior the individual is. Consequently, "it is critical that leaders are carefully selected and developed" (Wigfield, 1996, p. 101).

Over the past decade or so, the importance of administration in general and headship in particular, in Maltese schools, has been boosted for three salient reasons:

- a number of major developments are taking place in the educational field, which are affecting the way schools are organised, managed and run; consequently the role of the head, or any educational leader, has become increasingly complex and constrained (Fullan, 1998; Bush, 2006; Borg, 2006).
- In 1985, the first diploma programme in educational administration and management, was introduced by the Faculty of Education, at the University of Malta. This programme was targeted for those already occupying administrative posts and for those who wanted to be considered for such posts.
- Last year the Master programme in Educational Leadership was re-introduced by the University of Malta, with the aim of offering better training for Heads and prospective Heads.

It is worth noting that local research in the field of headship has been considerably added to over the last decade (Bezzina, 1995; D'Amato, 1997;

Micallef, 1997; Abdilla, 1999; Quintano, 1999; Cini and Vella Cutajar, 1999; Cassar, 1999; Xuereb, 1999; Spiteri, 1999; Galea Urpani, 1999; Galea Scanura, 1999; Debono, 2001; Cassar, 2001; Briffa, 2001; Attard, 2001; Micallef, 2002; Borg Cauchi and Borg, 2003; Busuttil, 2004). Most of these studies employed a mainly quantitative methodology with questionnaires being the main instruments used. However, some researchers relied on interviews and ethnography as a means of learning more about this field.

Yet it can also be observed from the bibliography that the majority of studies are based in state schools and research in the field of headship in Maltese Catholic church schools is very scarce. I believe I can safely say that this is virgin ground for research.

CATHOLIC CHURCH SCHOOLS

The roots of the term 'Church Schools' are to be found far back to the old days; indeed, even as old as the history of modern civilisation. Teaching, education and culture were, for long centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire, imparted solely by the monastic orders. (Scerri, 2000, p. 13)

During the Dark Ages, it was the religious monasteries, especially those of the Benedictine Order, founded in the 6th century that served not only as centres of prayer and work but also for teaching and the spread of culture. Even when it comes to the origins of the famed European universities, one would find that they

were founded by religious members of the Catholic Church. Religious orders did not reserve their institutions for secondary and higher academic level students. Their education mission was far more widespread than that because in fact some of the schools even reached the young at primary level while others cared for children's nurseries (Scerri, 2000).

The Vatican, by means of the Congregations for Catholic Education, has published, over the years, a series of statements (1977,1982, 1988, 1998) that were intended to give guidance about what should be the distinguishing features of Catholic education internationally. Grace (2002) summarises these features in five principles:

1. Education in faith (as part of the saving mission of the Church)
2. Preferential option for the poor (i.e. providing education to those who are mostly in need)
3. Creating a sense of solidarity and community
4. Education for the common good
5. Providing a source of knowledge and skills as a means, not an end.

These are usually referred to as the *formal Church mission* for modern Catholic schooling. But inevitably one would ask to what extent do Catholic school leaders support these principles and what kind of difficulties do educational leaders face in order to put these principles into practice? (Grace, 2002) Mission statements of modern Catholic schools are undoubtedly influenced by a

number of factors including the religious order that runs the school, parents, teachers, students, and of course the Head of the school, who indisputably has an impact on the ethos of the school. The mission statement is meant to incorporate the educational, spiritual, moral and social purposes of the school, and should point towards a desired educational outcome.

Speaking about the Catholic church's mission in the educational field, Cardinal Hume (1997) says that:

Today, Catholic schools are increasingly popular, not only because of the good academic results they often achieve, but also because many parents sense that a Catholic school might help their children to develop the self-discipline, moral resilience and spiritual maturity so necessary in surviving exposure as young adults to the winds of secularism and materialism in our society (pp. 25 – 6).

Coleman, Hoffer and Kilgore, (1982) through their research, also demonstrate that Catholic schools produce better cognitive and academic outcomes for their students than public schools. Convey (1992) comes out with an explanation for Coleman and his associates' findings. He says that the authors

Attributed the better performance of students in Catholic schools to the strong discipline, high expectations of the teachers, and structured curriculum that characterised these schools. Catholic schools provided a safer, more disciplined, more orderly environment and Catholic schools students had higher rates of attendance, did more homework and generally took more rigorous academic subjects than did public school students. (p.17)

Catholic schools, in many societies, are oversubscribed with students. "Catholic schools are filled to capacity and are in fact over-subscribed by parents attracted

by the Catholic school's reputation for academic success, 'good' discipline and for taking spiritual and moral education seriously" (Grace, 2002, p.3). This fact is also true for Malta (Tabone,1987; Scerri, 2000). "The catholic church operates among the rank and file as a powerful cultural force by virtue of a multitude of organisations. Notable among these are the church schools" (Sultana and Baldacchino, 1994, p. 12). Educating near to thirty per cent of the total formal school age population, "access is keenly contested since these schools are popularly considered to provide a better education than the alternative state school" (*ibid*). This fact has recently been proven by a study conducted by the Malta Employment and Training Corporation among unemployed young people (2006)¹, where it was found that the greatest percentage of young people who leave school without any qualifications attended either a state Junior Lyceum or a state secondary school.

At this stage it is worth noting that entry into Maltese Catholic primary church schools, is decided by ballot, since the demand is far greater than the supply. At secondary level, there is a competitive examination for boys who would have completed the last year of primary school. Again about two thousand boys sit for this exam and only around five hundred make it through. When it comes to girls, there is no such opportunity. The only lucky ones are those whose school caters both for primary and secondary levels.

¹ This study was carried out by the *Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Business Development Division* of the Employment and Training Corporation of Malta. The results of this research show that the vast majority of young people who leave school without any kind of qualification, namely 76.2 % come either from State Junior Lyceums or State Area Secondary schools.

Yet despite the over-all rising profile of Catholic schooling, it is still relatively under-researched both abroad (Grace, 2002) and locally (Tabone, 1987). As I said earlier on, the vast majority of local studies have been carried out within state schools and research on Maltese Roman Catholic Schools is certainly under researched, if not practically inexistent (Cauchi Cuschieri, 2007b).

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN MALTA

Catholic Church schools in Malta date back to the 13th century (Vella,1961; Bonnici, 1967). The church was in fact, the first institution to provide educational instruction to lay persons, although the idea may have been to draw people to join religious orders and communities. At the present, church schools in Malta cater for about one third of the entire Maltese student population.

The cohort in this study comprises sixteen primary schools and thirteen secondary schools. There are also eleven schools that are both primary and secondary. These forty schools cater for approximately fifteen thousand students ranging from five years to sixteen years.² This total includes three primary schools, one secondary school, and a primary and secondary school in Gozo³. This would be the entire population of church schools in Malta.

² There are also twenty-seven kindergarten schools catering for circa one thousand four hundred students and two post secondary schools catering for circa six hundred and fifty students (These numbers are quoted from the official statistics of the secretariat for Catholic Education).

³ The island of Gozo forms part of the Maltese Archipelago.

Catholic Church schools in Malta have to abide by the official Education Act and the National Minimum Curriculum. Yet they enjoy a considerable amount of autonomy. There is the Secretariat for Catholic Education that is part of the Maltese Roman Catholic Church organisation and administration. Although this entity, to a certain extent, monitors what goes on within church schools, the latter are still self-governing.

Different religious communities run one, or a number of schools. The trend is that each religious community that runs the school usually prefers to appoint one of its members as Head. Yet in the last few years, some church schools in Malta were compelled to appoint lay people as Heads, either due to lack of suitable applicants within the community and also because the number of people in Maltese religious communities is on the decrease. O’Keeffe (1999) states that the number of priests and members of religious and teaching orders in Catholic educational organisations in the UK has dropped considerably. The same pattern is happening in the local context where religious vocations are on the decrease. “The diminishing involvement of priests and religious in Catholic education is a major symptom, a visible and tangible indicator, of the irreversible nature of the changes that are taking place” (Lombaerts, 1998).

All Heads must be approved by the Education Division. The salient difference is that Heads coming from within the religious community need not have any degrees in educational management (although this is encouraged). The choice

is left at the discretion of the order. The only requirement is a permanent warrant in teaching which is issued by the Malta Education Department either to those who have a Bachelor Degree in Education, a Post Graduate Certificate in Education, or a Master Degree, or to those who have taught for at least fifteen years. Yet lay Heads are required to be appropriately qualified in educational administration and management by at least having the post-graduate diploma in educational administration and management. Such a Diploma is organised and delivered by the University of Malta.

I have gone through the dissertations submitted by students reading for this diploma, as from 1987 to date and I could see that very little work has been carried out in the area of church schools. I have also gone through the dissertations submitted at Masters level, and it seems that the material related to this field is also very scant there.

A Maltese student who is reading for a doctorate with Lincoln University is currently doing a comparative study that is in its final stage of submission. The study is on school culture and how this impinges on the ethos of the school, and is being carried out in two Maltese and two English Catholic Church schools. This person incidentally happens to come from a religious order and is himself the Head of a church school.

Therefore research on leadership in the Maltese Catholic church school sector is still in its embryonic stage and at this time when education in Malta is going through such major reforms, I feel that this is a very opportune time to carry out this research. I also think that I am at an advantageous position to carry it out. This is because I myself work as a counsellor in church schools so I am very familiar with their ambience. My work involves seeing to students' emotional, social and academic problems. At times in my work I have to liaise with the Head of school concerned, teachers and even the parents. Since I am employed by the Secretariat for Catholic Education, I have access to relevant information that was necessary for the research. Furthermore, since this research has the 'blessing' of the head of the secretariat, I could acquire all the help that I needed. On the other hand, I recognise the fact and I was fully aware that there were inevitably some difficulties associated with doing 'insider' research. Some of the Heads perceived me as a potential 'informer' and so were very careful to give me information albeit I assured them that the research was anonymous and that ultimately they would benefit from the findings.

THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Johnston and Pickersgill (2000) argue that successful school leaders have personal and professional determination, clarity of vision, courage and personal and interpersonal skills to interpret and use the considerable powers and duties

of their office wisely. Bringing these qualities to the development of a management stance, successful Heads will be moving their organisations in the direction of collegial structures and processes grounded in co-operative teamwork. The authors say that this involves the interaction of personality, experience, values, dispositions, attitudes and coping strategies.

In the light of this, the main research question that the study tries to explore is: What does it mean to be the head of a Maltese Roman Catholic church school?

This will incorporate such issues as:

- What is the role, and what is expected from the Head of a Maltese Roman Catholic church School?
- What, if anything, would a leader do differently if it were a state school?
- Are there any specific motivating and satisfying aspects to being a Headteacher of a Maltese Roman Catholic church school?
- What are the Heads' experiences of stress in leading such an organisation?

My research is also an attempt to understand the challenges that contemporary Catholic Heads of schools face in their mission. A range of significant research questions are delved into:

- What effects are Catholic schools having upon the spiritual, moral and social development of their students?

- Are Catholic conceptions of indirect pedagogy being taken over by the ever-increasing prominence being given to direct pedagogy?
- Is Catholic culture still predominant in these schools?
- How are Heads responding to mission challenges, market challenges, moral challenges and social challenges in their work?
- What are the sources of support that Catholic Heads are attaining in trying to meet these challenges?

Naturally, it would be impossible for any research project to explore and find definitive answers to these questions. But it is hoped that a small-scale, quality, and grounded study like this would provide some enlightenment and some indicative findings that would be valuable both to the field of Maltese Catholic Education and to other researchers who might wish to delve further into this intriguing field.

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) say that “qualitative researchers are more likely than quantitative researchers to confront the constraints of the everyday social world: “They see this world in action and embed their findings in it” (p.10). Educational research requires “a larger sense of embeddedness, i.e. the location of contemporary fieldwork data within a developed theoretical, historical and cultural analysis of the phenomenon under investigation” (Grace, 2002, p. 114). This is because educational research is affected by a number of inter-related occurrences. This particular research, like most educational research, has to be

interpreted against a theoretical framework, a historical set of relations and the cultural constitution of which it forms part.

All this will be studied in the light of literature relating to Headship, and against a background of a strong Maltese culture where church schools still enjoy an excellent reputation, obtain high academic achievements, and are still in great demand among Maltese parents.

It will also be constantly borne in mind that the study is being conducted against a background of church schools culture which includes all the special qualities, ways of thinking and working, lifestyle, priorities, values and convictions emanating from the community that runs the school (Lombaerts, 1998).

The study will also take into consideration the different dilemmas being faced by Catholic education in an increasingly secularist, consumerist and market-driven milieu (Grace, 2002).

PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY

Following this introduction, in Chapter One, I review some of the literature dealing with leadership in general, literature dealing with leading and managing specifically within the educational context and explicitly within Catholic schools.

In chapter Two, I explain the route that this research takes. The grounded study that is adopted, through the use of interviews and questionnaires, is assessed and discussed.

Chapter Three takes a closer look at the participants of this study, shedding light on their biographical information, their qualifications, experience, and training in headship.

Chapter Four delves into the findings that emerge from the interviews and the questionnaires, with an in-depth discussion that tries to interpret these findings, and ground them into theory. This leads to the concluding chapter where recommendations and suggestions are given.

CONCLUSION

Educational leadership is a dynamic discipline full of paradoxes, contradictions and contested notions (Calvert, Harvey and Ramsdale, 2000). It is highly problematical and far from value-free (Bottery, 1992), and every aspect of leadership cannot be divorced from values and attitudes whether these be explicit or implicit.

“A leader’s results will be measured beyond the workplace,
and the story will be told in the changed lives of others.”
(Pollard in Hesselbein *et al.*, 1996, p. 248)

Educational leadership is a phenomenon whose importance is gaining momentum because leading is considered as one of the major pillars of any organisation. My research has the aim of taking the reader on a journey in the world of a particular group of educational leaders: Heads in Maltese Church schools. It is a world, having a particular culture and identity, a world of work that undeniably has its impact on Maltese society at large.

Chapter One

Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

“Take care of your people, and the business takes care of itself” (Carnegie, Levine and Crom, 1995, p.48). This is a synthesis, a starting point of how a leader should manage an organisation. Management is not solely a question of having and maintaining a motivated work force striving towards achieving the desired goals. In fact Beare, Caldwell and Millikan, (1997) point out that “the effectiveness of a leader lies in the ability to make activity meaningfulnot to change behaviour but to give others a sense of understanding of what they are doing” (p.25).

The term ‘organisation’ has a very broad sociological connotation, meaning any structure by which social life and behaviour are managed (Daft, 2003). The term is then narrowly understood to mean formal organisations which have a bureaucratic structure (Brewer, 2004) and which process ‘clients’, like schools and police stations, where the main intention is the management of people and their needs. Some other organisations are involved with managing work, like factories, where the main scope is the work itself. My research involves organisations of the first type where people are employed within the formal organisations whose work regards the management of people in non-work settings: human service and people oriented establishments.

Educational organisations function within a legislative framework set down by national, provincial or state parliaments (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). One of

the main aspects of such a framework is the degree of decentralisation in the education system. Educational Systems that are highly centralised have the tendency to be bureaucratic and consequently allow little discretion to schools and local communities. School leaders operating in such controlled systems usually experience particular problems in developing a distinctive vision for their schools. It transpires that when school leaders are reduced solely to putting into practice directives from national, regional or local government, they are likely to lack the aim of articulating school goals. They also cannot lead and manage staff effectively, because government officials make all major decisions about staff appointments, promotions and developments. This approach is evident in China (Bush, Coleman and Si, 1998), the largest educational system in the world, and also in the Seychelles, which is one of the smallest.

This is perceived to be mostly the system in Maltese government schools where although the system is moving to a more decentralised method, in actual fact many aspects of each educational institution are still governed by the state.

Yet this cannot be said for Maltese Church schools. These enjoy a good degree of autonomy and although they have to follow rules issued by the Education department and by other guidelines issued by the Secretariat for Catholic Education, they still enjoy a large degree of self-government in distribution of funds, staff recruitment and promotions. Decentralised systems entrust a significant amount of power to subordinate levels resulting in self-management.

Decentralisation involves a process of reducing the role of central government in the planning and provision of education: it is a shift in the distribution of authority “away from the central ‘top’ agency in the hierarchy of authority” (Lauglo, 1997, p.3).

In a study about leadership in ten challenging schools, Harris (2002) elicits five main features that, according to her, constitute successful leadership:

- vision and values: “an alignment to a shared set of values “(p.18), together with a vision built around these core values, both of which are communicated to staff and students displaying people-centred leadership in the day-to-day dealings with individuals.
- distributing leadership: there seems to be a shift from autocratic styles of leadership to a greater focus on teams and distributed leadership and this is perceived to bring about school improvement.
- investing in staff development, both support staff and teachers as a means of raising staff morale and motivation, as well as improving their capabilities.
- relationships: importance is also given to developing and maintaining sound relationships with staff, students and parents placing emphasis on people not systems and inviting others to lead.
- community-building, thus creating an interconnectedness between home, school and community, because it transpires that certain forces

within the community may hamper learning. Internal as well as external environments have to be managed to ensure success.

Harris (2002) concludes that successful leaders display people-centred qualities and skills: “The context in which people work and learn together is where they construct and refine meaning leading to a shared purpose or set of goals” (p.24).

As Bush and Middlewood (2005) argue, these successful dimensions of leadership can be applied to any school. The most salient feature is recognising the fact that leaders’ approaches have to be tailored to the particular needs of the school and the context in which it functions.

Darmanin (1985) formulates nine roles, functions, attributes or characteristics which he considers as essential in contemporary leadership:

- establishing goal attainment
- promoting values
- integrating all the members’ talents and resources
- serving and uniting
- energizing
- facilitating communication
- delegating authority
- planning and evaluating
- making decisions

Darminin's analogy fits perfectly in this context:

The role of a leader may be compared to that of a driver whose task is normally to push the accelerator, occasionally the brakes, rarely puts the car in reverse, and sometimes has to shift gears – each time depending on the circumstances. There are situations where only by taking a risk can the driver and the car be saved from ruin.

(Darmanin, 1985, p. 72)

It is strongly agreed that heads of schools are integral to the process of school improvement (Blackmore, Thomson and Barty, 2006). There is strong evidence that high-quality leadership is imperative in achieving successful educational organisations (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). The Commonwealth Secretariat (1996) states that “the head ... plays the most crucial role in ensuring school effectiveness”. On the same lines, the National College for School Leadership (2001) alludes to the “pivotal role of effective leadership in securing high quality provision and high standards” (p.5).

Bearing in mind the widely accepted premise that exceptional leadership and management are necessary in the development and sustainability of educational organisations, two questions arise:

- what types of leadership are best to produce positive results?
- which is the best way to develop good and efficient educational leaders?

In looking at the issues that headteachers face, the literature suggests some salient key issues that I discuss under the following sub headings:

- Definitions of leadership
- Leadership styles
- The role of spiritual experience in educational leadership
- Leadership and management
- Culture and context
- Primary and secondary headship
- Leaders as change agents and catalysts
- Work motivation and its relevance to leadership
- Job satisfaction
- Stress in leadership
- Vision.

These issues were also raised by my informants during the ten initial interviews.

DEFINITIONS OF LEADERSHIP

A coherent and comprehensive definition of educational leadership seems to be lacking (Ramsdale, 2000) in organisational literature. Leithwood and Duke, (1999) say that a definition of leadership needs to be comprehensive and closely related to the school context to which it relates. Comprehensive means that the method has to have depth and breadth of perspective (Bolman and Deal, 1997). This would include also the politics and culture of the organisation, and not just

the structural and human resource frames that usually are the main factors that influence most leaders (*ibid*). The point of view from where authors perceive things is crucial to be able to put things in the right perspective (Trotter and Ellison, 1997). In fact writings on leadership often reflect different authors' point of view, their philosophical standpoint (Busher, 1998), the research paradigm they are using (Clark and Clark, 1990), and the underlying ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2001). These different perspectives give a multi-dimensional aspect to the study of educational leadership.

Albeit its contemporary prominence in the educational field, there is no agreed definition of leadership (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). Yukl (2002) argues that the definition of leadership is "arbitrary and very subjective" (p.4) and there is really no definitive elucidation.

Very often, three dimensions of leadership are identified as the basis of a working definition:

- Leadership involves a process where one person or group of people, exert influence over other people to "structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation" (Yukl, 2002, p. 3). The author uses the words 'person' and 'group of people' to emphasise the fact that leadership can be exercised both by an individual or a group.

- Leadership should be grounded in strong personal and professional values because as Wasserberg (2000) states “the primary role of any leader [is] the unification of people around key values” (p. 158). Emphasis is certainly on *people*, showing the central importance that staff and other stakeholders have for the success of educational organisations.
- Leadership entails developing and articulating a vision that is specific to, and embedded in, the organisation if leadership is to be successful.

Beare *et al.* (1997) quote different authors in trying to define what a leader is and what leadership entails. Definitions include:

- that person who exercises authority and makes decisions (Dubin, 1968);
- that person in a group who is given the job of ‘directing and co-ordinating task-relevant group activities’ (Fiedler, 1967, p. 8);
- the person who influences the activities of a group that is working to set and accomplish goals (Stogdill, 1974);
- that person who is able to make an activity meaningful rather than changing behaviour (Pondy, 1978);
- the person who tries to build a social world of those who are in a group (Greenfield, 1986).

Evidently such definitions show that a leader is primarily a person who has the authority and power to lead others in performing a specific task. The leader

should also be the motivating force of others striving towards accomplishing set goals. In this context, Stogdill (1974) lists out a number of leadership traits:

- sense of responsibility
- concern for task completion
- energy
- persistence
- risk taking
- originality
- self-confidence
- capacity to handle stress
- capacity to influence
- capacity to co-ordinate.

Dimmock and Walker (2002) say that an educational leader should possess eight interrelated qualities:

- *collaboration and participation*: having the ability to empower others to collaborate and share power;
- *motivation*: inspiring effort and commitment among followers;
- *planning*: visioning and strategic planning
- *decision-making*: having the right set of skills and techniques that are often exercised politically;
- *interpersonal communication*: vital in enabling and promoting understanding and sharing of knowledge and information;

- *conflict management*: managing conflict within the school community;
- *evaluation and appraisal*: staff appraisal and evaluation are two key leadership responsibilities;
- *staff and professional development*: developing staff professionalism in line with school needs.

LEADERSHIP STYLES

Recent changes in the Maltese school system have brought about more autonomy and yet more accountability (Wain, 1995). As a result, heads of schools are finding themselves more loaded with work, consequently having to adapt to a leadership style that caters for these changes, while at the same time defining who he /she is as a leader. “The reality of the school day, with its constant interruptions, can put a principal under considerable stress. Typically, a principal will adopt a particular ‘leadership style’ which emphasises certain priorities and limits others. This is his or her coping mechanism” (Marsh 2004, p.95).

Different leadership styles have been identified and discussions about these styles often refer to “The Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum of Behaviour” (Hersey, Blanchard and Johnson, 1996, p. 122) where the leader’s behaviour is

related to a continuum. At one extreme is the autocratic leader who dictates to a staff that has to abide by his / her word. At the other is the collaborative head, very democratic in style, sharing a good proportion of power and information with the members of staff who are treated as colleagues, and who play an important role in decision-making. In between are styles where the Head of school shares different degrees of power, collegiality, consultation and support with staff.

TRAIT LEADERSHIP THEORIES

The first group of theories on leadership focus on the attributes of a leader – attributes that one is born with. “Leadership was explained by the internal qualities with which a person is born” (Horner, 2003, p. 27). This implies that if certain persons have personality, physical and mental characteristics then they would qualify as successful leaders. “This was based on the idea that leaders were born, not made and the key to success was simply in identifying those people who were born to be great leaders” (Horner, 2003, p. 27). Contemporary versions of this theory suggest that certain traits can be learnt.

Lussier (2003) writes about the Ghiselli Study, carried out in the United States, where Edwin Ghiselli concluded that particular traits were vital to effective leadership. Ghiselli identified the following six traits, in order of importance, as being significant traits for effective leadership:

- Supervisory ability: getting the job done through others
- Need for occupational achievement: seeking responsibility, the motivation to work and to succeed
- Intelligence: the ability to use good judgement, reasoning and thinking capacity
- Decisiveness: the ability to solve problems and make decisions competently
- Self-assurance: viewing oneself as capable of coping with problems
- Initiative: self-starting in getting the job done with a minimum of supervision

(Lussier 2003, p. 407)

Still research shows that traits alone do not identify a great leader. One has to incorporate with them the environmental and situational factors.

BEHAVIOURAL LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Behavioural leadership theorists try to elicit and determine idiosyncratic and distinguishing styles that effective leaders adopt. Leadership styles include traits, skills and behaviours that leaders use with their subordinates. Lussier (2003) mentions that studies identify three basic leadership styles:

- Autocratic: the leader who makes decisions, tells employees what to do and closely supervises employees (similar to Theory X (McGregor) behaviour).
- Democratic: the leader who encourages employee participation in decisions, works with employees to determine what to do, and does not supervise employees closely (similar to theory Y (McGregor) behaviour)
- Laissez-faire: the leader takes an uninvolved attitude, allowing things to slide and happen within the organisation.

Other behavioural leadership theories include the Leadership Grid that takes two leadership dimensions: “concern for production and concern for people” (Lussier 2003, p. 410). This is also referred to as job centred leadership versus person or employee centred leadership. This particular model identifies five leadership styles that Lussier lists as:

- the impoverished leader
- the authority-compliance leader
- the country-club leader
- the middle of the road leader
- the team leader

(Lussier, 2003, p. 411).

SITUATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORIES

“Situational leadership theorists attempt to determine the appropriate leadership style for various situations” (Lussier, 2003, p. 414).

One of the models that falls within this category includes the *Contingency Leadership Model*, developed by Fiedler in 1951. This model is used to establish if one’s leadership style is task or relationship oriented, and furthermore if the situation matches the leadership style that is being adopted. This model states that situational favourableness is determined by three variables:

- leader-member relations
- task structure
- position power.

Another model is the *Leadership Continuum Model* proposed by Robert Tannenbaum and Warren Schmidt. In this model, leadership behaviour ranges from one end that is boss-centred to the other which is employee-centred. This model also proposes that decisions ought to be taken by all stakeholders.

An additional model is the *Path-goal model*, which incorporates four leadership styles:

- Directive: where the leader is highly authoritative because subordinates have low ability and need total control

- Supportive: where the leader is not autocratic but provides high consideration. Here subordinates have high ability but need support
- Participative: where the leader includes subordinates in decision-making because they have high ability
- Achievement-oriented: the leader proposes difficult but achievable goals and expects the subordinates to achieve their utmost.

Finally there is the *Situational Leadership Model*, developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. This model is believed to select one of the four leadership styles that match the employee's maturity level in a given situation. The four styles include:

- **Telling**: denoting high structure, and low consideration
- **Selling**: denoting high structure and high consideration
- **Participating**: denoting high consideration and low structure
- **Delegating**: denoting low consideration and low structure.

(Lussier, 2003).

Situational theories focus on the fact that leadership style depends a lot on the situation which leaders find themselves in. "Leadership is 'situational', i.e. leaders may exhibit different styles and aspects of leadership depending on the specific context within which they are operating" (Bush and Coleman, 2000, p.

23). Therefore the context of the situation is also a vital element of how leadership is articulated.

OTHER FINDINGS

Bush and Jackson (2002) take a different view and instead of taking each style separately, they view leadership as one entity, but with different dimensions. They adopt Cheng's (1994) five dimensions of leadership that are the result of the four leadership functions suggested by Bolman and Deal (1997) and Sergiovanni's (1984) five leadership forces. Cheng (1994) combines these into five dimensions:

- **Human leadership:** leadership that develops positive social relationships, facilitates social interactions and participation and enhances commitment and satisfaction in the educational institution.
- **Structural leadership:** leadership that develops clear goals and policies, sets appropriate organisational structure for diverse roles, holds staff accountable for results and offers suitable technical support to plan, organise, co-ordinate and execute policies in the institution.
- **Political leadership:** leadership that builds partnerships and coalitions, encourages participation and collaboration in decision-making and resolves conflicts among the parties involved.

- **Cultural leadership:** leadership that inspires and encourages participants to strive for organisational vision and excellent performance, constructs a new institutional culture and changes the prevailing values and norms of staff involved in the organisation.
- **Educational leadership:** leadership that offers direction and expert advice on developments of learning, teaching and curriculum; puts emphasis on importance of management, identifies educational problems and encourages professional development.

Other authors emerge with other aspects of leadership:

PERSONAL LEADERSHIP

This style of leadership “develops positive social relationships” (Bush and Bell, 2002, p. 56). Improvement in relationships may induce the staff to work more contently. According to McGregor’s theory Y, people tend to work better and more if they are satisfied and content. Bush and Bell (2006) say that this style of leadership increases “participation and enhances commitment and satisfaction” (p.56). This can possibly lead to teachers and the senior management team to work more together and be more willing to take risks and be ready for change. This can also lead to an open climate, unfreeze social barriers whilst enhancing human values and contacts.

DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Bush and Bell (2006) say that political leadership “encourages participation and collaboration in decision-making” (p. 57). This kind of leadership values win-win solutions and emphasises democratic values in decision-making and participation.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

Here the head will be “actively participating in the instructional process – collecting weekly lesson plans from teachers, reading about different instructional strategies, undertaking clinical supervision process” (Marsh, 2004, p. 95). This has to be done with great care and attention so that the staff would not be placed under more stress, thinking that the Head is doing this to control them further.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

“This style of leadership focuses on the people involved and their relationships, and requires an approach that seeks to transform feelings, attitudes and beliefs (Hopkins, 2000, p. 40). Four “I’s” are involved in this model:

- Idealised influence: being a role model for one’s followers
- Inspirational motivation: motivating and inspiring followers

- Intellectual stimulation: stimulating followers to be innovative and creative
- Individualised consideration: paying special attention to each individual's needs

(Marsh, 2004, p. 95).

“Transformational leadership is based on a leadership style that brings about continuous learning, innovation and change” (Lussier, 2003, p.413).

Transformational leadership, which is about building a consolidated common interest between leaders and followers, is very often closely associated with vision building and its implementation (Gunter, 2001). In this effective and complex process, where the motives of the leader and the follower merge, “one or more teachers engage with others in such a way that administrators and teachers raise one another to higher levels of commitment and dedication, motivation and morality” (Miller and Miller, 2001, p. 182). This type of organisational leadership puts its main focus on the process by which leaders try to influence the outcomes of the organisation rather than on the nature or direction of these outcomes, and that is why this method is sometimes criticised of having the tendency to be despotic at times (Chirichello, 1999; Allix, 2000).

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

Another emerging type of leadership is Distributed leadership. It is being referred to as the “new kid on the block” (Gronn, 2006, p. 1), it is “in vogue” (Harris, 2004, p.13) and attracting growing attention (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005). It is essentially about sharing out leadership across the organisation and as Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) say, “School leadership has a greater influence on schools and students when it is widely distributed” (p.12). This kind of leadership is perceived taking up momentum for two reasons, namely:

- the “failure of the ‘charismatic hero’ associated with transformational leadership (Hartley, 2007, p. 206): some authors (March, 2003; Ingvarson, Anderson, Gronn and Jackson, 2006) argue that it is not heroic leaders who make an organisation work well, but it is rather the competence of its members, together with initiative, identification with a shared destiny based on trust, collective effort and unobtrusive coordination.
- the greater complexity of the tasks which now beset school leaders” (Hartley, 2007, p.206): distributed leadership is perceived as a pragmatic response to the demands of policy shifts in education (Pricewaterhouse-Coopers, 2007).

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

Bush and Bell (2006) say that leadership should enhance educational quality. Yet when it comes to defining the latter, a complex process is involved and the outcomes are very often conflicting and controversial. Yet the authors say that “there are seven models that can be used to conceptualise, manage and pursue educational quality” (p. 60):

- Goal developing
- Resource developing
- Process engineering
- Social leader and satisfier
- Environmental leader
- Supervision
- Organisation developing.

These seven models are all integrated in Total Quality Management.

At this point distinction should be made between genuine collaborative leadership styles, and contrived and manipulative styles. Busher (1998) says that not all leadership styles are apposite for effective educational leadership as particular styles, like “autocratic styles.... which demand obedience from followers, however they are coerced, do not fit into notions of educational or transformational leadership” (p. 21 – 22), while “the corporate style is likely to lead to staff developing a cynical view of the influence they wield through

consultation and an instrumental view of their work” (Busher, 1998, p. 22). In other words, the perception on leadership depends on the beliefs and values of those who scrutinise the relevance of the leadership style (Ramsdale, 2000) and the vision of the educational organisation that is being led (Yukl, 1994).

Coercive leaders usually want immediate compliance. They order without consulting and very often lack empathy. In such leaders, there is no place and time for caring for people – the latter are there and have to do what the leader demands. Such leaders may also be type pacesetters as they try to push their staff to accomplish tasks and changes. Yet at times as pacesetters, they might not aim at excellence and high standards: they are simply content with accomplishing tasks at the expense of quality.

Sustainable success focuses on the needs and wishes of all stakeholders, rather than on a vision built on the head’s personal wishes or external demands (Bush and Middlewood, 2005).

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

In school leadership literature there seems to be a growing emphasis on the moral, ethical and emotional aspects of leadership (Fullan, 2003; Beatty, 2005; Bottery, 2005). Nevertheless the vast majority does not deal with how

spirituality is perceived and enacted by school leaders. While there exists some literature about spirituality and leadership (Starratt, 1995a; Bhindi and Duignan, 1997; Johnson and McCreery, 1999; Johnson and Castelli, 2000; Capper, Hafner and Keyes, 2002; Deakin-Crick, 2002; West-Burnham, 2002; Flintham, 2003; Thompson, 2005), there is little empirical work and barely anything that gives in depth attention to the significance of spiritual experience in educational leadership. Yet it is evident that spiritual experience is prevalent and has a great meaning.

Spiritual experience “refers to an area of human experience which involves heightened awareness of something of profound significance beyond what is often taken as normal everyday reality” (Woods, 2007, p. 136) like religious, spiritual, or transcendent experience of spiritual awareness (Maxwell and Tschudin, 1990; Hardy, 1991; Hay and Nye, 1998). It is that “deep inner resource which shapes and sustains outward action” (King, 1993, p. 189). Evidence shows that such experiences are exchanged into positive energy which Hardy (1966) calls “a shared reservoir of spiritual power” (p.27) that can be a font of encouragement, strength, upliftment, healing and enlightenment (Woods, 2007).

These spiritual experiences are perceived to have an influence on people’s views and behaviour. In fact a study was conducted by Woods (2007) to discover how spiritual experience relates to the practical professional life of

people who are in influential positions to interpret educational policy and lead schools: in other words how the spiritual experience of Heads influences the school's ethos and the educational aspects of students in their care. In this study it resulted that spiritual experiences have a positive influence on headship. Evidence from other studies confirms the positive influence of spiritual experience and how this impinges on people's behaviour, their relationships with and concern for others together with their ethical behaviour (Hay with Nye, 1998). Spiritual experience does not seem to be manifested in an extreme focus on inner feelings or the inner self. Rather it seems to elicit an appreciation of interconnectedness and interdependency with others, resulting in the connectivity that West-Burnham (2002) and Starratt (1995b) propose to be an important trait of leadership. Nearly fifty per cent of Heads in Woods' (2007) study said that spirituality is a natural dimension of school leadership, and they do not use spirituality as separate from their leadership duties as a headteacher.

Needless to say, spirituality is not the only factor that influences leadership attitudes. Also, the depth and insight of spiritual experience among Heads varies among individuals. As a result, impact on leadership also varies.

Consequently, in a study on leadership in church school, one cannot overlook the role of spirituality that is perceived to be one of the salient qualities of Catholic school leaders.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Another area that needs to be explored in the literature is the weight and meaning attributed to educational leadership and management by the leaders themselves and the organisation. There is a lack of agreed definitions of the words *leader* and *manager* (Busher, 1998) as sometimes they are perceived to intersect and this is particularly true in the educational field (Morrison, 1998) especially in the case of senior school managers where there is “considerable input into policy and strategy formation” (p. 206). We can no longer rely on seeing heads of school administering their institution; they now have to adopt a managerial and leadership role. In the past heads were asked and expected to administer their schools rather than manage or lead them forward, but today it is a different story (Cauchi Cuschieri, 2007a)

In theory, a manager is perceived to be assigned an organisational role, whereas a leader is a role that can only be granted by one’s subordinates (Collins and Porras, 1996). “Leaders live out of their imagination instead of their memory. They tie themselves to their infinite potential instead of their limiting past” (Whisenand and Rush, 1993, p. 56).

Both leadership and management are equally important in an organisation: the first concentrates on efficiency and the second requires effectiveness (Goleman, Boyatzis and Mckee, 2002b). “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things” (Whisenand and Rush, 1993, p. 56). Management is

climbing the ladder of success effectively. On the other hand leadership determines the ladder is leaning against the right wall (Whisenand and Rush, 1993). The processes of leadership relate to how one person inspires others and helps them to develop shared values and purposes. Management complements this through planning, organising, co-ordinating, monitoring and evaluating the work of others (Busher, 1998).

Law and Glover (2000) tabulate the distinctions between leadership and management that can be identified from some of the various authors who have researched the issue (Source: Law and Glover, 2000, p. 14).

Management	Leadership
Building and maintaining an organisational structure. (Schein, 1985)	Building and maintaining an organisational culture. (Schein, 1985)
Path-following. (Hodgson, 1987)	Path-finding. (Hodgson, 1987)
Doing things right. (Bennis and Nanus, 1985)	Doing the right things. (Bennis and Nanus, 1985)
The manager maintains.... relies on control. (Bennis, 1989)	The leader develops inspires trust. (Bennis, 1989)
A preoccupation with the here and now of goal attainment. (Bryman, 1986)	Focused on the creation of a vision about a desired future state. (Bryman, 1986)
Managers maintain a low level of emotional involvement. (Zalzenik, 1977)	Leaders have empathy with other people and give attention to what events and actions mean. (Zalzenik, 1977)
Design and carry out plans, getting things done, working effectively with people. (Louis and Miles, 1992)	Establishing a mission ... giving a sense of direction. (Louis and Miles, 1992)
Being taught by the organisation. (Hodgson, 1987)	Learning from the Organisation. (Hodgson, 1987)

Mintzberg (1973) discusses the overlap too and says that management may be mostly concerned with practical action, whereas leadership mainly concerns visioning, setting the tone and direction, establishing long-term objectives and thus propagating the right ethos. In the same tone, Kotter (1990a) says that while “management is concerned with coping with complexity, leadership is concerned with coping with change” (p. 104).

The words ‘leadership’ and ‘management’ cannot be totally distinguished from each other in this respect. Since leadership may be defined as the ability to get things done under the right circumstances (Thibault, Lynch and McBride, 1995) the real challenge for most heads would be to examine and understand the problems and theoretical parameters within which this can be done, and this is basically a management issue.

Therefore a head of school is very often a leader and a manager, as there is the trend that educational leadership is moving away from a purely authoritative style of administration to a more collaborative style of management (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). Educational heads should ideally be managers and leaders who are willing to address a wide range of school issues (Bhindi and Duignan, 1997).

Effective management is just as important as visionary leadership if educational organisations are to be successful (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). As Lumby

(2001) notes, polarisation of leadership and management should be replaced by an androgynous approach, synthesising both dimensions.

Bolam (1999) defines educational management as “an executive function for carrying out agreed policy” (p. 194). On the other hand educational leadership is different in the sense that it has “at its core the responsibility for policy formulation and, where appropriate, organisational transformation” (*ibid*). Sapre (2002) says that ‘management is a set of activities directed towards efficient and effective utilisation of organisational resources in order to achieve organisational goals’ (p. 102).

According to Bush (2003) educational management should be centrally focused on the purpose and aims of education. And unless this link between purpose and management is clearly and closely established, there might be the danger of exerting “a stress on procedures at the expense of educational purpose and values” (p. 240). This happens when emphasis is put on managerial efficiency rather than on the aims and purposes of education, that is on educational concerns (Newman and Clarke, 1994; Gunter, 1997; Elliott and Crossley, 1997; McTavish, 2003).

Another salient difference that is usually brought out between the two terms is that leadership is associated with change while management is seen as a maintenance activity (Cuban, 1988). “Leadership is influencing others’ actions

in achieving desirable ends. Leaders are people who shape goals, motivations, and actions of others. Frequently they initiate change to reach existing and new goals. Leadershiptakes much ingenuity, energy and skill” (Cuban, 1988, p. xx). On the other hand, management is “maintaining efficiently and effectively current organisational arrangements” (*ibid*). Although managing entails leadership skills, it is rather focused towards maintenance than change.

Both notions ought to be given equal importance if educational organisations are to function efficiently and achieve their aims. This is because while a clear vision is needed in order to establish the nature and direction of change, it is equally essential to make sure that innovations are implemented efficiently thus ensuring that the organisation’s main functions are carried out effectively and efficiently while a number of elements are undergoing change (Bush and Middlewood, 2005).

Bolman and Deal (1997) state that organisations that are over-managed but under led will eventually “lose any sense of spirit or purpose” (p. xiii). On the other hand, organisations which have strong charismatic leaders but are poorly managed “may soar temporarily only to crash shortly thereafter” (*ibid.*). Consequently, in order to survive, modern organisations need “the objective perspective of the manager as well as the flashes of vision and commitment wise leadership provides” (Bolman and Deal, 1997, p. xiv).

CULTURE AND CONTEXT

Two factors that should be borne in mind and cannot be excluded in the study of educational leadership are the school culture and context that prevail in every institution (Michiels, 1998; Bush and Middlewood, 2005). These are two of the most emerging concepts in the study of leadership (Simkins, 2005) as they are increasingly being seen as important (Grace, 2000).

Great prominence has been given to the concept of school culture during recent years, just as businesses have become more interested in their organisation culture (Morgan, 1986). The reason is at times economic. Management and administration, efficient co-operation, motivating people, group cohesion, dealing with personnel must all be subservient to economic considerations (Michiels, 1998). However, the school's culture is also looked at in educational terms. People ask what bearing the daily life of the school has on stated goals. Thus school culture is judged according to its usefulness in promoting the educational project (Michiels, 1998).

The term *culture* is very often used in the same sense as anthropologists use it: as knowledge, beliefs, morals, customs, attitudes and habitual behaviour patterns (Tylor, 1871; Linton, 1940). Culture-building provides meaning and values (Lombaerts, 1998). It develops symbolic systems and it represents all that is typically human, everything that enables people to create their own living space, their world and the civilisation in which they live (*ibid*).

Bell (1976) says that culture

is a continual process of sustaining an identity through the coherence gained by a consistent, aesthetic point of view, a moral conception of self and a style of life which exhibits those conceptions culture is thus in the realm of sensibility, of emotion and moral temper and of the intelligence which seeks to order these feelings. (p. 36)

In other words, culture includes patterns of behaviour, beliefs, laws and all the other thoughts and activities which are proper to a particular community or population, handed down through social interaction (Lombaerts, 1998). Culture encompasses all the experiences and insights concerning everything people do in order to ensure their survival and organise their living together in a meaningful way. In this way, ethical, philosophical, economic, political and social ideas play a major role in culture (Long, 1991).

Prosser (1999) claims that there is actually no general agreement on what is the actual meaning of school culture. “The same view is shared by Michiels (1998) “It is difficult to describe directly the culture of a school, because this is something that resides in people’s minds and hearts” (p. 237). Very often the anthropological definition is adopted in order to establish more focus and avoid the problem of looseness and vagueness (Reid, 1986). “The understanding of school culture requires insights from history, philosophical, religion, political, economy and cultural analysis” (Grace, 2000, p. 62). School cultures refer to those “characteristic patterns of behaviour, beliefs and values and physical

environments which are to some degree different from those of other institutions in society” (Reid, 1986 p.58).

In this respect the study of school culture from an anthropological perspective would entail:

- institutional norms, values and beliefs
- ceremonies and rituals
- rules and regulations
- school atmosphere and climate
- social behaviour of staff and students.

In this way, school culture indicates all the viewpoints, the means of communication and the strategies for action shared by those engaged in the educational work of the school. It includes the social, cultural, and economic interests that exist in the school’s environment, the professional relationships among the staff, the leadership given and the syllabi used in the different subjects (Quinn, Mintzberg and James, 1988). A school culture is an expression of a school’s underlying unit, its explicit and implicit values, its rules and expectations. The school culture directs the behaviour of individuals and groups: it is the cement that holds the school together as an organisation (Michiels, 1998).

School culture “may be defined as the whole set of values, norms and expectations which the people in a school share with one another, implicitly or explicitly” (Lombaerts, 1998, p. 205). School culture is manifested through relationships, structures and processes within the school, and it is recognisable by the customs of the school, and the people’s ways of speaking and behaving. Sometimes, the expression ‘school climate’ is used to refer to the more subjective emotional side of a school culture (Lombaerts, 1998, p.96).

In this particular research, the notion of school culture bears a specific weight since church schools are believed to have their particular culture (Lombaerts, 1998) and Maltese Roman Catholic church schools are no exception.

Lang (1999) says that “values ‘move’ people philosophically, psychologically, sociologically, physiologically” (p. 17). In various research studies conducted over the past ten years in a variety of cultures and contexts, leaders who were asked to identify factors and characteristics of effective leadership, refer to such values as integrity, honesty, authenticity, trust, care and compassion (Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Brown and Townsend, 1997; McEwen and Salters, 1997; Sale, 1997; Swann, 1998; Duignan, 1998).

Leadership and how it is defined and practised depends on the cultural conditions at micro and macro level (Covey, 1992), the field the leader is working in, the context in which it has developed over the years, the nature of its

constituents, the issues involved, agendas, and the unique ambience and personalities that make up the organisation (Bush and Bell, 2006).

Education provided by church schools is envisaged “to give students access to a new and better Christian, social culture” (Lombaerts, 1998, p. 34). This is because a religious order is perceived to provide the “right atmosphere of regularity in the shape of an organised group of people working for a common goal” (*ibid.*).

Bearing in mind that this research concerns leaders who work in Maltese Catholic Church schools, the notion of culture cannot be overlooked or ignored. Maltese church schools, like other church schools, still give great prominence to their prevailing culture. At the same time, people still inquire what bearing the daily life of the school has on its stated goals. In this way, school culture is evaluated according to its usefulness in promoting the organisation’s educational project in all its aspects (Michiels, 1998).

As the number of lay teachers and leaders in Maltese Roman Catholic church schools is currently on the increase, each community tries to integrate laypersons into its tradition so that they would make its particular culture their own. In systematic terms, these measures are essential in order to guarantee the continuity of the organisation (Gallagher, 1997). All those involved in the school are expected to manifest this culture in their internal organisation and in

the work they do for the external environment. In this way, there would be a common vision and a common way of acting.

Church schools culture is the culture operating in schools founded and run by the church. It includes all the special qualities, the ways of thinking and working, the lifestyle, the priorities, values and convictions emanating from the community in question. It involves a common heritage that guides and determines the shape of the school and its concrete ways of operating (Lombaerts, 1998). People can assimilate these things, get to know and understand them, as it were, from within, so that they treasure them and be inspired by them.

It should be borne in mind that the aim of the church to build schools was to give children and young people an opportunity for education (Lombaets, 1998; Michiels, 1998; Scerri, 2000): monasteries served “not only as centres of prayer and work, but also for teaching and the spread of culture” (Scerri, 2000. p. 13). “In the past it was largely the priests and religious who often at great financial cost, organised and animated an impressive network of Catholic schools and colleges of every sort” (Scerri, 2000, p.14) and “religious orders were always willing to make adaptations and take initiatives to develop educational programmes designed to make their schools more relevant socially, culturally and politically” (Lombaerts, 1998, p. 3). Schools were always regarded as the best way to gain a foothold on the social ladder towards better living conditions. This strategy clearly implied a whole set of educational presuppositions, with

economic and political overtones, concerning the school's participation in social order (Lombaerts, 1998).

Christian school culture has to be perceived at the level of the individual school and the level of the whole Christian school network (Fulton, 1997). Students, parents, staff, administrative personnel and leaders all contribute to the special ambience of the school. They shape the school's culture and at the same time they are influenced by it (Michiels, 1998). The different aspects that link Christian schools are equally important. What really unites these schools has to be analysed together with the concept of how far individual schools are open to accept and participate in the orientations given by the Church and the different Religious orders concerned.

The ideological attitude of the school is part of its culture since the two are closely interwoven together. This is because generally the culture gives a precise reflection of the values held in the school. The ideological culture of Catholic schools is determined by the way in which the Catholic vision is handled, projected and manifested, together with the influence it has on the social and pedagogical choices taken by the school (Grundy, 1994).

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY HEADSHIP

Since my cohort includes both Primary and Secondary Heads of school, I feel that part of my literature review should concentrate on each level of education separately. Different authors have focused their writings on these two different, but equally important stages of education.

LEADERSHIP IN THE PRIMARY SECTOR

Although leadership in primary schools is not confined solely to headteachers, most of the literature concentrates upon them (Bell, 1988). Despite the growing belief that leadership in primary schools should be distributed over different levels, studies of leadership in primary schools generally regard the Headteacher as the principal leader (Southworth, 2000).

Primary Heads are perceived to be very powerful figures inside the school that they lead (Coulson, 1980). They are seen to be possessive of 'their' schools (Nias, Southworth and Campbell, 1992) are regarded as holding a "formidable concentration of power" (Alexander, 1984, p.161); they exercise nearly absolute control over the form and direction of development in their schools (Campbell, 1985); they dominate the schools they lead (Southworth, 1995b) and are believed to be one of the main factors which determine the effectiveness and the success of the school (Southworth, 2000).

Another factor that comes out from literature is that discussions about primary headteachers generally fail to take differences in school size into account (Southworth, 2000). Evidently this factor is bound to affect the Head's behaviour and attitude. In the cohort under my study, there are schools that cater for one class for every grade, and yet there are others who have to cater for at least three classes at every level (or grade).

LEADERSHIP IN THE SECONDARY SECTOR

Caldwell and Spinks (1992) say that cultural, strategic, educational and reflective leadership are important dimensions of the work of school leaders in secondary schools. These aspects of leadership are happening against a background of rapid change mostly concerned with improving the quality of learning for all students in most educational organisations especially at secondary level (Caldwell, 2000). This is due to the social, economic, academic, technological, psychological, moral and physical changes that are constantly happening, at such a quick pace, beyond the school walls. At this level, school leaders are perceived by researchers to be educational strategists, working with others to develop a capacity for state-of-the-art learning (Bolam, 1988; Lingard *et al.*, 2003). Secondary school principals like most primary Heads, are giving priority to improving standards of literacy, higher academic achievements and better social skills, and this role is changing to a more strategic one in every aspect (Education Division, Malta, 1995).

The principal is spending more time on the 'bigger picture' in ways that reflect the contemporary view of transformational leadership (Gurr, 1996). For this reason the concept of educational strategist is pre-eminent as the educational leader has to take a macro view of things that concern the organisation. While this is happening and gathering momentum, there is evidence that secondary education is being reinvented and reformed. This certainly would require that a capacity for strategic management will become increasingly important for secondary school leadership (Caldwell, 2000).

LEADERS AS CHANGE AGENTS AND CATALYSTS

Different writers on leadership (Cheng, 1996; Stoll and Fink, 2001; Morrison, 1998; Middlewood and Lumby, 1998a; Helsby, 1999) give great prominence to the changing context within which leadership is exercised. Other authors (Caldwell, 1997; Leithwood *et al.*, 2002) even go a step further by trying to imagine how leadership would be in the coming years and what the implications are. Changes in society, economics, business, technology, national policies, centralisation and decentralisation, accountability, schooling and learning are all issues which are perceived by authors as catalytic agents affecting educational leadership.

The pace of change is ever increasing, becoming more unpredictable and therefore unmanageable (Ramsdale, 2000). Another factor that has to be borne in mind is the need for every education system to put forth a responsive and well-prepared work force because this is understood to be very important for the economic, cultural and political survival of the country involved. Hargreaves (1995) links these constant changes to the shift from Modernism to Post-modernism.

Change is an essential element in education. Like any organisational change, it is a process of transformation, and can be initiated from within the institution or else imposed externally (Fullan, 1991). Evidently, preparing and adapting to change depends on the organisation's leader to "adapt the content, methods and ethos of education to new needs" (Everard and Morris, 1996, p. 5).

Strategic decisions made by school leaders may also involve and demand change. The natural tendency in people is to resist change (Helsby, 1999) especially "if the change is parachuted upon them" (Everard and Morris, 1996, p.5). Therefore the school leader has a particular task to undertake, that of helping each member of staff to identify and conceptualise the real meaning of change and how it can affect him / her. This will be tilling the land before throwing the seeds.

The effective school leader should have the ability to take a bird's eye view of any proposed changes and see them in context (Thompson, 1993). Staff members might have the tendency especially at times of stress, to look at any new proposed changes negatively.

Change is also generating a wide variety of roles within which leadership is expected to be exercised (Simkins, 2005). School leaders are being faced by a changing policy environment. People respond differently to changes. One may find:

- the willing compliers who are dedicated followers of the new discourse, with its underlying values and the collective purpose and policies of the institution;
- the strategic compliers who, while feeling uncomfortable with many of the changes, find ways of redeveloping policy in their own areas of responsibility by methods which help them retain their core values in spite of the wider policy pressures bestowed upon them;
- the unwilling compliers who, sceptical and disenchanted with the new ethos, can only manage to work on a set of coping strategies to be able to survive;
- the defeated, who merely sink under the pressure through illness or withdrawal. (Simkins, 2005)

Both willing and strategic compliers manage to make some sense of their changing policy environment and use it to retain a sense of agency within their organisational context. Yet others are liable to fail in this mission.

Here one cannot overlook the importance of leadership in analysing the interaction between structure and agency in particular contexts, and how this is negotiated by individuals' values, personality and personal history (Simkins, 2005).

In this case this would be far more than a 'what works' question, because it raises fundamental issues about how power should be distributed in professional educational organisations, about the justifiability of various forms of authority, and about the values and norms on which the exercise of power should be founded.

Subsequently, the research delves into how Heads perceive change and how they go about it.

WORK MOTIVATION AND ITS RELEVANCE TO LEADERSHIP

Another aspect, into which I delve in this research, is job motivation among Heads. The study of work motivation has two basic strands:

- why people behave in the way they do in the workplace
- how they can engage in work behaviours that are beneficial to the organisation and themselves (Riches, 2000).

There seems to be no clear definition of motivation (Handy, 1993; Hall and Rowland, 1999; Foskett and Lumby, 2003). The term carries with it a plethora of interpretations (Foskett and Lumby, 2003) and there is actually “no overarching or single theoretical model which explains [it]” (Riches, 1994, p. 224). Very often the notion of motivation within the educational context is mostly based on research carried out in the world of business (Bottery, 1992; Bush, 1999).

Being derived from the Latin word *movere*, meaning ‘to move’ (Rue and Byars, 1989), motivation “involves arousal, direction and persistence (Turner, 1992, p. 2). People have to be activated in some way; having become activated, they have to choose a particular line of action; having chosen that direction, they choose to maintain that behaviour for some period of time (*ibid*).

Similarly, Steers and Porter (1983) and Mitchell and Larson (1987) include in their definition of motivation three factors:

- what arouses human behaviour
- what directs this behaviour towards a specific goal
- how this behaviour is upheld.

Handy (1993) emphasises the importance of motivation for managers: “if we could understand, and could then predict, the ways in which individuals were motivated, we could influence them by changing the components of that motivation process” (p. 29). According to Turner (1992) educational managers do not need to motivate staff because the latter are motivated. The job of educational managers would be to influence the direction and intensity of the motivation. The reward basically comes from the job itself, from the good feeling that it elicits. In fact it is often believed that intrinsic motivation is far more long-term and deeply rooted than extrinsic motivation (Vroom, 1967).

These theories are all based on the premise and belief that motivation is necessary and crucial if employees are to perform well. Evidently people are motivated in various ways and through different factors, and therefore knowing what really works for every individual provides the capacity for enhanced long-term performance. The better people feel about their work, the better they are likely to perform. “The ability and strategies to motivate staff, to develop staff morale and to try to ensure job satisfaction are central to the leader’s role in raising performance” (Bush and Middlewood, 2006, p. 76). Yet this is no simple matter. Bearing in mind the limitations that leaders are bound to face in trying to motivate themselves and their staff, perhaps the most important task would be to acknowledge the particular context within which motivation can flourish. This context puts the individual as the main focus, bearing in mind the fact that

external factors which are very often beyond the leader's control, can actually work against individual concepts of what really motivates an individual.

"People and their motivation are seen more than ever to be irreplaceable" (Riches, 1994, p. 224). In fact, according to Riches, since the beginning of the 1990's, "programmes have come to the fore to help to provide a continuous reservoir of well-trained and highly motivated people" (p.224). Riches (1994) claims that in the educational field, with all the constant emphasis on professionalism and autonomy, very little prominence is being paid to motivation and personal development.

There are several theories of motivation, but maybe the most popular are Maslow's (1970) Hierarchy of Needs, McGregor (1960) 'X' and 'Y' Theory, and Herzberg's (1966) 'Two Factor' Theory. Different authors group motivation theories into diverse categories: Middlewood and Lumby (1998b) classify the main theories under three headings:

- *Need theories*, based on the notion that basic needs or drives within human beings are the key to what motivates them;
- *Goal theories*, stating that all employees make a personal calculation of costs and benefits of how they act and perform accordingly;

- *Equity theories*, suggesting that employees are mainly motivated by a sense of fair play and feeling that they are being treated less fairly than others can be a demotivating factor.

Handy (1993) divides motivation theories into three categories:

- *Satisfaction theories*: here it is assured that satisfied workers are more productive, although this notion is sometimes debated (Du Brin, 1981; Handy, 1993).
- *Incentive theories*: based on the principle of reinforcement, in simpler terms, the 'carrot' approach. It is sometimes believed that individuals tend to work harder if they are rewarded or somehow encouraged for good performance. This theory supports also the idea of performance related pay.
- *Intrinsic theories*: inferring that people give their best in work if they feel that their job is worthwhile and they are allowed to get on with it.

Other authors (Bennett, 1994; Harvey, 2001) focus on the relationship between motivation and human need and thus divide motivation theories into two categories:

- *Content theories*: concentrating on the specific factors that motivate individuals at work, i.e. exploring reasons for individuals' goal choices;

- *Process theories*: attempting at identifying and examining the dynamic relationships among the different variables that bring about motivation: how it is initiated, directed and sustained. Such theories try to identify the behavioural pattern that a person follows when striving for desired objectives.

If the experience of work has a negative impact on school leaders, they cannot possibly give their best in that sphere of their lives. And it is a well-accepted fact that Heads have undeniably a great influence in their organisation and their attitude, be it negative or positive, has a ripple effect on the rest of the organisation (Riches and Morgan, 1989; Beare *et al*, 1997).

According to Riches (2000), in order to make some relevant application of theoretical knowledge about motivation in educational management, it is important to understand the relationship between theories of motivation and theories of managing motivation. This is because motivating people to get results through them is central to the purposes of leadership. “Apart from developing the skill to work well we need to look for ways of developing the will to work well” (Evenden and Anderson, 1992, p. 27).

Katz and Kahn (1978) argue that organisations need people who:

- are interested in filling in a post and maintaining it
- perform their task in a dependable and conscientious manner

- go beyond this to engage in creative, spontaneous and innovative behaviour.

There is strong evidence that successful leaders put strong emphasis on motivating and developing people rather than solely on establishing and maintaining systems and structures (Carnegie *et al.*, 1995; Allix, 2000; Bush and Jackson, 2002; Bush and Middlewood, 2005; Goleman *et al.*, 2002a).

Systems and structures are important, but should always come second (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). This is because, like in many other organisational settings, in education, people are more likely to be committed in their work and towards the organisation if those who have responsibility for them value them. This is corroborated by some of the main theories of motivation (McGregor, 1960; Vroom, 1964; Herzberg, 1968; Maslow, 1970; McClelland, 1985), and a very long series of more recent studies that have built on such theories (Rue and Byars, 1989; Everard and Morris, 1996; Fernandez, 2000; Cauchi, 2001; Goleman *et al.*, 2002b). This sense of commitment applies to the teaching staff as much as to students. It also applies to support staff that work in schools. And ultimately it also applies to the educational leader *per se*. An inclusive approach, incorporating all stakeholders, is most plausible to cultivate the notion of teamwork that is also a very strong characteristic of effective organisations (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2001).

Motivation is a very individual and personal matter. Since people's needs and desires are basically internal factors, the educational leader has to undergo a difficult job in trying to elicit the factors that influence staff motivation and morale. Each member of staff needs "to come to school in the morning with an understanding that each is valued first and foremost as a person" (Mortimore and Mortimore, 1995, p. 7).

One of the salient difficulties regarding the study of motivation is that, as I said earlier on, there is no overarching or single theoretical model that explains motivation (Rue and Byars, 1989). Against a wide theoretical background about the different notions applied to this concept by numerous authors, in my interviews and questionnaires, I tried to elicit what the leaders themselves understand by motivation. I also tried to explore how motivated these heads feel and how this is impinging on them and on the rest of the organisation. "Some people have a strong 'internal motivation' – a sense of purpose or drive. Others do not." (Everard and Morris, 1996, p. 20).

Motivation is not a neutral term sanitised from other positive and negative manifestations. There are other concepts that are clearly related to motivation and the study takes a close look at these concepts too.

JOB SATISFACTION

The motivation needed to achieve a high level of performance is satisfaction with the job (Riches, 2000). People work in order to satisfy some need. The need may be to achieve name or power, to save other people or simply to earn money. Most theorists therefore concentrate their attention on examining human needs, how these needs are met and can be better met at work. This is because people work at their best when they are achieving the greatest satisfaction from their work (Everard and Morris, 1996).

Job satisfaction refers to an attitude or internal state that is mainly related to the work that the individual is currently doing (Bush and Middlewood, 2005). Frase (1992) says that the greatest satisfaction comes from doing a good job. This is because improved performance leads to improved learning, and this results in greater employee satisfaction. Consequently, responsibilities and recognition are both perceived as key motivators, because each appeal to the individual's intrinsic needs related directly to work.

Job satisfaction and motivation are inextricably linked because people need to feel that they are performing well, and when that is established, the leader can build on that to try to motivate the staff and help them to move forward. "If there is basic dissatisfaction, there is little scope for motivation" (Bush and Middlewood, 2005, p. 78) and consequently satisfaction.

Some theorists refer to job satisfaction as if it were synonymous with motivation. In fact motivation and satisfaction are quite different notions. Motivation is the “drive to perform while satisfaction reflects the individual’s attitude or happiness with the situation” (Rue and Byars, 1989, p. 100). Motivation results in increased effort, which in turn augments performance once there is the right ability, and an adequately directed effort. Satisfaction results in increased commitment to the organisation, which normally results in a decrease in problems like absenteeism, tardiness and strikes.

Job satisfaction is an attitudinal state associated with a personal feeling of achievement, either quantitative or qualitative (Riches, 2000). The evidence from research on job satisfaction conducted among educational leaders (e.g. Fullan, 1998; Johnston and Pickersgill, 2000; Day, Harris, Hadfield, Tolley and Beresford, 2000) seems to suggest that achievement on task or in reaching specific standards of competence is significant (Vroom, 1964; Locke, 1965; Herzberg, 1966). Conversely, loss of autonomy (for example, trying to deal with problems over which leaders have no control) and powerlessness (for example the moving goalposts of government legislation) lead to job dissatisfaction (Tomlinson, Gunter and Smith, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2001).

With particular reference to headship, Nias (1981) in a study among primary school teachers found that job satisfaction arises out of factors that are intrinsic to the job like good relationships, purposeful leadership and a close fit between

the ideologies of teachers and the ideologies of the school. But she also identifies 'negative satisfiers' like poor conditions of work, which, if removed, would result in more job satisfaction, whereas contextual dissatisfiers like bad management and absence of a sense of purpose in the ethos of the school, would not. In my opinion, for this particular research this is a salient point that should be borne in mind.

STRESS IN LEADERSHIP

Perhaps the other side of the coin of job motivation and satisfaction is job stress. Whilst the vast majority of studies in educational organisations have focused on the classroom teacher, some studies have looked at the particular sources of stress faced by those in managerial positions (Dunham, 1992; Cooper and Kelly, 1993; Ostell and Oakland, 1995). Such studies have served to highlight the acute stress that can be generated in trying to deal with demands coming from those above, when one feels that one has very limited power and resources to influence those people below in agreeing to and being able to deliver these demands.

Often leaders feel unsafe, as if they are under a microscope, their every action scrutinised by those around them. Knowing that others are watching with a critical eye, may provoke educational leaders to judge their own progress too

soon, to curtail experimentation, and decrease risk taking (Goleman *et al.*, 2002a).

Stress has its origin in *fight or flight*. The hormones involved in making the body ready to fight are used to gear up for action in a different way. Even if there is a refusal to recognise stress, eventually the body will begin to show unmistakable signs.

When people feel stressed, they no longer feel safe and are further inhibited in practising new ways of acting. Instead, they become defensive, relying on their most familiar habits.

Stressful working conditions can create a climate of frustration and tension, potentially leading to *burnout*. In a state of burnout, people find their emotional resources exhausted, feel undervalued and worthless. The only way for such individuals is downward and depression or other ill health may be the result.

When a person's stress increases, the body reacts by secreting more adrenaline and noradrenaline. This leads to higher blood pressure, getting the individual ready for action. At the same time, the body secretes the stress hormone cortisol, which is even longer lasting than adrenaline, and which even interferes with cognitive abilities.

Recent research by James Zull (2002) suggests that cortisol at persistently high levels causes reduction in the branching of neurons in the brain centre for conversion of short term memory to long term memory (the hippocampus). Even more dramatically, long duration of very high cortisol levels appears to destroy hippocampal cells.

Both good and bad moods tend to perpetuate themselves, in part because they skew perceptions and memories: when people feel upbeat, they tend to see the positive light in a situation and recall the good things about it. When they feel bad, they focus on the downside (Bower, 1991).

Beyond this perceptual skew, stress hormones secreted when a person is upset, take hours to become reabsorbed in the body and fade away. Negative emotions, especially chronic anger, anxiety, or a sense of futility, powerfully disrupt work, by hijacking attention from the task at hand.

Smilansky (1994) argues that work stress has special meaning in the educational field in that only in education is an individual required to play so many roles such as supportive parent, disciplining taskmaster, stimulating actor and information resource person. The special affective characteristics of the profession exert pressure towards presenting an understanding, supportive and optimistic appearance.

Various authors (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1978; Cook, 1992; Dunham, 1992) have tried to define stress in the educational field. It is defined as the experience of unpleasant emotions such as tension, frustration, anxiety, anger and depression resulting from aspects of the work people in the educational profession do. The authors emphasize the role of the person's perception of the circumstances, and the degree of control one perceives as having.

According to Everard and Morris (1996) the study of stress has to be tackled from 3 different angles:

- causes
- symptoms
- remedies and coping strategies.

Several authors have tried to adduce causes of stress that educational leaders experience. Among the most common one would find: student misbehaviour, poor working conditions, time pressures, role conflict, confusion or overload, a demanding school ethos, personal attitudes (Everard and Morris, 1996) general intensification of working life, a growing insularity among teachers, increased demands for accountability, paperwork, more frequent administrative meetings and bureaucratic requirements (Day, 2000); conflict among staff, unmotivated staff and highly qualified staff (Crawford, 2000); unreasonable parents (Cook, 1992); physical ambience (Dunham, 1992); status issues (Kyriacou and Sutcliffe, 1998).

All these sources can produce symptoms of stress that may have adverse effects upon professionalism as they sap energy and increasingly divert from the core professional task of managing an educational institution.

The emotional art of leadership includes pressing the reality of work demands without unduly upsetting people. In such ways leadership is intrinsically stressful. Moreover, distress not only erodes mental abilities, but also makes people less emotionally intelligent. Hence leaders who are upset may have trouble reading emotions accurately in other people – decreasing the most basic skill needed for empathy, and as a result, impairing their social skills.

One of the areas under study in this research is actually to elicit causes of stress and delve into the coping strategies adopted by Maltese Roman Catholic Church School Heads.

VISION

The leader of an organisation must have a mental image, a vision, of a possible and desirable future state of the organisation. This vision can be as vague as a dream, or as precise as a goal or mission (Carnegie *et al.*, 1993). The leader's role is to create the necessary structures and climate for this vision to take root (Everard and Morris, 1996).

It is an often-stated axiom that educational leaders should cultivate and develop a vision for their organisation and disseminate it to all the staff and all the stakeholders. People are more likely to implement a vision if they have been included in its development. Democratic educational leaders do not impose a vision without prior discussion with all the stakeholders involved, who have a legitimate interest in the end result (Begley, 1994; Bush and Middlewood, 2005). And even involving the stakeholders in vision-building does not necessarily lead to effective leadership and management. It is of utmost importance to ensure the successful implementation of such a vision. A sense of purpose for the organisation is very important, but it needs to be well-managed to be successful. A close rapport between the vision, goals, activities and school outcomes has to be established (Leithwood, 1994; Bush and Middlewood, 2005).

Once school leaders identify the attitudes of their school community, they should strive to achieve at least genuine compliance and hope to move on to enrolment in such a way that they can gauge the level of commitment and be sure that the vision is shared and agreed upon. Once this is achieved, then the head can proceed with the school community at developing the mission of the school.

It is important that the vision is shared, that it becomes an integral part of whatever is done at school. This sense of belonging helps to promote the vision as it permeates through the mission and in the School Development Plan. It is the leader's responsibility to make sure that this is actually taking place because

one can easily fall in the mistake that the school community shares the leader's vision when in reality it may not be so. In fact Lumby (2002) shows that there are a variety of possible attitudes towards a vision and these are listed in the Table below:

Attitude	
Commitment	Wants it. Will make it happen. Creates whatever 'laws' (structures) are needed.
Enrolment	Wants it. Will do whatever can be done within the 'spirit of the law'.
Genuine Compliance	Sees the benefits of the vision. Does everything expected and more. Follows the 'letter of the law'. 'Good soldier'.
Formal Compliance	On the whole, sees the benefits of the vision. Does what is expected and no more. 'Pretty good soldier'.
Grudging Compliance	Does not see the benefits of the vision. Still does not want to lose job. Does enough of what is expected because one has to, but also lets it be known that one is not really on board.
Non-Compliance	Does not see the benefits of the vision and will not do what is expected. 'I won't do it. You can't make me'.
Apathy	Neither for nor against the vision. No interest. No energy. 'Is it five o'clock yet?'

Source: Lumby, 2000, p. 28.

Research on leadership extols the centrality of vision as one of the main ingredients of effective school leadership (Buell, 1998; Champy, 1995; Fullan, 1995).

Vision is the heart of the leadership because vision transcends political interests, testing the outer limits of the vested views

that lock people into parochial perspectives, limit creativity and prevent the emergence of new cultural and political realities. Vision designs new synergies. Vision challenges everyday, taken-for-granted assumptions by offering new directions and articulating what people feel but lack words to say. Vision speaks the unspeakable, challenges the unchallengeable, and defends the undefendable.

(Terry, 1993, p. 38)

HOW IS A SHARED VISION ACHIEVED?

As an educational leader, the head of a school has the responsibility to create a vision and implant it in strategic planning. "Visioning and strategic planning are central leadership roles" (Dimmock and Walker, 2002, p.73). In fact Bush and Bell (2006) insist on this: "Strategic leadership in an educational institution can be considered as leadership for initiating, developing and maintaining the strategic management process (p.64). The head of school is the initiator – the provider of the vision. But this is not enough. "Leadership means having a clear personal vision of what you want to achieve" (Day *et al.*, 2000, p. 165). The authors show that schools that were successful and ensured certain standards, were led by heads who "were clear in their vision for the school and communicated it to all its constituents" (p. 164).

The leader of the organisation should communicate his / her vision to the staff (Carnall, 1995). Yet in the process of communicating it, one has to bear in mind that this is a vulnerable process (Morrison, 1998; Biott and Rauch, 2000). In this context Morphet, Johns and Reller, (1982) caution against either "the flagrant manipulation of the process of consultation" or the more tactful

“pseudodemocratic cooperation” by which decisions are at times subtly conditioned” (p. 149). Bennis (1989) insists that a good network of communication is thus indivisible from effective leadership. “As leaders, we recognize thatour hope sustains us. Our vision of what could be inspires us, and those we lead. In implementing our vision, we accept the reality that we don’t have all the answers” (Pollard in Hesselbein *et al.* 1996, p. 248).

“Working in a planned way with all those involved in the life of a school will both shape and refine one’s own educational values and provide a springboard for the whole school development” (Chapman, 1997, 9.33). So planning, with particular reference to strategic planning, has to be done as it is very crucial. Lumby (2002) suggests that “strategic planning is critical for managing education effectively” (p.86). Strategic planning leads to freedom and greater autonomy in shaping possibilities for improvement as well as acting as a vehicle for implementing vision and mission. “Planning for school improvement, we argue, must be based on the premise that schools have different values and that these values must be mapped before strategic intent can be determined” (Lumby, 2002, p.87). So it is very important that the head would link vision to strategic planning.

The real challenge of effective leadership is in motivating and involving others in order to build shared visions. The role of the headteacher is in promoting relationships and establishing processes that engage everyone in the school

community in a dialogue of shared commitment. “Aheadteacher can be proactive in developing such interpersonal competencies” (Chapman, 1997, p.33).

Leithwood, Begley and Cousins, (1992) say leaders have to develop a “widely shared, defensible vision directly assisting the member of the school community to overcome obstacles they encounter in striving for the vision” (p.8). Heads should set a behavioural model that reflects existing behavioural norms and help staff to pursue intrinsic values of work. This dimension will help everyone in the school to perform beyond expectations, and internalise values. Heads should strive to become goal developers because as Bush and Bell (2006) suggest, when discussing the seven models of educational quality, the leader must be a goal developer: “develop appropriate institutional mission and goals and establish programmes, plans and standard” (p.61).

COMMUNICATING THE VISION

Transformational leaders work constantly on vision, charisma and inspiration. Bush (1995) insists on the “adoption of transformational leadership in self-managing schools. This model requires leaders to develop and communicate their vision of the school and to empower individuals and groups to make decisions in respect of their areas of responsibility” (p.12). This style of leadership promotes the communication of the vision to enhance commitment

from followers. “Vision must be communicated in a way which secures commitment among members of the organization” (Bush and Coleman, 2000, p. 22). First the head of school has to communicate clearly the vision and motivate the staff members to adopt this vision. Then the vision must be shared by all stakeholders and this is done by involving them in its definition, its building up, its translation into a mission and later on in the School Development Plan. If the stakeholders feel committed to it and empowered by it, then there is a bigger probability that this owned vision would be implemented.

Transformational leaders have a strong and clear vision for their organisation. Bennis and Nanus (1989) describe vision as “a mental image of a possible and desirable state of the organisation.” (p.89). This statement places vision as a forward-looking activity, a dream and desire for continuous improvement yet it also firmly roots vision in reality and actual possibility. This way of looking at vision provides a sound basis for the setting of objectives: challenging yet realistic.

However it is not enough for leaders to have vision. This vision must then have to be communicated to enrol members of the organisation and secure their commitment. This vision should be communicated in a way that is meaningful for the people working within the organisation. Sergiovanni (1987) makes the point that leadership cannot exist outside what is meaningful and significant for

the people in the group. Strarratt (1986) further adds that for a vision to become shared, it must pervade the reality of the day-to-day activities of the group.

Kouzes and Posner (1996) found that being forward-looking, that is providing a sense of direction and showing a concern for the future, and being inspiring, that is not merely dreaming about but enthusiastically communicating a vision that is increasingly shared, are the top characteristics of the most admired leaders.

If all stakeholders are involved in creating a school vision, then the vision will not belong solely to the head of the school. In fact Fullan (1991) argues that, visions can be blind if they remain the prerogative of one person.

Once there is a vision, it must not remain a dream. The leader must see that it is made real. The vision must be communicated in such a way that secures commitment among the members of the organisation. This may be done through agreement by shaping and reshaping, over time, ideas that point to improvement as well as the means of getting there. The vision must be made visible. This may be done through the mission statement that is a public statement that defines the purpose, intentions and priorities that form the basis for planning and decision making. This, in turn, may be translated into School Development Plan.

CONCLUSION

This literature review shows some of the many facets of leadership and how they impinge on the individual, and how this ripples over the entire organisation.

In literature, the notion of leadership frequently appears with other key words as collaboration (Farrugia, 1987; Helsby, 1999; Goodson, 2000), joint decision making (Bajunid, 2000; Simkins, 2005) and collegiality (Morrison 1998; Sachs, 2000; Helsby, 2000).

Such important notions are also delved into in the research. The importance given to each concept is studied together with the meaning that each concept may have for every different school leader.

In the leadership world, making sense of things is at least as important as seeking what works (Atkinson, 2000; Levacic and Glatter, 2001; Wallace, 2001; Sanderson, 2003; Simkins, 2005). Such authors contend that ideas about leadership, that are predicated upon the premise that what works can be elicited, prescribed and repeated, are an inadequate way of conceiving the concept. In a world which seems to be dominated by the idea that leadership is one of the major factors that are likely to determine whether an educational organisation, be it a school, college or a university, will succeed or fail, conceptualisation of leadership has to be studied and perceived both from traditional and emerging approaches.

Albeit there has lately been an explosion of leadership literature, and research, leadership in education remains a stubbornly difficult activity (Gronn, 1999). Moreover, there is evidence that those who work in education hold less than sanguine views about much of the leadership they experience (Simkins, 2005).

At the turn of the 21st century, it is evident that in the public sector in general, and in education in particular, the dominant discourse echoes the idea, presented by Bolman and Deal more than ten years ago that “an unquestioned, widely shared canon of common sense holds that leadership is a very good thing and that we need more of it – at least, more of the right kind” (1997, p.404). On the other hand, this opinion, albeit dominant, is not uncontested by authors like Gemmill and Oakley (1992) who say that leadership “is a serious sign of social pathology that induces massive learned helplessness among members of a social system” (p. 113).

Such contrasting views bring out the fact that in spite of burgeoning discussion and debate, the nature of leadership remains very elusive. Still many argue that “the holy grail of effective leadership practice is within our grasp or at least that the search for it is not in vain” (Simkins, 2005, p.10).

Again the ‘what works’ answer – ‘establish a powerful and engaging vision’ brings about the ‘what makes sense question’: a vision of and for what?

Evidently these issues of sense-making cannot be dismissed as they are a key aspect of strategic leadership (Leithwood, 2001; Glatter, 2003; Simkins, 2003).

Chapter Two

Methodology

INTRODUCTION

Stenhouse (1975) defines research as “systematic inquiry made public” (p.142). Yet there is no single blueprint for planning and carrying out research. Research design is very often regulated by the notion of ‘fitness for purpose’ (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2001). Yet it is possible to identify a set of issues that need to be addressed, regardless of the specifics of the research being undertaken so that the research can be designed to be practicable and feasible.

Research-based knowledge is without doubt, dynamic, growing and changing as new inquiries, that expand both the empirical phenomenon that are studied and the theories and analyses used to explain those phenomena, are undertaken (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003).

Quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry have different rationales: generalisability and prediction versus contextualisation and interpretation; they adopt a different approach: experimental and deductive versus inductive and naturalistic; and depend on different researcher roles: detachment and impartiality versus personal involvement and empathic understanding (Garland and Grace 1993). Since many aspects of educational leadership do not divide neatly into clear-cut compartments, qualitative methods of inquiry are more befitting to study the complex phenomena that verge together to form leadership experience (Patton, 1990; Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996; Garland and Grace, 1995;

Marshall and Rossman, 1995). Some authors insist that a qualitative research method can acquire results that cannot be gathered by quantitative methods (Brown, Stevens, Troiano, Schneider (2002). Although qualitative research may have different notions to different people, it usually refers to research that throws light on understanding people's lives, stories, and behaviours. It can also delve into the functioning of organisations, social movements or interactional relationships (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

This chapter describes the route and methods that were adopted in my research. As I explained in my introduction, this study concerns the attitudes, behaviour, management strategies and coping skills of Heads in all Maltese Roman Catholic Church Primary and Secondary Schools (forty in total).

Since in my study I was interested in developing, instead of testing a hypothesis, in my opinion, adopting a grounded approach research was an appropriate way to elicit the qualitative and subjective data needed to address these concerns. For this reason, this chapter initially strives to explain the grounded approach that was adopted for collecting data. Consequently the advantages and disadvantages of both research methods are discussed together with other issues like ethics, validity and piloting.

GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory, first devised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) is a methodology in which theory is derived from data that is systematically gathered and analysed. It emphasises the building, or discovery of theory, rather than its testing or verification. Thus Grounded Theory is based on the 'logic of discovery' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

The grounded theory approach adopts a "systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 24). The procedures are founded on the "systematic generating of theory from data, that is systematically obtained from social research, and offers a rigorous, orderly guide to theory development that at each stage is closely integrated with a methodology of social research" (Glaser, 1978, p.2.). The method was designed to build new theory that is faithful to the area under study and that illuminates a particular phenomenon. The constructs are grounded in the particular set of data the researcher collects, and the usefulness of the constructs can be tested in subsequent research (Gall *et al.*, 1996). This qualitative method is effective because it helps develop the building blocks for empirical research that can be generalised (Brown *et al.*, 2002).

The selection of a research method is very often based on the nature of the research and the preferences of the researcher (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The purpose of grounded theory studies is the exploration and understanding of

how complex phenomena are or can be. Because of the grounding of theory in the data that is actually gathered, grounded theory reverberates with both the people who experience the phenomenon and the researchers who have a professional interest in it (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This is because grounded theory provides techniques and procedures “to create an inductively-deductively integrative theory” (Brown *et al.*, 2002, p. 3).

The researcher in qualitative methodology is an integral part of the process and this is actually the role of the researcher in grounded theory. In the qualitative concept the researcher is perceived as the instrument through which data collection and analysis are performed. For this reason the researcher’s views and assumptions about the phenomena under study are critical and as such they have to be clearly declared in the research report.

The application of grounded theory has recently gained more popularity among organisational researchers (Cassell and Symon, 2004). Organisational psychology and research have been marked by a shift from the individualistic point of view to a more collective view founded on social psychology, sociology and anthropology (Peiro’, 1990; Schein, 1996; Rousseau, 1997). For this reason grounded theory has achieved more popularity among organisational researchers. It has been employed in for example studies focusing on organisational culture (Lansisalmi, Peiro, and Kivimaki, 2000), organisational growth (Brytting, 1995), organisational change and innovation (Price, 1994;

Lowe, 1995; Carrero, Peiro and Salanova, 2000), work teams (Gersick, 1988), company survival (Lowe, 1995) and organisational leadership (Cooper, 1998). Grounded theory is highly recommended in organisational research because it produces descriptions of organisational reality that may elicit positive discussions around important themes in an organisation (Cassell and Symon, 2004).

Studies that use grounded theory in organisational research are usually categorised into two groups:

- studies that focus on generating new hypotheses around a particular theme
- studies that try to show how social processes produce certain phenomena (Lansisalmi, Peiro and Kivimaki, 2004).

My study belongs to the first category because it strives to build a hypothesis around the perspectives of a specific group of Maltese educational leaders.

Grounded theory is highly commended in organisational research due to the fact that it elicits descriptions of organisational reality that can be easily identified by the members of the target organisation (Lansisalmi *et al.*, 2004).

As for the ethical considerations of a grounded approach, issues of confidentiality may arise when collecting interview data. To avoid such issues it

was important for me to communicate clearly to the participants of the study before data started to be collected. Additionally I described in detail how the research results were going to be presented and how it was not going to be possible to identify individuals' opinions and quotes in the reported research results. Given that I was investigating an entire yet small population, anonymity was guaranteed to be maintained throughout. Direct quotes would be put in such a way that it would not be possible to elicit the source.

THE TWO DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE RESEARCH

The grounded approach was exercised through the initial phase of the project that involved interviews with ten (10) heads of schools (5 primary and 5 secondary). Ten semi-structured interviews were designed to stimulate discussion with three (3) female primary Heads and three (3) female secondary Heads together with two (2) male primary Heads and two (2) male secondary Heads. This was in proportion to the gender difference as there are actually two females to every male Head in Maltese church schools. The interviewees were chosen at random from the list of schools that was provided by the Secretariat for Catholic Education. I contacted each interviewee and an appointment was fixed. My intention was to conduct a semi-structured interview, thus giving the interviewees as much leeway as possible to answer the particular questions I was seeking answers to. There were instances where I had to change the order

of the questions according to how the interview was developing. Different individuals put different emphasis on particular topics: an interviewee dismissed the issue of stress because he alleged that he can cope with it and then talked for a long while on the type of leadership that he uses. Another interviewee put great weight on the notion of experience in leading an educational organisation, while fulfilling parents' expectations was the main theme of another interviewee. Another two important concepts were the charisma of the school's patron saint and religious order, and school culture. Interviews were carried out in the period between October 2005 and March 2006. Interviews (vide appendix One) lasting about ninety minutes were mostly tape-recorded (with the exception of three) and transcribed and later submitted to content analysis to elicit the main features and categories of discourse.

What people had to say provided the basis for the construction of a questionnaire (vide appendix Two) that focused on what had been identified as the key issues that needed to be examined. During this process I resorted to literature on the different topics so that in this way, my questions would be substantiated.

The issues that emerged mainly concerned:

- style of leadership
- work motivation, satisfaction and stress
- role of a head of school

- school culture
- vision
- leading and managing.

I decided to try to study all these factors as omitting any of them would have left a gap in the study and maybe even create a bias. Each issue was dealt with by means of a number of questions, all providing some information that led to the construction of an overall picture as Borg and Gall (1979) suggest.

The questionnaire was then distributed to the heads of all Maltese Roman Catholic church schools at the beginning of May 2006. This time was chosen with the idea that Heads would have settled back after the Easter recess but would not be entangled, as yet, in the bustle of end of year examinations. The participating schools ranged in size from one hundred and fifty students (150) to nine hundred and eighty (980) students.

While analysing the interview transcripts and the responses in the returned questionnaires, I could notice a diversity of versions of what good educational leadership is all about.

It must be made clear that my analysis was naturally based on what the Heads said about their idea of school leadership. Whether these concepts were actually realised in the day-to-day practice of these Heads cannot be confirmed.

This would require research among Catholic schools staff, thus providing research triangulation. Certainly this would not be a bad idea at all and maybe it is a research project that can be undertaken in the near future.

WOMEN HEADTEACHERS

There were twenty (20) female Heads in this research inquiry, twelve (12) of whom were in charge of primary schools, four (4) were in charge of girls' primary and secondary schools and three (3) in charge of girls' secondary schools. Then there was one newly appointed Head of a boys' secondary school. Seventeen (17) of these school leaders were religious nuns and three (3) were lay.

Hall (1994) when speaking about empirical research on educational leadership argues that:

Theories of educational management and administration continue to be based largely on research into men as school leadersSuch studies have tended to use 'no differences' as a rationale for not focusing on gender as a potentially significant factor in understanding educational leadership. (p.1)

For this reason I scrutinised the responses of the twenty women involved in my research to see if the "no difference" theory that Hall (1994) mentions, is true or not. My analysis showed that female Heads were slightly more likely to use a

discourse of shared leadership in their organisation. Female respondents were also more aware of the religious aspect that their organisation should offer to the students.

When it comes to gender, a binary distinction is often made. There are stereotypes about how men and women in management and leadership operate. Women are thought to be caring, tolerant, emotional, intuitive, gentle and predisposed towards collaboration, empowerment and teamwork. Men are supposed to be aggressive, assertive, analytical, decisive, and more inclined to act independently. There are also firmly held cultural expectations that managers and leaders should be males. These expectations are pervasive, and are held mostly by men, to a lesser extent by women (Schein, 1994).

Stereotypes are held by women as well as men. Yet research (e.g. Coleman, 2002) shows that the majority of both men and women see themselves as managing in a way that is actually more stereotypically feminine than masculine, i.e. nurturing, caring and collaborative. Grace (2002) sustains that “stereotyped views of Catholic schooling as monolithic and uniform cannot be sustained”.

DESIGN OF RESEARCH

Oppenheim (1966) says that the “function of research design is to help us to obtain clear answers to meaningful problems” (p.7). It moves the research from

simply an expression of interest, into a series of issues that lend themselves to being investigated in concrete terms (Cohen *et al.*, 2001). This makes it possible not only to formulate the specific questions to be posed, but also to choose the most appropriate instruments to gather data, thus making a general concept amenable to investigation (Rose and Sullivan, 1993). There are tensions and differences of opinions about which methods are appropriate for doing research (Campbell, McNamara and Gilroy, 2004). “Justifying methodology and methods is an extremely important part of any research account” (Wellington, Bathmaker, Hunt, McCulloch, and Sikes, 2005, p. 96) because the credibility of any findings, conclusions and claims depend on the combination between the methodology and methods adopted and the research focus. For this reason, choosing the right methodology and methods is very crucial and this is considered as a reflective and philosophical endeavour (*ibid.*)

It is up to the researcher to decide which are the best methods to be used to collect and interpret the valid data needed for the project. Choices and decisions have then to be justified. This is because researchers should be able to contend that the methods adopted, elicit the data that “legitimately and validly answers the questions they have posed” (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p. 101).

This particular project involves people in a social setting and inevitably this may, as Wellington *et al.*, (2005) say, involve a “range of potential contributory causal

factors and multiple perspectives and interpretations” (p. 96). Naturally I bore this in mind when I chose my research methodology and methods.

At the same time, I was careful not to take anything for granted and to question all my fundamental assumptions about how things work, how people think and react and ultimately what makes sense. For this reason, questioning throughout the process of the research was of utmost importance. As Wellington *et al.* (2005) say, “a reflective and reflexive approach” (p.96) is very important, trying to go beyond what is perceived to be simple or obvious.

Research that involves human beings is not easy and simple because it “is always on / for/ with other people – and getting knowledge on / for / with other people is a complex matter. It is complex for three main reasons: human agency; social relations, especially the effects of power; and ethics” (Griffiths, 1998, p. 35-36). In my research, these three elements are very prominent: the human aspect is the basic element on which the entire research is founded; social relations play a very important role between Heads of school and the rest of the staff, and incidentally, Griffiths pinpoints exclusively *the effects of power*, a quality directly associated with headship; and ethics which should be the backbone of every research project, in particular of a project conducted within the educational field. No educational research can discard issues relating to legal and ethical considerations in particular relating to confidentiality, ownership and management of data, copyright and intellectual rights (Campbell *et al.*,

2004). These issues can be tricky to negotiate and research participants may have potential concerns relating to them. This might have been truer in my situation that involved a closely-knit community of schools. Albeit all have their autonomy and style of leadership, they all form part of a corpus namely Maltese Roman Catholic Church schools.

“Issues of increasing importance are the justification for one’s methodology, the consideration of ethical matters and the social context of research in the workplace” (Campbell *et al*, 2004, p. 81). Wellington *et al.*, (2005) say that the choice of methodologies and methods is determined and influenced by a number of components that include

The personal predilections, interests and disciplinary background of the researcher; why the research is being done and the desired outcomes; the sorts of questions being asked; situational and contextual factors; ethical and moral issues relevant at different stages of the research process, the resources and time table available, and the nature of the research population and the ability of ‘subjects’ to give particular types of responses (p. 99).

In my case it is a fact that many of these factors influenced my choice of methodology and methods. My personal preferences have always been questionnaires and interviews because I have used these methods in my previous three research projects (Diploma, Bachelors, and Masters) and I feel versed in their application. I also feel convinced that through these two methods, the researcher can triangulate information. To add to this, qualitative methodologies are concerned with authenticity, voice and interpretation of

situations and behaviour (Campbell *et al.*, 2004). Furthermore, the grounded approach that is being adopted in this research should make the two methods i.e. interviews and questionnaires even more reliable where theory would emerge from and is grounded in data (Le Compte and Preissle, 1993).

POSITIONALITY

The researcher's position should also be made clear: "To fail to do so would be to lay themselves open to criticisms of unacknowledged bias" (Wellington *et al.*, 2005, p.101). It is important to reflect on researcher positionality and to interrogate one's philosophical position and fundamental assumptions concerning ontology, epistemology and human nature and agency. These have a very marked and indicative influence upon the choice and use of methodology and method (Wellington *et al.*, 2005).

ONTOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

Ontological assumptions about social reality focus on issues around being human within the world and on whether social reality or aspects of the social world, are perceived to be external, independent, given and objectively real or rather are seen as socially constructed, subjectively experienced and the result of human thought as expressed through language.

If the social world is seen as given, one will believe that it can be observed and accounted for through objective quantifiable data. This usually leads to the adoption of positivist, scientific experimental methodology and use of methods like tests and structured observation schedules.

Taking a social constructivist position, it will be necessary to collect subjective accounts and perceptions that explain how the world is experienced and constructed by the people who live in it. Thus methods will be naturalistic, phenomenological, ethnographic, auto/biographical using methods like participant observation and unstructured interviews.

Recent research is now adopting the stance that both nature and nurture contribute towards difference (Capra, 1997; Walford, 1998; Wellington *et al.*, 2005). Yet one factor is usually perceived to have an edge over the other. Inevitably this is liable to affect what is perceived as valid data, and consequently the methods adopted to collect, analyse and interpret it.

The ontological stance may also affect any action that will be taken as a result of the findings. Consequently, the ontological assumptions of the researcher can have ethical consequences. For instance, if from this research it transpired that the majority of heads are unqualified and need training, the Secretariat might feel bound to enforce higher academic levels. Or maybe the vision of some of these heads of schools does not tally with what is actually expected from a

Roman Catholic school and this may cause concern from the authorities. Therefore in research that involves people in any way, these assumptions have to be borne in mind (Wellington *et al.*, 2005).

EPISTEMOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

“Many of the bitter arguments about the significance of research findings are founded in fundamental disagreements about knowledge and how to get it: these are precisely disagreements about methodology and epistemology” (Griffiths, 1998, p. 33).

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge, thus epistemological assumptions relate to the origin and nature of knowledge, and what is considered to constitute knowledge. Research is done to elicit data and consequently knowledge, usually with the aim of bringing about some kind of improvement and / or change. For this reason, it is impossible to engage in research and ignore epistemology. Connected to this would be the notion of truth, i.e. how the data that is derived from the research is perceived to support the knowledge that it claims it does. To add to this, criteria for deciding what constitutes acceptable and appropriate knowledge have to be established (Ramazanoglu, 1990; Gamson, 2000; Olesen, 2000).

At this point it is salient to consider the ways in which people are believed to be capable of controlling their actions within the world. Do people have control over, or even initiate actions and make choices, or do they simply respond to the environment to do things that happen to them? Do people have what is referred to in psychology as the *locus of control*? (Rotter, 1975; 1980). Since researchers are human beings, this area cannot be overlooked or discarded as whatever researchers decide inevitably applies to them and to their research populations (Wellington *et al.*, 2005).

This brings out such notions as social power, role and agency. It also raises questions about natural behaviours (Miller and Dollard, 1985; Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem, and Noten-Hoeksema, 2000). The usual norm is that the more social power a person has, the more one can choose what to do in life. This may be further complicated by the way in which people may have power in particular social settings but not in others. For example, in this study, some heads may be perceived as seemingly powerful in their educational organisations because they manage and lead the school. However they may be simultaneously impotent, subordinate or far less authoritative in their religious community where they are 'ruled over' by their religious community superiors.

Notions of human nature and agency have to be borne in mind when choosing methods and methodology: if it is believed that people behave in predetermined or reactive ways, then observatory techniques would be appropriate. Yet if it is

perceived that people can make their own decisions, then methods that look into explanations and understanding of personal perceptions and attitudes will be needed.

The epistemological implications of opting for specific methodologies and methods have to be borne in mind. In this process I pondered on how the ways in which I conceive of, approach, and go about doing my research may influence the type and nature of the knowledge that I envisage my research would produce.

RESEARCH METHODS

INTERVIEWS

The first research tool used was Interviewing. Kvale (1996) says that interviews are a step towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans. Thus the social situatedness of research data would be more emphasised (Cohen *et al.*, 2001). Interviews are inter-subjective because they allow participants, both interviewers and interviewees, to discuss their conceptions of the world from their different points of view (Laing, 1967; Barker and Johnson, 1998). Interviews can go deep into the motivations, reasons and perspectives of respondents (Kerlinger, 1970).

Kvale (1996) says that an interview follows an unwritten script for interactions, “the rules for which only surface when they are transgressed” (p.125). That is why the interviewer must be at pains to conduct the interview carefully and sensitively. According to the author, since the interviewer is the research instrument, the former should not only be knowledgeable about the subject matter that is being researched, but should also be an expert in interaction and communication.

In the initial phase of the study I conducted ten semi-structured interviews (five with Secondary Heads and five with Primary Heads) worked in proportion to the total number of schools involved in the study. Sample size “often plagues researchers” (Cohen *et al.*, 2001, p. 93) but in my opinion ten were representative enough, as they constitute twenty five per cent of the whole school cohort. Enlarging the number would have made my work less feasible and practical.

Semi-structured interviews may include some predetermined questions, yet the order in which these are asked can be modified according to the interviewer’s perception of what seems most appropriate (Robson, 2002). Wording can be changed and explanations given. Questions that may seem inappropriate with a particular interviewee can be omitted, or additional ones included (Robson, 2002). In fact during the process of interviewing I was very flexible and let the interview flow in a natural manner.

Interviews are “a two-person conversation.... for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information” (Cannell and Kaahn, 1968, p.527). In this case, through direct verbal interaction, interviews served to elicit the main issues that needed to be explored in this exploratory study.

Initial interview questions need to be easy, non-demanding and not threatening, in order to put respondents at ease (Patton, 1980). I asked respondents whether they had any problems regarding audio taping the interview. The majority of the interviewees (n = 7) did not object to this. Yet the other respondents (n = 3) found some difficulty. Therefore I had to use the other option of taking notes and comments. It was a matter of a trade-of between the “need to catch as much data as possible and yet to avoid having so threatening an environment that it impedes the potential of the interview situation” (Cohen *et al.*, 2001, p.281).

Cohen *et al* (2001) allege that it is often after the cassette recorder or video camera has been switched off that the “‘gems’ of the interview are revealed, or people may wish to say something ‘off the record’” (p.279).

During the interview I noted details like where and when the interview was conducted together with particular characteristics and behaviours of the interviewee, before, during and after the interview.

During the interviews that I recorded in the form of handwritten notes I felt it was vital to write down the dialogue, as much as possible, verbatim.

When it came to transcribing the interviews it was important for me to be discriminating in the selection of excerpts that were to be transcribed (Campbell, 2004). It was not practical, and anyway futile, to transcribe the entire interviews. There was also another problem that I had to solve: in Malta the official language is Maltese. Yet a lot of people, especially those who belong to middle class (and upwards) and people of a certain educational level, tend to use a lot of English while conversing. As a result a lot of these interviews were a concoction of Maltese and English. Yet when transcribing, I had to translate everything into the English language, trying to give the closest and most faithful interpretation.

Cohen *et al*, (2001) say that transcribing is a crucial step because there is a potential chance of losing data, of distortion and of reduction of complexity. Transcriptions inevitably lose data from the original encounter. This problem is compounded, because a transcription is a translation from one set of rule systems (oral and interpersonal) to another very remote rule system (written language) (Kvale, 1996). As the prefix indicates, in a transcription there is a change in form, therefore it is a selective transformation. As Cohen *et al.*, (2001) state, there can be no single correct transcription: "rather the issue becomes whether, to what extent, and how a transcription is useful for the

research". In my case, interviews were explicitly aimed at eliciting the main issues that were to be further explored in this study. For this reason, I had to be ever more selective. I also used interviews in my discussion to support issues that came out from the questionnaires. The amount of data was huge, so I had no choice but to try to choose the best quotes to support my arguments: "When it comes to writing up the conclusions from the interview, the researcher has no choice but to be selective in the choice of extracts to quote in support" (Nisbet, 2006, p. 12)

As I said earlier on, the interview is also a social encounter, not just a tool for collecting data. The possible problem of transcribing is that it makes the interview simply a mass of data rather than a record of a social encounter. That is why extra attention has to be taken even if the interview is being recorded. To minimise this problem as much as possible, in my journal, after each interview, I noted as many contextual factors as possible, paying special attention to the visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview as suggested by Mishler (1986). "We have to beware of assuming words are a mirror of reality, of 'treating language as a transparent window on the world... a direct channel to some real thing in the social world'" (Oancea, 2004, p. 748). Apart from the interviewee's words, the interviewer has to pay particular attention to the intonation, eye contact, body movement and all the non-verbals which people use, very often unconsciously (Nisbet, 2006). Video-recording would have solved a great degree of this problem but apart from being more time-consuming to analyse

(Cohen *et al.*, 2001) it would have probably been more threatening in the sense that it is more self-revealing. And bearing in mind that 3 of my interviewees objected to being audio-taped, proposing video-taping would have made matters worse.

When it comes to transcribing interviews, Nisbet (2006) comes with a few assertions saying, amongst other things that there is no such thing as an accurate transcription of an interview; that the notion of having a neutral interviewer is an impossibility because every person has his / her own biases and opinions: an interviewer is not a blank sheet on which interviewees write their thoughts. He goes on to say that interviewing “is an art, not a method – and transcribing is a bit of an art too” (Nisbet, 2006, p. 12).

QUESTIONNAIRES

The other research method that I used was questionnaires. These were distributed personally to every participant and in the process I introduced myself and explained the whole motive of the research.

Questionnaires are useful tools for descriptive purposes because they seek detailed intimate reflection from the respondent; they can provide information about people characteristics and the relationship between such characteristics

(Wilson and McLean, 1994). Therefore in this particular research, they were envisaged to be an adequate research tool.

The questionnaire is an effective and widely used research instrument adopted to gather survey data (Cohen *et al.*, 2001). This is because questionnaires can be designed in order to provide structured data that is very frequently comparatively straightforward to be analysed (Wilson and McLean, 1994; Cohen *et al.*, 2001). They are also easy to administer and analyse, and they are consistent across subjects (Silvester, 2004). Yet they are also perceived to have some important limitations: attention is focused on topics that the researcher considers to be significant and salient. Thus the respondent may have little or no freedom to negotiate the meaning or relevance of the attribution with the researcher (Antaki, 1994).

Yet on the whole, questionnaires are a very versatile data-gathering method. They are not expensive to administer and can be used to gather a great diversity of data, both qualitative and quantitative.

Apart from serving to collect data, questionnaires can serve to raise awareness of particular issues and make respondents feel valued and important elements of the decision-making process (Campbell, *et al.*, 2004). Questionnaires can also be instrumental in educating, and in opening respondents' eyes to particular issues, concepts and ways of perceiving.

In fact I truly believe that while filling in the questionnaire, many of the respondents (if not all) had to stop and think before answering certain questions. I also believe that they may have become conscious of certain issues. Cases in point would be question 1 (what it feels like to be head of a roman Catholic school), question 6 (style of leadership) question 7 (relationship with staff), question 8 (handling staff conflict), question 9 (motivation for work), question 10 (job satisfaction), questions 11 – 14 (job stress), questions 20 and 21 (what is expected from the head of church school), questions 23 and 25 (school culture and vision) and question 26 (difference between leading and managing).

One basic requirement of questionnaires is that the researcher knows what kind of information is needed to be collected (Borg and Gall, 1979). In my case, there was very little difficulty with this as the main issues to be explored were elicited from the interviews. Questionnaires need to have some standardised questions where the researcher is confident that the questions mean the same thing to different respondents (Robson, 2002). Consequently, a number of closed questions were included.

However, such questions may not enable the respondents to add any necessary remarks and thus there may be the possible risk of some kind of bias in them (Oppenheim, 1992; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). For this reason, a number of open-ended questions were also included, adopting a more word-based qualitative approach to elicit richer data (Cohen *et al.*, 2001). Open-ended

questions were aimed as a 'catch-all' (Campbell *et al.*, 2004 p. 157), giving the respondents an opportunity to explore more freely and reveal any opinions, ideas and comments that they wished to write down.

As Campbell *et al.* (2004) suggest, in formulating the questionnaire I had to strike a balance between the response rate on one hand, and the length, complexity, density and covering on the other. I was aware all the time that every question I include in the questionnaire is at the expense of another, and some questions lead to others. So it was important for me to prioritise the data that I really needed to collect.

In planning the layout, I tried to make it look as relaxing to the eyes as possible, spreading it over 7 pages, leaving enough space for respondents to answer at leisure. Cramming it into fewer pages would have made the questionnaire look discouraging and I believe, rendering it less likely to be filled in.

With the questionnaire I included instructions relating to completing and returning that were very easy to read and understand. My letter also explained how ethical issues were going to be safeguarded. I also included a self-addressed envelope to facilitate response.

The questionnaire that I devised included different types of questions aimed at eliciting different types of data:

- *Descriptive data*, which includes information about preferences and personal histories (questions 2,3,4,6,7,8,16,17,18).
- *Insight data*, studying the respondents' attitudes and perceptions (questions 1,5, 9,10,11,12,15,19,20,21,22,23,25,26).
- *Explanatory data*, looking at reasons behind actions (questions 13, 24).
- *Evaluative data*, looking at how effective and valuable particular aspects are (question 14).
- *Personal data*, to obtain demographic information about the respondents (last part of the questionnaire).

PILOTING

In order for the questionnaire to be as refined as possible, it was piloted, because this "is crucial to its success" (Cohen *et al.*, 2001, p.260). Piloting increases reliability, validity and practicability (Oppenheim, 1992; Morrison, 1993; Wilson and McLean, 1994) because it checks clarity and helps to eliminate ambiguities and difficulties in working, layout, length and time taken to complete (Borg and Gall, 1979; Cohen *et al.*, 2001).

The questionnaire was piloted with a Primary and Secondary Head teacher, a colleague of mine who read for a Masters Degree in Educational Management with me, the Head of the Secretariat for Catholic Education and a colleague from

the Faculty of Education, University of Malta, whose field of expertise is Educational leadership.

The overall feedback was very good. Yet there were some minor suggestions: the head of the Secretariat felt that question number 5 "*Do you feel adequately trained in Headship*" might be taken badly by some of the respondents as it might offend them. This was discussed with my tutor and we decided that the question should remain as it is. In fact both the primary and the secondary heads did not comment on it. The Secondary Head teacher found no need for any adjustments while the Primary Head teacher suggested that I should include a question on help and support. This is now question number 15 "*Do you feel you have adequate help / support when you come across difficulties?*". My study colleague suggested that I should include a question on stress coping strategies, namely question number 14 "*Do you use any stress coping strategies? If in the affirmative, can you share what these are?*". Finally my colleague from university suggested that in question number 6 "*How would you describe your style of leadership*" I should give examples and question number 26 "*Do you see any difference between managing a school and leading a school?*" might be misleading. Yet after discussion with my tutor, I decided that giving examples in question 6 might create a bias and I should leave question 26 as it is in order to elicit whether Heads identify any difference between *leading and managing*.

The questionnaire response from the different Heads was very varied. I received the first questionnaire on the day after I distributed the questionnaires. That was a very quick and prompt response and taking a quick glance at the way the questionnaire was filled in, it was evident that the respondent took the matter seriously. The flow of the returned questionnaire was constant so that by the end of mid June 2006 I had eighteen returned questionnaires in hand. Seeing that the end of the scholastic year was drawing near, I sent an email to all Heads thanking those who had returned the questionnaire and urging the others to return it, explaining again the importance of this research. A few other envelopes came in. At the beginning of July I made a final attempt by sending another email, marked *urgent*, asking Heads to send the questionnaire before the summer recess. In the meantime I was contacted by three Heads who said that they preferred to fill in the questionnaire with me. So I fixed an appointment with each and things went very smoothly. It came to my knowledge that there was a small number of Heads (about three) who were reluctant to fill and send in the questionnaire lest I would report their views to the Secretariat. By the end of July, the total number of returned questionnaire was thirty (seventy five per cent), which in my opinion was a very good response. I photocopied all the questionnaires to be able to keep the originals in a safe place and use the copies, thus being able to jot down notes, highlight, cut, paste and do all that was necessary to make my work more feasible and easier.

TRIANGULATION

Triangulation is frequently used to check the perceptions and interpretations of several people (Campbell *et al.* 2004). Crosschecking and gathering different perceptions of participants is an essential way of ensuring reliability and authenticity (*ibid*).

Triangulation can assist the researcher to generate reliable evidence (Cohen *et al.*, 2001). There is a risk that observations will be selective, and the effects of this can be attenuated by triangulation.

“Triangulation can help to counter all of the threats to validity” (Robson, 2002, p. 175) though there is no foolproof way of guaranteeing validity (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Maxwell, 1996). Yet triangulation provides alternative and sometimes overlapping strategies that without doubt may help in ruling out threats to the process (Robson, 2002).

Defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection (Cohen *et al.*, 2001; Robson, 2002; Campbell *et al.*, 2004), triangulation is considered to be a cogent way of proving validity (Eisenhart and Howe, 1992). Relying on one research method may bias or distort data (Cohen *et al.*, 2001), and can also create “method-boundedness” (Smith, 1975). For this reason I decided to triangulate data through the use of interviews and questionnaires.

ETHICAL ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

“Ethics has to do with the application of moral principles to prevent harming or wronging others, to promote the good, to be respectful and to be fair (Sieber, 1994, p. 14). Ethical issues, concerns and considerations are important at every stage of the research process, irrespective of the methodologies that are being adopted.

Ethical awareness focuses mainly on the subject matter and methods of research and findings in so far as they affect the participants (Cohen *et al.* 2001). Researchers are thus required to find a balance between the demands placed on them as professional scientists in the search of truth, and the participants’ rights and values that may be potentially threatened by research. This is sometimes referred to as the *costs / benefits ratio* (Frankfort – Nachmias and Nachmias, 1992).

For this reason, researchers have to proceed ethically without threatening the validity of the research. Methodological and ethical issues are inextricably interwoven in much of the research that is qualitative or interpretive (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). The research should respect the equal worth of all people – this is treating people as ends rather than means (Strike, 1990).

By its very nature, educational research involves studying people’s activities in one way or another. For this reason the researcher must take responsibility for

the well-being of those who participate in the research (Wilkinson and Stark, 1997). Ethical guidelines relate to the need for respect for the participant, for knowledge, for democratic values and for the quality of educational research, and also include matters relating to the responsibilities that the researcher has towards the participants in the research, to any sponsors of the research and to the community of educational researchers (*ibid*).

Questionnaires and interviews are an intrusion into the life of respondents because the latter “are not passive data providers for researchers; they are subjects not objects of research” (Cohen *et al.*, 2001, p. 245).

Consequently some ethical issues had to be borne in mind and considered when carrying out the research. Such issues included:

- not feeling coerced to take part (Cohen and Manion, 1994): Although participants were encouraged and urged to take part in the research, because their participation was crucial for the study, they were in no way compelled to participate.
- guaranteeing as far as possible issues of confidentiality, anonymity and non-traceability (Cohen *et al.*, 2001): since the research population was specific and relatively small, this may have been perceived to be very difficult. Therefore every precaution had to be taken so that responses and /or respondents would not be distinguishable.

- no sensitive or threatening questions that may lead to over-report or under-report (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982): I paid extra attention when wording the questions so none would be perceived to be self-incriminating, hence participants would not feel endangered or unsafe. Importance was also given to the layout of the questionnaire so that it would look flowing and straightforward.
- the right to withdraw from the research and / or not answer particular questions (Borg and Gall, 1979): participants were specifically told that they were free to refrain from the research, omit any questions that may be perceived as self-incriminating, or even not take part at all.
- assurance of methodological rigour and fairness, validity and reliability, through the avoidance of bias (Morrison, 1996): participants were guaranteed both verbally and in writing that findings would be analysed and presented in the most professional and procedural manner.

I felt that these ethical points were important because the human aspect must not be forgotten or overlooked at any point during my research (Borg and Gall, 1979).

KEEPING A JOURNAL

During the course of my research, I found it very useful to keep a journal. This helped in my data collection and in noting experiences, words, and any other striking factors that I felt were necessary for my research. I kept a list of events, dated and timed. I documented behaviour of others, and my own reactions, some “deliberative thoughts” as Holly (1988, p.78) calls them. Logging also the course and the conduct of the research project was a very useful aid when it came to writing up my methodology.

This journal involved a great deal of reflection that helped me think, analyse, understand and appraise more people and situations. Consequently this yielded invaluable data relating to the research focus.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS USING GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory comprises both a method and the product of inquiry (Charmaz, 2003). Grounded theory involves a set of flexible, analytic guidelines that allow researchers to converge their data collection and to formulate inductive middle-range theories by means of successive levels of data analysis and conceptual development (Charmaz, 2003). Grounded theory methods entail simultaneous data collection and analysis, with each factor informing and focusing the other throughout the entire process. Grounded theorists

commence analyses early in order to be able to focus further data collection. In turn these focused data are used to refine any emerging analyses. Grounded theory strives for an analytic interpretation of research participants' worlds and of the processes that represent how these worlds are built.

Today there is a drive towards adopting a constructivist approach to grounded theory. Some authors (Charmaz, 1990, 2000, 2003; Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001) advocate a reflexive, constructivist version of grounded theory that emphasises the studied phenomenon, rather than the methods of studying it. Constructivist grounded theorists take a reflexive standpoint: "we must build upon its constructivist elements rather than objectivist leanings" (Chiraz, 2005, p. 509). What researchers observe depends on their personal prior interpretive frames, biographies, interests, the research context, their relationship with research participants, concrete field experiences and methods of initiating, making, and recording empirical materials. "We share in constructing what we define as data" (Chiraz, 2005, p. 509). Our conceptual categories emanate from our interpretations *of* data rather than *from* data or from methodological practices (Glaser, 2002). This would mean taking a critical stance while adopting a systematic approach to research that cultivates integrating subjective experience with social conditions in the research. All analyses come from specific stances, including even those that surface during the research process. Grounded theory studies materialize through data, comparisons, building categories, employing theoretical sampling and integrating an analysis. But *how*

all these research activities are conducted does not happen in a social vacuum (Chiraz, 2005). The whole research route is an interactive process: past experiences and current interests of the researcher infuse and integrate in the processing of all the data. Neither data nor ideas are simple entities that the researcher passively observes and compiles (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). Contrary to this, Glaser (2002) keeps insisting that data is something separate from the researcher and says that competent researchers do not let their data be tarnished during interpretation. Yet this notion is rather contested as no analysis can be said to be neutral. No researcher is uninitiated (Denzin, 1994; Morse, 1998; Schwandt, 1994; 2000; Chiraz, 2005). “What we know shapes, but does not necessarily determine what we ‘find’” (Chiraz, 2005, p. 510) and “as social scientists, we *define* what we record as data, yet how we define data outlines how we represent them in our works” (*ibid.*, p. 511). To add to this, data need to be informed by the researcher’s theoretical sensitivity, as data on its own is insufficient (Silverman, 2000).

Grounded theorists insist that the researcher defines what is happening in the setting of the research (Glaser, 1978; Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This is in line with the Chicago tradition: *discover and detail the social context within which action occurs*. A dual focus on action and context can help the researcher to make distinctive and clear explanations of people behaviour. “What people think, feel, and do, must be analysed within the relevant social contexts, which, in turn, people construct through action and interaction” (Chiraz, 2005, p. 524).

People consider the actions of those around them as they themselves act and interact. Interaction depends on fitting lines of action together (Blumer, 1969; 1979). Attention has also to be paid to language as this shapes meaning and influences action as the Chicago school tradition also affirms.

There should also be a reciprocal and dynamic relationship between interpretation and action as people interpret what happens around and to them, and shape actions accordingly, especially when something interrupts their routines and causes them to rethink their positions.

Grounded theory provides the tools to elicit contradictions within the empirical world: to tell the difference between what people say and compare it to what they actually do. Learning what meaning people give to things makes what they do with them more comprehensible, at least from their point of view. Equally how people act toward things in their worlds show the significance that they give to such things. Such considerations help the researcher to build an inductive analysis instead of imposing structured concepts.

Grounded theory is a methodology that asks for constant comparison, thus combining data analysis with data collection. Grounded theory has five analytic goals:

- Build rather than test theory.

- Provide researchers with analytic tools for handling masses of raw data.
- Help the analysts to consider alternative meanings of phenomena.
- Be systematic and creative simultaneously.
- Identify, develop, and relate the concepts that are the building blocks of theory. (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 13).

The heart of data analysis in grounded theory is based on three types of *modus operandi*: open, axial, and selective coding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Open Coding: this occurs at the initial phase of the study where data is conceptualised and categorised mainly by making comparisons and asking questions of the data. Open coding initiates the process of labelling many individual phenomena. Then a number of individually labelled concepts are clustered around a related theme. The categories are sometimes words used by the participants themselves, what Strauss and Corbin call “in vivo” language. Once categories are formed in open coding, they are fleshed out in terms of their assigned qualities and dimensions. The qualities are “characteristics of a category, the delineation of which defines and gives it meaning” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 101). Dimensions show how each property can vary along a continuum: for example by frequency (*never to every day*) or amount of impact (*little to transformative*) (Brown, 1999). Open coding is attained by examining

the transcripts line by line, by paragraph, and sometimes by going through the entire document.

Axial Coding: this is the process of relating categories to their subcategories “linking a category at the level of properties and dimensions” (p. 123). The main function of axial coding is to create a model that gives information on the specific conditions that give rise to a phenomenon’s occurrence. Conditions can be causal, intervening, contextual or all of these three factors. Causal conditions are factors that lead to the occurrence of the phenomenon. Intervening conditions refer to a wide range of factors that can have an effect on the phenomenon: they are those conditions that “mitigate or otherwise impact causal conditions on phenomena” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.131). Contextual conditions are the “specific set of conditions (patterns of conditions) that intersect dimensionally at this time and place to create a set of circumstances or problems to which persons respond through actions / interactions” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 132). Actions and interactions are processes and different conditions facilitate and / or constrain them. Consequences refer to the outcome of the phenomenon as it is engaged through action and interaction.

Selective Coding: this builds upon the basis of the previous open and axial coding. It is “the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and

filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 116).

Mapping forms the basis of this theory. A theory is actually perceived to be grounded when it is validated against the data and mapped out narratively, and when states of transition and intervening conditions are included as well.

In grounded theory, the process is also examined in terms of passage of time in order to acquire a sense of how, when and how often the phenomenon occurs (Glaser, 1978). The process also includes studying the relationships between macro and micro conditions / consequences both to each other and to the process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Grounded theory throws light on compound phenomena, with special emphasis on how it occurs. This theory answers process-oriented questions, connecting the conditions that give rise to a certain complex, dynamic phenomenon: it is like capturing a moving picture instead of a snapshot. Grounded theory generates “a rich, tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

Analysing the interviews involved organising and explaining the data thus making sense in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Parlett and Hamilton (1976) suggest that this can be done by taking

a wide-angle lens to gather data, and then sifting, sorting, reviewing and reflecting so that the most important features emerge. It would be like funnelling from the wide to the narrow.

After collecting the questionnaires they were first divided between primary and secondary heads of school. Then data was reduced to be suitable for analysis. Data reduction (Cohen *et al.*, 2000) and coding is important for the preparation of analysis. Questionnaires were checked to identify any errors made by respondents mainly in three aspects: completeness, accuracy and uniformity (Moser and Kalton, 1977).

In the case of specific questions, the responses were collated and themes identified. Responses of the different open-ended questions were each typed as a list. This was very time-consuming but paved the way for the analysis process that was thus very simplified.

The analysis of qualitative data is without doubt “the most challenging research skill to master” (Campbell *et al.*, 2004 p.144). This is because it requires time, sensitivity to nuances of meaning and a high ability to accomplish well. To add to this facility at data analysis alone is not enough. As a researcher I needed not only to be able to interpret data, but also to convert them into information, which information I had to articulate and communicate in my discussion.

All qualitative data analysis is a very crucial part of the research process. Very often it is considered as an interpretative art, rather than a science (Campbell *et al.*, 2004). It is interplay between the researcher and the data itself. This is because the process is not objective, mechanistic or scientific. The researcher must bring to it knowledge of life and literature, together with the necessary technical skills. This made it more important for me to watch out for personal biases or preconceptions that may have affected my data collection or analysis. Yet at the same time I was aware that as I explained earlier on, I am an integral part of this research.

Writing should lead to further discoveries and deeper insights. It therefore should lead to further investigation. Rather than professing authorship under the premise of a scientific research, grounded theorists should assert audible voices in their writings (Charmaz and Mitchell, 1996; Mitchell and Charmaz, 1996). This would mean bringing the writer's self into the words while shedding light on the intersubjective worlds. This is bound to evoke the reader's imagined involvement in the scenes portrayed and even beyond (Chiraz, 2005).

INTERPRETING QUALITATIVE MATERIAL

Usher and Scott (1996) speak of the problems that can be encountered when interpreting educational research:

Interpretation is not simply a matter of 'reading out' a meaning which is already there. Rather, meaning is read *into* the data and this is not simply a matter of elucidating it by applying neutral techniques. Interpretation is a social act and the meaning that is read into the data is dependent on the paradigms and research traditions within which the researcher is located. It is this which makes the researcher the 'great interpreter' with privileged access to meaning" (p.177).

This would mean that apart from keeping a number of factors into perspective when trying to interpret data, all interpretations of the data can be open to challenge from other researchers, or even, in the case of educational and social science research, from the participants themselves. Consequently, the interpretative strategies suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) were adopted. Central meanings and categories of discourse used by participants were identified, interview transcripts were read a number of times and questionnaires scrutinised in order to be able to achieve in-depth understanding of the content of both research media that were used.

I also was on the look out and gave importance to the degree of engagement, animation and in some cases obvious emotion that some participants showed regarding certain issues. I could also note how certain interviewees came back to certain topics that to them carried a lot of importance in their role as Heads. In the whole process I tried to be as faithful as possible to the integrity of the account, even when selecting direct quotations both from interviews and questionnaires.

Through this, I tried to ascertain the notion of trustworthiness, which in the qualitative paradigm, refers to a conceptual soundness from which value of the research can be judged (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). This trustworthiness is reinforced by the amount of time spent in the field and with the data, through triangulation of data, by mapping what works within the boundaries and limitations of the study and through an alertness to the subjective lenses and ensuing biases that the qualitative researcher brings to the study (Denzin, 1978; Lincoln and Guba, 1985)

CONCLUSION

This research is intended to be a qualitative and subjective project aimed at exploring what it is like to be the head of a Maltese Roman Catholic church school. The two proposed research methods were envisaged to elicit the right data as accurately and authentically as possible adopting a grounded approach.

Grounded theory provides methods that expound an empirical process in ways and means that stimulate the reader to see beyond it (Chiraz, 2005). This is because the researcher can go deeper into meaning and action than simple words can portray. In this way, a focused grounded theory approach should be able to portray a picture of the whole.

It is envisaged that findings will be presented to the Secretariat for Catholic Education so that beneficial policies and procedures can be worked on. The findings would also serve as a good reason to hold a number of seminars for Heads of Church schools, where findings would be presented and discussed, and possible strategies elicited.

Chapter Three

Profile of Respondents

In the words of the author and scientist H.G. Wells, the future is a race: 'A race between Education and Catastrophe'.
Personally, not finding the idea of catastrophe all that attractive, I decided some while ago to throw in my lot with Education!
(Puttman, 2007)

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the respondents of the study to the reader. The chapter contains demographic information about the participants (age and gender), their years of experience in Headship, and their social standing (whether they are religious or lay). There is also information about the level of the school that these Heads lead (whether primary or secondary) and information about the student population. Finally, but very important, is the section on the respondents' teaching experience and relevant qualifications together with information on any training that these Heads might have had in educational leadership and / or management.

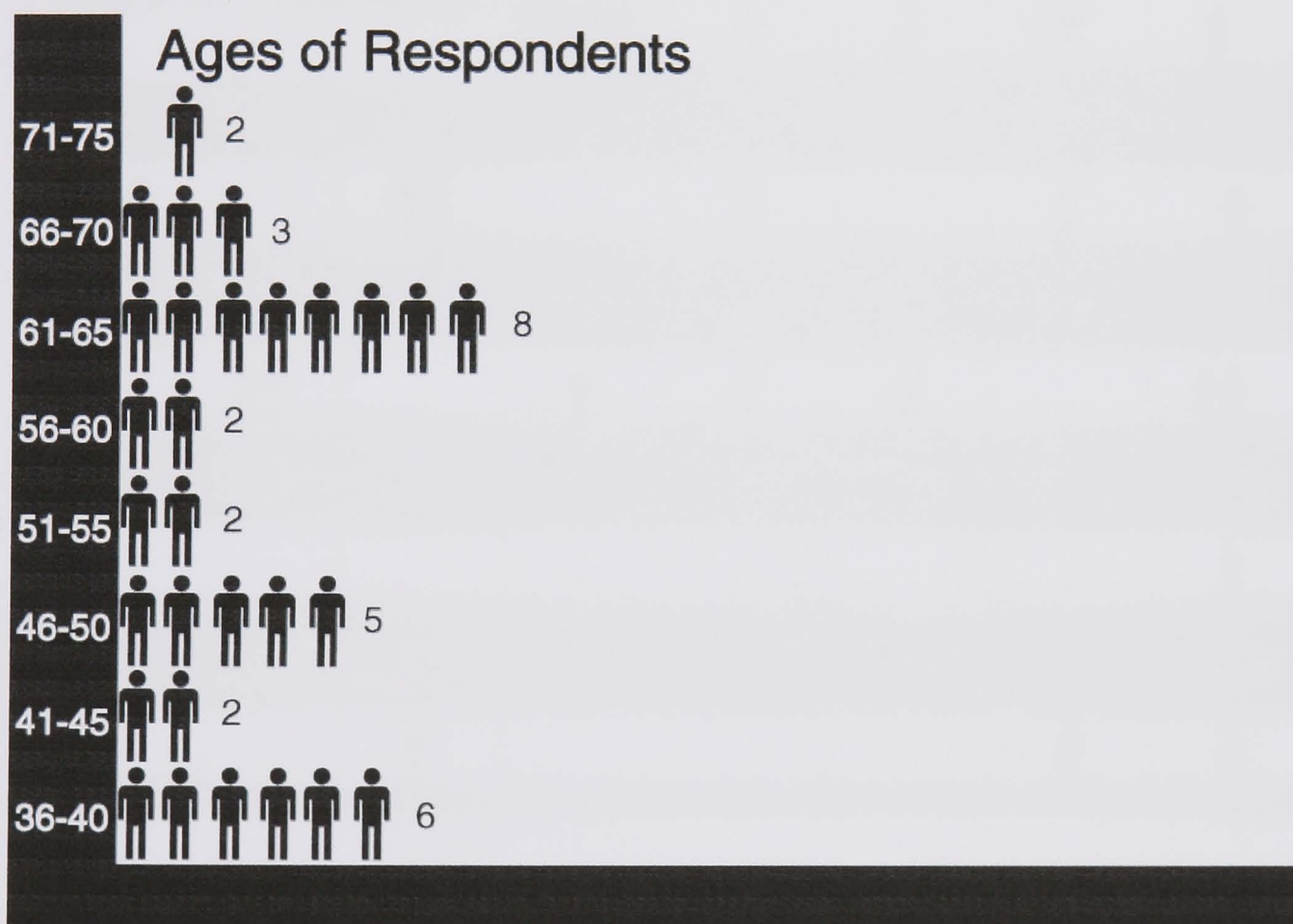
I feel that such information should act as a backdrop to the rest of the study. It should also put the reader into the right perspective in order to be able to comprehend the findings and the discussion in the ensuing chapter, in the best way possible.

TURNOUT

Out of the forty questionnaires that were sent out, thirty questionnaires (75%) were returned.

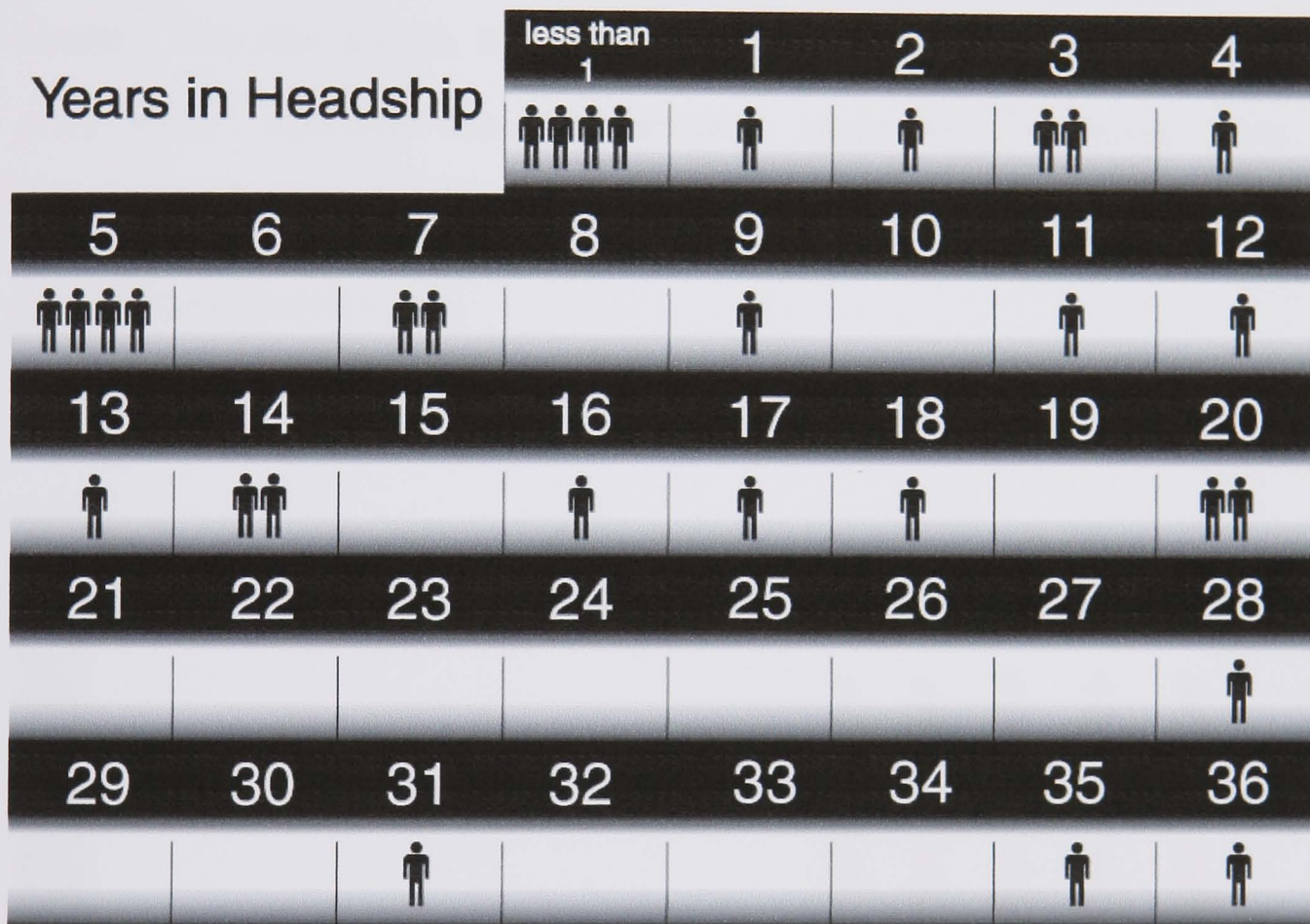
AGES OF PARTICIPANTS

Ages of participants varied between 36 to 74 years.



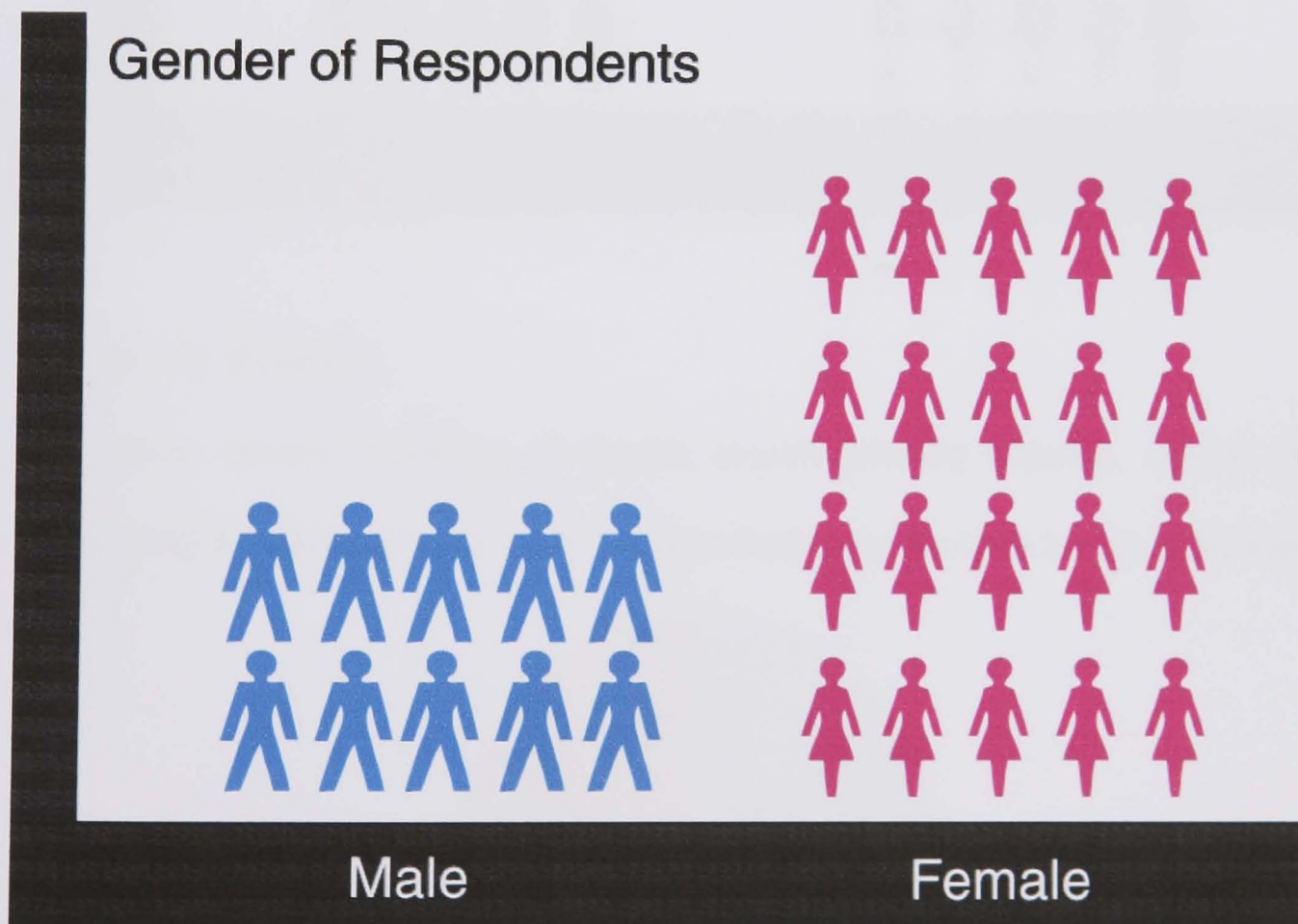
YEARS IN HEADSHIP

Experience in the post of headship is also very wide: 4 respondents have been in the post for a few months whereas there are others who have held the post for decades, the longest period of headship being thirty-six years.



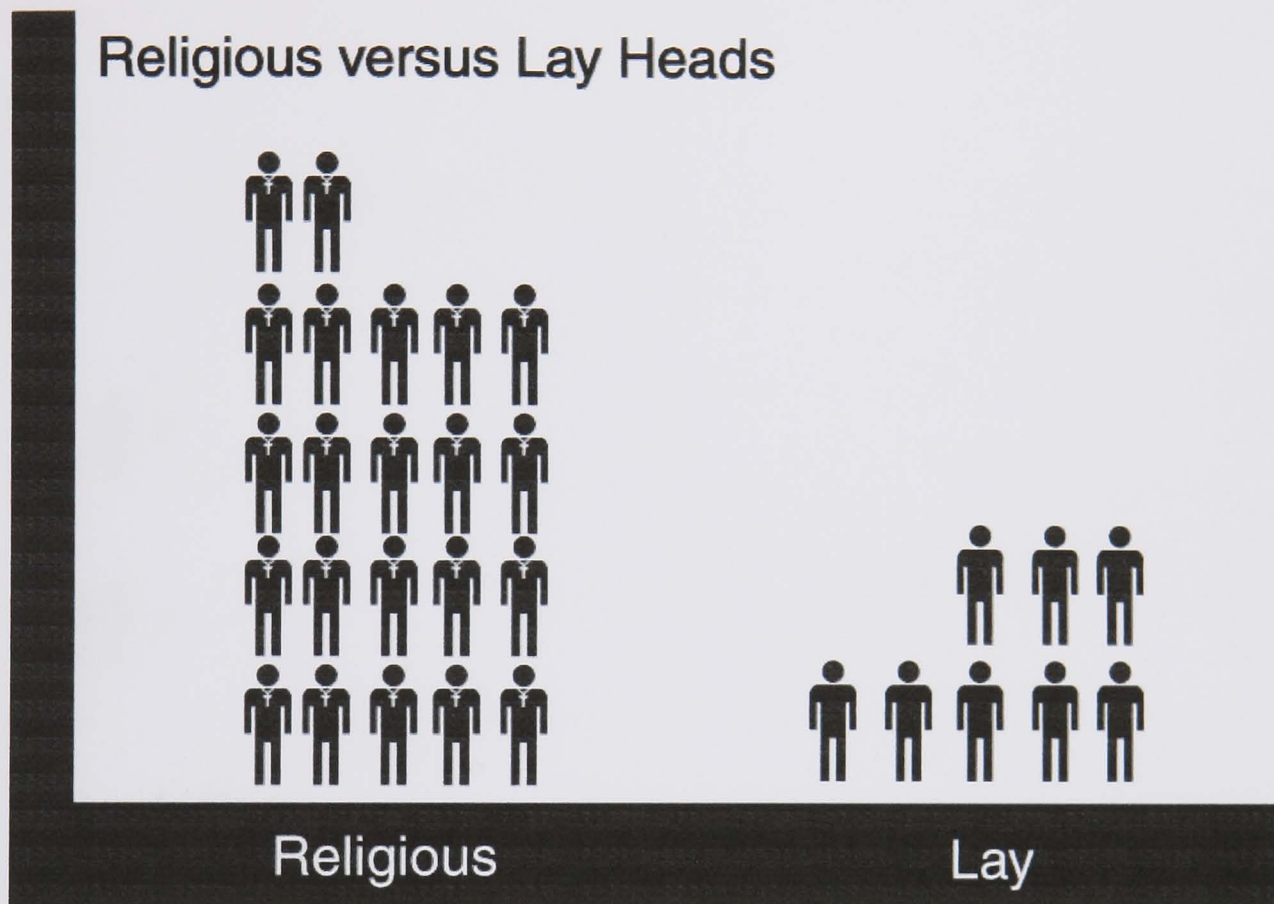
GENDER

Female respondents are in the majority (n = 20). Obviously the remaining are males (n = 10). This is in very close ratio to the actual number of female heads as opposed to male heads because in the total number of forty Maltese Church schools there are actually twenty eight (28) female Heads and twelve (12) male Heads. This also shows, that the majority of male Heads (ten out of twelve or circa 83%), returned the questionnaire, while female Heads were less cooperative as twenty Heads out of twenty eight (or circa 71%) returned the filled-in questionnaire.



RELIGIOUS OR LAY

The vast majority of heads are members of the religious order that runs the school (n = 22) while the other leaders (n = 8) are laypersons.



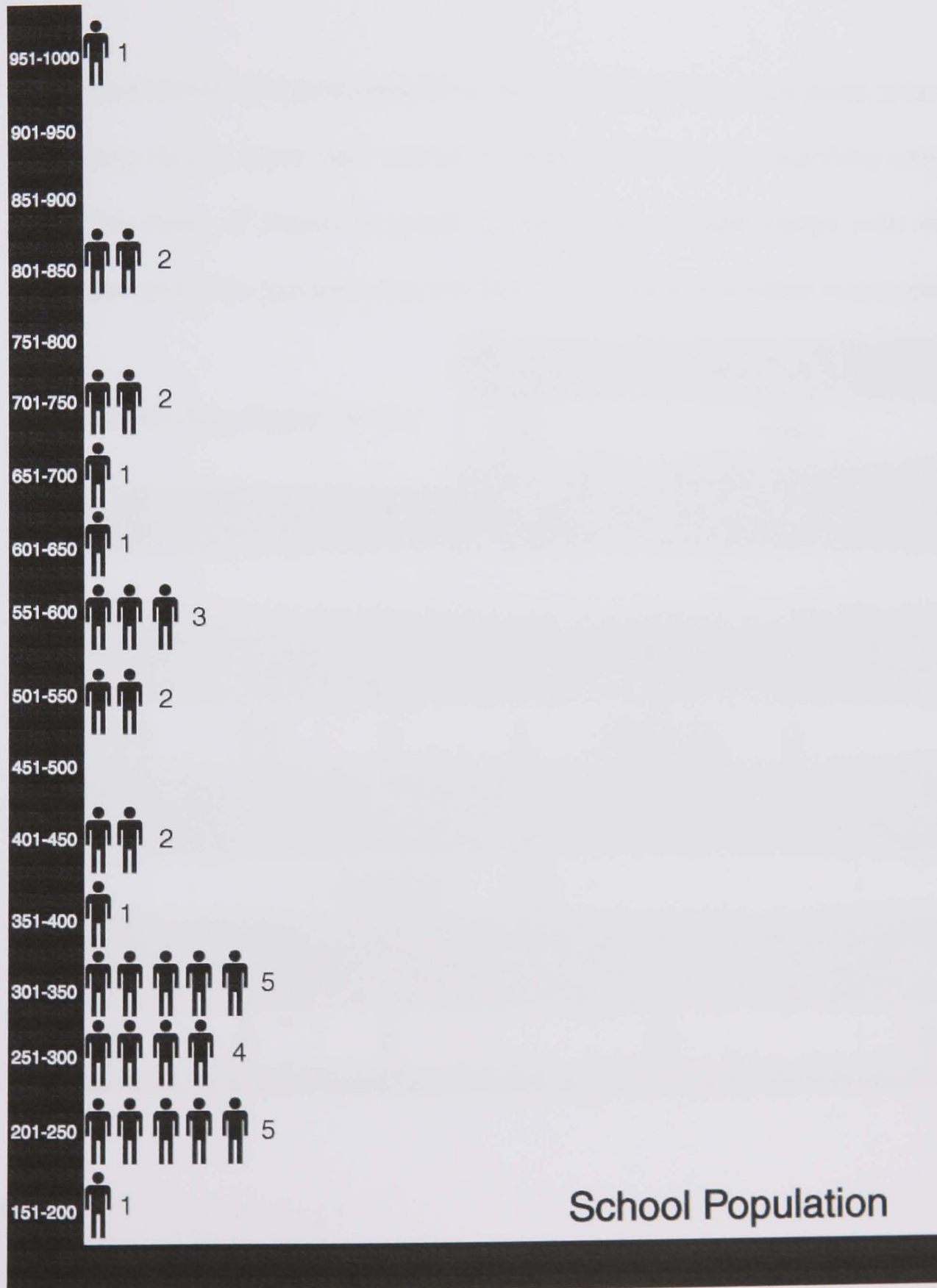
LEVEL OF SCHOOL

The study covers headship in twelve church primary schools, twelve church secondary schools, and six other schools that cater for both levels of education.



STUDENT POPULATION

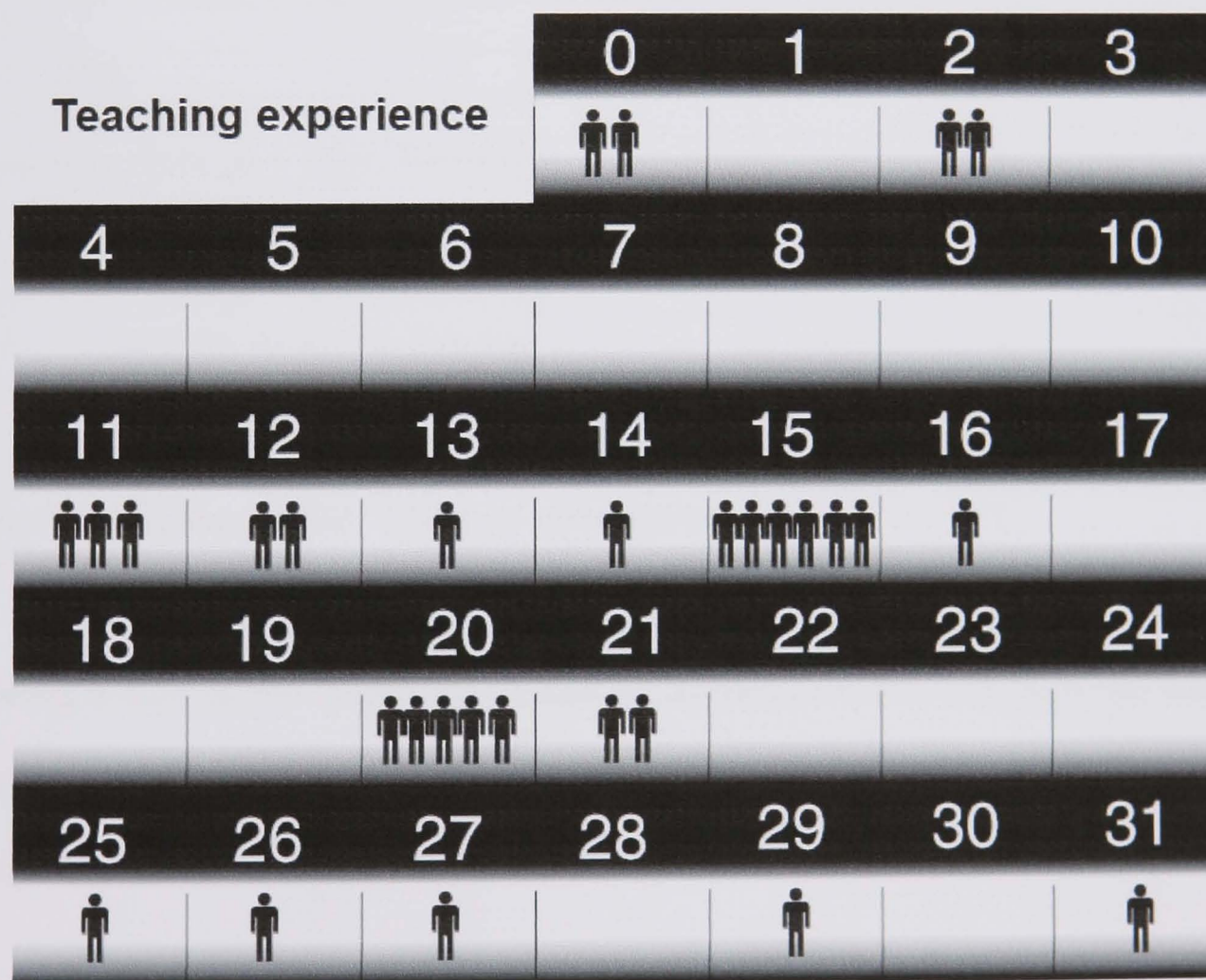
Student population also comprises a wide range of figures with the smallest school cohort comprising of 150 students and the largest cohort being of 980 students.



TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Respondents were asked if they had any teaching experience before they were appointed Heads of school. The vast majority (n = 28) answered in the positive while there were two respondents who were never in the teaching profession.

The respondents who answered that they had teaching experience prior to their becoming Heads were then asked to state how long this teaching experience was. The span of teaching years covers quite a broad range with the least being two years as compared to the thirty-one years of another respondent.



Respondents were then asked if they have any teaching qualification. Twenty-eight answered in the positive while naturally the other two answered in the negative. Consequently respondents were asked to specify the type of teaching qualification that they have:

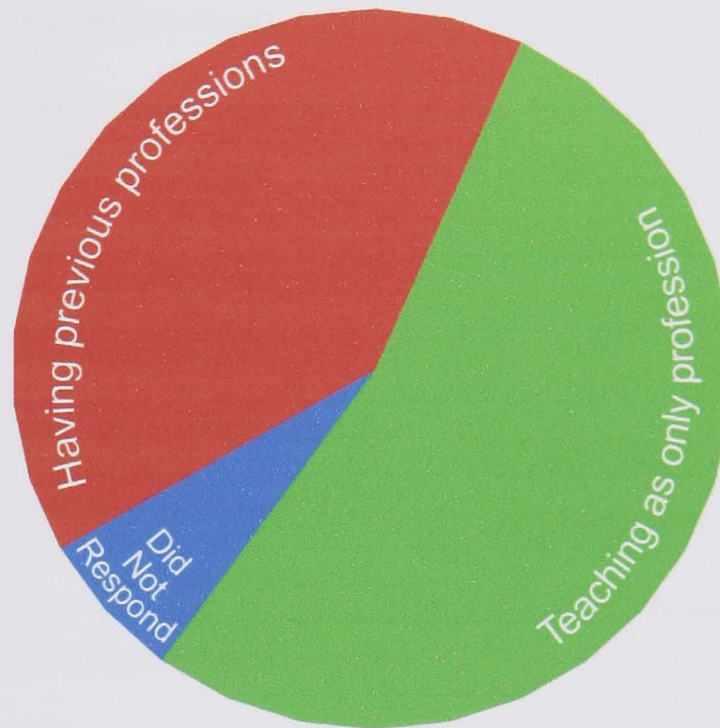
Type of Teaching Qualification	Number of respondents
Licentiate ¹ + B.A.	1
B.A. + PGCE	2
B.Ed + M.Ed	1
Cert. Pedagogy + M.Ed.	1
B.A.	3
B.A. + B.A. + Dip. In Holistic Dev.	1
B.Ed.	2
Cert. Ped.	1
M.A (Educ. Stud)	2
Teachers College + Cert. Theology	1
Teachers College	6
B.A. + Teachers College	1
Teachers College + Montessori Dip.	1
B.A. + Licentiate in Social Science	1
Teachers College + Dip. Theology	1
Ph.D in Education	1
B.Ph + LPH	1
Teachers College + Dip. Children with special Needs.	1

Taking a look at the above list, it can be ascertained that although the twenty-eight respondents all hold a qualification / s, some degrees are not really teaching related.

The next step was to ask respondents who had teaching experience if that had been their only occupation since they left school. Two people did not respond;

¹ This is a degree declaring one as professionally competent to exercise a profession. Normally priests read for it with or after the lectorate. Lay persons can also read for it in philosophy or social sciences.

twelve answered in the negative meaning that besides teaching they had had other occupations; sixteen answered in the positive, stating that teaching was their only occupation since they finished their own education.



Those who had previous teaching experience were asked if they think that they were given the post of Head of school on the basis of this. Respondents' answers were quite varied.

Two respondents did not answer the question. Three other participants simply answered, "Yes" with another respondent saying "*Probably*" and two others writing "*Partly*". The next five respondents answered in the positive but gave a reason:

"Yes, I think so. Reliability more than anything." (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

"Yes, but also because of my leadership skills, commitment and vision." (Female, secondary, lay Head respondent)

“That was an important part of it. Other important areas were the various leadership experiences in different areas of my life and for a well articulated vision which resonates with that of the school.”
(Male, secondary, lay Head respondent)

“Yes and also because the need arose.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“Yes and when a need arose to replace the Head of our school.”
(Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

The last two very similar responses show how certain Heads, who come from religious communities, find themselves in the post of Headship unpredictably.

Some are happy to accept the post while some others do it out of obedience:

“Being religious, we are always bound to obey.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

In fact during one of the interviews, the Head said:

“I did not choose the role of Head. It was given to me, or rather imposed on me. I was sent abroad for training in management before I took up the post. It came to me quite as a surprise. I must admit that on one hand it showed that my superiors believe in me. Yet on the other, it is a huge responsibility without which one can do. Still now I am here and I have to do my best for the sake of the school and for the sake of my Community.” (Male, secondary, religious Head interviewee)

And yet another Head revealed:

“When I was informed about my new role, it struck me like thunder. I spent a couple of sleepless nights wondering how on earth I could take up such a role and make a good job out of it. Fine, I taught for a good number of years. But that is different from having to lead an entire school all on your own. And the parents of some of the students here can be very difficult to deal with. In fact I must admit that this was one of my greatest concerns. Then I threw myself in the hands of God and I said ‘Thy will be done’. Seems so far things are moving smoothly.”
(Female, primary, religious Head interviewee)

Going back to the question where respondents were asked if they think that they were given the post of Head of school on the basis of their teaching experience, there were some who said that this was not the only criterion:

“Not only. Personal qualities and aptitude were also into it.”
(Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

Finally there was that group of respondents who outrightly answered in the negative, with some writing simply a “No” while others provided reasons:

“No. We were sent abroad to study and then graduated. But mostly I feel that I was given the post due to my outstanding leadership traits.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“No, I think it’s because I have the qualities of a good leader and because I have been instrumental to affect changes in other schools.” (Female, primary, lay Head respondent)

It has been strongly agreed and accentuated both in literature and in my research that heads of schools are vital to the process of school improvement (Blackmore *et al*, 2006). One of the most salient features is to recognise the fact that leaders’ approaches have to be tailor-made to the particular needs of the school, the context in which it functions and its social role. In fact as is discussed in the literature review, leadership style depends a lot on the situation which leaders find themselves in. The style, efficiency and effectiveness of the leader also depend on how much the leader is familiar with the particular area that one is operating in (Bush and Coleman, 2000). The context of the situation is a vital element of how leadership is articulated. Therefore in my opinion having previous teaching experience is quite an asset for any educational leader.

TRAINING IN HEADSHIP

Respondents were asked if they were trained in Headship before they were given the post of school leaders. Sixteen (or 53%) answered in the positive while the other fourteen (or 47%) answered in the negative.

Subsequently respondents who answered in the positive were asked to specify their kind of Headship training.

Degree	Number of Respondents
M.Ed	2
Short <i>ad hoc</i> courses	5
Diploma in Educational Administration and Management + M.Ed	2
M.A + short <i>ad hoc</i> courses	1
Diploma in Educational Administration and Management	5
PhD	1
MBA + short <i>ad hoc</i> courses	1

Three of the respondents who said that they do not possess any training in Headship still added a comment in the “*Other*” section:

“I have held administrative posts in the Congregation.” (Female, secondary, religious Head respondent)

“I have had periodic training by the Congregation.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“Nonetheless the priestly formation gives one a sound foundation in humanities, organisation and pastoral care and some pedagogy (catechesis).” (Male, primary, religious Head respondent)

Naturally they felt that this information was important in the sense that although they do not possess any specific qualification in Educational leadership or

management, they still feel that holding an administrative post within the Community or receiving training by the same Community can be helpful. Noteworthy is the last comment where the respondent feels that being a priest means automatically being a good leader.

The subsequent question tried to elicit information whether respondents have received any kind of training in Educational management and / or leadership while they have been Heads of schools. Twenty Heads (circa 67%) replied in the positive while the other ten (circa 33%) replied in the negative. I feel that this issue has to be tackled either by the religious communities that run the schools, or even by the Secretariat itself. In an era when lifelong education is being so advocated for all, the importance that Heads obtain ongoing training cannot be accentuated enough.

The Heads who actually received training during their years of headship were asked to say what it consisted of:

Course	Number of Respondents
Master in Education	1
12 hour course organised by Secretariat	3
Dip. In Educational Administration and Management	3
PhD	1
Short <i>ad hoc</i> courses	8
In-service courses	2
Courses organised by Education Dept.	2

Taking a look at the above list concerns me as in my opinion the courses that most of the respondents took during the years during which they have been Heads might not be enough, especially if the person involved has no other qualification in leadership. And inevitably the question that comes to my mind would be: why is this happening? Could it be that adequate courses are not provided? Could it be that some Heads feel that they do not need any training? Or that they can not afford the time because their job is taking too much of their time?

On a positive note, one respondent answered:

“Apart from the Post graduate diploma in Educational Administration and Management, I have sought other short courses and subscribed to journals and bought publications covering various issues.” (Female, secondary, lay Head respondent).

So at least some individuals do take the initiative to keep abreast and well informed.

Finally Heads were asked if they feel that they are adequately trained in Headship and why. Nineteen (63%) answered in the positive while the other eleven (37%) answered in the negative. Again to me this is very worrying. How can a person perform a good job if he / she does not feel well trained or competent in the field?

Respondents who feel that they are adequately trained for Headship gave different reasons:

“Besides sitting for the Diploma in Educational Administration and Management, I have acted as teacher in charge of a special Unit for 11 years and as an assistant head of school for 4 years.” (Female, secondary, lay Head respondent)

“I have occupied various middle and senior managerial posts during my career. I have also had very good mentors along the way. Furthermore I have also found it helpful to have read for my Master Degree while I was occupying a middle management position and so I had the opportunity to test the theory against the practice of everyday school life.” (Male, primary, lay Head respondent)

“I have been leading successfully my organisation and am very active in the Community.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“Because I believe that I am adequately trained; also because of the feedback I get from others.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“ I am aware of issues, experience, skills and values.” (Male, secondary, religious Head respondent)

“Due to experience. I have a very good relationship with people and this helps me a lot.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“I served as a parish priest for 10 years.” (Male, secondary, religious Head respondent)

“I see the fruit of my work and from the feedback of those who monitor my progress.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“Through hard work and experience.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“ I think I am carrying out my duties professionally.” (Female, secondary, religious Head respondent)

The first two answers are basically training based, that is these two Heads feel that they are adequately trained because they have a sound theoretical and academic background. Yet the rest of the responses verge on the subjective that is respondents feel sufficiently trained due to their feelings and to the feedback that they obtain from their peers.

Then there were those respondents who answered that they do not feel adequately trained:

“Theoretically I feel very prepared (I am an indefatigable reader) but I feel I need some more experience and practical knowledge.”
(Female, secondary, lay Head respondent)

“To be adequately trained I should have the Master Degree.”
(Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“Because I studied other fields and I was not specifically trained for this. I learnt through experience.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“I feel adequately trained in the normal, daily running of the school, but I feel ill-equipped for the ever-changing demands and realities around us.” (Female, primary, religious Head respondent)

“No in the sense that it is a learning curve. Apart from the basics, the rest is learnt on the job through reflexive practice.” (Male, primary and secondary, lay Head respondent)

Evidently those respondents who feel inadequately trained seem to give due importance both to qualifications and experience. These two factors seem to go hand in hand.

CONCLUSION

Selection of Heads can be a cause for concern. The ageing membership of religious institutes means that the selection of leaders from within these Communities is fairly narrowing down. The pool of suitable candidates seems to be diminishing as the absence of younger people within the same Communities is leaving a negative effect, a well-felt shortage. This is even impinging on morale and when members are recycled in leadership positions, there may not be the urgency or vibrancy that is usually related with younger people (SOLR, 2003). This is undoubtedly raising questions about the selection and suitability of future leaders. Older leaders “are recycled” (SOLR, 2003, p. 53) and they may not have the same energy and enthusiasm of younger personnel.

So while the list of demands on educational leaders is on the increase, opportunities have to be created for people to develop the necessary skills and characteristics to be able to do a good job. For while some leaders may be born, other people who are put into leading positions have to be trained (Darmanin, 1998). Unfortunately some leaders find themselves in leading positions, without being sufficiently trained, prepared or exposed beforehand. To add to this, leadership also requires a practicum element that may be neglected or poorly developed during training and development programmes (Jefferson & Edwards, 1998; Harvey *et al.*, 1999). Therefore a lot of work needs to be done at this level.