THE INFLUENCE OF TRUST ON TEACHERS’ INCLINATION TO EXERCISE INFORMAL LEADERSHIP

by

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This research focuses on the role that trust and its component facets - competence, benevolence, openness, reliability and honesty (Tschannen-Moran, 2004) - play in affecting teachers’ inclination to exercise informal leadership. Teachers in the elementary sections of three elite urban independent schools in Ontario nominated colleagues as informal teacher leaders in their schools and a total of nine teachers, who received multiple nominations, were selected for interview. The interviews unexpectedly revealed two distinct experience-based groupings of informal teacher leaders, with the members of the two groups exhibiting distinctive leadership behaviours. Trust was an important factor affecting all of the teacher leaders’ inclination to exercise informal leadership, but the two experience-based groups revealed different patterns of emphasis for the trust facets (for example, the less-experienced leaders highlighted benevolence above all other facets while the more-experienced teachers considered openness to be the most important). The findings have implications for the ways in which schools can promote the exercise of informal leadership.
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Chapter One

Context of the Study and Review of Literature

Traditional conceptions of school structure and culture have been called into question in recent years. The emergence of terms such as ‘distributed leadership’, ‘shared leadership’ and ‘teacher leadership’ (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2006; Wahlstrom and Seashore Louis, 2009) have suggested a departure from the traditional hierarchies of school administration. At the same time, there has been a push towards cultures promoting teacher collaboration, collegiality and the development of professional learning communities (Hargreaves, 2004). These changes suggest a shift in power from formal school leaders and an increase in influence for teachers.

Central to the functioning of learning communities and collaborative cultures in schools is the expansion of teachers’ roles in sharing ideas and improving practice. In line with most definitions in the educational literature that describe leadership as the exertion of influence over others (Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Spillane, 2004; Yukl, 1994), this investigation takes the position that teachers who influence others are exercising leadership, and focuses on those who do so without formal designation as leaders.

Teacher leadership can be classified as ‘formal’ if it is enacted from a position of recognised authority in a school (e.g. department head), but can also emerge more organically in the shape of ‘informal’ teacher leadership. According to Lieberman and Miller (2005), the exercise of informal leadership is dependent upon the creation of suitable conditions by the school administration. This study seeks to investigate the contribution of one aspect of school conditions: trust. A growing body of research suggests that trust is an important variable influencing the creation and sustainability of collaborative cultures in schools (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004); this
study seeks to investigate the role of trust in promoting conditions that support the exercise of informal teacher leadership.

Building on the work of Tschannen-Moran (2004) and Bryk & Schneider (2002), this investigation employs a survey to gather data on school culture and interviews with informal teacher leaders (identified by their peers) to gain insights into the factors that affect their inclination to exercise informal leadership. The major implication for the findings of this study is the identification of facets of trust that promote the exercise of informal teacher leadership: knowledge that could help administrators unlock the full potential of teachers for the benefit of their school communities.

Acknowledging and promoting informal teacher leadership is important because it increases the potential for positive influence from a greater number of individuals in an organisation. Timperley (2005) suggests that “strong individual leaders with exceptional vision” (p. 3) are not the answer for transforming schools. She claims that leaders of this type do not exist in sufficient quantities and “such conceptualizations [of ‘strong’ leaders] often have little appeal for potential leaders” (p. 3). Anderson (2004) acknowledges the importance of informal teacher leaders when he states:

[teacher leaders] are not always the formal leaders, nor do they always aspire to be, but they do have influence. It is with this in mind that one quickly comes to the conclusion, as much of the literature does, that understanding the relationship between teacher leaders and principals is of critical importance, as not recognizing their mutual influence means missing valuable sources of input. (p. 101)

Anderson’s words resonate with my personal experience as an educator. I have observed, and been influenced by, the informal leadership of colleagues. I have witnessed in my own career, during episodes of administration-driven change, the loss of trust and a
resultant retreat of teachers from a collaborative culture towards a more solitary approach - with teachers’ heads down and their doors closed to avoid unwanted visits from formal leaders. Observation of favourable conditions for informal leadership and of the consequences of declining trust relationships has stimulated an interest in considering how trust can be developed to help encourage the exercise of informal leadership.

Embracing the idea that some teachers who are not motivated to pursue formal leadership positions still have the potential to positively influence those around them has significant implications for the development of schools. This study seeks to shed light on the school conditions and, more specifically, the kinds of relationships within schools that promote the exercise of informal leadership.

**Research Questions and Setting**

**Research problem and questions.** This study examines the contribution of trust and the various facets of trust, as described by Tschannen-Moran (2004), to teachers’ inclination to exercise informal teacher leadership. Participants were drawn from the elementary section of three elite independent schools in an urban setting in Ontario. Participation involved the completion of survey questionnaires by teachers in the three schools - through which they nominated informal teacher leaders from their schools - and interviews with nine teachers who had received multiple nominations. The following questions drove the study:

1. What role (if any) does trust play in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership?

2. What specific facets of trust are important in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership?
Concepts and variables emerging from the research questions. The major concepts upon which this study is based are trust and informal teacher leadership. Drawing upon the work of Tschannen-Moran (2004), Bryk and Schneider (2002), and Chrispeels and Daly (2008), trust is viewed as multifaceted and is considered in relation to its constituent parts, specifically those identified by Tschannen-Moran: honesty, reliability, benevolence, openness, and competence.

Teacher trust is examined in relation to administrators (the extent to which identified informal teacher leaders trust their school administrators) and teaching colleagues (the extent to which the identified informal teacher leaders trust their peers), a categorization similar to that employed by Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, and Yashkina (2007) in their study of distributed leadership patterns. Informal teacher leadership is defined as leadership initiated by teachers, beyond the normal professional expectations, without a formal leadership designation (Leithwood et al, 1999; Harris, 2003; Lieberman and Miller, 2004; Katzenmayer and Moller, 2009).

Literature Review

The review of literature draws upon two areas within the realm of educational administration: leadership and trust. The review locates informal teacher leadership within the area of educational leadership; trust is discussed in relation to the role it might play in affecting teachers’ inclination to exercise informal teacher leadership.

Informal teacher leadership. Informal teacher leadership is a widely referenced but under-researched area in the field of educational administration. Precise definitions of informal teacher leadership are rare in the literature, but it is usually described in terms of leadership exercised by teachers who do not have a formal leadership designation (Leithwood et al, 1999; Harris, 2003; Lieberman and Miller, 2004; Katzenmayer and
Moller, 2009). Varying conceptions of leadership itself and the proliferation of shared models of leadership in recent years make isolated discussion of informal teacher leadership a significant challenge. The following review situates informal teacher leadership in the wider field of educational leadership.

**Defining leadership.** Bass (1990, cited in Spillane, 2006) describes leadership as “the interaction between two or more members of a group that often involves a structuring or restructuring of the situation and the perceptions and expectations of the members” (p. 10). Yukl (1994, cited in Leithwood et al. 1999) adds another dimension to this definition, the intent to change, claiming that most definitions of leadership “reflect the assumption that it involves a social influence process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organization” (p. 6). Leithwood et al. (1999), in their discussion on leadership, assert that influence “seems to be a necessary part of most conceptions of leadership” (p. 6). However, Spillane (2006) refutes this point, suggesting definitions that assume leadership is dependent upon evidence of influence are flawed. He argues that individuals can recognize leadership even if they are not influenced by it. His definition states that leadership constitutes activities that “are designed by organizational members to influence the motivation, knowledge, affect, or practices of their organizational members or that are understood by organizational members as intended to influence members” (p. 11).

Within most models of educational leadership, efforts to influence members of an organization are presumed to come from those in formal leadership positions. On the basis of a comprehensive literature review of “four representative English-language educational administration journals” over the preceding 10 years, Leithwood et al. (1999) outline six...
broad categories that capture 20 identified leadership concepts. These categories: instructional leadership; transformational leadership; moral leadership; participative leadership; managerial leadership; and contingent leadership are described, and differentiated, in terms of influence: “who exerts influence, and what is the nature, purpose and outcome of that influence” (p. 17). With the exception of the ‘participative’ category, influence within the six models is considered to be exclusively (in the case of moral and managerial leadership), or at least typically (in the case of instructional, transformational, and contingent leadership) restricted to those in formal administrative roles (pp. 18-19).

However, there has been growing support in recent years for a movement away from leadership enacted by a small number of individuals in the educational setting. According to Gronn (2002), criticism of existing conceptions of leadership “is palpable and increasing” (p. 4). Gronn claims: “The main difficulty created by orthodox formulations such as leader-followers and leadership-followership is that they prescribe, rather than describe a division of labour” (p. 6). Such conceptions of leadership, he suggests, do not recognize the true complexity of organizational work; they do not reflect the reality of patterns of influence in schools. Harris and Muijs (2007) observe that the educational leadership literature is preoccupied with ‘strong leaders’. Hargreaves and Fink (2006) claim that this has “reinforced the assumption that school leadership is synonymous with the principal …[while] other sources of leadership have largely been ignored” (p. 96). Timperley (2005), drawing upon the work of Camburn et al. (2003), suggests “a more achievable and sustainable conceptualization of leadership has been coming increasingly to the fore to replace the model of a single, ‘heroic’ leader standing atop a hierarchy, bending the school community to his or her purposes” (p. 395).
**Distributed leadership.** A number of models that describe more distributed forms of leadership have received attention in recent years: collaborative leadership, shared leadership, and democratic leadership (Spillane, 2006) are examples. The most popular of these models, and currently receiving significant scholarly interest, is ‘distributed leadership’, which has enough features in common with many of the other models to have generated questions over whether it is a genuinely new idea (Leithwood et al., 2004; Timperley, 2005). However, Gronn (2008) claims that distributed leadership has “weathered an initial stage of conceptual exploration, is now well into a phase of empirical investigation and may shortly be entering a period when some sense of its impact (and the difference, if any, that it makes) will become clearer” (p. 141). Distributed leadership, in its broadest definitions, describes any situation where leadership is spread through an organisation. However, most commentators in the field are inclined to highlight particular, more desirable, models of leadership distribution. A number of observers (e.g. McBeath, 2005; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006) describe patterns of leadership distribution as continua, with high administrative control at one end and low control at the other, essentially with less control being considered desirable. However, most observers flag the dangers of unchecked leadership distribution. Timperley (2005) warns, “Distributing leadership over more people is a risky business and may result in the greater distribution of incompetence” (p. 417). Spillane (2006) refuses to even consider efforts that are not “tied to the core work of the organisation” (p.11) within his definition of distributed leadership. Leithwood et al. (2007) suggest that the ‘planful alignment’ of leadership tasks by the formal school leadership is the optimal pattern for leadership distribution, a position that contrasts with Gronn (2002), who highlights the importance of interdependence between organizational members. For Leithwood et al., the ‘planful alignment’ of leadership tasks by the school
administration maximizes results; for Gronn, a richer leadership emerges from interactions initiated by organizational members. Harris and Muijs (2007) suggest that too much of the distributed leadership research has focused on more bureaucratized forms of distribution while the theory points to the value of more organic forms. This investigation is closely aligned with the latter interpretation of distributed leadership, seeking to highlight leadership that emerges from the initiative of teachers rather than in response to administrative actions.

*Teacher leadership.* As described previously, distributed leadership shares characteristics with other conceptualizations of leadership enacted by teachers, including the well-established concept of ‘teacher leadership’. Harris (2003) asserts,

> The relationship between teacher leadership and distributed leadership has not been explored in depth, yet it is clear that there is a strong resonance between the empirical terrain provided in teacher leadership literature and the theoretical perspectives provided by those writing about distributed forms of leadership. (p. 316)

Leithwood et al. (2006) observe that teacher leadership has provided much of the data used to produce initial hypotheses in the area of distributed leadership. However, while clearly overlapping to a large degree, distributed leadership and teacher leadership are not synonymous. Harris and Muijs (2007) describe the connection between the two concepts thus:

> Teacher leadership is conceptually closely linked to distributed leadership, but is narrower, being concerned exclusively with the leadership roles of teaching staff, while similarly being broader than many practical operationalisations of distributed leadership that have often concentrated on formal positional roles, in particular those relating to middle management and subject leadership, even though most theoretical
conceptualizations of distributed leadership have stressed emergent and collaborative leadership that would incorporate teacher leadership as one of its manifestations. (p. 113)

One such theoretical conceptualization is that of Gronn (2002b), who suggests that a distributed perspective “reflects the division of labour confronted by fieldworkers and is experienced on a daily basis by organizational members” (p. 660). According to Gronn and others (e.g. Timperley, 2005; Hargreaves and Fink, 2006), leadership enacted by teachers is part of the reality of life in schools. This stance “opens up the possibility of all teachers becoming leaders at various times” (Harris and Muijs, 2007, p. 113). In this scenario, the term ‘distributed leadership’ describes an existing reality of leadership distribution rather than a situation where leadership roles are prescribed by the school administration. This distinction is useful in the discussion on teacher leadership as it can be seen to highlight a distinction between two recognizable forms: informal and formal teacher leadership. Formal teacher leaders carry an official designation, usually granted by the school administration, informal leaders do not.

Some observers base their discussion on promoting teacher leadership in the school reform rhetoric, suggesting that “the accountability movement” (Katzenmayer and Moller, 2009, p. 2) has failed to raise standards of education (Lieberman and Miller, 2004; Katzenmayer and Moller, 2009), where “the rightful pursuit of higher standards has degenerated into a counterproductive obsession with soulless standardization” (Hargreaves, 2003, p. 82). Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) suggest that the concerns arising from the excessive controls placed on schools “rest in the potential of a leadership structure that taps into everyone’s talents within the school community, especially the teachers” (p. 2).
Lieberman and Miller (2004) discuss what they see as the growing importance of teacher leadership in terms of “transforming social realities in teaching” (p. 10). They describe the importance of teachers moving from established norms of individualism and isolation to “build the capacity for joint work and develop norms of collegiality, openness, trust, experimentation, risk taking and feedback” (p. 11). Similarly, Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) promote the idea of culture change and building organizational capacity. They argue that, “[administrative] leaders must build a school culture in which teacher individualism is honored while insisting on a unified approach to student learning and quality professional learning for all teachers” (p. 26). Lieberman and Miller (2004) assert, “When teachers cast off the mantle of technical and managed work and assume new roles as researchers, meaning makers, scholars, and inventors, they expand the vision of who they are and what they do” (p. 11), echoing the sentiments of Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (1992), who propose an alternative to the technical view of teaching by forwarding their model of teacher research communities, through which “teachers’ voices can play a more prominent part in the dialogue of school reform” (p. 320).

There is considerable overlap between the rationale described by Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) and Lieberman and Miller (2004) and the promotion of professional learning communities, notably the emphasis on a movement away from individualism, promotion of collective teacher professionalism, and the building of capacity among teachers (Cochrane-Smith and Lytle, 1992; Little, 1990). Interestingly, within the professional learning community literature, there is little discussion on leadership, perhaps because of its association with formal roles. This study is located primarily in the educational leadership literature and cannot accommodate a detailed analysis of the professional learning community literature. However, it is clear that the exercise of teacher
leadership (especially informal teacher leadership) plays a major role in professional learning communities and there is significant overlap between the two areas.

**Defining formal and informal teacher leadership.** Leithwood et al. (1999) cite Sirotnik and Kimball (1996) and Hart (1995) in stating, “Leadership does not take on new meaning when qualified by the term ‘teacher’. It entails the exercise of influence over the beliefs, actions and values of others, as is the case with leadership from any source” (p. 116). Katzenmayer and Moller (2009), drawing upon a review of the literature and their own field research, propose that “teacher leaders lead within and beyond the classroom; identify with and contribute to a community of teacher learners and leaders; influence others towards improved educational practice; and accept responsibility for achieving the outcome of their leadership” (p. 6). From their review of literature in the field, York-Barr and Duke (2004) describe teacher leadership as, “the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement” (p. 288). Somewhat more succinctly, Harris (2003) suggests that teacher leadership, “essentially refers to the exercise of leadership by teachers, regardless of position or designation” (p. 316). While this definition is refreshingly brief, it clouds the distinction that some observers make between formal and informal teacher leadership. Such a distinction appears to rest on the allocation of a title to those in formal teacher leader roles, and these titles are generally granted by school administration, suggesting that the influence of formal teacher leaders is very much affected by position or designation. For examples of formal teacher leadership roles, Leithwood et al. (1999) list, “lead teacher, master teacher, department head, union representative, member of the school’s governance council, mentor” (p. 116).
Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) give further examples: ‘math coach’ and ‘full-time mentor of new teachers’.

Unlike formal teacher leaders, informal leaders do not possess a formal designation and, to use Harris’s (2003) parlance, exercise their leadership without a ‘position or designation’. While some observers do not make the distinction between formal and informal teacher leaders, Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) do make a distinction, highlighting the fact that the latter “choose not to leave the classroom”, opting instead to influence others “through having casual conversations, sharing materials, facilitating professional development, or simply extending an invitation for other teachers to visit their classrooms” (p. 7).

According to Leithwood et al. (1999), teachers exercise informal leadership by sharing their expertise, volunteering for new projects, and bringing new ideas to the school. They also offer leadership by helping their colleagues to carry out their classroom duties, and by assisting in the improvement of classroom practice through the engagement of their colleagues in experimentation and the examination of more powerful instructional techniques. (p. 117)

Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) express a distinct preference for informal forms of teacher leadership, stating, “Formal positions are not necessary to influence others” (p. 10). They suggest that formal teacher leaders make a contribution to school improvement, “as long as the teachers are not pulled into quasi-administrative responsibilities that take them away from the focus on teaching and their authentic relationships with colleague teachers” (p. 7), the tone of their writing implying that formalising a teacher leadership role brings with it dangers of negatively affecting the impact of an informal teacher leader. Anderson
(2004) suggests that future teacher leadership studies should “reduce the impact of formal teacher leadership positions such as the department head in research samples as they, like administrators, were often too readily identified as leaders to the detriment of other influential sources of teacher leadership perceptions” (p. 99).

**Narrowing the focus to informal teacher leadership.** The broad and varied definitions of teacher leadership mean that isolated discussion on informal teacher leadership is challenging. There is very little research targeting informal teacher leadership specifically. However, using a working definition of informal teacher leadership based on that of Harris (2003), and filtering the literature for evidence of teacher leaders with formal designation, this discussion focuses on the actions of informal teacher leaders, evidence of their influence on the practice of their colleagues, and the conditions that promote their existence. Considering informal teacher leadership as the exercise of leadership by teachers without a formal leadership position or designation, the discussion will first address how these teachers come to be recognized as leaders.

One of the luxuries of considering informal leadership in isolation is that its effectiveness is easily recognized; influence will only occur if desired by the ‘followers’; potential informal leaders can try to lead but, without a formal designation, no one is required to follow. Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) posit that the key to teacher leaders’ influence is the relationships they have with their colleagues, “which become the foundation upon which teacher leaders are able to share and learn with others” (p. 9). Informal teacher leaders, they suggest, “have to rely on their personal power to influence others” (p. 11). York-Barr and Duke (2004) report that teacher leaders typically have significant teaching experience, “are known to be excellent teachers, and are respected by their peers” (p. 267). Snell and Swanson (2000), in a case study of 10 teacher leaders,
observed that, “expertise is the foundational dimension of teacher leadership, for it served to establish the credibility of those teachers as exemplars” (p. 21). Katzenmayer and Moller (2009) observe that teacher leaders are those who, ”are credible to their peers, who are continuous learners, and who pass relevant information about best practices to others influence their colleague teachers” (p. 10). Informal teacher leaders are leaders because colleagues want to be influenced by them. It is no great surprise to conclude that they would typically be competent and well-respected teachers from whom colleagues believe they have something to learn.

Acknowledging that the informal teacher leaders from whom data are gathered in this study are nominated by their peers, some consideration is given here to the attribution of leadership to others. Lord and Maher (1993) suggest that perceptions of leadership can be explained,

by two qualitatively different cognitive processes: either leadership can be recognized from the qualities and behaviours revealed through normal, day-to-day interactions with others, or it can be inferred from the outcomes of salient events. For example, someone who is intelligent, honest, outgoing, understanding, and verbally skilled is likely to be recognized as having strong leadership qualities. Alternatively, leadership is likely to be inferred when a person… is seen as being directly responsible for a favourable performance outcome”. (p. 34)

Leithwood, Mascall, Strauss, Sacks, Memon, and Yashkina, (2009) suggest that the former scenario is often pervasive in the realm of school leadership, with observers often ascribing leadership based upon the recognition of traits rather than observed actions:

When people identify strongly with their group or organization, they are most likely to identify, as leaders within their group or organization, those with the most
prototypical characteristics, not necessarily those with the greatest expertise. …There seems to be good evidence to suggest that groups often ascribe leadership to those with the most prototypical features of the group. (pp. 232-3)

Research by Leithwood et al. (2009) in this area confirmed their expectation that “attribution of leadership to those in non-administrative roles will be significantly shaped by perceived traits associated with attributions of leadership to those in formal administrative roles” (p. 246), a finding that should be acknowledged when relying upon peer-nomination of leaders.

**Research on informal teacher leadership.** Harris and Muijs (2007) observe, “Literature in the field of teacher leadership tends towards advocacy rather than empirical research, presenting a very optimistic picture of the implementation of teacher leadership and its consequences” (p. 962). Similarly, York-Barr and Duke (2004) report that the literature is “rich with claims for the potential and desired effects of teacher leadership [but] relatively sparse with evidence of such effects, especially at the levels of classroom practice and student learning” (p. 282). They report that the “strongest effects found for teacher leadership have been on teachers themselves” (p. 282), identifying benefits to teachers’ leadership skills, their instructional practices and their motivation as teachers. They also note some negative outcomes, including stress resulting from increased workload and multiple roles, and deterioration of relationships with colleagues. They suggest that school culture is a “considerable obstacle to be overcome if the potential positive effects are to be realized” (p. 285). York-Barr and Duke also note the dearth of evidence on student outcomes, identifying only five studies in that area that presented evidence of student benefit from teacher leadership, none of which yielded significant data supporting a strong relationship between the two variables. They attribute the lack of
evidence to “the methodological challenges inherent in attempting to identify ambiguous variables” (p. 287). York-Barr and Duke (2004) report that most of the research into teacher leadership,

is limited to case study designs, small sample sizes and self-report interview methodologies. The few large-scale quantitative studies that do exist have not provided evidence of the exercise of leadership but have exposed dilemmas in attempting to define teacher leadership in ways that make quantification possible and meaningful. (p. 287)

The complexity of variables in teacher leadership studies makes quantitative analysis challenging, but case study methodology that can more accurately capture the reality of life in schools is typically perceived as less useful to policy makers, thus making funding harder to obtain. Flessa (2009) suggests that research conducted at school sites has typically been “examined as [a] technical and managerial issue with methodological approaches borrowed from administrative science” (p. 344), suggesting a preference for funding studies utilizing quantitative methods – methods not best suited to research in this area. Harris and Muijs (2007), acknowledge that a greater longitudinal component to their own case study research into teacher leadership could add strength to the claims they make.

There is no escaping the fact that research in this area will never be a clean and clinical exercise. The indirect path of influence between teacher leadership and student learning makes definitive claims of benefits for student learning extremely problematic. However, the complexities that make research in the area a challenge only serve to reinforce the importance of gaining a better understanding of teacher leadership.
Conditions that support informal teacher leadership. Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) suggest that teachers draw from their experience and passion for teaching in order to exercise informal leadership; informal teacher leaders typically possess knowledge and/or a passion in the areas in which they influence others. A number of observers, seeking to promote the exercise of informal teacher leadership, identify school conditions that can support it. Leithwood et al. (1999), drawing upon large-scale survey and interview data, make a number of recommendations, directed at school administrators, for promoting informal teacher leadership. Some of these recommendations address the shortfall in leadership skills reported in the literature (York-Barr and Duke, 2004). These include helping teacher leaders make realistic use of time (i.e. not taking-on too many initiatives), providing support with challenging tasks to increase leadership capacity, and supporting teachers who already possess leadership characteristics. Other recommendations, such as promoting the use of guided reflection as a training tool, and building a culture of collaboration (Leithwood et al., 1999, pp. 131-133), reflect the general focus in the literature around promoting a suitable school culture to foster teacher leadership. This discussion is closely aligned with the literature promoting professional learning communities, which highlights, “a focus on student learning, …peers helping peers, …and supportive and shared leadership” (Roy and Hord, 2006, pp. 491-2). However, the focus for developing teacher leadership leans more on the relationships between teachers. Katzenmeyer and Katzenmeyer (2005, cited in Katzenmayer and Moller, 2009) suggest a number of dimensions that “help determine a healthy school culture” (p. 85) for developing teacher leadership: developmental focus, recognition, autonomy, collegiality, participation, open communication and positive environment.
Murphy (2007), in his review of teacher leadership literature, identifies many of the supports for informal teacher leadership outlined above, notably the importance of values and expectations within the school, supportive structures, and leadership-specific training. Additionally, he highlights the importance of incentives and recognition, citing Kahrs (1996) who states: “Recognition of leadership and credit for leadership among teachers is a key factor influencing teacher involvement and leadership” (cited in Murphy, p. 697). In addition to financial reward - which can be a “complicated issue” - Murphy identifies access to additional resources, expanded opportunities for professional development and “the gift of time” (p. 670) as ways that teachers are rewarded for teacher leadership.

The biggest barriers to the creation of cultures that are supportive of informal teacher leadership, as reported in the literature, are the established norms of isolation and individualism (Lieberman and Miller, 2004), lack of professional growth (specifically in developing leadership skills), and the limited availability of time for exercising leadership (Harris and Muijs, 2007). From their case studies of three schools in the United Kingdom, Harris and Muijs (2007) conclude, “for teacher leadership to be successful there needs to be a fundamental cultural shift in the vision and values of the organization. …Teacher leadership needs to be deeply embedded in the culture of the schools” (p. 129).

According to Harris and Muijs (2007),

Much of the research evidence points to the importance of shared norms and values and of collaborative practice between teachers. The evidence suggests that teacher leadership flourishes most in collaborative settings, and that creating a culture of trust that allows collaboration to grow is crucial to the development of teacher leadership. (p. 113)

A number of observers have highlighted trust as an important factor in the promotion
of professional learning communities and teacher leadership. Tschannen-Moran (2009) suggests that schools should become more “professional in their orientation” (p. 228), encouraging teacher initiative and leadership. For this to happen, she suggests that, “conditions need to be cultivated to foster greater trust between teachers and school leaders” (p. 228). Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly and Chrispeels (2009) state, “Trust is an important component of school effectiveness and an integral part of positive school leadership” (p. 228). Tschannen-Moran (2004) claims that trust is vital in the building of a culture that will allow a school to function as a professional learning community.

**Trust.** In describing the development of research into trust in organizations, Van Maele and Van Houtte (2009) observe that social psychological theories consider trust, “an interpersonal phenomenon and conceive of it as a psychological state at the individual level” (p. 560), whereas sociological literature views trust as, “a quality of the social system that enables maintenance of social order within the system” (p. 560).

Much of the work on trust in schools that has emerged in recent years stems from the research of Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Hoy and Tshannon-Moran (1999). Both sets of researchers examine *faculty trust*, a concept that emphasizes teachers’ collective perceptions of trust – more in line with sociological theory. They, and various colleagues, have described trust in multi-faceted terms, providing detailed descriptions of the concept and presenting it as a key construct in the discussion of school leadership. Bryk and Schneider (2002) state that, “trust is rooted in the microdynamics of day-to-day social interactions among teachers, principals, and parents and the discernments that various participants make about these interactions” (p. 122).

**Defining trust.** Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) observe, “Trust means many things. Everyone knows what it is, yet articulating a precise definition of trust is no simple
matter” (p. 185). Trust is a complex concept; definitions from various sources capture numerous sub-concepts to which authors can attach differing levels of importance. Most definitions of trust include some reference to vulnerability and the inclination to participate in a relationship with others. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) suggest, “Trust is an individual or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, honest, open, reliable, and competent” (p. 189).

Similarly, Bryk and Schneider (2002) state that the decision to trust another individual involves the “calculation, whereby an individual decides whether or not to engage in an action with another individual that incorporates some degree of risk” (p. 14). This calculation is based upon factors such as a predisposition to trust, previous experiences involving that individual, that person’s reputation or general social similarities with them. Kochanek (2005) asserts that while individuals have a predisposition to trust those with social similarities to them, this alone cannot create trusting relationships.

Bryk and Schneider (2002) identify three forms of trust: organic, contractual and relational, before focusing on the latter as the most appropriate for the school setting. Organic trust involves “unquestioning beliefs … in the moral authority of the particular social institution” (p. 16) and is, thus, of limited relevance to the majority of schools. Similarly, contractual trust, which depends upon social exchange that is “primarily material and instrumental” (p. 17), is limited in its applicability to school settings. Bryk and Schneider suggest that this form of trust shapes “much of modern life, including virtually all commercial transactions” (p. 17). However, they argue that the complexity of schooling means that contractual trust does not apply in most educational environments. Basing their work around the concept of ‘social capital’, especially the work of sociologists Simon Coleman, Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama, Bryk and Schneider focus their attention...
on what they call ‘relational trust’, which “views the social exchanges of schooling as organized around a distinct set of role relationships: teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, teachers with parents and with their school principal” (p. 20). Within these role relationships, each party “maintains an understanding of his or her role obligations and holds some expectations about the role obligations of the other” (p. 20). The development of relational trust, Bryk and Schneider (2002) suggest, requires synchrony in these mutual expectations and obligations. …Parents expect that teachers will take the necessary actions to help their child learn to read. Teachers feel obligated to work in a professionally appropriate manner and are willing to commit extra effort, if necessary, in seeking to respond to the parents’ expectations. Parents in turn are obligated to make sure that students attend school regularly and, more generally, to support the teachers’ efforts at home. (pp. 20-21)

Bryk and Schneider (2002) discuss relational trust as a property of an organization “in that its constitutive elements are socially defined in the reciprocal exchanges among participants in a school community, and its presence (or absence) has important consequences for the functioning of the school” (p. 22).

Both Bryk and Schneider (2002) and Tschannen-Moran (2004) outline multiple, and overlapping, facets within their conceptualization of trust. The former describe the concept in terms a “dynamic interplay among four considerations: respect, competence, personal regard for others, and integrity” (p. 23). They suggest, “individual school members simultaneously analyze the behavior of others through all four lenses” (p. 23). Respect, according to Bryk and Schneider (2002), is of vital importance in the social exchanges upon which schools are based. Key to their understanding of respect is, “a genuine sense of listening to what each person has to say… which fosters a sense of personal esteem for
participants and cements their affiliation with each other and the larger institution” (p. 23). Competence “connects directly to instrumental concerns about the ability to achieve desired outcomes” (p. 24). Bryk and Schneider’s discussion notes the reality that competence is hard to assess in the school setting, particularly that of teachers as their role is generally performed in isolation from other adults. However, they emphasize that this does not prevent individuals making competence judgments - especially when attributing incompetence. In describing personal regard for others, Bryk and Schneider state:
“Interpersonal trust deepens as individuals perceive that others care about them and are willing to extend themselves beyond what their role might formally require in a given situation” (p. 25). Personal regard for others, they suggest, creates a “social affiliation” which can “intensify the relational ties” (p. 25) between individuals. Integrity refers to congruence between what people say and what they do and implies “that a moral-ethical perspective guides one’s work” (p. 26).

Overlapping in part with Bryk and Schneider (2002), Tschannen-Moran (2004) expands upon the five facets of trust highlighted in her definition: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence. Closely related to Bryk and Schneider’s (2002) ‘personal regard for others’, Tschannen-Moran (2004) describes benevolence as, “the confidence that one’s well-being or something one cares about will be protected and not harmed by the trusted party” (p. 19). She suggests that the absence of trust in a person’s benevolence leads to inefficiency through the expenditure of energy in “making mental provisions or alternative plans or in assessing the available recourse in case of betrayal” (p. 19). She adds, “Principals who hope to earn the trust of their faculties need to demonstrate good will and genuine concern for teachers’ well-being” (p. 22). Again overlapping with Bryk and Schneider, Tschannen-Moran (2004) states that honesty “concerns a person’s
character, their integrity and authenticity. Trust means that one can expect that the word or promise of another individual, whether verbal or written, can be relied upon” (p. 22). She states that trust is unlikely to develop “without the confidence that a person’s words can be relied upon and can accurately predict future actions” (p. 22). Tschannen-Moran describes openness “as a process by which people make themselves vulnerable to others by sharing information, influence, and control” (p. 25) and suggests that it “initiates a kind of reciprocal trust, signaling a confidence that neither the information nor the individual will be exploited, so that recipients infer that they can feel the same confidence in return” (p. 25). Reliability is described as “The sense that one is able to depend on another consistently” (p. 28). In order to secure the trust of faculty, a Principal must demonstrate, “enough consistency…to inspire confidence that teachers can count on them in a time of need” (p. 30). Tschannen-Moran’s final facet, competence (again, shared with Bryk and Schneider), is described as, “the ability to perform a task as expected, according to appropriate standards” (p. 30). According to Tschannen-Moran, the four preceding facets are of little value if there is no trust in the skills required to perform either as a teacher or administrator.

As illustrated by Tschannen-Moran (2004) and Bryk and Schneider’s (2002) descriptions, there is some variation in the facets the various observers include within their conceptions of trust. Mishra (1996) emphasizes the importance of communication, while Daly and Chrispeels (2008) draw upon Tschannen-Moran, Bryk and Schneider, and Mishra to incorporate 8 facets in their construct: risk, communication, benevolence, reliability, competence, integrity, openness and respect. Chhuon et al. (2008) observe that while a number of scholars have defined trust as multifaceted, “few have examined those
individual facets and their separate effects” (p. 269). Similarly, Daly and Chrispeels (2008) also suggest that more attention should be paid to the various facets of trust.

**Benefits of trust.** Tschannen-Moran (2004) observes:

Trust has paradoxically been viewed as both glue and lubricant. As ‘glue’, trust binds organizational participants to one another. Without it, things fall apart. …As ‘lubricant’, trust greases the machinery of an organization. Trust lubricates communication and contributes to greater efficiency when people can have confidence in other people’s words and deeds. (pp. 15-16)

In reviewing the organizational behavior and management literature, Bryk and Schneider (2002) report that trust is especially important “for organizations that operate in turbulent external environments, that depend heavily on information sharing for success, and whose work processes demand effective decentralized decision making” (p. 33), implying that schools fall into this category. They suggest that trust “moderates the sense of uncertainty and vulnerability that individuals feel” (p. 33) and reduces the transaction costs associated with decision-making “because participants are more able to coalesce around a plan of action” (p. 33). In contexts where trust is strong, individuals understand and rarely fail to perform their role, creating an efficient system requiring less supervision. Bryk and Schneider claim that relational trust, “sustains an ethical imperative among organizational members to advance the best interests of children. Participants in schools with high relational trust enact an interrelated set of mutual obligations with one another” (p. 34).

Summarizing the research on trust in schools, Van Maele and Van Houtte (2009) report,

Interpersonal trust enhances a school’s social capital and therefore has a positive
influence on a school’s effectiveness. Thus, because a school’s social capital strengthens organizational effectiveness, and because trust is part of a school’s social capital, a connection can be established between trust relations in schools and schools’ effectiveness. (pp. 560-561)

Trust is a highly complex concept and while observers in the educational field typically consider trust as a group characteristic, it is experienced on an individual level by members of an organisation. Bryk and Schneider suggest that relational trust is “founded on both beliefs and observed behavior” (p. 22). When members observe behaviours that conform to the broad collective beliefs of the organization, trust grows; when the opposite is true, trust is diminished. Researchers frequently refer to high- or low- trust environments, highlighting a broad collective measure of relational trust, but within every context there is potential for individuals to experience varied levels of trust.

Research on trust. Research in the area of trust has typically utilized case study or survey methodology, often combining the two. Using these methodologies, Bryk and Schneider (2002) have shown that, “collective decision making with broad teacher buy-in occurs more readily in schools with strong relational trust” (p. 122) and when relational trust is strong, “reform initiatives are more likely to deeply engaged by school participants, and to diffuse broadly across the organization” (p. 122). Additionally, they suggest that relational trust “lubricates the necessary social exchanges among school professionals as they engage together, learning from each other in the trial and error of implementing new practices” (p. 123).

While research is limited, there appears to be some consensus that trust is related to positive outcomes in schools. Bryk and Schneider (2002) have linked measures of relational trust within school communities with measured improvements in school
academic productivity. Tschannen-Moran (2004) summarizes from her research that, “establishing a trusting environment hits schools in their bottom line – student achievement” (p. 135). In a recent large-scale quantitative study that draws upon the work of Tschannen-Moran (2004), Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) found that a higher level of trust in colleagues was correlated with higher levels of teacher engagement.

Empirical evidence directly linking trust with teacher leadership is limited, but interest in the relationship between trust and leadership appears to be growing. While not focusing specifically on informal teacher leadership, a qualitative study by Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy & Louis (2007) concluded that trust played a significant role in the success of distributed leadership initiatives, finding evidence of positive trust relationships leading to successful implementation of distributed leadership and negative trust relationships leading to unsuccessful outcomes. Smylie et al. cite Masuch’s (1985) conception of “virtuous and vicious cycles of mutual influence” (p. 499) to illustrate the interrelationship between trust and distributed leadership. Reinforcing the idea that distributed leadership can also influence trust levels, Leithwood et al. (2008), in a large-scale quantitative study, considered the effect of various models of leadership distribution on trust (and other variables), producing data that suggested ‘planful alignment’ (leadership distribution exercised in a coordinated way, including significant communication between leaders) was associated with the highest levels of trust in two areas: mutual trust among teachers and teacher trust in administrators.¹

¹ It should be noted that Leithwood et al’s study did not consider leadership distribution emerging informally, as is the focus of this investigation, and measured trust levels resulting from various leadership distribution patterns prescribed by school administration rather than considering trust levels that predict the leadership behaviours of teachers.

² Technical Leadership involves making changes that are in line with current belief and
Daly and Chrispeels (2008) employed survey methodology to examine a multifaceted model of trust and its relationship with technical and adaptive leadership\(^2\) – leadership styles that, when effectively balanced by leaders, have been associated with higher levels of student achievement. Their findings suggest that three of their facets: respect, risk, and competence had “the highest predictive relationship with both types of leadership” (p. 53) and correlated strongly on both internal (rating their own school site) and external (rating the district office) measures with the technical and adaptive leadership styles that they considered desirable. Benevolence also correlated strongly with both types of leadership. Daly and Chrispeels state:

The behaviours that reflect genuine listening and recognizing the important role each plays in a system (respect), the degree of confidence in being, and allowing others to be vulnerable (risk) and holding high expectations and using a level of skill in executing role responsibilities (competence) reflect the significant predictors of adaptive and technical leadership. (p. 51)

Facets that correlated with one style or leadership and not the other were integrity (correlated with adaptive but not technical leadership) and reliability (correlated with technical but not adaptive leadership).

Chhuon et al. (2008) also examined the contribution of, “the individual and combined effects of the facets of trust” (p. 269). They engaged in a longitudinal study spanning four years of an initiative to develop relationships between schools and district offices which utilized a case study design involving semi-structured interviews and surveys based on the 8 facets employed by Daly and Chrispeels (2008). Like Daly and Chrispeels,

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\(^2\) Technical Leadership involves making changes that are in line with current belief and value structures. Adaptive Leadership is associated with creating the conditions for individuals to confront existing values and norms.
Chhuon et al. found that, as relationships were developed, risk emerged as a significant factor. However, contrasting to Daly and Chrispeels, openness and communication were the other two facets showing significant improvement on survey responses and emerging strongly in interviews (p. 269).

Comparing the Chhuon et al. (2008) and Daly and Chrispeels studies, it is interesting to note that risk - conceptualized as “the confidence one has in a situation of vulnerability” (Chhuon et al, p. 253) - was the only overlapping facet; this highlights and affirms the central role that vulnerability holds in the majority of definitions presented for trust. The findings also add weight to the assertions of Chhuon et al. (2008) and Daly and Chrispeels that individual facets are worthy of attention, in addition to trust as a whole, and suggest that the situation may dictate which facets are of greatest importance. The Chhuon et al. study highlights important facets that emerge when building relationships between school and district, while Daly and Chrispeels identify facets that emerge as important predictors of particular leadership behaviours. In their discussion, Chhuon et al. observe that the facets that “are more salient in central office-school relations may differ from [those] identified by Bryk and Schneider (2002) at the school level”.

**Teachers’ careers.** Stimulated by the unanticipated findings from the data gathered in this study, this section briefly outlines research in the area of teachers’ careers in order to frame the expectations of the career stage in which teachers might be most inclined to exercise informal leadership\(^3\). Much of the recent research in this area is informed by the work of Huberman (1993), who sought to “understand more fully the full professional trajectory of teachers as well as the consequences of that trajectory” (p. 2). His work

\(^3\) It should be noted that, because the findings relating to teachers’ careers were not anticipated, literature in this area was not reviewed prior to data collection. The literature is discussed further in relation to the findings (in chapter 6).
reviewing the empirical literature in the field revealed trends from which he defined phases in the lives of teachers. As shown in Figure 1, these phases progress from an initial ‘survival and discovery’ phase at the start of teachers’ careers, through a ‘stabilisation’ phase (after four to six years) and then diverge into a number of possibilities at subsequent stages of teachers’ careers. The first level of divergence sees teachers move from the stabilization phase to either a period of ‘experimentation/activism’ or ‘reassessment/self-doubt’. In the former, “consolidation of an instructional repertoire leads naturally to increase one’s impact” and “attempts to change the more surreal flaws of the school” (p. 34). Alternatively, or after a period of experimentation/activism, reassessment or self-doubt occur, “with the realization that other careers will have to be ruled out if one does not act quickly” (p. 35).

According to Huberman’s model, teachers enter, after 19 years, phases of ‘serenity/relational distance’ or ‘conservatism’. The former is described as “a phase of more ‘mechanical’ but also, more ‘relaxed’, ‘self-accepting’ activity in class. Instead of, or following, serenity, conservatism is characterised by a tendency to complain and a greater concern “with holding on to what one has than with getting what one wants” (p. 36). These phases are followed, after 31 years of teaching, by ‘disengagement’, “a trend toward increasing withdrawal and ‘internalisation’ towards the end of the professional career” (p. 36).

While Huberman’s descriptions are primarily framed in terms of traditional teaching roles (rather than any leadership activity beyond the classroom), his model suggests that informal teacher leadership behaviour would likely emerge in the ‘experimentation/activism’ phase, seven to eighteen years into teachers’ careers. The expectation that leadership behaviours would be exhibited here is underlined by
Huberman’s assertion that, “This new-found activism can also bring on new responsibilities (as co-ordinator of a project, as delegate), which can in turn open avenues of career ‘promotion’ (p. 34).

Figure 1. Successive themes of the teacher career cycle: schematic model (Huberman, 1989, p. 37).
Day (2012), acknowledging the influence of Huberman, and using data from 100 schools in the United Kingdom, identifies six consecutive professional life phases that show a similar pattern to Huberman (demonstrating that his model still has relevance after 20 years): the challenges of the first few years of teaching, followed by consolidation of professional skills, then progressing into a mid-career reassessment, culminating in a struggle with declining motivation. A likely career stage for the emergence of informal leadership is that which he describes as a ‘managing changes in role and identity’ phase (occurring between eight and fifteen years of teaching - closely aligned with Huberman’s ‘experimentation/activism’ stage) where, according to Day and Qu (2010), “the majority of teachers managed to remain highly committed and motivated” (p. 86). Similarly, Sikes’s (1985) work, which predates that of Huberman (but maps teachers’ careers in terms of age rather than years of experience), identifies a similar ‘prime’ stage of teachers’ careers. She states, “Throughout the thirties the conjunction of experience and relatively high level of physical and intellectual ability mean that in terms of energy, involvement, ambition and self confidence many teachers are at their peak” (pp. 47-48). Taken together, the literature broadly suggests that teachers would be most likely to exercise informal leadership in the period between years seven and eighteen in their careers.

Summary of literature review. Informal teacher leadership is defined as leadership enacted by teachers who do not have a formal designation as leaders. While it is frequently referenced in discussions regarding the broader concept of teacher leadership (which includes teachers with formal leadership roles), is closely related to the currently popular term ‘distributed leadership’, and with the professional learning communities literature, it

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4 Assuming an entry into the teaching profession at an age in the early twenties, a teachers’ thirties would correspond broadly with the eight to fifteen years-of-experience stage.
is rarely discussed or researched in isolation. The idea of teachers enacting leadership is aligned with the broad calls for greater teacher professionalism, collegiality and the development of organizational capacity in schools. The literature addressing teachers’ careers suggests that the most likely stage for the emergence of informal leaders would be in a period between seven and eighteen years of teaching.

A number of authors highlight trust as an important, but under-researched, concept in the field of educational leadership. All of these observers consider trust to be a multi-faceted concept, and a number see value in considering the impact of particular facets in relation to other variables. This study seeks to address the role of trust, and its component facets, in creating conditions that support informal teacher leadership.

**Conceptual Framework**

While this investigation focuses on the contribution of trust to teachers’ inclination to exercise informal teacher leadership, it is assumed that other factors are also at play. As discussed in the literature review, the most frequently cited factor supporting the development of informal teacher leadership is school culture, specifically a culture of collaboration (Katzenmayer and Moller, 2009; Harris and Muijs, 2004). Closely related to this is the existence of values and expectations that “accept and expect teachers to participate in leadership” (Lieberman, 1992, p. 160). Additionally, various factors, such as supportive structures (notably common planning time) (Murphy, 2007), leadership-specific training (Leithwood et al., 1999), the availability of resources (especially time) (Murphy, 2007), and incentives and recognition (Kahrs, 1996) have all been identified in the literature. It is also reasonable to assume that teachers’ individual passion and knowledge in an area may be a significant factor motivating them to exercise informal leadership (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009). With the influence of multiple other factors and their
complex interrelationships are acknowledged, the purpose of this investigation is to examine the role of trust in contributing to teachers’ inclination to initiate and sustain informal teacher leadership in their schools. Figure 2 illustrates how trust (highlighted in the framework) is located among a number of identified factors that influence informal teacher leadership.

Leadership is defined as behaviour that influences others towards improved educational practice. Informal teacher leadership is defined as leadership initiated by teachers, beyond the normal professional expectations, without a formal leadership designation. While many definitions of teacher leadership would include acts of ‘stepping-up’ to fill roles identified by school administrators (e.g. coaching a basketball team or supervising during recess), this study focuses on those acts of leadership that involve initiative on the part of teachers to change school practices rather than assuming roles identified by others.

Trust is considered, as is typical in the educational literature, to be a characteristic of an organization that is subject to variation among individuals within that group. This ‘relational trust’ (Bryk and Schneider, 2002) is based upon interdependence of the parties involved and, while only perceptions of informal leaders’ trust in others (teachers and administrators) is directly addressed, a degree of reciprocity of trust is assumed.

Trust is considered both as a single broad concept and as 5 sub-concepts, or facets, as identified by Tschannen-Moran (2004): benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence. Teacher trust in teaching colleagues is considered independently of teacher trust in administration, and each is considered in relation to the same 5 facets. The importance of these facets of trust is one of the foci of this investigation. The work of Chhuon et al. (2008) and Chrispeels and Daly (2008) illuminates the issue to some degree
and enables some prediction of trust facets that might be salient in the context of informal teacher leadership. As Tschannen-Moran observes, “One is vulnerable in different ways to an intimate friend, a boss, an investment broker, or a surgeon” (p. 33); this study seeks to identify which facets are important for teachers to feel inclined to exercise informal teacher leadership. According to the limited research into the influence of individual trust facets, it appears likely that different facets will emerge more strongly in the perceptions of informal teacher leaders with regard to their administrators and their fellow teachers (Chhuon et al., 2008).

The literature suggests that trust is necessary for individuals to place themselves in a position of vulnerability. Teachers choosing to exercise informal teacher leadership place themselves in a position of vulnerability with both their peers and their school administration and it is, therefore, expected that trust or its various facets will emerge strongly in interviews with informal teacher leaders.

The researcher approached the data collection and analysis with a mind open to the emergence of any facets that have been highlighted in the literature. However, previous research in the area of leadership (but not specifically teacher leadership) suggests that openness, benevolence and competence would feature strongly in informal leaders’ perceptions of both administrators and their teaching colleagues (Daly and Chrispeels, 2008).
Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

Supportive School Culture
- Collaborative Culture
- Values and Expectations
  - Trust in Teaching
    - Colleagues
  - Benevolence
  - Honesty
  - Openness
  - Reliability
  - Competence

Supportive School Structures
- Available resources (including time)
- Collaborative Planning
- Time
- Incentives and Rewards
- Professional Development

Informal Teacher Leadership

Individual Teacher Factors
- Passion
- Knowledge
- Training
Chapter Two

Methodology

The purpose of this study is primarily to investigate the perceptions of informal teacher leaders regarding the influence of trust relationships on their inclination to initiate and sustain informal teacher leadership in their schools. In addition to this primary aim, the study sought to shed light on the practice of informal teacher leadership in schools.

Research Design and Methodology

The study employed surveys, administered to the entire elementary faculties at three elite independent schools, that sought quantitative data relating to the collaborative cultures in these schools and asked teachers to nominate colleagues who fit the description of informal teacher leaders. Interviews were conducted with nine teachers (three from each school) who had gathered multiple nominations. These interviews were designed to illuminate the informal leadership role that these teachers performed in their schools and identify factors that contributed to their inclination to do so, specifically targeting trust and its component facets.

Population and sample. The population from which the sample was taken is elementary level teachers at elite independent schools in an urban/suburban setting in Ontario. Elite independent schools are a subset of private schools “characterized by autonomy and wealth, progressive curriculum and pedagogy, unlimited resources, and extreme selectivity” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009, p. 1118)\(^5\). Two of the schools are

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\(^5\) The schools involved in the study are all members of the Canadian Association of Independent Schools (CAIS), an organization that accredits its member schools according to a range of criteria including the role of their Board of Governors, ethical practice by school leadership and participation in joint projects with other member schools (CAIS, 2012).
single-sex schools (one for girls and one for boys) and the third is co-educational. These schools serve student populations ranging from kindergarten to grade 12. The elementary divisions within these schools have student populations of 300-330 students. By selecting elite independent schools, the investigation targets environments that are favorable for the existence of informal teacher leadership and which, therefore, provide settings where the relationship between teacher leadership and trust can be fruitfully investigated. Elite independent schools can be considered a rich context for informal teacher leadership due to their autonomy, resulting in a less bureaucratized administration (Powell, 1990), direct selection of teaching staff by the school principal, and increased involvement of teachers in decision-making (Chubb and Moe, 1985 – cited in Powell, 1990). Additionally, Goddard, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) report that trust is higher in schools with high socioeconomic status (they suggest this is due to the negative influence of poverty on social relationships). Additionally, my professional work is based in an elite independent school, so personal relevance and convenience also affected my choice of population.

From teachers in the three schools, a purposeful sample of nine participants was taken – three from each school. These teachers were identified by their peers as individuals who fit the description of informal teacher leaders provided by the researcher. Teaching faculty at the schools completed a brief survey (see Appendix B) in which they identified these colleagues. The three most frequently nominated (and consenting) teachers from each school were selected for interview.

**Data collection.** Data collection comprised two phases. The first phase was a short survey administered to the elementary teaching faculty at each selected school. Teachers were invited to complete the survey which asked them to nominate peers who they, based on a definition provided by the researcher, considered to be informal teacher leaders (see
Appendix B). The survey also generated data regarding the collaborative culture in the school, using items from Leithwood, Aitken and Janzi’s (2006) school survey; these data provided valuable background information on the conditions in the schools from which the participants were drawn.

The second phase of data collection comprised interviews with the nine nominated teachers (as described above). Interviews were recorded with an audio device and transcribed for analysis. A standardized open-ended interview approach was employed to give consistency between interviews and to give a level of predictability to the proceedings due to the anticipated time constraints of interviewing working teachers (Patton, 1980). This approach involves the use of identical questions for each participant and is appropriate, “in order to reduce the possibility of bias that comes from having different interviews for different people, including the problem of obtaining more comprehensive data from certain persons while getting less systematic information from others” (p. 98).

The interview (see Appendix C) began with a number of demographic questions before addressing the issue of informal teacher leadership. In order to give context to the discussion, initial questions were designed to generate a compendium of informal teacher leadership behaviours in which the participants engaged. The remaining questions were designed to investigate the reasons why the participants felt inclined to exercise leadership in their schools and the nature of their administrators’ and teaching colleagues’ responses to their leadership actions. Initially, these questions did not make reference to trust or its component facets (benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence) in order to discern if these concepts emerge without provocation; subsequent items directly addressed trust and trust facets. This approach was employed for a number of reasons: first, because trust is a broad term, a common understanding between the interviewer and the various
participants could not be assumed; second, the intention was to encourage the emergence of trust facets, as identified in the literature, from the responses rather than the broader term; third, in order to see if trust (or its constituent parts) emerged strongly in the responses without leading respondents to it, thus reinforcing the position of the researcher (i.e. that trust is an important factor promoting informal teacher leadership). Where respondents used the term ‘trust’, the interviewer would probe them for clarification as to their understanding of the word in order to establish whether particular facets of trust were being referred to. Similarly, the later questions directly addressing trust used probes to elicit reference to specific facets.

Data analysis.

Quantitative data. The teacher survey generated ordinal data from 5-point Likert-type scales. The survey questions addressed school culture and community and were designed by Leithwood et al. (2006), who report a high reliability rating (.814) for these items (p. 110). In line with Leithwood et al.’s. recommendations for analysis of data from their items, the ordinal data were coded as follows: ‘disagree strongly’ was assigned ‘-2’, ‘disagree ’ was assigned ‘-1’, ‘not applicable/don’t know’ was assigned ‘0’, ‘agree’ was assigned ‘1’ and ‘agree strongly’ was assigned ‘2’. SPSS software was used to calculate means and standard deviations for each of the school culture and community items.

Due to positive encouragement from teachers by their respective school administrations, response rates for the three schools were impressive. At Highsted School, 17 out of 30 elementary teachers completed the survey questionnaire, while 25 out of 33 and 26 out of 34 teachers responded at Hayesbrook and Borden School respectively (these response rates represent percentages in a range between 56.7% and 76.5%).
Qualitative data. Bernard and Ryan (2010) state, “research is never purely inductive or purely deductive, but for most problems a mostly inductive or mostly deductive approach is called for” (p. 165). This study fell into the ‘mostly deductive’ category, with coding of qualitative data based upon the facets of trust identified by Tschannen-Moran (2004) (benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability and competence), but there was only limited expectation as to which of the facets, if any, would emerge as significant. There was also be an inductive element to the analysis, developing hypotheses for how the emergence of informal teacher leaders is influenced by the presence of factors, including trust and its facets, emerging from the data. To analyse trust data and data that provided background to the research questions (teachers’ perceptions on why they were nominated as informal leaders and on their motivation for being leaders), observations were added, and quotes were copied and pasted, into tables in order to sort them and identify any patterns in the data – summarised versions of these tables appear in the findings chapters. Patterns that emerged as the interview transcripts were analysed generated inductive assertions that were modified as the analysis progressed.

For the purposes of coding the interview responses in relation to the research questions, Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) conceptualization of her five facets of trust framed the analysis. She suggests that benevolent behavior includes actions of “caring, extending good will, having positive interactions, supporting teachers, expressing appreciation, being fair, guarding confidential information”; honesty is described as “having integrity, telling the truth, keeping promises, honoring agreements, having authenticity, accepting responsibility, avoiding manipulation, being real, being true to oneself”; openness involves “engaging in open communication, sharing important information, delegating, sharing decision making, sharing power”; reliability is demonstrated by “having consistency, being
dependable, demonstrating commitment, having dedication, being diligent”; competence is manifested in “setting an example, engaging in problem solving, fostering conflict resolution (rather than avoidance), working hard, pressing for results, setting standards, buffering teachers, handling difficult situations, being flexible” (p. 34).

**Ethical considerations.** Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Toronto (see Appendix D). Principals of the three schools were contacted and subsequently agreed to introduce the study to faculty (see Appendix E). The principals granted permission for the researcher to interview all consenting teachers. All teachers were informed that completion of the survey and participation in interviews were voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time (see Appendices A and F). All participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

**Limitations of the study.** The nature of qualitative research is such that the generalisability of the findings is limited. However, the study targets elite independent school environments that share similar characteristics and it would be reasonable to assume that the findings could have relevance to other similar schools and, potentially, beyond. There are inevitable limitations in the use of surveys and interviews; one can never be certain that participants are being completely honest with their responses, although the non-sensitive nature of the topic should limit any motivation to be untruthful. The interview protocol was piloted prior to the data collection to identify obvious flaws. Additionally, there is a limitation in utilizing peer nomination of informal teacher leaders. As described previously, Leithwood et al. (2009) highlight the tendency of organizational members to ascribe leadership based on traits rather than actions; this could impact both the nomination of teacher leaders in this study and the nominated teachers’ perceptions of why they were nominated.
When analysing the data, there are dangers in attributing degrees of emphasis to points made by respondents during interviews; a point illustrated with a lengthy narrative may appear more important than one succinctly stated, when the opposite might be the case. There are also grey areas around language. For example, while there is broad consensus on the definition of trust, the lack of clear boundaries between the facets chosen by various observers (Hoy and Tschannen-Moran, 1998; Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Daly and Chrispeels, 2004) illustrates the subjective nature their selection and underlines the limitation of variable analysis (Blumer, 1969) in investigating issues as complex as leadership and trust.
Chapter Three

Presentation of Findings: Informal Teacher Leaders

This chapter provides context for the subsequent description of data that relates directly to the research questions. The quantitative data generated by the electronic survey questionnaires administered at the three schools is presented, including details of the teacher nomination process, before the interview data relating to the leadership activities of the nominated teachers are described and discussed.

Quantitative Data

This section describes the quantitative data that were generated by the electronic surveys administered to elementary teachers in the participating schools. The surveys were designed to generate a pool of informal teacher leaders (to be interviewed in the second stage of data collection) and to establish the extent to which the schools in the study are collaborative environments.

The initial questions generated data regarding teachers’ position in their schools and their willingness to be interviewed before asking them to nominate colleagues whom they considered to be informal teacher leaders. From the resultant list of nominated teachers, nine informal teachers were selected and interviewed based upon their frequency of nomination (and their willingness to be interviewed).

The ‘collaborative activity’ items address the extent to which teachers share resources, co-ordinate curriculum and co-operate in their schools. Table 1 lists the collaborative activity items on the survey.

---

6 The schools were selected with an expectation that they would have collaborative conditions that would provide a rich source of informal leaders to interview in the second stage of data collection.
Table 1

*List of items in the collaborative activity survey (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 139)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item no.</th>
<th>Item description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Within the current school year, I have frequently received useful suggestions for curriculum materials from colleagues in my department/division.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Within the current school year, I have frequently received useful suggestions for teaching techniques and/or student activities from colleagues in my department/division.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>In our school, there is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members on teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my teaching with other teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I meet regularly with colleagues to plan lessons, develop curriculum, evaluate programmes, or engage in other collaborative work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 describes the descriptive statistics for collaborative activity items at Hayesbrook School. The means fall in a narrow range (0.58 to 1.32), as do the standard deviations (0.72 to 1.10), indicating strong positive responses to the items and suggesting that the school is a collaborative environment.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for Collaborative activity - Hayesbrook School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture and Community Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.32</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 describes the descriptive statistics for collaborative activity items at Highsted School. The means fall in a narrow range (1.07 to 1.69), as do the standard deviations (0.72 to 1.69), indicating strong positive responses to the items and suggesting that the school is a collaborative environment.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Collaborative activity - Highsted School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture and Community Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
deviations (0.48 to 0.73), indicating very strong positive responses to the items and suggesting that Highsted School is an extremely collaborative environment.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Collaborative activity - Highsted School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture and Community Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.53</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for Collaborative activity – Borden School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture and Community Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Item 1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item 5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 describes the descriptive statistics for collaborative activity items at Borden School. The means fall in a narrow range (0.70 to 1.40), as do the standard deviations (0.76 to 1.14), indicating strong positive responses to the items and suggesting that Borden School is a collaborative environment.

In summary, the quantitative data yielded positive ratings for all of the collaborative activity items in all three schools, supporting the assumption that these chosen schools are collaborative environments in which to teach and ones that would likely yield suitable informal teacher leaders to interview.
Qualitative Data

Nine informal teacher leaders were interviewed for this study. These teachers were identified by their peers, based upon the following definition provided by the researcher:

Informal teacher leaders are teachers who exercise leadership without possessing a formal leadership designation; on their own initiative (rather than in response to a request from the administration), they influence others to improve their professional practice.

Table 5

Summary of informal teacher leader nominations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of teachers receiving at least one nomination</th>
<th>Number of teachers receiving three or more nominations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borden School</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highsted School</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayesbrook School</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 shows a summary of the teacher leader nominations and demonstrates the widespread practice of informal teacher leadership in the participating schools, with 12 to 23 teachers at each school receiving at least one nomination and five to seven teachers at each school receiving at least three nominations from their peers. With the exception of some frequently nominated teachers who did not want to be interviewed (one or two at each school and including the most nominated teacher at one of the schools), all of the participants selected were those most frequently nominated by colleagues in their schools. While it is acknowledged that many factors could have contributed to the nomination, or non-nomination, of teachers (e.g. their popularity, the
number of colleagues they work directly with, or the profile of their particular position within the school), multiple nominations by peers was considered evidence of them being recognised as informal teacher leaders. With this in mind, the individuals selected for interview are not considered to be the foremost informal teacher leaders in their schools, but are presented as credible examples of informal teacher leaders. Each of the interviewed informal teacher leaders received at least three nominations, with some receiving as many as eight.

Table 6

*Summary of interviewed teachers’ experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Total years of teaching experience</th>
<th>Years at current school</th>
<th>Experience category ascribed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Less-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>More-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Less-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Less-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>More-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>More-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Less-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Less-experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>More-experienced</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 shows basic data for the nine informal teacher leaders interviewed. These simple data show that all of the interviewed teachers (n=9) had been working in their current school for at least three years preceding the interviews. They also identify two distinct groupings of educators in relation to the length of their teaching careers: those with 14 or more years of teaching experience and those with four to six years of experience. Five of the interviewees had four to six years in the classroom and each had been teaching at their current school for at least the last three years. The remaining four interviewees had between 14 and 27 years of experience and had spent the majority of
their careers at their current schools, including at least 11 years preceding the interviews. Each of the participating schools were represented by teachers from each of the two years-of-experience categories: the sample of teachers from Hayesbrook School and Borden School comprised two ‘less-experienced’ teachers (four to six years) and one educator in the 14-27 year range; the Highsted School sample was composed of one teacher from the four to six year range and two ‘more-experienced’ teachers.

**Perceived reasons for nomination.** The survey completed by the teaching staff at the three schools did not seek reasons for teachers nominating their peers, but interviews with the nominated informal teacher leaders yielded data revealing why they believed they were nominated and highlighted differences between the profiles of the more- and less-experienced informal teacher leaders. For this reason, perceptions of the teachers in these two categories are described in separate sections.

**Less-experienced informal teacher leaders.** Table 7a summarises the perceptions of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders as to why they were nominated by their peers. The perceptions fall into two categories: actions and characteristics. The less-experienced teachers attribute their nomination as informal teacher leaders to a variety of tangible actions that they engage in within their schools and to a number of personal characteristics that they feel led to their identification as informal leaders. With regard to actions, the less-experienced interviewees are heavily involved in extra-curricular activities, they frequently ‘step-up’ to volunteer for, or are asked to perform, roles such as being an advisor on the school council, sitting on committees or being part of teams developing school policy or curricula. While such tasks fall outside the stated definition of informal teacher leadership, the fact that these teachers were nominated indicates that they are perceived to be informal leaders by their peers.
Table 7a

*Perceived reasons for nomination: less-experienced informal teacher leaders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Experience (years)</th>
<th>Perceived reasons for nomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Elizabeth| 6                  | Coaches more teams than is the expectation (started an athletic team in her first year at the school)  
Conducts interviews for a scholarship award (volunteered four years ago and has continued since)  
Organises student assistants for parent/teacher interviews. |
| Nigel    | 5                  | Involved with extra-curricular activities (e.g. coaching, drama, music) beyond school expectation  
Shares teaching resources with colleagues                                                                 |
| Alison   | 6                  | Coaches more team than is school expectation  
Involved in developing the school’s house system.  
Involved in school-wide curriculum/teaching initiative |
| Hannah   | 5                  | Shares ideas and resources with colleagues  
Heavily involved in extra-curricular activities  
Co-ordinates the character education programme and has developed it significantly  
Involved in a professional support/development group (for teachers) |
| William  | 4                  | Heavily involved in a school academic committee  
Advisor for student council  
Involved in a professional support/development group (for teachers) |
|          |                    | Characteristics                                                                                  |
|          |                    | Feels that people are comfortable approaching him – is an informal mentor to new teachers                                |
|          |                    | Has always been a leader (cites experiences at summer camps)  
Collegial/non-competitive attitude  
Positive attitude |
|          |                    | Collegial/non-competitive attitude  
Positive attitude |
A section of the interview with William, a teacher with four years experience, provides an example of these teachers’ perceptions of why they were nominated:

**Interviewer:** What kinds of things do you do that might have led [your colleagues] to have describe you as an informal teacher leader?

**William:** I think it is probably through some work I’ve done with [a school] committee – [that] would be my first guess. And with working on the school’s ideas and best practices about how we assess learning at the school.

**Interviewer:** And what does that work look like?

**William:** It involves a lot of committee work, so a lot of interaction with other teachers sitting down in meetings and trying to sift through things like [an Ontario Ministry of Education document] that came out at the beginning of this academic year and what does it mean and how do we want it to look in our school? And also developing some in-house PD stuff to do and hopefully helping people move towards better practices in their everyday teaching.

**Interviewer:** How did you come to be involved in that?

**William:** I was asked to do that job, to chair that committee, and then I agreed to do it. I feel like it’s grown over time from where it started, so... it feels like it’s grown into more than I originally anticipated it to be, and that might have been out of my own naïve approach.

While he goes on to list a number of other possible reasons why he was identified as an informal leader by his peers, William perceives that his performance in the formal role on that committee is the most likely reason for his nomination as an informal teacher leader - he states: “I would say that [committee] stuff is the most prominent
thing that I have done”, and his comments suggest that he has gone beyond what would normally be expected of teachers on committees.

William’s attribution of his nomination to his performance in a formal role (in his case, leading a committee) is a recurring theme in the responses of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders. Hannah attributes nomination to her efforts as co-ordinator of a character education programme. She suggests that the enthusiasm and passion she brings to that role to is a reason why she was identified by her peers as an informal leader:

I co-ordinate the [character education programme] here, which is something I believe in strongly, so I think …whether you are given an assigned role or if you informally have something that you are excited and enthused about, I think that motivates you, so I’m interested in helping people with their character ed. programmes beyond what is expected of me. …What is required of that [role] is very little. I choose to run with it because I also love it and I think its important and I think that in the grand scheme of everything we juggle as teachers, people’s character ed. lessons probably fall low on the priority list. And I think, as opposed to judging people for that, if you can give them resources and help them out and check-in on them in a positive way.

Both William and Hannah suggest that they were identified as informal leaders as a result of their work in formally assigned roles where they have gone beyond the general expectations of the school. Another way in which the less-experienced teachers exceed expectations is in their contributions to voluntary roles in their schools. One common area in which they contribute is to the extra-curricular activities in their schools. All of the interviewed teachers in this category make reference to their
contribution to this realm of school life and three of them specifically cite that their involvement surpasses that of most of their colleagues. Nigel coaches a school representative team in each of the three terms during the year as well as contributing to the drama and music programmes. Similarly, Elizabeth and Alison coach during all three terms. While there is an expectation to contribute to the extra-curricular programmes in these schools (e.g. teachers are typically required to coach a sports team for one or two terms), these teachers exceed the requirements by volunteering for additional responsibilities.

Further demonstrating her commitment to the extra-curricular programme at Borden, Elizabeth describes how she started an athletic team at the school:

My first year here, there wasn’t a team [in that sport]. And I was [an athlete] in high school, but I wasn’t [an athlete] at university, I just loved [the sport]. So I approached the Head of Athletics about starting a team. …we don’t even have [the necessary facilities]! I tried to figure out where we could practice and the logistics and came to him with this plan and I think that was the starting point when I knew that if I wanted things done I just had to do it and step up to the plate.

Elizabeth also attributes her nomination to a number of other voluntary roles, such as interviewing students for a scholarship award at the school, and her organisation of student ‘secretaries’ for parent-teacher interviews (students who greet parents and help to keep interviews on schedule) - she stepped-up for this role when the senior teacher responsible became ill. William and Hannah suggest that their involvement in professional support groups may also have contributed to their nomination as informal
leaders; they were involved in the creation of these groups (that help teachers critically reflect on their practice) following some leadership training they received.

In addition to her contribution to school athletics, Alison lists her role with students in the school’s house system, her work on the social committee as well as her involvement in the collaborative teaching initiative. Alison’s reference to her contribution in a curricular area of the school is also a common theme. As described previously, Hannah and William attribute their nomination, at least partly, to their work with specific curriculum development. Nigel describes a more general supporting role with his colleagues:

I’ve been given the opportunity to focus on certain aspects of curriculum and I’ve been empowered by our administration, which has really pushed me to become a better teacher. In doing so, I’ve been helping other teachers, so in your survey when those questions were [asking], “Do you share resources?” That’s what I try to do.

In addition to the specific actions that these teachers perceive influenced their nomination, some of them also cite personal characteristics that may have contributed to their peers identifying them as informal teacher leaders. Alison and Hannah attribute their nomination, in part, to a ‘non-competitive’ approach, implying that, despite the broadly collaborative environments in their schools, collegiality is not always pervasive:

I think partly my philosophy of teaching is supportive and collegial and non-competitive. I think some people are very keen to have their best practice, their programme, above and beyond where other people are and I think part of the beauty of our profession is sharing ideas and checking in on each other and if you
have something you think someone else would like, taking is down the hall. (Hannah)

Sometimes you can have power struggles, or teachers can find it challenging to work with their partner, but I really make an effort to not have that be a competitive process, but [my attitude is:] “I’m photocopying 20 of these, I going to photocopy 20 for you”. I’m not trying to be better than you. We are teaching together. (Alison)

Hannah and Alison perceive that their nomination is partly due to elements of their personality; to their collegial, or ‘non-competitive’ approach. Similarly drawing attention to personal attributes, Nigel suggests that his identification as an informal leader is partly because of his trustworthiness and his skills in communication: “I think people feel comfortable approaching me, talking to me about issues they have, questions they have”. The perception that these leaders are considered trustworthy is a common one, underlining the mutual element in trust relationships – a recurring theme in the responses of the informal teacher leaders.

A number of the less-experienced teachers suggest that a belief in ‘leading by example’ has led to their nomination as an informal teacher leader. Elizabeth states:

I was raised with idea of leading by example, and showing people how to do it instead of telling or asking and I think I’m like that in the classroom and outside of the classroom. I don’t know how that affects other people. Hopefully they jump on board and give that 110% too. Hopefully it’s contagious.

Showing similarities with Elizabeth’s comments, Alison states:
It comes back to that positive attitude and it’s contagious; it’s like everyone else is doing it [being a leader] and it’s fun and they’re meeting and they’re proud of the outcome. It creates an environment where other people want to hop on board.

Nigel emphasises the importance of role models, both in the perception of his own influence with others and with the influence his colleagues have had with him is captured in this reference to his involvement in extra-curricular activities:

In more recent years, we’ve been told by our principal, “You have to [coach a minimum number of teams during the year]”. …Some people think that it should be two [teams] for the year, or one minimum. For me, I just do it. …I’ve just been going with that [attitude:] “You do what you can”. I’ve learned that from the older staff members.

The less-experienced teachers’ perceptions regarding the reasons for their nomination are characterised by references to roles they either volunteer for, or are asked to perform. These teachers perceive that their nomination as informal leaders can be attributed to their tendency to surpass the expectations made of teachers in their schools; they do more extra-curricular activities than their colleagues, they excel in formal roles they are given, and they step-up when help is needed. Reinforcing this idea of surpassing expectations is the common reference to a belief in leading by example - something they appear to do regularly.

As described earlier, the perceptions of these teachers around the leadership actions that have led to their nomination do not necessarily align with the stated definition of informal leadership. The behaviours that they describe are associated more with the conceptions of distributed leadership (for leadership roles assigned to them)
and organisational citizenship behaviour (for volunteer roles). These distinctions will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

**More-experienced informal teacher leaders.** Table 7b shows the attributions of the more-experienced informal teacher leaders. As with the attributions of the less-experienced teacher leaders, they can be divided into the ‘actions’ and ‘characteristics’ categories. However, there is a striking difference between the more-experienced and less-experienced teacher leaders in the kinds of actions to which they attribute their nomination. Where the less-experienced informal leaders emphasise specific roles that they have volunteered for (or have been asked to perform), two different sets of behaviours emerge particularly strongly with the more-experienced teachers: first, they all make reference to the regular interaction they have with colleagues, often framed as advice-giving; second, they all give examples of features of school practice that they have initiated or helped to initiate. The actions described by these teachers fall more closely in line with the stated definition of informal leadership.

Norman, a teacher with 14 years experience, initially attributes his nomination to the advice he gives to colleagues: “People come to me for advice, people come to me for feedback on how they are doing. I would argue that’s one of my informal leadership roles, or why people might have recognised me”. Nadia, a veteran of 27 years, notes, “People tend to come down and ask me about how I go about my projects and that kind of thing”. Simon, with 21 years of experience, paints a picture of frequent interaction with his colleagues, observing that he takes a “wide stride through the day” – his way of illustrating that he interacts frequently with his colleagues. He states, “It feels like anybody I walk past, we’re working on something together. I think there’s a lot of stuff that happens in those ten-second contacts as I just check-in with somebody”.

Table 7b.

*Perceived reasons for nomination: more experienced informal teacher leaders*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Experience (years)</th>
<th>Perceived reasons for nomination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norman</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Colleagues come to him for advice and feedback on their teaching. Has brought curricular ideas that have been embraced in the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Leads curriculum development groups. Makes presentations at schools and conferences. Was an early advocate of a collaborative teaching initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Leads curriculum development groups. Actively helps and shares resources with colleagues. Colleagues seek her advice on teaching. Was an early advocate of a collaborative teaching initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Heavily involved in developing the Math programme. Interacts regularly with colleagues. Established use of video in assemblies.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nadia describes how she keeps abreast of professional development opportunities and is active in encouraging colleagues to take advantage of these:

I’m very aware of what conferences are going on, say in Mathematics, I’m in [the local mathematics association], so I bring people’s attention to what PD is going on and If I know of a young teacher who is really struggling, I’ll say, “You know what, this PD is going to be about this and why don’t you come with me?”

All of the nominated informal teacher leaders with more that 14 years of experience make reference to teaching initiatives that they have had a large part in
developing. Andrea and Nadia make reference to their school’s inquiry-based programme and a collaborative teaching initiative, both of which they have helped develop in their schools in recent years.

Nadia explains,

We began to explore [a new teaching philosophy] about 10-11 years ago now and so I was one of the first people to start doing that and also the time I was in kindergarten - and it really was a kindergarten programme - and I then went to grade 1; I took it up there and because it wasn’t specifically designed for [different] grades, it needed a lot of tweaking, so now we’re doing more inquiry in the grades, people tend to come down and ask me about how I go about my projects and that kind of thing. And I’ve always shared my projects. We are the kind of school that we put together presentations, we have a lot of visiting groups that come, so I will present my projects [and] the work that goes on in the classroom to these visiting groups.

Andrea, describes an extension of her inquiry-based work in the form of a discussion group, developed in conjunction with her principal:

I did an inquiry group, where people voluntarily met so that we would talk about inquiry. So I would either bring an article or we would talk about it or we would talk about the image of the child … or the image of the teacher, or conversations around that. So that was something that I kind of led and ran.

Norman highlights bringing new initiatives to his school, after returning from a year-long exchange overseas:

I came back with some new [teaching and assessment ideas], tried to introduce [them] to some of my colleagues and some of them have jumped on board and
some of us have developed a [collaborative group] to develop and teach
[interdisciplinary courses], so that’s one aspect in terms of our curriculum design
that people might be looking towards that has been successful and has been
beneficial to the students.

Simon provides an example of a non-curricular initiative that has changed an
aspect of school life:

There were years when I made films from different events and clipped them
together and that became kind of a touchstone at various times of the year. If we
had a concert, a week later or so we would see the film. That’s something that I
don’t do anymore but it has sort of been absorbed in different departments or
different areas. And it’s impossible to say that was entirely my own doing, but it
felt like… it wasn’t going on before I was doing it.

In addition to his role as a teacher, Simon holds formal positions as co-ordinator
in a number of areas. Like some of his less-experienced counterparts (both in his and in
other schools), he attributes his nomination as an informal leader to some of the work he
has done in these roles:

We’re a homeroom-based school, so [subject programme] team is 17 teachers, so
that would have been widely participated in. We’ve just finished a very intense
year of weekly morning meetings where we were working through a new
curriculum package and a set of essential skills. And the environmental
programme [which I lead] is also meant to touch everybody at school. And so [I
attribute my nomination to] things that I have asked people to try, formally and
informally, PD we’ve done, meetings we hold and then informally with the boys
doing some activism things, making presentations.
As was the case with many of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders, Simon’s attribution for his nomination conflicts somewhat with the stated definition of informal teacher leadership. However, he offers a possible explanation in describing the way he seeks to perform these roles; his collegial approach may affect his peers’ perceptions of the leadership he performs within his formal role:

I think I’ve tried to understand people where they are and not just [make] blanket requests. …I’ve tried to understand where people are and not just forge ahead with paperwork requirements …just trying not to waste anybody’s time, choosing my words and my places carefully. And I hope I’ve been able to have a decent presence, leading by example, to be active to be here to be present and to, whether it’s committees or meeting or with small teams of the boys, to not just say something good but to take a step.

Like a number of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders, Simon perceives that his personal characteristics may have affects his peers’ inclination to recognise him as an informal leader. Similarly, Andrea suggests that her tendency to offer critical analysis that might explain her nomination as an informal leader:

I’m the person in the meetings who always tries to give the other side to the picture and kind of look at it in a different way, always provoke people to think instead of leaving it at the surface level.

The perceptions of the more-experienced informal teacher leaders contrast with those of their less-experienced counterparts in the attribution of their nomination to influence over their colleagues in the realm of curriculum. While examples of this kind of influence are scattered among the perceptions of the less-experienced teachers, such perceptions dominate the responses of the more-experienced teachers. These leaders
typically have a history of involvement in curriculum development in their schools and are frequently sought out by their colleagues for advice on curricular matters. The profile of the experienced informal teacher leader is captured by William (one of the less-experienced teachers) when he states: “I feel as though in our school we have some real sages of teaching who have gone through their career with a relentless drive to improve”. These teachers’ actions are more closely aligned with this study’s stated definition of informal teacher leadership.

**Teachers’ motivation to be informal leaders.** Further context for the discussion on the influence of trust in affecting the exercise of informal teacher leadership is provided by data regarding the factors that contribute to teachers’ inclination to exercise leadership in their schools. The interviewed teachers expressed a range of motivations for their leadership behaviours. Some of these are prevalent in both categories of experience, while others are more common in, or exclusive to, only one of those two categories. Many regard their leadership as a manifestation of their commitment to lifelong learning or self-improvement, some cite a desire to improve the educational standards around them, and some of the more-experienced teachers speak of a responsibility as senior teachers to pass on their knowledge.

Regardless of their experience, many of the interviewed informal teacher leaders describe a desire to further themselves as professionals and people, embodying the notion of being ‘lifelong learners’. They are characterised by a passion for what they do, a drive for self-improvement and a commitment to improving the quality of education in their schools; they are excited about teaching and they enjoy working with others.

Nigel captures this attitude when he states:
I think that when we become teachers, we want to become lifelong learners and continue to change and get better, that’s my push. I think education is changing and there needs to be a big change in education; we need to change with the times, so I think that’s my big drive is we’re doing a disservice to the students if we’re just teaching in one way or one direction, which I’d like to change in some way.

Andrea also epitomises the lifelong learner; open to influences around her, seeking ways to improve and embracing the idea of change:

I truly believe education should change and why it should change. I think, because I have two little kids at home, they influence me all the time. They go to [schools in] the public system. I see and hear what is happening there. I think it is really important to believe in what you are doing and why you are doing it and I’m a very intense person, so everything I go and look at and study always becomes multi-layered, so for me, my personal qualities makes me go further and further.

Nadia frames her role as an informal teacher leader, particularly her desire to collaborate, as motivated by a desire to further herself and enjoy her job:

I think because I get a lot out of it [her informal teacher leadership] too. Every time I make a presentation to visiting educators or to my colleagues, it helps my understanding of what I’m doing. And so it benefits me as well as them, and it’s more fun. And we always have students in - we have the Masters students from [the local university] - we have them in the classroom. So, the atmosphere is just one of collaboration.

Similarly, William attributes his continued efforts to go beyond his job description to a desire for continued growth:
[One of the reasons why] I would stay involved in any kind of informal leadership role would be just my own learning, my own opportunity to learn from other people that I am working with. Every time I do it I have the chance to look at my own teaching practice and fiddle around with something. So every time I’m involved in a meeting, it makes me reflect on what I’m doing in my own classroom, so I have this sense that my classroom is always getting better. [I’m] nowhere near perfection but always getting better and that’s a good feeling for me.

Alison, a former student at the school in which she now teaches, expresses a desire to contribute to developing the school where she feels she benefitted from the efforts of her own teachers:

I have been here since [being a student in] grade 1, I feel quite passionate about it, I see these kids and think: I’ve been you, I’m so lucky to have had what you have so I can give that back but I also know that it’s my teachers and all that hard work they put in that allowed me to have that experience.

Norman describes his collaborative attitude towards teaching, highlighting his desire to enrich his own professional experience and that of those around him:

We’re not teaching in isolation. Anything that you can do to make the people that you are surrounded with not just better teachers but also part of the same programme and trying to reach and achieve the same role as a team. Anything that you can do to make the team of teachers better is going to make your own professional experience within that school, department, whatever it is you’re in, better. So, I guess that’s one of the reasons why I’ve been doing this, wanting to
influence other teacher and change their professional practice and help them along.

He also suggests that he feels a sense of responsibility to help ensure that new colleagues understand how the school works:

We have new teachers that come into the school that don’t really see or understand our school culture, see the energy that’s required, the creativity that’s required, the time that’s required to provide the best education for the students that we have. Being a senior teacher, people look towards that and will see that behaviour modelled and I think that has an influence on the new teachers that come into the school.

William is also motivated by a belief that he is contributing to school improvement:

I think I might derive a certain amount of satisfaction from having the sense that I might be helping to shape school policy or school culture, so the idea that I might be influencing how we teach as a whole or also influencing what we produce – the students that graduate from our school - I think, is an appealing notion.

Nadia suggests a more personal motivation - her own preference for working with others: “It’s more the collaboration part I like. I’m very much a person who needs to brainstorm with other people and bounce ideas off people. I find that works better”.

While these teachers believe that their nomination has resulted from the positive example that they set to others, some believe that they have colleagues who have somewhat different intentions when they demonstrate leadership. Nigel and Andrea contrast their motivation as informal leaders with some of their peers who perform informal leadership in order to ‘be seen’, in an effort to promote themselves as potential
candidates for formal leadership positions. Nigel suggests that his own drive – the desire to improve the education he and his school provides – is different from that of some of his colleagues:

I think some people have a drive where they want to become [formal] leaders, so they do those things because they just want the title. …They want to become formal leaders, they are looking for promotion, so they’re doing all these little things to get recognised whereas I don’t want to become a formal leader, not right now at least. I want to stay in the trenches and do the dirty work.

Similarly, Andrea makes the distinction between the attitudes of those who wish to be formal leaders and those who lead informally, suggesting the former are acting more in self-interest whereas the latter are more child-oriented:

I think some people are trying to put it on their resume, as “I’ve done it and check it off”, and the opposite is you truly believe education should change and why it should change.

She also appears to be dedicated to her informal leadership role:

I would definitely be the informal person. I don’t strive to be a principal or a VP, I don’t want to be the person in charge of everything, but I want to be the person that instigates from the bottom up - organic is the trend word - to get people thinking in different ways, from among the teachers.

In contrast to Andrea’s position, Norman feels that while he has not sought to become an administrator, his experience as an informal leader has led him to start considering a future role in formal leadership,

I don’t see myself as a person that’s actually actively gone out to get the leadership, I see it as something that has come towards me and now that it is
starting to come towards me and I find myself in that position and I’m beginning to look at professional development in my own career to get to that position where there will be a formal leadership position.

A commitment to personal learning and to developing the quality of education in their schools appears frequently in the responses of the interviewed teachers, regardless of years of experience. Also emerging from a number of the nominated informal teacher leaders (in both the less- and more-experienced categories) is an alternative form of motivation observed in some of their colleagues who seek to ‘be seen’ as leaders in order to further their ambitions to be formal leadership roles.

**The emergence of informal teacher leaders.** Table 8 provides examples of teachers’ stated perceptions of how their informal teacher leadership has emerged in their careers. While data on teachers’ life- and career histories were not explicitly sought in this study, the narratives of the selected teachers serves to highlight some differences between the more- and less-experienced informal teacher leaders in how they perceive the emergence of their informal leadership behaviour. These differences do not define the boundaries of the two groups to the same extent as the perceptions for nomination.

Three of the less-experienced interviewees attribute their leadership behaviour to characteristics that preceded their teaching careers. A number of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders – the three women – identify a background of working in summer camps and the leadership associated with that.

Alison suggests that her leadership preceded her becoming a teacher, “my career as a teacher started 6 years ago, but my career working with people and wanting to make a difference and making things fun and exciting started years before that”.

...
Similarly, Elizabeth suggests that leadership was something she brought with her to the job:

I can’t think of when I started in my career, I feel like it’s always been, since a young girl at camp, I was a CIT [counsellor-in-training] leader, a counsellor, it’s always been a natural progression. I was a tripper, so I’d lead camping trips out …[I’d] just lead by example.

Hannah, too, believes that her leadership is “largely personality-related in terms of how you approach your job”. She continues,

My whole background, too, is [summer] camp, so I think that there is …that collegial aspect and working together and that being a team and having some fun with it, I think it is a camp philosophy too and to some extent that may influence [my leadership].

Alison too, expresses a belief that leadership is a personality-based, and reinforces the connection with her camp background:

I don’t want to keep bringing back to camp, but it was part of my life… when it comes to personal leadership, that’s a big part of it, you can’t be forced, in my opinion, you can’t be taught, I think you can learn how to be a leader, you can learn how to work with people, you can learn some of those key people skills if you don’t have them, but part of that is inherent, and part of it is passion and I think there needs to be a balance of both.

These teachers believe that they entered the profession with some leadership attributes, gained through prior life experiences, which have naturally emerged in their school roles.
Table 8

The emergence of informal teacher leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Experience group</th>
<th>Perceived reasons for emergence as leader</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>She has always been a leader: “I can’t think of when I started in my career. It’s always been, since I was a young girl at camp”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alison</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>She has always been a leader: “My career as a teacher started 6 years ago, but my career working with people and wanting to make a difference… started years before that”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannah</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>She has always been a leader: “It’s probably largely personality-related in terms of how you approach your job”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>His leadership emerged after getting involved with long-range planning: “…then I started to have a little more influence on other people’s work”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel</td>
<td>Less</td>
<td>His leadership emerged as younger teachers came into the school and his seniority increased: “I’m now taking on a leadership role, I didn’t recognise it [previously]”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norman</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>He recognises a point in his career when he started leading: “I’d say about 7 years in to my teaching career, I began to start thinking about sharing my professional experiences with teachers”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>He feels that becoming a leader was a natural progression: “I think it is just a natural progression of having some experience and… having some desire to move things forward beyond your own little class and your own little world”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>Her confidence to be a leader came with experience: “I started believing in myself that I could do this, that I could know things and talk about things and have opinions and be able to share them”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>More</td>
<td>She feels it is her responsibility to pass knowledge on to her colleagues: “…when I first started, people influenced me, so I felt that when I knew more it was my duty to help them”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Collectively, the more-experienced informal teacher leaders are more inclined to describe a transition into informal teacher leaders, some framing it as a progressive
evolution of their careers, others identifying particular events that precipitated their emergence as informal leaders. Two of the less-experienced teachers also identify a progression into their informal leadership role. William (in his fourth year of teaching) states:

I don’t know if I could pin [the start of my informal leadership] down to a particular moment. I think when I got involved in doing some long-range planning work with the academic stuff, I started to have a little more influence on other people’s work.

Compared to the more-experienced teachers, William identifies an early emergence as an informal leader during his career. Nigel (in his sixth year of teaching) pinpoints precisely when, in his brief career, he began to see himself as a leader:

This year, actually, I was talking to the principal and he said, “You won’t know you’re a leader until somebody says something and you’ll just realise that you’ve already been a leader”. So when you [asked when I began to see myself as a leader], I just started reflecting back on people calling on me for help, people looking to me for discipline or for guidance. I just realised that [it is] this year, I would say.

Nigel’s emergence as an informal leader in his sixth year of teaching resonates with a number of the more-experienced teachers who reflect upon stages and, in some cases, significant events in their careers that shaped their behaviours.

Norman introduces a simile to help describe his perception of his early years of teaching and subsequent emergence as a leader. He indicates a more deliberate path to the role of informal leader, describing an explicit decision to start sharing his knowledge:
Becoming a teacher is like learning how to drive a car. It takes a long time to get there so that you’re just jumping behind the wheel and not thinking about what you’re doing. So I’d say about seven years into my teaching career, I began to start thinking about sharing my professional experiences with teachers and I’d argue, starting to experience people looking up to me as a leader in my department would have been seven years-in.

Simon also captures this sentiment when he describes how his informal leadership role has developed from a focus on his own classroom to a broadening of his sphere of influence:

I don’t know that I have deliberately set out to have any particular impact with any other people. But I think it is just a natural progression of having some experience and... having some desire to move things forward beyond your own little class and your own little world. I think it’s a natural progression.

In addition to the progression through an initial phase of his teaching career, Norman attributes his emergence as an informal leader to a significant experience in his life:

I’d argue that my trip [overseas, on a teacher exchange] was a really good thing - to leave the school and come back. I started to feel like I was sharing ideas and people were listening and responding, not just in terms of listening, but valuing and implementing in their classroom.

It is interesting to note that Norman attributes his emergence, in part, to the experience he had abroad during a year-long exchange: “I’d had that experience and gone somewhere else and [saw] things with a new perspective after having that year away”. Although having taken time away from her school for a different reason, Andrea
describes how that period of absence, at a similar time to Norman - the mid-point of her 15-year career - was an antecedent to her emergence as an informal leader:

I think I more of a shy person and I don’t really like to go out and put my [opinions] out there, I’m more of a listener – [I] take the step back. But I always talk about having children and having that monumental transformational moment that you’ve given birth so you can do anything, and when I came back to school after my maternity leave, I was recognised by the principal to be able to go to [Europe] for this tour [regarding a curricular programme]. I was grade 6 and [the programme is based] is in kindergarten and grade 1, so I had to write a proposal saying I really wanted this, and then I started believing in myself that I could do this, that I could know things and talk about things and have opinions and be able to share them.

Nadia also describes a significant stage in her career that showed her the benefit of collaborating with her senior colleagues and helped shaped her subsequent practice.

I think it was more when I first started, people influenced me so I felt that when I know more it was my duty to help them (laughs). Because I was actually middle-school trained… and after teaching in a middle school for years, [I] was put into a realm [teaching kindergarten] that I absolutely did not know, and I think it was more the collaboration aspect, the fact that I had to totally rely on the teachers that I was with and learn from them. From then, I’ve always been open to working with other people, so I think that’s more part of it than thinking, “Oh, I’m a leader” or something.

While three of the younger, less-experienced, teacher leaders see leadership as something they brought to their schools and exercised from an early stage in their
current positions, the remaining interviewees describe an emergence of leadership behaviour during their careers. Some can pinpoint specific times or events during their careers when they have started to influence their colleagues, normally after a few years of teaching\(^7\), others suggest a more gradual expansion of their sphere of influence beyond their classroom.

**Chapter summary.** This chapter describes a number of emerging themes in the data. The most striking of these is the distinction that becomes apparent in a number of areas between the perceptions of the less-experienced teachers (those with between four and six years of experience, \(n=5\)) and the more-experienced teachers (those with 14 to 28 years of experience, \(n=4\)). This distinction is most apparent when analysing data that describe the interviewees’ perceptions of why they were nominated; the former are more likely to attribute their nomination to roles that they have volunteered for (e.g. additional extra-curricular activities), or have been asked to perform (e.g. leading committees), while the latter are more inclined to attribute their nomination to self-initiated curriculum-related actions (e.g. giving advice to colleagues, introducing new teaching ideas to their schools). While the teachers in the more-experienced category appear to model the kinds of behaviours defined as informal teacher leadership in this study, the less-experienced teachers’ leadership actions are more closely aligned with the conceptions of ‘distributed leadership’ and ‘organisational citizenship behaviour’ – a finding that will be discussed in detail in later chapters.

The experience categories do not always serve to differentiate the teachers’ stated motivations for exercising leadership. Teachers from both groups frequently refer to a

\(^7\) This timeline corresponds with what the teacher career literature suggests is the beginning of the most productive time in a teacher’s career (Huberman, 1989; Day, 2012)
desire to extend their own learning and to improve the quality of education at their school. However, some differences between the two experience groupings are apparent. For example, the more-experienced teachers feel a sense of responsibility to pass on their knowledge to younger teachers while some of the less-experienced teachers feel a strong belief in leading by example rather than overtly trying to exert influence.

When considering the interviewed teachers’ perceptions regarding their emergence as informal leaders, the majority describe their development as leaders after an initial period of being ‘just’ a teacher. However, three of the less-experienced teachers express a belief that they have ‘always’ been leaders and have simply brought their leadership behaviours to their teaching jobs.

While the actions and characteristics of these nominated teacher leaders has made them stand out in various ways to their colleagues and be identified as leaders, many, like Nigel, expressed surprise at having been nominated, and quickly brought attention to the influence others have on them. William, for example, states: “I don’t think there’s anyone here who has no leadership whatsoever”, while Hannah offers, “I’m more aware of people who have an influence on me”. Reinforcing the evidence of collaborative culture from the quantitative data discussed earlier, comments like these indicate a pattern of influence arising from many sources within the ranks of teachers and the existence of an environment that supports informal teacher leadership.

The following chapters address the data that relates to the role that trust plays in creating this environment in which teachers feel inclined to exercise informal leadership.
Chapter Four

Presentation of Findings: Informal Teacher Leadership and Trust in Teaching Colleagues

This chapter addresses the research questions with regard to trust in teaching colleagues; trust in administrators will be addressed in the following chapter. Data used in this section were drawn mainly from responses to questions relating to teachers’ relationships with their peers - questions that addressed why the interviewees felt comfortable exercising leadership and probing any references to trust before asking directly about the importance of trust and the specific trust facets. This chapter will first consider the interviewed informal leaders’ references to the broad conception of trust in their responses before considering reference to the component facets of competence, benevolence, openness, reliability and honesty (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). Building upon the findings outlined in the previous chapter, the two groups of informal leaders (the less-experienced and more-experienced) are considered separately when considering the trust facets, before the findings are compared.

The Importance of Trust in Relationships with Teaching Colleagues

All of the interviews yield data suggesting that trust in teaching colleagues is a significant factor affecting teachers’ motivation to exercise informal leadership. One of the main purposes of this study is to consider the role of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) five facets of trust, so references to trust in the interview responses were followed-up in an attempt to glean a better understanding of which facets respondents were referring to when they used the term ‘trust’. Consequently, the later sections discussing the trust facets are more extensive than the section discussing trust as a whole. This initial section serves mainly to illustrate the emphasis that the interviewed teachers place upon
trust (including any of its component facets) in creating conditions that support the exercise of informal leadership.

The importance placed on the respondents’ trust in their teaching colleagues is immediately made apparent by a number of them referring to trust, or some of its facets, before they are asked directly about its influence. In responding to the question, “What is it about your relationships with your colleagues that makes you feel comfortable engaging in informal leadership?” William and Alison emphasise the open communication and honesty that is characteristic of relationships with their colleagues. Alison states: “You need to have challenges and you need to have people question your opinions in order for you to push your opinion and reflect on that”. William illustrates how this can play out in his interactions with his peers:

Well, there’s some of my colleagues that I know I can go to and ask, “Did I look like a total ass when I said that?” I feel like I can get a very honest response, or when I’m trying to work on something at a school level, if I’m trying to move something at a school level and ask, “Am I out to lunch here? Is this being perceived poorly?” So with some of my peers I feel there’s very open and honest and direct feedback.

Nigel also flags openness, and associates it with benevolence in his colleagues:

If you care about the students, you’ll be open to change and you’ll be open to new ideas and hopefully you’ll become a better teacher. So for those teachers, especially here - the majority people do want to become better teachers - they’re open to new ideas.

Like Nigel, Andrea highlights a relationship between the openness and benevolence she sees in her colleagues, and she explicitly links it to trust:
We’re at a point where we honour one another’s opinions, that we are able to put our ideas out, even if you disagree with it. …There is a real trust. I think that we all trust each other that we’re putting our best foot forward.

Norman is another informal leader who is quick to make reference to the importance of trust before being directly questioned about it, although his comments initially refer to how he feels his colleagues trust him,

I feel like I’m the kind of person that each of my colleagues can trust. I think trust is a huge thing that if they do confide in you, or share with you, that it stays with you, it’s not something that gets blabbed around as gossip or hearsay. That’s really important.

When directly asked about the role of trust in affecting their inclination to exercise informal leadership, all of the teachers acknowledge that it plays an important role and many of the interviewed teachers are unequivocal in their positive responses. Alison, Elizabeth, Nadia and Andrea all state that the role of trust is “huge”, while William suggests that trust is “super important”.

One element of trust that emerges from a number of participants’ responses is its reciprocal nature, an element of trust that is not directly addressed in this study but is expected due to the interdependent nature of relational trust – it is hard to imagine a scenario where trust is only experienced in one direction. This reciprocity is implied in many responses and stated explicitly in others. Nadia describes how open communication is important in relationships with her colleagues:

You have to have that respect for each other and you have to also discuss things and not take things personally. I think that was very hard for us initially, realising that we are critiquing ideas and not each other, and that’s why you need the trust.
Elizabeth and Norman make more explicit reference to the mutuality of trust. Elizabeth states: “[Trust] plays a huge part, trust both ways”. Similarly, Norman offers, “I would argue that trust is a definitely a mutual component [of relationships with my peers]”.

Another illustration of the importance of trust to these informal leaders is in the responses of two teachers, Norman and Nigel, who refer not only to how significant the presence of trust is, but also how its absence affects their inclination to work with (and, therefore, the influence they have with) some of their colleagues. Both suggest that they are more inclined, and more likely, to influence peers whom they trust. Nigel states:

I trust most of [of my colleagues]. A few of them I don’t and, it’s funny, I don’t have as much interaction with them professionally. Personally I do, outside of the school I do, in some way, but the ones I don’t trust as much I don’t help as much.

Norman communicates a similar outlook:

The people that I feel I trust, I trust that they are doing the best they can to perform in their classroom. I feel that I have an influence over those colleagues. I don’t feel as an informal teacher leader that I have an influence over all my colleagues, and the sense that I get is that, [with] trust, when it is not there, [it] is difficult to have that influence. My trust comes from, “Do I really believe you are here in this classroom for the right reasons? Are you there for the students or are you there for yourself? …I would argue that I have invested less energy in those teachers for sure. [I have] fewer conversations [with them, and] less sharing.

The assertion that these teacher leaders will only seek to influence colleagues whom they trust is further evidence of its importance and takes the discussion beyond
the idea of broad conditions that support trust to include also the idea that some non-
trusted colleagues might be excluded from these leaders’ attempts to influence.

The informal teacher leaders interviewed provide substantial data addressing
Research Question 1 (What role, if any, does trust play in creating supportive conditions
for informal teacher leadership?). Most of the interviewed teacher leaders highlight the
importance of trust in their teaching colleagues, or some of its component facets, before
they are asked directly about it. When asked directly, all recognise its importance,
suggesting that it plays a significant role in creating supportive conditions for informal
leadership. Even in these preliminary comments, the interviews reveal insights into the
conditions that foster their informal leadership. First, the data suggest that the collegial
culture in the school is an important condition supporting the exercise of informal
leadership; the interviewees make frequent reference to the interdependence of teachers
in their schools - the reciprocity of relationships, the confidence they have that
colleagues will communicate openly, provide honest feedback, and support each other
(and also the possibility that some colleagues who do not conform to the school’s
collaborative cultural norms might be excluded). Second, they herald the emergence of
particular facets from the data, most notably honesty (a facet that teachers from both
experience-based groups are inclined to emphasise), openness and benevolence.

The Importance of Trust Facets in Relationships with Teaching Colleagues

Analysis of the interviews in relation to Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) trust facets
reveals significant differences in the responses of the two experience-group categories
of interviewees. As with the data in the previous chapter, there is clearly some overlap
between the responses of the two groups, but the differences are sufficient to warrant
separate sections for their description. Table 9 shows brief descriptions of the facets, as defined by Tschannon-Moran (2004).

Table 9

Summary of trust facet descriptors (from Tschannen-Moran, 2004, p. 34)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facet</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Caring, extending good will, having positive interactions, supporting teachers, expressing appreciation, being fair, guarding confidential information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Having integrity, telling the truth, keeping promises, honouring agreements, having authenticity, accepting responsibility, avoiding manipulation, being real, being true to oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Engaging in open communication, sharing important information, delegating, sharing decision making, sharing power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Having consistency, being dependable, demonstrating commitment, having dedication, being diligent”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Setting an example, engaging in problem solving, fostering conflict resolution (rather than avoidance), working hard, pressing for results, setting standards, buffering teachers, handling difficult situations, being flexible.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The importance of trust facets in relationships with teaching colleagues

– less-experienced teachers. Table 10a summarises the responses of the less-experienced teachers regarding their relationships with their teaching colleagues: specifically, the role that Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) five facets of trust play in creating conditions that support the exercise of informal teacher leadership. A ‘strong’ label represents a high level of emphasis placed on that facet by the respondent, whereas ‘present’ denotes an acknowledgement of the importance of the facet, but less emphasis placed upon it. All of the facets are acknowledged as important by all of the interviewees, but honesty and benevolence are emphasised particularly strongly. Interviewees’ responses relating to each facet are considered in detail in the following sections.
Table 10a

The importance of trust facets in less-experienced teachers relationships with teaching colleagues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Elizabeth</th>
<th>Nigel</th>
<th>Alison</th>
<th>William</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Competence.** In the majority of interviews, competence emerges as a factor directly contributing to teachers’ inclination to exercise informal leadership, although it is not typically emphasised strongly. Some of the interviewees believe in the competence of their colleagues as a result of experiences with them, others rely more on an assumption of competence.

Among the informal teacher leaders, Alison was alone in placing great importance on competence; she appears to define trust in terms of that particular facet. Her initial response to the question of whether trust in colleagues is important focuses on competence:

At the beginning it’s forced trust, because you [think], “OK, so you’re the new art teacher and last year the last five years it’s been done this way, but I’m going to respect you and I’m going to trust you as my colleague to do x, y and z”. It’s giving the newbie a chance - you want to make the new person feel welcome, you want to develop a friendship, you also want to develop a working relationship with them and you want to trust them. And I’ve been in situations before where I don’t know if I actually do trust that person but I have to give them credit.

…That’s the first piece, then once you have experienced the relationship with the
colleague, I do believe that once you’ve shown that you can organise [a charity fundraising activity] or you can pull off a [presentation], or you and your teaching partner can have this awesome field trip, whatever it may be… that’s my initial statement of trust versus professional trust. It’s a different level of [trust].

Alison’s strong emphasis on competence is interesting considering that she appears to assume competence in her colleagues (her ‘initial statement of trust’) before seeing evidence of it. This is, presumably, a dimension of the “positive outlook” that she claims to possess. Regardless of whether she is assuming competence or ascribing competence based upon experiences with her colleagues (what she calls “professional trust”), competence appears to be a significant factor affecting her inclination to exercise leadership. Such strong emphasis on competence in the discussion on trust is not typical of the less-experienced group of informal leaders. In the majority of the interviews, competence only enters the discussion after Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) facets are introduced by the interviewer. However, once introduced, competence is often related directly to the exercise of informal leadership. Hannah refers to the facet in terms of a minimum requirement, echoing Alison’s conception of ‘levels’ of trust,

[If] you are going to turn to someone, to know that they are competent to do it is sort of a baseline and to know they are going to follow through on it, because if you are doing something together and they are not doing… I mean, we do not have time to go back and check the way we do with our kids and say, “Did you do this?” So knowing that if you are going to put something into action… and you know that person is going to do that end of the deal. I think that is huge in the busy pace of what we do here.
As shown in Table 10a, the competence of teaching colleagues is recognised by all of the less-experienced teacher leaders, but rarely emphasised strongly. Elizabeth recognises the importance of knowing that her colleagues will “do a good job”, while William states, “We all have to trust in one another’s competence and believe in one another’s competence… it just seems less acknowledged [relative to other facets], as though it has less profile”. Similarly, Nigel offers, “I would say it is [important], it just doesn’t jump out. It’s one of those things that I’d probably not focus on”.

Whether the competence of colleagues is assumed to be present by these informal teacher leaders or it is actually experienced, the interviewed teachers believe their peers to be competent teachers. While it is not strongly emphasised by most of the less-experienced teachers, perceived competence of teaching colleagues appears to be a condition supporting the exercise of informal leadership, and teachers generally relate this competence to their exercise of leadership. As Hannah suggests, competence is a ‘baseline’ necessity when they are looking to influence others; a lack of confidence in colleagues’ competence in performing their role would be a significant barrier to proceeding with a leadership initiative. While this appears a commonsense finding, what is surprising is the lack of emphasis placed upon it by these less-experienced leaders. Some of the interviewed teachers explicitly state that they assume their colleagues are competent, while others only acknowledge its importance when asked directly. This finding could be attributed to perceptions of consistently high levels of competence in their colleagues - competence might simply be expected in their school environments - and/or it could simply reflect an optimistic outlook (a personal characteristic highlighted by both Alison and Hannah).
**Benevolence.** Benevolence emerges strongly from the interviews with the less-experienced informal leaders, either through explicit reference to the facet or through indirect reference to the nature of the relationships they have with their peers.

Tschanon-Moran’s (2004) definition of benevolence is multi-dimensional (including the concepts of caring, extending good will, being supportive, and guarding confidential information) and the interviewed teachers collectively capture the full range of elements, but tend to focus on specific qualities in their colleagues.

Hannah frames her own definition of trust in terms of benevolence, initially emphasising the importance of colleagues guarding confidential information:

> I think trust [means] that when you work on something, or share something in confidence, that it stays in confidence, but I also think that you can trust that that person isn’t judging you; that you can be vulnerable with that person, you can ask for advice from that person or help with something and know that you are someone who is imperfect talking to someone else who is imperfect saying, “Can we help make this better together?” …Knowing that the relationship that you have between the two of you is between the two of you, and gives you the confidence to turn to that person when you need something.

Elizabeth, too, defines trust in terms of benevolence, but she highlights the supportive nature of her peers in encouraging her leadership actions:

> I trust that if I go ahead and take on these leadership roles or go ahead and do things extra, that my colleagues will be there to support me and help me if I need them. …I think trust in any relationship, just like a family - and that’s how I visualise our dynamic [in my grade-level team] - trust is the number one thing for any relationship; to trust and feel comfortable and feel safe and feel OK with
doing extra work and knowing that it’s being recognised and they know what you are doing and the extra time you are putting in.

She offers a recent example of benevolent behaviour that illustrates her point:

Just yesterday, the other two [team] coaches - we have to start thinking about report card comments and house points for the [team] - they said, “Elizabeth: you have to do all the secretary house points, we’ve got this, we’ll do the comments for the team”. And that, I don’t know if that is trust… I almost expected if from them. They were giving back to me.

Elizabeth recognises that she is part of a supportive school culture, where she expects colleagues to reciprocate her own helpful and caring behaviour. During her interview, she frequently made comparisons with a family to emphasise the closeness of relationships among staff. Alison also highlights the close social bonds she enjoys with her colleagues, suggesting a high level of benevolence: “We often say to each that we are so lucky to come to work each day and be able to see some of our best friends”.

While Elizabeth and Alison are inclined to emphasise the supportive and caring component of benevolence, William and Hannah highlight the ‘extending good will’ element of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) definition. William states:

We give each other the benefit of the doubt, that when we see an initiative that we all believe that it’s for the best of the school and the [students] that we teach, and that we are benevolent to each other in that way. …There’s no worry or hesitation to bring up something that you know you messed up, because you know you are going to get and honest and caring response. It’s a very supportive environment.

In addition to observing benevolence when things do not go to plan, William brings attention to his colleagues’ willingness to embrace new ideas with a positive
outlook. He cites an example that came from his committee work (this example could also be considered evidence of openness):

I think another way that I see it is people just trying something new. We had this thing this year where we took some stuff from [an Ontario Ministry of Education document] about the learning skills and the work habits and we said, “Can we fit this into our parent-teacher, and sometimes parent-student, conferences in the school? And, instead of saying, “How is he doing in Math?” Can we address some of the specific skills in there? So we brought that idea forward and [teachers from other grades] took it and really ran with it and developed a really fascinating and well thought-out and purposeful process for their student-teacher-parent conferences. And I see that as a sign of trust too that someone was willing to take that idea and give it their best shot, and make it their own too.

Similarly, Hannah highlights the way in which she expects her colleagues to understand that her actions are well-intentioned:

It’s that willingness to… the “Yes” as a go-to, as opposed to the “No” as a go-to, and the support and the understanding as opposed to the judgement. It’s very easy to say, “I can’t believe they made that mistake”. Well, we all make mistakes, we make a million decisions a day. Being willing to see the better part… assume there is a good reason for something as opposed to [there not being a good reason].

The less-experienced informal teacher leaders typically recognise benevolence as a characteristic of their peers. They feel that their colleagues are caring, supportive and inclined to assume good intentions in their actions when they exercise leadership. The comments of these teachers indicate that the benevolence of their colleagues directly
supports their leadership efforts. The emphasis placed upon benevolence could be explained by these relatively inexperienced teachers lacking confidence in their actions and needing to feel that their colleagues will be supportive, will ‘assume good will’, and will appreciate their efforts when they put themselves in the vulnerable position of exercising informal leadership.

**Openness.** Tschannen-Moran (2004) summarises openness as, “engaging in open communication, sharing important information, delegating, sharing decision making [and] sharing power”. Context dictates which of those elements comes to the fore. Most typically in the context of informal leaders’ trust in their colleagues, openness is communicated as being open to ideas (best captured by Tschannen-Moran’s ‘engaging in open conversation’ and, to a certain extent, ‘sharing power’ descriptors).

The openness of colleagues is not something the less-experienced teacher leaders choose to focus on in their interviews. While all of them acknowledge its importance – some suggesting it was very important – few speak at any length about it in their interviews. While Nigel refers generally to openness when he states, “They’re open, they’re easy to talk to, they listen, they ask questions”, the rest of the less-experienced teachers relate openness directly to their leadership actions. Elizabeth simply states, “I trust that they would be open to ideas that I have”. Similarly, William reports a confidence that his suggestions will be received with openness by his colleagues. He goes on to describe it as a “high profile” facet. Hannah is more specific, considering it an important factor in, “the sharing of curriculum and new ideas and that kind of thing”. Alison states its importance more, “It’s essential… I feel that openness is so important. If I feel you’ve got a different agenda, or you are not on the same page. …I just feel like you need to have that [openness] in order to be successful”.


The group of less-experienced teachers acknowledge the importance of openness, recognise it in their colleagues, and directly relate it to their leadership actions. However, if the foci of their interview responses are an indication of the salience of that facet, openness does not rank highly in relation to other trust facets. The acknowledgement, but lack of emphasis, on openness could be attributed to the nature of the leadership activities in which these less-experienced teachers engage. Many of these activities, such as taking-on extra coaching responsibilities or helping with drama productions, do not depend upon high levels of openness for their success – their colleagues are often unburdened by these actions and are unlikely to resist!

**Reliability.** Reliability is another facet acknowledged as important by all of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders but not extensively illustrated in their responses, and it is rarely related explicitly to leadership actions. The interviewees’ comments typically infer that it is a particular colleague, rather than colleagues in general, that they feel they can rely on. Elizabeth highlights the importance of reliability in the relationships with her colleagues, she says, “I think being reliable is very important, being able to call up a colleague and say, ‘I can’t do this, can you help me out?’ and knowing that they would do it, drop everything for you and do it.

Also referring to a singular example, Hannah illustrates how reliability plays out in relationships between teachers:

Someone you trust more is the person you are going to go to first if you need a hand with something, especially when it’s something that goes above and beyond the base of what is expected to be done. So, if you are doing something, [for example] you’re running a drive for a community service thing, and you need
another set of hands and it’s 4.30, you go to the person that has helped you out before that is willing to take that extra step, the person that you trust.

Alison also places great emphasis on reliability in terms of a particular colleague, suggesting it is particularly important in her busy school environment, and highlighting a recent example of how she relies on her teaching partner.

I’m the colleague of someone else and this is the day when I have my kids all day and I’ve got this and that and today is a busy day and I need to know that I can rely on you; today is not so busy for you so we’re working together to get the job done. And with my teaching partner, I was really sick last week, we had to get this stuff done, and she really pulled through and we were able to get the stuff done.

While these less-experienced teachers discuss reliability in response to questions on informal leadership, they typically frame it in terms of a small number of close colleagues honouring their side of a reciprocal relationship that involves helping one another out – not in broader leadership scenarios. This is not entirely surprising considering the nature of informal leadership. Unlike with formal leadership, where ‘followers’ are relied upon to respond to direction, response to informal leadership is not required in the same way – the reliability of colleagues would not be particularly important in the case of the ‘stepping-up’ activities typical of these less-experienced teachers, such as coaching a school team or helping with a drama production.

Additionally, the fact that most references to reliability relate to a minority of colleagues suggests that it is not perceived as a general characteristic of their teaching colleagues. However, the interviewed teachers’ consistent references to reliability suggest that the presence of colleagues whom teachers perceive to be reliable appears to
be important and may well contribute to the creation of conditions that promote the exercise of informal leadership.

**Honesty.** Honesty emerges strongly from the interviews with the less-experienced informal teacher leaders. Some of them talk in general terms about honesty among colleagues, while some refer to specific examples and a number of them speak explicitly of the importance of honesty in affecting their inclination to exercise (or not exercise) leadership.

Elizabeth highlights the importance of the constructive criticism that she values and would expect to get from colleagues. She illustrates this with reference to her leadership in organising student secretaries for parent-teacher interviews - a situation in which she had recently received some honest feedback:

If the [student] secretaries are on their laptops and they are distracted from [enforcing] the 20-minute time limit, I would expect my colleagues to say, “It worked out really well, but next time let’s let them use their laptops, but not let them play video games, but have books [and] homework. That’s it”.

Alison sees the power of collective honesty, describing it in relation to work with her colleagues in the collaborative teaching initiative:

With our [teaching project], it wasn’t a walk in the park, it’s challenging. So being able to say, “Guys, this is really difficult” [is important]. …In fact, often when one person admits how they’re feeling it just open everything up, “I know, I’m feeling the same way, don’t worry”. And then you feel good [that] we’re all in this together.
William talks even more specifically about the role of honesty affecting his inclination to exercise leadership: “If I didn’t trust them to be honest about what they thought of the initiative then I wouldn’t do it”.

Hannah communicates a strong belief in the importance of honesty in her professional relationships, but suggests that it is not as pervasive as she would like:

I think when people are honest in a collegial sense, …it’s harder, it’s a more unusual thing than maybe we’d like to all believe. I think we are more likely to be honest people personally than professionally because there’s a bit of the feeling that you need to cover up for something that you forgot with a reason why it didn’t get done.

She feels that, when it is demonstrated, honesty makes her professional work more efficient:

I have had people come up and say that to me about the [character education programme], “This is so low on my priority list, I can’t even tell you it’s going to happen this week”. And that actually makes it a lot easier for me to help them, you know, “That’s good to know, maybe if I did this for you, is that something you’d be open to?” Rather than them saying, they’re ‘on it’ when they are not on it [which leads to] a lot more work later.

Both William and Hannah refer to the professional support groups that they are involved in. Hannah captures the essence of these groups and the importance of honesty within them when she says members of the groups must: “…be honest and say, ‘My lessons are deeply flawed sometimes and let’s talk about it’”.

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8 The professional support groups involve teachers sharing their reflections on teaching episodes that have not worked out well.
William describes his experience in the professional support group as follows:

I know I have brought [teaching episodes] to that group that I just know haven’t worked and I have brought those to that group [in order] to workshop [them] because I know they haven’t worked in my classroom. ...The other people in the group have done the same thing, so that’s an example of trust. There’s no worry or hesitation to bring up something that you know you messed up, because you know you are going to get an honest and caring response.

Nigel provides an alternative perspective when he describes colleagues that he does not trust because he feels that they are not honest:

I always feel that [some colleagues] have a different agenda - they are not being honest with me. They are playing this game. …I always feel like it’s a game for [them] and that [they’ve] got to win this game. …So that trust, they communicate things to me that they don’t communicate to other people. It’s difficult, it’s like we’re back in grade 6, that’s how I perceive it.

Relating to his previous comments on how he exercises informal leadership more with colleagues that he trusts, Nigel is explicit in his comments, suggesting that honesty is a key facet affecting his inclination to exercise leadership.

_The importance of trust facets in relationships with teaching colleagues – less-experienced teacher leaders: summary._ The less-experienced group of informal leaders emphasise honesty above all other facets of trust in affecting their inclination to exercise informal leadership. When they illustrate how this plays out in their schools, their examples are generally in the realm of the leadership roles related to professional practice (rather than the stepping-up activities discussed previously) – this adds to their relevance in the context of this study’s conception of informal leadership. Not only do
all of the less-experienced leaders observe, and highly value, honesty in their professional relationships, they relate it directly to their leadership roles. The great emphasis placed upon honesty by the less-experienced informal leaders could be attributed to a lack of professional confidence resulting from their inexperience in relation to the majority of their colleagues. When they make themselves vulnerable by exercising leadership, they appreciate feedback and, judging by their perceptions of benevolence in their colleagues, that honest feedback is delivered in a constructive way.

The interview responses of the less-experienced group of informal teacher leaders provide rich data informing Research Question 2 (What specific facets of trust are important in creating supportive conditions for the exercise of informal teacher leadership?). This group of teachers collectively acknowledge the presence of all of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) trust facets in their colleagues. With the exception of reliability, they relate the presence of these facets to their leadership actions, emphasising honesty and benevolence above the other facets. Emerging from these data is a pattern not entirely surprising for teachers whose colleagues are generally senior to them in terms of experience. In the early years of their careers, these teachers are still developing confidence in their professional work and place great importance on having a benevolent environment if they are to make themselves vulnerable by exercising leadership. Having some reliable close colleagues appears to contribute to their feelings of security. When they do exercise leadership, they are eager for feedback, appreciating the honesty of their colleagues to help inform their future efforts. They believe in the competence of their colleagues and are often happy to do so based upon little evidence (perhaps out of respect for their senior colleagues). They perceive openness in their fellow teachers, although many of the leadership activities these teachers engage in (e.g.
coaching extra teams, organising students, helping with school productions) are not dependent upon openness and are unlikely to be resisted by colleagues.

**The importance of trust facets in relationships with teaching colleagues - more-experienced teachers.** Table 10b summarises the responses of the more-experienced teachers regarding the role that Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) five facets of trust play in making them feel comfortable exercising informal teacher leadership. The facets are labelled as ‘present’ or ‘strong’ (or not at all) in the teacher columns in relation to the strength of their emergence in the interview data. A ‘strong’ label represents a high level of emphasis placed on that facet by the respondent, whereas ‘present’ denotes an acknowledgement of the importance of the facet, but less emphasis placed upon it. Empty cells in the table represent minimal reference to a facet in the interview responses.

Table 10b

*The importance of trust facets in more-experienced teachers relationships with teaching colleagues.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Norman</th>
<th>Andrea</th>
<th>Nadia</th>
<th>Simon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows a different pattern of facet-emphasis than the corresponding table for the less-experienced teachers. The high number of empty cells suggests less importance placed on trust in general and on many of the facets. As is the case with the less-experienced teachers, honesty is emphasised strongly by the more-experienced
teachers. In contrast to the former group, openness emerges strongly for the more-experienced teachers. Competence is emphasised to some extent, while benevolence and reliability are considered less important.

**Competence.** Competence is not a facet that emerges spontaneously from the more-experienced interviewees’ responses, but is generally acknowledged when directly addressed in interview questions. Of the more-experienced interviewees, Nadia places the most importance on competence as a significant factor affecting her inclination to exercise informal leadership. She highlights competence indirectly when she refers to the respect she and her colleagues have for one another, offering an anecdote that illustrates the importance of trust in colleagues’ competence when team-teaching a mathematics inquiry:

The day we were going to do the [demonstration lesson], the raisins [that the students were counting] were much smaller [than anticipated] and there were 35 in a box [rather then the expected smaller number] and it totally screwed-up the whole lesson, but [my colleague] looked at me, and I looked at her, and we managed to talk our way out of it and rearrange the lesson. When you do [demonstration lessons], you follow a script and I had to go off script because it was no longer going to work as planned and she totally supported me with that and was able to add onto what my idea was and it worked really well in the end even though it wasn’t what wasn’t on the script… So I think it is that element of trust that if things are going to go wrong then they are going to be there to back you up.

Nadia’s last comment underlines the faith that she has in the competence of her teaching partner (as well as reliability and a trust in her supportive qualities), and
illust rates the important role that attributions of competence can play in relationships with colleagues.

In common with a number of the less-experienced teacher leaders, Simon is inclined to assume that his colleagues are competent:

Any input we give or take is under the ground rule that we’re all competent. We’re not propping one another up due to incompetence or some glaring lack of something, “I’d better go in and help this guy with long division because he can’t do it”. …I don’t think we’d expect that everyone knows everything …[but] we’d expect they are competent enough to put suggestions into action.

Similarly acknowledging, but de-emphasising, the importance of competence, Norman observes the competence of his colleagues, but suggests that it is not enough to secure his trust in them, “I see the competence there, but the benevolence or reliability can fall off. Definitely talented teachers, good at their craft, but there’s a bigger picture than just your subject”.

Andrea offers an alternative perspective, suggesting that competence is not essential, feeling that it can be developed by her colleagues where necessary, “I don’t think competence is as important, because who I am is the person who instigates and tries to light fires under people so they can build that confidence”. While she refers directly to competence, Andrea’s comment implies that she is referring to the importance of high levels of competence rather than a baseline; she refers to her role as a motivator rather than an educator, suggesting that her colleagues have the necessary competence to follow her lead, but need to develop their confidence.

As with the perceptions of the less-experienced teachers, most of the more-experienced teachers believe in the competence of their colleagues, but few place huge
significance upon it as something that affects their inclination to exercise leadership. In the case of more-experienced teachers, this is probably a result of these teachers’ experience of witnessing consistently high (or, at least, sufficient) levels of competence in their colleagues. Although it is not strongly emphasised, competence is generally acknowledged as a present condition in these teachers’ schools and, as such, is likely an important condition promoting the exercise of informal leadership. As described in the section on less-experienced teachers, this finding is not surprising; a perceived absence of competence in colleagues would likely impede teachers’ motivation to exercise informal leadership.

**Benevolence.** Unlike in the responses of the less-experienced teacher leaders, benevolence does not emerge strongly in the interviews with their more-experienced counterparts. Two of the teachers make reference to the benevolence of their colleagues, but do not emphasise it strongly.

As illustrated in her ‘raisins’ example, Nadia identifies the support she feels from her colleagues, stating,

I find the trust comes in when they are encouraging. They say, “Have you thought of trying it this way or have you thought of doing it that way?” And then they are supportive - supportive but non-judgmental. I think it is important that teachers don’t judge each other; that we see each other as a team.

Also acknowledging the benevolence of her peers, Andrea values their tendency to assume good will when new ideas are suggested, “There is a real trust…I think that we all trust each other that we’re putting our best foot forward”.

While Andrea and Nadia’s comments allude to a mutual benevolence between herself and her colleagues, the other two more-experienced teachers make no explicit
reference to the benevolence of their colleagues. Simon’s comments suggest that his own benevolence towards his colleagues is a factor in his relationships with other teachers (another illustration of the reciprocity of trust). He appears to place great importance on the benevolence his colleagues attribute to him, “I think there’s a great safety in knowing that if you enter into a conversation or peer over someone’s shoulder as they are working on something, that if we can trust one another then you have some safety”.

While two of the more-experienced informal teacher leaders make reference to the benevolence of their peers, specifically through being supportive and extending good will, the more-experienced teachers are not generally inclined to consider the benevolence of their colleagues as an important factor affecting their inclination to exercise informal teacher leadership. This contrasts markedly with the responses of the less-experienced teachers. For those teachers, I propose that a lack of confidence, due to these teachers’ relative inexperience, might account for them valuing the benevolence of their colleagues; for the more-experienced teachers, it seems far less important. With their extensive experience, they have more confidence in their ideas and practice and, consequently, are less concerned with how their ideas or actions will be received by their colleagues.

**Openness.** Openness is a facet that emerges strongly from the interviews of the more-experienced teacher leaders. All acknowledge openness as a factor affecting their inclination to exercise informal leadership, attributing varying degrees of significance to it.

Andrea places great importance on openness, appearing to define trust largely in terms of this facet, “I think it’s huge to have trust - I think it’s huge to have someone
look at your ideas. A big thing for me is the knowledge-building; we’re trying to build our understanding about the whole idea [of inquiry]”. She highlights the openness of her colleagues when considering factors that affect her inclination to exercise informal leadership, suggesting the current school climate in her school is favourable, “We’re at a point where we honour one another’s opinions, that we are able to put our ideas out. …There is a real trust.”

Nadia describes the school culture in a similar way, and provides an example of the openness of her colleagues when she describes how the single-subject specialists work with what she is teaching in her classroom:

If I tell them what’s going on, especially like the French teacher, the Music teacher, the Art teacher, then they’ll come back and say we can follow that line of inquiry through in our lesson and it just all becomes richer and better because of that… For instance, the Music teacher; it is difficult to integrate music and we were doing a unit on structure and she is doing this great thing on rhythm and beat and the structure of music and I said, “We can really integrate this”, and we ended up actually writing an article together and that was really nice for me that she wanted to write the article with me and do it together. So that really validated what we had done. So, I actually like it when people come and say, “I want to do this together”. I think that validates the trust. And the Art teacher, she was brand new but we instantly clicked and she can just walk into my room and we just bounce ideas and we just work totally together and, I think, some of it is personality, the trust, some people are more open than others and I think you work more with the ones who are more open.
Nadia’s last statement echoes the comments of Norman and Nigel, who suggest that they are more inclined to work with colleagues whom they trust. While not appearing to place as much importance on openness as the other more-experienced teachers, Norman implies an expectation that teachers should be open when he highlights the absence of openness in his relationships with those teachers with whom he does not exercise leadership (as discussed previously). He reinforces the importance of openness in the context of what he sees as necessary conditions for a successful middle school,

Interviewer: Openness, is that something we’re talking about with the teachers who don’t respond, or you don’t feel you can influence?

Norman: Right, they’re not into the team. And we are a middle school, it’s really important we function well. We are a network of teachers, a team of teachers.

While Norman observes that some teachers are more open than others, Simon suggests that his colleagues’ openness depends upon who is presenting the ideas; his teaching colleagues are more open to him that they are to some of his peers. He attributes this openness to the effectiveness his own behaviours, again flagging the mutual element of trust:

You can feel it sometimes in a meeting when there are four or five people who have to make a bit of a spiel on different topics. Everyone is received a little differently, and I have always felt a good receptive space with my peers and, again, I think that is a product of not wasting anybody’s time and I’ve typically tried to go at things with some preparation and get my thoughts together, get something interesting to work on, and so if it is in a meeting situation or just in a small group in a hallway, I feel that people are very receptive to my contributions.
Simon attributes his colleagues’ receptiveness to a mutual openness in their relationships with him:

I guess I have a hard time not making it a two-way thing, that people trust that I’m not there to [waste peoples’ time], “Oh, here comes [Simon] and he’s going to go on and on about something…” Just have a quick chat with a kid or suggest my own thing and trust that the teachers can work with that, that I’m not upsetting anybody’s work, that we’re flexible enough. So I guess there’s a trust in that.

The more-experienced teacher leaders tend to emphasise the importance of openness to a greater degree than their less-experienced counterparts. Most describe a school culture where openness is common and expected, but they suggest that is not universally present; some of their colleagues do not demonstrate it all of the time. Most references to openness relate directly to informal leadership actions, reinforcing the strong relationship between the two variables. The comments of Norman and Simon illustrate this relationship by highlighting circumstances where they, as informal leaders, choose not to try to influence colleagues who they perceive are not open and where their colleagues are only open to, and thus influenced by, some of the potential teacher leaders.

The importance of openness in supporting the exercise of informal leadership by more-experienced teachers is not surprising. Informal leaders, by definition, can only influence others who choose to be influenced. It makes sense that they would only change their professional practice if they were open to the ideas of these leaders. The contrast in the degree of emphasis placed on openness between the less-experienced and more-experienced leaders underlines the findings of the previous chapter: that the two groups of teachers tend to perform different kinds of leadership tasks. While the less-
experienced teachers tend to engage in activities that do not require ‘buy-in’ from their colleagues (e.g. organising extra-curricular activities or helping-out in various ways), the more-experienced teachers are typically more engaged in influencing colleagues’ professional practice (e.g. introducing new ideas and curricula). To do this, the openness of their colleagues to their ideas is essential.

**Reliability.** Reliability is the least emphasised facet in interviews with the more-experienced teachers. With the exception of Andrea, who states, “I can completely count on the people I work with”, no notable references are made to reliability. While reliability registers as a present condition for the exercise of leadership for the less-experienced group of teachers, it is clearly not important for their more-experienced counterparts. As with the disparity in importance placed upon openness, this could be explained by a greater sense of self-confidence in the latter group. As discussed previously, the nature of informal leadership is such that reliability is unlikely to be a necessary condition. While having reliable colleagues is likely a desirable condition, it is apparently not one that is necessary for the exercising of informal leadership – when colleagues are not required to follow, these leaders do not need to rely on them to do so.

**Honesty.** Honesty features strongly in the responses of the more-experienced informal teacher leaders, suggesting that it is an important factor contributing to the exercising of informal leadership. While they do not typically describe it as impacting directly on their inclination to exercise leadership, they suggest that it is a feature of their school culture and, as such, it can be considered an important contributor to conditions supporting the exercise of informal leadership.

Nadia describes how honesty is a necessity in relationships within a collaborative environment:
People [are honest] in a jokey way, they do it in a nice way, but they are honest. They are honest because we always do things together, so if we are going to present together [to colleagues or visitors], things have to be good, things have to be worked out so, I would say, occasionally people do get upset about things. There is one teacher who is very negative about things and I will say to her, “Could you phrase that differently, because people feel like you are beating up on them”. We had someone [critiquing] our lesson study who said, “The kids can’t do this, the kids can’t do that, the kids can’t do the other”. And I could tell she was upsetting the teacher and I said, “Did you see [the teacher’s] face? We know these problems exist but we can’t start assigning blame, it doesn’t help to say that”. We know we’re not perfect; we can’t dwell on it. What we have to dwell on is how we’re going to resolve it. So I would be blunt in that respect if someone was upsetting someone else.

Nadia’s comments suggest that, in her school at least, blunt honesty is tempered by benevolence; her example demonstrates that honesty is valued, but the expectation is that it is framed in a way that does not offend.

Resonating with Nadia’s comments on the nature of honesty in her school’s culture, her colleague, Andrea, reports that the honesty demonstrated among teachers in her school is facilitated by a belief that the critiquing of ideas is not personal:

Trust is putting you ideas out and knowing and understanding that someone is not going to attack you as a person, they are not attacking the idea; they are contemplating and mulling-over the idea and not you.

Norman offers an alternative perspective on honesty, describing how dishonesty can serve to erode trust relationships with colleagues. While discussing the peers that he
is less inclined to work with, he gives an example of dishonesty that falls outside the realm of informal leadership, suggesting that trust in colleagues’ honesty can be affected by interactions in a range of circumstances. “[I’ve had colleagues who say]: ‘Sorry I wasn’t outside at duty, I had to do this’ when really they were off doing something else. That honesty is super-important”.

The more-experienced informal teacher leaders value honesty as highly as any of the five trust facets and suggest that it is a crucial part of the collaborative process that is associated closely with informal teacher leadership. These teachers believe that honesty is essential to maintain the quality of their professional work, they expect that their colleagues will critically evaluate their suggestions and do not take it personally when they do. As with their less-experienced counterparts, these teacher leaders believe that receiving honest feedback from their colleagues is an important part of the process that leads to improved professional practice.

The importance of trust facets in relationships with teaching colleagues – more-experienced teacher leaders: summary The responses of the more-experienced group of informal leaders provide plentiful data that informs Research Question 2 (What specific facets of trust are important in creating supportive conditions for the exercise of informal teacher leadership?). These teacher leaders place importance on fewer of the facets than their less-experienced counterparts. The more-experienced leaders, whose leadership behaviours are typically associated with the development of professional practice among their peers (as opposed to the ‘stepping-up’ of their less-experienced counterparts), place great importance on the openness of their colleagues. This finding is not surprising considering that informal leaders seeking to change the practice of their colleagues lack a formal position of power, and thus require ‘followers’
to be open to their ideas if they are to exercise leadership. Like the less-experienced
teacher leaders, this group of leaders also placed great emphasis on the honesty of their
colleagues, recognising the importance of feedback when developing professional
practice. Competence was recognised in a similar way to that of the less-experienced
teachers: acknowledged as present by the majority of teachers, but not emphasised
strongly. The remaining two facets, reliability and benevolence, did not feature strongly
in the interviews of the more-experienced teachers. In contrast to the less-experienced
teachers, who placed some importance on these two facets, these leaders are senior
teachers in their schools, more secure in their professional knowledge and less in need
of a supportive environment.

**Comparison of trust facets between the two experience-based groups.** Table 11 summarises the data collected for both experience-based groups of teachers and
shows that they collectively place great value on the honesty of their colleagues. The
teacher leaders’ comments suggest that honest feedback helps them to develop and
refine their ideas. Competence, too, shares similar importance in the eyes of both
groups; they universally consider that their colleagues are competent but do not see this
competence as a particular motivator to their leadership actions and often see it as a
‘given’ in their working environments.

The main differences between the two groups are in the emphasis placed on
openness (important for the less-experienced teachers, highly important for the more-
experienced teachers), reliability, and benevolence (both important for the less-
experienced teachers, less important for the more-experienced teachers).
Table 11

Comparison of the importance placed upon trust facets between the two experience-based groups of teacher leaders in relationships with teaching colleagues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less-experienced informal teacher leaders</th>
<th>More-experienced informal teacher leaders</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly Important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Less important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Benevolence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The disparities between the two groups can be attributed to the two main differences between the profiles of the groups’ members: the kinds of leadership activities they engage in, and their experience levels. The less-experienced teacher leaders tend to engage in activities that involve them taking-on extra responsibilities - often reducing the burden on their colleagues. These activities do not typically require openness from their colleagues - who would not be open to having their burden reduced? Conversely, the more-experienced teachers are more involved in developing the curriculum in their schools; activities in this realm require openness from their colleagues if they are to be influenced and, one assumes, for these teachers to be recognised as informal leaders. The more-experienced teachers, judging by their nomination as informal leaders, are respected senior teachers in their schools. As such, they have a proven track record and are likely to be confident in their professional abilities and do not place great importance on having a support group (reliable and benevolent colleagues) around them. The less-experienced group, largely surrounded by
senior colleagues, tends to feel a greater need for colleagues that they can rely upon for support.
Chapter Five

Presentation of Findings: Informal Teacher Leadership and Trust in Administrators

In this chapter, the research questions will be addressed with regard to trust in administrators. This chapter will first deal with the broad concept of trust before considering Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) five component facets (competence, benevolence, openness, reliability and honesty). Data addressed in this section were largely drawn from responses to questions relating to the interviewees’ relationships with their administrators - questions that inquired into why the informal teacher leaders felt comfortable exercising leadership and probing respondents’ references to trust for more precise meaning - before asking directly about the importance of trust and the specific trust facets. As with the previous chapter, the two experience-based groups of teachers will be considered separately when the data are analysed at the facet level.

The Importance of Trust in Relationships with Administrators

This section addresses Research Question 1 (What role, if any, does trust play in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership?) as it pertains to teacher leaders’ relationships with administrators. In considering the importance that the interviewees place on trust in their school administration, there is less unprovoked reference to trust or its component facets in the early phases of the interviews (before trust is directly addressed) than is the case with teachers’ trust in their teaching colleagues. In these initial exchanges, none of the teachers highlight the broad term ‘trust’, but a number reference the component facets. When asked about how their relationships with administrators affect their informal leadership, the less-experienced teacher leaders highlight a number of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) facets. Elizabeth flags
the competence of her administration, suggesting that they provide good role modelling for her leadership actions. Nadia, Andrea, Hannah and William are keen to acknowledge the support they get from their administration, highlighting a combination of openness and benevolence – administrators open to the ideas of teachers and willing to support them. Nadia states,

I’ve always been encouraged here, which is nice, because you get to some schools where the administration pull rank and they have to know everything, and it’s not like that here. The administration will come and ask me stuff; they respect you intellectually.

Andrea suggests that her administration has been even more positive by actively encouraging her to exert leadership even though she is not naturally inclined to do so,

I think that, for me, I needed someone to say, “You’ve got something here. Why don’t you try and do something with it?” I may not have done that previously and said [for example], “I want to start an inquiry group”. It’s not quite my personality to do that, but someone saw something in me that made me believe more [in myself] in order to be able to push that forward.

Hannah, having acknowledged how the administration establishes a positive culture in the school, reinforces this by contrasting it with an alternative scenario: “I think that if we don’t feel that we have the support of the administration, it can limit you or make you question what you are doing”.

William acknowledges the support of the administration in his leadership actions, but qualifies this with the recognition that they often want to influence his initiatives, citing the example of his professional support group,
I had an incredible opportunity to go on a course last summer that was fascinating. …I was away for two weeks - a colleague of mine had been away on the exact same course the year before - and I came back and said [to my colleague], “OK, now there’s two of us in the school and we’ve got to get people involved”. So we had this conversation and we came to [the administrator] and said, “We want to open this up in the school”. And she said, “This is great, everyone should be doing it”. And we said, “Absolutely not!” So there was this balancing where we say to her that we want to initiate this and make it available to anyone who wants to participate and her desire for everyone to benefit from it and then us pushing back and saying, “No way, we want your support to make it go ahead, but no way can you conscript people into this process because it will fail for sure, it’s doomed if it is a mandatory thing”. So it’s a give and take [situation].

While a number of teachers, from both the more- and less-experienced groups, highlight trust facets in their initial responses to questions, these teachers are less inclined to reference trust as a whole concept when describing the role of their administration in affecting their inclination to exercise informal leadership than is the case with the role of their teaching colleagues. These initial ‘unprovoked’ references to trust facets underline the importance of analysis at the facet level that follows later in this chapter.

When asked directly about the importance of trust in their administrators, most of the interviewed teachers acknowledge its importance, sometimes as the whole concept, but more often in relation to specific facets.\(^9\)

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\(^9\) It should be noted that when trust in administrators is directly addressed in the interviews, Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) facets have previously been introduced (in the discussion on trust in teaching colleagues) – this may have affected the respondents’ choice of words when referring to trust.
Nigel is one of the few teachers who speaks at any length about trust as a whole, describing the trusting relationship he shares with his principal and how it has motivated him:

We’ve developed a great relationship so far and it makes me work harder; it makes me work harder for the students, it makes me work harder for him and I respect him, I trust him, I don’t fear him. I’m not doing it because he told me to do it. He’s asked me to do these things and I’ll do it for him. Trust is probably the biggest word and that’s all those [facets].

Hannah captures most of the facets (only honesty is absent) in her initial response to the question of trust in her administrators:

I think [trust] has a huge role. In terms of if you’re interested in pushing an idea through, you need [the administration’s] support. I mean there’s a lot you can do, colleague to colleague down the hall, but if something comes of that that you want to pursue, then you need their assistance; just a nod that you can go with it. All those things, I mean knowing that they are going to follow through, knowing that if you are going to put something in their hands, to take that it will be done competently, that it will be done.

More typically, after an initial acknowledgement of trust, interviewees focus on particular facets in their responses. A number of teachers highlight openness in these initial responses. Norman, perhaps using ‘faith’ as a synonym for trust, states,

I have a lot of faith in my administration right now. If I didn’t, I don’t think I’d be working as hard as I do right now. I think they share with me as much as they can. I’d argue that they are open. In terms of openness, they do value input, [they] ask and will look for (when the time is right) some input on issues in the school.
William, as mentioned previously, describes trust in his administrators in terms of openness and benevolence:

I think [trust] has a lot to do with [my motivation to exercise informal leadership]. When you do something, you have to trust the admin. to back you up. You have to know you have support for your initiative and [they will] not hold it against you if it doesn’t work out. I think you’ve got to trust them to do that. And maybe that’s the benevolence thing again. This year alone, there were a bunch of things that I feel I was trusted with that really didn’t work out as well as I’d hoped, but I feel the administration continued to be supportive because at some level they believed in the value of the idea that was put forward.

Similarly, Simon describes his administrators’ trust in terms of openness and support (benevolence), highlighting how they welcome ideas and stimulate deeper thought about them:

I guess I’ve always trusted that… I’ve tried to describe this school to people that haven’t met us, that [the administration believes]: “Every good idea is welcome”. And really the litmus test for a good idea begins with what you believe in. “Is this something that you believe in, that makes sense to you? Then we’ll work from there”. So I’ve always been trusting that administration is happy to have things moving forward. [They ask questions, such as:] “Have you thought about this? Is this something you’ve read about? Is this something you believe in? OK. So what next?” “We’re not going to build a brand new programme, but is there a way? Is there a project or a lesson?”

Alison focuses more on the benevolence of her administration when asked about her trust in them:
I think a big part of it is, for me, it’s care. I think being in an environment when you know that they respect you and they care about your life at school and even your life away from school, so you’re walking down the hall and they say, “Oh, I hear you bought a house, that’s great”, or “How’s it going with this?”

Elizabeth emphasises openness and honesty in her administration, “I believe that they are open, they’re honest about ideas or anything that you bring forward”. When questioned about examples of their honesty in regard to her actions as an informal leader, she responds with an illustration of their benevolence: “Yes, there have definitely been suggestions from them. They’re so supportive”.

Andrea makes reference to the trust she has in the competence of her administration; knowing that the decisions that are made are made with careful thought by knowledgeable professionals. She states,

You know that [the principal] has background knowledge; she’s not just saying it because the person next door is saying it. You know that she has had a lot of thought in putting it forward. So there’s that, I have that trust.

Nadia provides an alternative perspective to the other informal teacher leaders, suggesting that recent development have eroded perceptions of competence in her administrators, highlighting a clash of values between the philosophy of her teaching and some of the recent directives from administration, notably in relation to standardised assessments.

So, I go along with it, but …I don’t trust them fully on those issues in that… I whip through this assessment half-heartedly because I don’t want to give it the time, because I don’t feel it is valid. …I still do the assessments, I have to, but I don’t lay
any value by them and I don’t give them the time other teachers do. I don’t want them to impact on my teaching.

In summary, a number of the interviewed teacher leaders highlight the importance of trust in their administrators, or some of its component facets, before they are asked directly about it. When asked directly, most acknowledge the importance of trust and their comments highlight the range of facets, suggesting that it plays a significant role in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership. All of the facets emerge to some extent from the data, some more strongly that others and, as with the data regarding teachers’ relationships with their colleagues, contrasting patterns of response emerge from the less-experienced and more-experienced groups of teachers. One facet that emerges as universally important from the initial comments is openness, suggesting that the administrators in these teachers’ schools play an important role in encouraging their informal leadership by being open to teachers’ ideas and by communicating openly with them. The following section addresses in more detail the interviewed teacher leaders’ responses in relation to the trust facets.

The Importance of Trust Facets in Relationships with Administrators

This section addresses Research Question 2 (What specific facets of trust are important in creating supportive conditions for the exercise of informal teacher leadership?) as it pertains to teacher leaders’ relationships with administrators.

Analysis of the teacher leaders’ interview data in relation to Tschannon-Moran’s (2004) trust facets supports the emphasis placed upon openness in their initial comments (when they were asked more broadly about trust). It also reveals some differences between the two experience-based teacher groups in the facets emphasised.
While these differences are not as marked as with the relationships with teacher colleagues, they diverge enough to warrant discussion in separate sections.

The importance of trust facets in relationships with administrators

- less-experienced teachers. Table 12a summarises the responses of the less-experienced teachers regarding their relationships with their administrators; specifically, the role that Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) five facets of trust play in making them feel comfortable exercising informal teacher leadership. The facets are labelled as ‘present’ or ‘strong’ in the teacher columns in relation to the strength of their emergence in the interview data. A ‘strong’ label represents a high level of importance placed on that facet by the respondent, whereas ‘present’ denotes an acknowledgement of the facet, but with less emphasis placed upon it. Empty cells reflect minimal importance placed upon a facet.

Table 12a.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Elizabeth</th>
<th>Nigel</th>
<th>Alison</th>
<th>William</th>
<th>Hannah</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
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<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Competence.* While most of the less-experienced teachers acknowledge competence in their administrators, few emphasise it as a facet that is significant in creating conditions that encourage the exercise of informal leadership.
Nigel and Alison categorically state the competence of their administrators, when asked directly, before moving on to other matters that they are more inclined to discuss. Hannah simply states that she has confidence in her administration, “If you are going to put something in their hands, [I assume] that it will be done competently”. She also makes reference to the respect she has for her administrators, suggesting a belief in their competence, emphasising the role that it plays in creating conditions that support informal leadership: “I think that trust and respect for your administrators [is] a huge aspect of not only your workplace happiness but also your confidence in what you can accomplish as a leader, even informally”.

Elizabeth is alone in taking some time to illustrate, specifically, how she sees competence in her administrators,

They are competent as leaders because [the school] runs so smoothly and because [when] any issues… do come up, everything is dealt with professionally, but with compassion and there’s open communication. They always keep us in the loop. I mean, we don’t feel that they are sitting on their throne, pointing fingers and telling us what to do. There’s always this open communication… and they always make time for us.

William does not make direct reference to competence, but describes various scenarios that suggest a confidence in his administration. For example, he states:

There is opportunity to interface with the administration to say, “This is what we are doing right now” and to have their support. You get their feedback almost right away, and every meeting is like a workshop where you put the ideas together and then you try the next move.
As with the perceptions of competence in their colleagues, the less-experienced teachers all acknowledge that their administrators are competent, but appear to take it as a given; few emphasise it as being particularly important and most are not inclined to discuss it in any detail. Perceptions of competence are typically associated with the individual’s vision of what ‘doing a good job’ looks like in any given situation. In the case of these teachers, competent administrators are open to the ideas of their teachers, are supportive, provide feedback, and communicate effectively. The less-experienced teachers report that their administrators’ actions align with their conceptions of competence. Relating these perceptions to the leadership activities typically engaged in by these less-experienced teachers, the competent behaviours highlighted align logically with the needs of teachers looking to engage in actions such as coaching extra teams, helping with extra-curricular activities and otherwise ‘stepping-up’; they want approval from administrators to take on the extra responsibilities, and want feedback on their performance in those roles.

**Benevolence.** Benevolence is a facet highly valued by the less-experienced teacher leaders; it is frequently mentioned and illustrated in a number of ways, often in relation to their informal leadership actions. Many references are made to the support teachers receive from administration; some refer to the extent to which they feel their formal leaders care about them, others make reference to feeling appreciated by the administration, and one teacher talks about the guarding of confidential information.

Support is a feature of teachers’ perceptions that can be aligned with benevolence but it can also include an element of openness. There are shades of grey in the distinction, but where administrators are supportive of actions, this is considered more in the realm of benevolence; where administrators support ideas, it also includes a
degree of openness. Elizabeth illustrates this with her comments about making suggestions in meetings, “…if you come up with anything in a meeting, [they will say] “that’s a great idea, make a few notes, come and see me tomorrow, let’s discuss it”. So there’s always the “that’s a great idea, let’s move forward”. Many of the teacher leaders reported similar experiences that can be interpreted as benevolence with respect to valuing teachers’ opinions, but also openness to their ideas.

Perceptions aligned more with openness are discussed further in the following section. Relating more specifically to benevolence, a number of teachers perceive care from their administrators in the way their ideas are put into action. William describes how his principal has reacted to some of his ideas that have not worked out as planned:

There’s been a couple of things where I’ve gone to my review with my principal, sharing a couple of things and him saying, “Don’t be too hard on yourself, it’s OK”. …Maybe that’s his wisdom, having been through a lot and knowing it, and …his ability to have perspective on the whole process. That really makes a difference, for me to have a mentor say, “It didn’t work, but don’t worry about it”. Because sometimes it feels like it really matters, and that is my own issue with ego and getting wrapped up in how important I think it is. But having your boss say, essentially, “Don’t worry about the script, keep trying”, and that was a helpful thing. So I feel that supports any informal leadership role.

In addition to feeling that their ideas are respected, a number of the teachers express a clear belief that their administrators care about them in more general terms. Alison illustrates her confidence in how her administration cares for her when she states: “I’m comfortable going to them. [For example], last year [with a parent who
upset me] I’m comfortable and …I know [they’re] not going to judge me, they’re going to support me. I feel supported which I think is so important.”

Nigel also speaks with conviction about how his principal cares for the members of his community,

He cares about the boys, he puts himself second. …What he does for the boys he does for [the teachers] as well. …At the beginning of the year, he was loaded down with work, but his door was always open and every time he was in there, there was a staff member in there crying, laughing, talking. So I think that’s one of his strongest attributes, that [element of] caring.

William identifies another way in which his administration demonstrates benevolence: with public displays of appreciation for teachers, “The trust looks like somebody, one of the admin., standing up in a faculty meeting and acknowledging the work done by a group of people, which I think is a nice thing.”

Outside the realm of professional matters, Elizabeth provides an example of how an administrator demonstrated care around a personal issue:

I can think of a specific example last year when I was having a problem with a family member outside of this whole community, and [my administrator] walked into my classroom and he sat down, closed the door and said, “What do you need, how can I help?” And that was compassion and everything, but I felt I could really trust him. And he said, “Nothing goes out of this [room]. What can I do? How can we help? How can I help?” I felt there was always trust, and I can’t really pinpoint how I knew, but it was at that moment I thought, “OK”.

The issue of confidentiality is something that was clearly important for Elizabeth. Hannah also refers to this, but in a negative way (in this case around
professional rather than personal matters), when she suggests that a lack of confidentiality in professional matters has eroded her trust in administration,

Sometimes, there are details of conversations that get shared with me about other people or get shared about me to other people from an administrator here that I’ve thought: “I’m sure that was told in confidence”. Little things about why people are off for the day, or, “Someone had hoped to have this job next year but we’re not moving them” kind of thing. And while it’s not directly tied to anything you are doing, it does kind of take that [trust] meter down, …sometimes I’ve heard things in passing about other people and I’ve thought, “I shouldn’t know that”.

Hannah’s example illustrates the importance of confidentiality – an element of benevolence – in maintaining levels of trust. This example also highlights the reality that trust as a whole, or in a particular facet, is not necessarily applied to all administrators in a school by these informal leaders. Hannah clearly has reservations about a particular administrator, but it has not prevented her from exercising informal leadership.

The less-experienced group of teachers all feel generally supported by their administration and many report perceptions that their administrators genuinely care about them. Perceptions of benevolence are typically general (rather than specifically in the realm of informal leadership), suggesting that it is an important facet contributing conditions that support the exercise of informal leadership, but is not necessarily directly related to leadership actions. Benevolent administrators help to create conditions in which these teachers feel secure and are inclined to exercise informal leadership. As discussed in the previous chapter (in relation to supportive colleagues),
the relative inexperience of these teachers may explain their need for emotional support from their administrators. They want to know that their formal leaders value their ideas and are behind them as they carry out their additional responsibilities. They also want to be confident that their administrators will support them if things do not go exactly to plan.

**Openness.** As discussed in the preceding section, openness is often associated with benevolence when administrators offer support to teacher leaders. Openness, as distinguished from benevolence, is manifested mainly in administrators’ willingness to listen to and embrace teacher leaders’ ideas, and by actively involving teachers in decision- and policy-making. As such, it relates more directly to the exercise of informal leadership. As shown in Table 12a, openness is a facet that emerges strongly from the responses of the less-experienced teachers. A number of the interviewed teachers highlight their administrators’ openness to ideas. Hannah states,

> If you have an idea that you know you can walk in the door and say, “Can I put this on the table?” And know that they will be open to it, but also that they have the time to listen to that, that they have the time to value that stuff that’s happening ground-up out in the halls as opposed that they are pushing from the top down.

Similarly, William describes his principal’s response to teachers’ continued efforts to modify the school report card,

> We’ve been working on improving the report card and I went to the principal at the beginning of the year and said, “We’d like to try this with the report card”. And he said something to the effect of, “You guys always want to change the report card, and we’ve changed it every year and I’m not sure of the value that it
adds to keep changing it”. And, at the same time, he said, “If you think it’s going to add value, give it a try”. [They are] very supportive, and very willing to make space for those ideas.

The less-experienced teacher leaders also observe that their administrators actively seek teachers’ input into school-level decisions. Nigel provides an example of his principal initiating the involvement of the whole middle school in creating a new mission statement,

He allowed us to collaborate and come up with a new mission, a new vision for middle school. Instead of just saying, “This is the new mission. This is the new vision that I’ve come up with, or the board has come up with”. He … took away [parent-teacher] interviews for a day and we sat in the boardroom and we discussed ideas. He came up with the topics but we came up with the solutions.

Communication is another area where the less-experienced teachers observe openness. William suggests that his division head models a trusting relationship by making herself vulnerable to the teachers by openly talking about mistakes she has made,

One of the experiences I’ve had this year with working with [my division head] is things that she has tried that haven’t worked - mistakes she has made that she is open and honest about and willing to debrief and unpack them. So I feel that she is modelling the trusting relationship. And I guess her willingness to reflect that way would support that sense of being able to take risks with any kind of leadership in that I know she’s willing to do the same.

Elizabeth describes how the physical layout of the administrator’s offices and their general demeanour reflect their openness: “The door to the office is always open.
The way their desks are positioned, they are facing the open door. They are open, they always look up and wave and smile.”

Members of the less-experienced group of teachers positively assert the importance of openness in creating suitable conditions for the exercise of informal leadership. They highlight the willingness of their formal leaders to listen to their ideas (directly supporting the exercise of informal leadership) as well as bringing attention to their leaders’ efforts to harness the opinions of teachers in their schools. Additionally, some teachers report the demonstration of openness in their administrators’ general demeanour and willingness to admit their mistakes. Openness can be considered a highly significant element contributing to conditions that support the exercise of informal leadership.

The emphasis placed upon openness by the less-experienced teachers could be attributed, in a similar way to benevolence, to the relative lack of professional confidence on the part of these teachers. It is likely that these teachers’ confidence in pursuing their ideas stems from a perception that administrators value their input. This openness helps provide a safe environment in which these teachers can express themselves; when they bring an idea forward, they are confident that it will be considered.

**Reliability.** In contrast to teachers’ perceptions of reliability in relation to their teaching colleagues, the less-experienced interviewees are not inclined to make explicit reference to the reliability of their administrators, emphasise its importance, or illustrate how it plays out in relationships with their formal leaders. However, they do often suggest, implicitly, that their administrators are reliable and typically confirm this when asked directly.
Reliability in administrators is often implied through teachers’ comments regarding how they find their administrators’ behaviours predictable and consistent. For example, William begins numerous sentences with, “I feel like I trust them to…”, while Elizabeth expresses great belief in predicting what will happen when she approaches her administrators. For example, “The door to the office is always open …they always look up and wave and smile. ...So there’s always the, ‘That’s a great idea, let’s move forward’” (emphasis added). Nigel uses the same adverb to express confidence in his principal, “He’s always …visible, he cares about the boys, he puts himself second, after his staff”. In a similar way, Hannah speaks of ‘knowing’ things will happen: for example, “…knowing that they are going to follow-through, knowing that if you are going to put something in their hands, to take that it will be done competently, that it will be done” (emphasis added).

While none of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders emphasise reliability as having an important role in creating suitable conditions for the exercise of informal leadership, it is acknowledged by all of these interviewees as a quality possessed by their administrators. As such, it should be recognised as a feature of the conditions that support the exercise of informal teacher leadership. Echoing the attribution in the previous two sections, perceptions of reliability in administrators help teacher leaders to feel confident and secure in their environment. They feel that their administrators can be relied upon to react in a predictable way to their actions.

**Honesty.** While not referred to as frequently or in as much detail as is the case when describing relationships with their teaching colleagues, honesty is mentioned explicitly by most of the less-experienced teachers and should be considered a factor affecting their inclination to exercise informal leadership. Honesty is discussed mainly
with reference to feedback that they get for ideas they take to their administration – thus 
relating directly to the exercise of informal leadership. William states, “I feel like I trust 
them to give me an honest response if I’d say, ‘Can we do it like this?’ …I trust them to 
give me honest feedback”. Elizabeth describes the honest feedback she received in 
relation to her work on a scholarship award, supplementing the support she felt and 
providing a useful reminder of her responsibility, 

[The administration said], “Make sure the interviews are after school, because your boys are number one. Your classroom is number one”. That’s something 
they’ve always said, so …that’s the honesty. …It’s honesty and it is also 
caring, and compassion for the boys and reminding me, “Oh right, my boys are 
number one, so I can’t stretch myself too thin, because they are the number 
one, they are the most important”.

Speaking in more general terms, Nigel, as stated previously, expresses great 
trust for his principal, including references to honesty, but he contrasts this with his 
relationship with another administrator, underlining the importance of this facet:

Nigel: [The principal is] unique, I would say. [The administrators] all have 
strengths and weaknesses, [one of them] is great at empowering teachers to be better teachers. … He’s given me different roles, but …I wouldn’t say he is 
very honest or caring. In terms of managing people, that’s where he’s lacking. 
Interviewer: Do you trust him?

Nigel: No, I don’t. He’s made me become a better teacher, but I don’t trust 
him.

Nigel is able to see value in this administrator, but is unable to trust him based 
upon his perception that he is not honest or caring. This raises the question of whether
teachers need to trust all of their administrators; in Nigel’s case, he appears to have a high level of trust in his principal but not in one of his other senior administrators.

Data collected from interviews with the less-experienced informal leaders suggest that honesty is an important facet contributing to conditions that are supportive of informal leadership. However, Nigel’s comments provide evidence that trust need not be felt universally across the whole of the administration, providing teacher leaders have a trusting relationship with one of the formal leaders - in his case, the principal. These comments echo the sentiments of Hannah, who suggests that she does not trust in benevolence of some of her administrators.

Honesty does not feature as strongly in the less-experienced teachers’ comments in relation to their administrators as it did with respect to their teaching colleagues (where it was the most emphasised facet). The relative lack of emphasis placed on the honesty of administrators could be attributed to a natural tendency to call upon colleagues for feedback on their ideas before taking them ‘to the top’. While administrators’ honesty is acknowledged as important (with some teachers connecting its importance directly with their leadership actions) it is the honesty of their colleagues whom they rely upon more regularly to help develop their ideas.

**The importance of trust facets in relationships with administrators – less-experienced teacher leaders: summary.** While the less-experienced group of informal teacher leaders collectively acknowledge the importance of all of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) trust facets in their relationships with their administrators, they emphasise benevolence and openness most strongly as attributes of their administrators. Honesty and reliability are considered important, while competence is acknowledged but not emphasised. The pattern emerging from these data differs from that apparent in the
responses with regard to their teaching colleagues, but can be similarly attributed to these teachers’ relative lack of experience and need for a safe environment in which to exercise leadership. These teachers’ leadership appears to thrive in conditions where they perceive their formal leaders to be caring, supportive, and open to their ideas. The honesty of their administrators is valued (but not to the same extent as the honesty of their colleagues whom they likely call upon for feedback more often), and while they do not emphasise the competence of their administrators, they are confident that they will act in a positive and predictable way.

**The importance of trust facets in relationships with administrators**

- **more-experienced teachers.** Table 12b summarises the responses of the more-experienced teachers regarding their relationships with their administrators; specifically, the role that Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) five facets of trust play in making them feel comfortable exercising informal teacher leadership.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Norman</th>
<th>Andrea</th>
<th>Nadia</th>
<th>Simon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Strong</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The facets are labelled as ‘present’ or ‘strong’ in the teacher columns in relation to the strength of their emergence in the interview data. A ‘strong’ label represents a high level of importance placed on that facet by the respondent, whereas ‘present’
denotes an acknowledgement of the importance of the facet, but less emphasis placed upon it. Empty cells reflect minimal importance placed upon a facet.

**Competence.** The more-experienced teachers collectively give the impression that they perceive their administrators to be competent. They typically acknowledge complexity in the role of administrators and suggest that they believe they do a good job.

As discussed previously, perceptions of competence are typically attributed to behaviours aligned with the expectations of the observer. Simon appears to recognise value in the way his administration critically evaluate ideas he brings to them. His comments reflect a belief that he expects them to perform a role in expressing a different perspective and encouraging deeper thought:

The things that come [to] administration are often works in progress or diversions from what we’re currently up to and elicit [responses, such as] “Have you thought about this? What are the implications?” Administration has often got a little wider view than individual schoolteachers do. So …I think you know when you bring things to administration that …they are going to add a thing or two. …I take that as validation, [they say] “We’re going to move forward, but does it require more thought or more research? Bring it back to your team”. But all of those steps are positive. I don’t feel like that is rejection.

When asked if he feels this is a reflection of their competence, he replies: “Of course, and that’s why you take things to them. … It’s positive, it’s honest, it’s productive”.
Andrea, as stated previously, acknowledges the background knowledge of her administrators, and implies a confidence in the way they go about making decisions when she states:

The majority of the time, [they make decisions] collaboratively. There are some pieces that need to be directed as they are time-sensitive, but the collective piece is that we are given our voice, I think that is important. But that means there are a trillion meetings - there are so many meetings - but it is valuable as they are asking for our input. We are all this big family, this big group. I think it is important that they value our input.

Andrea’s comments also reflect a belief that competence is tied to an alignment with her idea of what good administrators should do. The interviewed teachers frequently speak approvingly of the way their administrators go about their work. This is particularly apparent when teachers refer to changes in administrators that have taken place in their schools in recent years. Norman compares the previous school leadership with the current:

Change is hard in schools, and I think that the people that resist the change the most are the administration. …Sometimes it involves taking a chance and it could fail, and are they prepared to pick up the pieces and build it back up after if it doesn’t? You’re taking-on change and new things. You [have to] balance how much, and the administration that’s in place right now is prepared to take that risk. …I felt it was difficult to identify leadership in the middle school. …getting the school to move forward in a certain direction and it felt like people were managing rather than leading. …And now, there’s more reflective practice
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…and that’s coming about from the new leaders that are coming into this building.

In terms of what Norman perceives to be the necessary qualities of effective administrators, his current formal leaders seem to fit the mould. Similarly, Nadia talks in terms of a change from a previous regime to one that matches better with her beliefs about education.

When I first came, it was a very traditional school and I went from being one of the oldest [faculties] to one of the youngest overnight. …[The school had] a reputation as a ‘traditional’ school and it wasn’t really until we got [the new principal and vice-principal, who] introduced inquiry learning and they …really encouraged us to change the way we teach. So, they were the ones who initiated it and it snowballed form there. …So, it became much more of an academic place, teachers would give each other articles, there’s just more of an academic atmosphere than there was when I first came here.

Nadia’s comments suggest that these new administrators have brought a set of educational beliefs that make them appear competent in her eyes. Interestingly, she goes on to discuss even more recent developments that have eroded her trust due to a movement away from her beliefs. She discusses an increased emphasis on standardised assessments in her school. She states,

That can be frustrating because you have a different vision so I think, to a certain extent, that might erode you trust. So you know you can’t do what you believe in or there’s this fundamental difference. …I don’t trust them fully on those issues in that, if I whip through this assessment half-heartedly, it’s because I don’t want to give it the time, because I don’t feel it is valid.
When asked if the assessment policy is a reflection of the administration’s competence, she replies:

I don’t know that it is that they don’t understand as much, they are just as educated. But it’s a different understanding, but I don’t think it is necessarily what they believe, I think [it’s because] they are answerable to the board, the governors, [and] the parents.

In her perception, the competence of the administration is diminished because they are not acting according to their (and her) beliefs, they are being influenced by other stakeholders.

The perceptions of the more-experienced teachers regarding their administrators’ competence appear to be important in creating conditions that support the exercise of informal leadership. All of these teacher leaders recognise the competence of their administrators. These perceptions of competence appear closely tied to a shared set of beliefs between informal and formal leaders. It appears that these experienced teacher leaders are comfortable exercising leadership in circumstances where their formal leaders’ beliefs are aligned with theirs. In such circumstances, they feel confident that their ideas will be considered and often embraced.

Benevolence. The more-experienced group of informal leaders are not particularly inclined to recognise benevolent behaviour in their administrators. They make some reference to support and appreciation but, as discussed previously, support is also associated with openness and their references to support are more frequently aligned to this facet. Simon is one experienced leader who does evoke benevolence in his comments about his administrators; his comments reflect an ongoing support for his work:
Our administrators are very supportive, very appreciative. I’m always surprised with the level of granular attention that [the principal] pays to things. The papers he reads, the emails that he gets, and I know that he is pleased to have a handful of people that cut a wide swathe through the day and keep the school churning in some informal ways. So I’ve only felt great support.

Similarly, Nadia reports that she finds administration supportive, although she frames it in such a way as to suggest that the emphasis is on delegating the work of supporting new teachers, “I have found administration very supportive. Obviously they want you to mentor the younger teachers and they want you to share your expertise, so I’ve always been encouraged here”.

Norman is more specific, providing an example of how an administrator sought him out after he was unable to help him immediately with an urgent discipline issue (although his comments could be seen to betray the administrator’s apparent need to appear supportive!),

He tracked me down, half an hour after the fact, walked up to my desk, looking for reassurance that I felt supported by him and I think was somewhat apologetic for being occupied, but once that was over he realised that he needed to make sure that we feel supported by him.

The other two informal teacher leaders are less inclined to recognise benevolence in their administration. When asked directly about whether her administration display benevolence, Andrea offers (perhaps damning them with faint praise), “I think there’s a bit of caring; they ask you how your day is, sometimes”.

Nadia, following her more positive previous comments, describes a climate which could be described as the antithesis of caring,
I mean we have a high turnover of staff. This is a place you get burnt out in easily and... we have a high turnover of staff. "If you are not up to scratch, you’re out!" kind of thing. ...I would say that erodes trust with the administration. You get to know these people as people, as colleagues, so every time someone is fired, that erodes your trust in the administration as you start to think “What if that was me?” and these people have lives and families to support.

Nadia’s comments suggest that, in her case at least, benevolence is not of great importance in creating suitable conditions for the exercise of informal leadership. While none of the other teachers are negative in their perceptions of benevolence, few report strong perceptions of benevolence in their administration, suggestion that it is not a necessary element in creating suitable conditions for the exercise of informal leadership. As discussed in the previous chapter, this could be attributed to a confidence and security borne from their numerous years of experience.

**Openness.** As mentioned in the previous section, teachers often describe openness in terms of support; they feel that their administrators are open to, and supportive of, their ideas. References to openness are frequently made with direct reference to informal leadership actions. Norman gives an example of an administrator supporting a curricular initiative - being open to it and supporting (but not controlling) its development.

My assistant head, right off the bat, saw [the idea] as an interesting initiative and got right behind it - and wasn’t actively involved but facilitated and allowed it happen. And, in terms of supporting that with [addressing] parental questions, said this is supported by research, best teaching practices and thus is
done for the benefit of the boys and also, he has helped us through this process of growth and development as a group.

This example reinforces the distinction between benevolent support and support of an idea motivated by the desire to improve the education provided by the school. Similarly, Simon explicitly suggests that the support of his administration is motivated by a belief that being open to, and embracing, the ideas of the teachers can improve the school,

Administration is appreciative, [and] supportive, but I think [they understand] that extra stuff is, sort of, the raw material or fuel for having good things happen at school. I think if you just depended upon all the stuff that’s in the handbook or the job description, maybe you don’t get quite as active or vibrant a place.

Andrea, too, suggests that the openness of her administration to new ideas is motivated by a belief that positive change can result:

They encourage you try it out because they …want you to try it out and see if it works because they may not have tried it before. …so they encourage people to try to take different directions more so than ever.

Nadia describes her administration as open and supportive of her ideas, illustrating this with the example of a collaborative teaching initiative,

I went and found out about [the idea] and said, “Look, this professor was here”, and then I told them about this [teaching initiative, and I said] “I’d really like to go down there [to the USA] and look, and can I go to this conference?” And they were really supportive.
In addition to being receptive to the ideas of teachers, the more-experienced teachers offer examples of how the administration actively seeks input from teachers. Norman reports that his administrators have consulted the teachers on a number of policy issues:

They do value input, [they] ask and will look for, when the time is right, some input on issues in the school … even right now in the middle school, to develop a big picture of what the [remodelled] middle school will look like, … [they] have asked for not just my feedback but everyone’s, so [they are] definitely very open.

Andrea, too, provides an example of an administrator actively seeking the input of teachers in designing a new report card.

[The principal] didn’t come down and say, “This is how it’s going to be done”… [And] because we’ve had such a voice in [the report cards], it’s empowering that we have created these pieces … the idea that our principal is giving us the opportunity to produce something that is meaningful and valuable.

Nadia offers another example of how the administration is open to suggestions around teacher workload, also implying an element of benevolence.

[There were] so many lunchtime meetings and we have to supervise the kids at lunch too, … we literally went throughout the day without a break and by Christmas we said, “OK. Enough. We can’t do this”. Because we only barely get 20 minutes for lunch, we have to have that time to eat. … But the administration listened and they said “OK, no more lunchtime meetings”, and they did away with it.
Members of the more-experienced group of leaders provide numerous examples of their administration being open to, and supportive of, their ideas as well as actively seeking teachers’ input in decision-making and a willingness to listen to, and act upon, teacher grievances. Not only is openness frequently referred to as important, but these references are typically made with regard to informal leadership actions. As such, it is the facet emerging most strongly as a support for the exercise of informal leadership.

The kinds of leadership actions engaged in by these more-experienced teachers (typically curriculum-related initiatives) often require the approval of school administrators. Thus, it is not surprising that administrator openness is an important facet to these teacher leaders. Without it, their informal leadership could not be so influential in their schools.

**Reliability.** As with their less-experienced counterparts, the more-experienced leaders are not inclined to cite reliability as an important quality in their administrators. However (again like their less-experienced peers), they sometimes explicitly, but more often implicitly, suggest that their administrators are consistent in their actions. Andrea makes a direct reference to reliability when talks about the transparency of their actions, “They will do what they say and, if they don’t do what they say, they will have some explanation that’s reasonable and thought through and is understandable because they say what they do”.

All of the more-experienced teachers imply a belief in the consistency of their administrations’ actions. Norman and Simon make statements that suggest predictability in their administrators’ actions. Simon states, “I’ve always been trusting that… administration is happy to have things moving forward”. Norman offers, “The
administration that’s in place right now is prepared to take that risk [in making changes]. …They do value input, ask and will look for, when the time is right, some input on issues in the school”. Andrea’s use of the present tense in her responses also suggests a belief in the consistency of her administration. Statements such as, “They encourage you to try it out” and, “You know that she has had a lot of thought in putting it forward”, imply a confidence in a predictable response from administration.

Similarly, Nadia implies consistency with statements like, “I would go to them, because I know that they are interested”. She states, “[The administration] are really supportive. …If you can show them the research and you can ask them that way, they are great here. … If you say I really want to go to this conference and I’ve read about this, they’ll support you”. These comments illustrate these teachers’ confidence in receiving a particular response if they approach the administration.

While the more-experienced teachers are not inclined to explicitly flag reliability as an important facet affecting their inclination to exercise leadership, it appears to be a quality perceived as present in their administrators. As such, it can be considered an element of the environments that support the exercise of informal teacher leadership. The reliability of administrators appears to play a more important role than benevolence in creating an environment in which these teachers feel secure exercising leadership. They may not need to feel cared for, but they do want to feel that their administrators’ response to their actions will be predictable; such an environment encourages creative action on the part of teachers.

**Honesty.** Honesty is not a facet that is discussed at length by the more-experienced informal leaders. While most report that their administrators are honest with them, there is a range in the level of importance they place upon it.
Simon is alone in speaking at any length about honesty and in relating it directly to his leadership actions. He suggests that while teachers in his school are not always good at being honest with each other (they typically give positive, rather than honest, responses when presented with an idea), his administrators are more direct. Where colleagues shy away from questioning ideas, his administrators do not:

I think administration will absolutely ask those questions - ask for more time, ask you to write something up. There are ways to slow down a process or force some second thought. And I feel like our administration doesn’t hesitate to ask for that.

As described earlier, Simon values the honest input of his administrators, believing it to play a valuable role in the development of his ideas. Other teacher leaders from this experience group recognise honesty in their administrators, but do not relate it directly to their informal leadership. Norman states that honesty is, “the most important” facet of trust (without expanding upon this statement), Andrea believes that some of her administrators are “completely honest” with her, but others are less so – a recurring theme in the responses of teachers who state that they trust only some of their administrators.

While acknowledged as a quality of their administrators by most of the more-experienced teachers, honesty does not emerge strongly in their interviews. As with the less-experienced teachers, honesty on the part of administrators can be useful in helping the process of refining ideas, but it appears to be less important than honesty shown by their teaching colleagues (where it is highly valued). This discrepancy could be explained (as with the less-experienced teachers) by these teacher leaders relying more frequently upon their teaching colleagues for feedback in the early stages of idea
formulation; by the time these ideas reach the administration, they are at a more advanced stage of development and in less need of honest feedback to inform modifications.

**The importance of trust facets in relationships with administrators – more-experienced teacher leaders: summary.** Members of the more-experienced group of informal teacher leaders acknowledge the importance of all of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) trust facets to varying degrees. As with perceptions regarding their colleagues, they consider openness to be the most important facet at play in relationships with their administrators. The emphasis placed upon openness is not surprising considering these teachers’ leadership actions typically involve curriculum development – the kind of action that requires administrative support to proceed. Similarly emphasised is the competence of these teachers’ administrators. The attribution of competence by these teachers appears closely related to perceptions that the administrators share similar values to these leaders; such ‘competent’ leaders are typically open to the ideas of these senior teachers and encourage a collaborative approach to decision-making.

Reliability and honesty are acknowledged as important, but emphasised less, by these leaders. They feel comfortable exercising leadership in environments where their administrators’ behaviours are predictable and they can be relied upon to be honest. Without having a direct effect in promoting informal leadership in the way openness and competence appear to, reliability and honesty can be considered as ‘background conditions’ supporting the exercise on informal leadership.

Benevolence is not widely considered important by the more-experienced teachers, a finding that could be attributed to the professional confidence of these experienced teachers and the lack of need for emotional support.
Comparison of trust facets between the two experience-based groups of informal teacher leaders.

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less-experienced teachers</th>
<th>More-experienced teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highly important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Competence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Reliability</td>
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<td>Reliability</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less Important</td>
<td>Less Important</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Benevolence</td>
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</table>

In relation to the research questions addressed in this chapter, trust clearly plays a significant role in creating supportive conditions for informal leadership (Research Question 1) and all of the facets are important, to varying degrees, in creating supportive conditions for informal leadership (Research Question 2). As shown in Table 13, the data reveal a complex relationship between the facets and other variables, suggesting that the importance of particular facets is affected by teachers’ career stage and, considering the data described in the previous chapter, on whom they are interacting with.

The distinction that was identified in previous chapters between informal teacher leaders who have four to six years of experience (the ‘less-experienced’ group) and those who have 14 to 28 years of experience (the ‘more-experienced’ group) is continued in this chapter. Collectively, the teachers broadly acknowledge the importance of all of the facets. However, analysis of the data pertaining to Tschannen-
Moran’s (2004) five facets of trust reveals different patterns in the two groups of teachers.

There is some similarity between the emphasis placed upon the five facets across the two experience groups: openness emerges strongly with both groups, and reliability and honesty are universally considered important. However, there is disparity in the relative importance placed on benevolence and competence. The less-experienced leaders consider the competence of their administrators the least important of the facets, while the more-experienced teachers place great emphasis upon its importance. For benevolence, the opposite is true: for the less-experienced teacher leaders, benevolence is highly important; for the more-experienced group, it is emphasised far less as a factor affecting their inclination to exercise informal leadership.

The high level of importance placed upon openness within both experience groups is clear from the interviews, both in the frequency of references to it and in how it is often directly related to the exercise of informal leadership. All informal leaders require openness from their administrators in order for their ideas to be embraced by their schools. Both groups of teachers placed comparable levels of emphasis upon honesty and reliability, with less importance placed upon them than openness and the influence less direct than is the case with that facet of trust. Honesty and reliability are described as attributes generally recognised in their administrators rather than qualities that directly affect the exercise of leadership.

The disparity in the level of importance placed upon competence and benevolence by members of the two groups can be explained by the difference in their years of experience. With competence, it should be noted that the less-experienced group of teachers’ lack of emphasis on this facet appears to result from an assumption
that they have faith in their administrators’ competence; it generally appears to be a non-issue. In the early stages of their careers, these young teachers perhaps do not feel confident questioning the competence of their formal leaders, feeling automatically that their superiors know what they are doing. Members of the older group of teachers, on the other hand, with (one assumes) greater craft knowledge and experience to draw upon, are more inclined to judge the competence of their administrators. In fact, a number of them reflect upon previous administrators in their buildings who have not set the same standard that their current formal leaders do. They recognise the competence of their administrators based, to some degree, on perceptions of their administrators sharing their own values and beliefs.

The difference in years of experience can also explain the disparity between these two experience groups’ perceptions of benevolence. While the less-experienced teacher leaders emphasise the importance of the benevolence they recognise in their administrators, their more experienced counterparts appear to consider it the least important of all of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) facets. It is not surprising that less-experienced teachers, who are likely to be younger than most of their peers, would feel more comfort making themselves vulnerable in an environment where they perceive their administrators as caring and supportive. Older, more experienced teachers are likely to be more secure and confident in themselves and their ideas; they are less likely to feel the need for such emotional support.

The data reveal significant differences between the importance placed on the various trust facets by the two groups of teachers, differences that generate implications for administrators looking to promote informal leadership in their schools. These will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Six

Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter summarises the findings described in the previous three chapters before discussing them in relation to the existing research in the field and expanding upon the suggested explanations for these findings proposed in the previous chapters. The conclusion considers the implications for these findings.

Summary of Findings

Surveys conducted at three independent schools yielded data suggesting, as expected, that these schools are collaborative environments likely to be conducive to the exercise of informal teacher leadership. A surprising development in the analysis was that the nine teachers nominated by peers as informal teacher leaders fell into two categories based on their years of teaching experience: five teachers (the ‘less-experienced’ teachers) had four to six years of experience, the remaining four had 14 to 28 years of experience (the ‘more-experienced’ teachers). These two groups of teachers broadly described two different sets of behaviours that they felt had led to their nomination as informal leaders. The former typically described actions more akin to definitions of organisational citizenship behaviours (OCB) (e.g. coaching extra teams, helping out with drama productions), and common conceptions of distributed leadership (e.g. taking on leadership roles allocated by their administrators) than the stated definition of informal leadership, while the latter described behaviours that are closely aligned with that definition.

Trust and its component facets (competence, benevolence, honesty, openness and reliability), both in relation to their teaching colleagues and their administrators, emerged strongly, without provocation, as a reason why these teachers felt comfortable
exercising informal leadership. Direct probing with regard to how trust affected the teachers’ inclination to exercise informal leadership reinforced the importance of trust to these teachers and revealed patterns of emphasis placed on particular trust facets. These patterns show variation based upon the teacher leaders’ level of experience and on whether they considered trust in colleagues or trust in their administrators. The following discussion considers these findings in relation to existing research in the areas of trust and informal leadership, but also addresses trust with regard to distributed leadership and OCB as these concepts also emerge from the data.

Discussion

This study was designed to investigate the role of trust in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership and it generated some interesting findings in this regard. In order to provide context for this investigation, it also sought to illuminate the characteristics and actions of the teacher leaders involved. In doing so, it revealed some unexpected data relating to teacher leaders’ years of experience and the leadership behaviours in which they engage. The following discussion will address these findings as well as those relating directly to the research questions.

Informal teacher leaders. Hargreaves (1994) observes: “One of the particular strengths of qualitative research is its capacity to identify the unexpected and illuminate the odd” (p. 182). The data gathered from the interviews with informal leaders reveal an unexpected pattern that serves to add another dimension to the findings: the influence of career stage on informal teacher leadership. From the teachers selected for interview emerged two distinct groups of teachers: those with four to six years of experience, and those with 14 to 28 years of experience. Given the small sample size, this could be accounted for by coincidence. However, further analysis yields distinct differences
between the groups in a number of areas, most notably in the nature of their leadership behaviours. This finding stimulates consideration of the influence that experience, or career stage, has on informal leadership.

**The professional lives of informal teacher leaders.** Huberman (1989) provides context for discussion on teachers’ career stage with his extensive work on the life cycles of teachers. As outlined in the literature review, he describes a number of career phases (derived from his review of previous literature) in which he was able to place teachers that were part of his extensive research. Surprisingly, all of the teachers interviewed in this informal leadership study, whose years of experience range from four to 28 years, appear to best fit into one of his phases, ‘experimentation/activism’, which spans only years seven to 18 of teachers’ careers in Huberman’s model. The majority of the informal teacher leaders in this study, whose profiles all appear to match this phase, fall outside this range.

The experimentation/activism phase is the third sequential phase identified by Huberman (1989), following the ‘survival and discovery’ (in which teachers find their feet in the profession), and the ‘stabilization’ phases (in which teachers settle into their careers). Huberman states that the experimentation/activism phase captures a number of themes in the literature and is described in terms of a progression:

First, the gradual consolidation of an instructional repertoire leads naturally to attempts to increase one’s impact… Next, the desire to increase one’s impact in the classroom leads to an awareness of the instructional barriers that are depressing or constraining such an impact and, from there, to attempts to change the more surreal flaws in the school. (Huberman, 1989, p. 34)
While all of the teachers in this study appear to fit into the description (if not the time-scale) of this phase, the distinction between the two experience-based groups is recognisable in Huberman’s (1989) description of progression within the phase, with the less-experienced teachers reflecting the early stage, and the more experienced teachers the later stage. The “increase in impact” can be seen in the less-experienced teachers’ expanding their activities outside their own classrooms with their contribution to extra-curricular activities, sharing of resources and accepting small, formalised leadership roles. The second part of Huberman’s phase, involving teachers’ “attempts to change the more surreal flaws…” can be seen in the work typical of the more-experienced teacher leaders: developing curricular initiatives.

While these phases are, by Huberman’s (1989) own admission, “uneven and inconclusive” (p. 33), all of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders fall outside the normal range for the experimentation/activism stage (by one to three years), and some of the more experienced teachers apparently remain in this phase well beyond the 18-year mark (up to ten years beyond!). Compared with the general population of teachers, these particular teachers can be considered a special group - nominated as a result of their leadership behaviours (although it should be noted that they were a sample taken from a larger pool of nominated teachers) - but it is interesting that all of the informal teacher leadership behaviours fall into the description of the experimentation/activism phase, suggesting that informal teacher leadership would most likely be practiced in the period between the seventh and eighteenth years of teachers’ careers. Of the nine interviewed teachers in this study, only two of them fall into this range, suggesting that informal leaders somehow defy Huberman’s (1989) model, both
by engaging in leadership behavior before they would be expected to and extending that leadership beyond its normal duration.

In discussing the limitations of his work, Huberman (1989) identifies the school organisation as a variable that is potentially significant and under-represented in the literature. The sample of informal teacher leaders in this study can be seen to reinforce his view that the “school as an organisation” (p. 53) is an important factor worthy of attention. The schools represented in this study rate highly as collaborative cultures, and numerous teachers in these schools appear to reside in the experimentation/activism phase both earlier and later in their careers than Huberman’s norms. An explanation for this could be that school cultures play a role in creating conditions where teachers engage in experimentation and activism before and after the expected stage in their careers. Obviously, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the entire populations of the selected schools\textsuperscript{10}, but they do serve to reinforce Huberman’s assertion that the organisation might significantly affect teachers’ transitions between his phases; in this case, with these collaborative independent school environments, by accelerating the start of, and expanding the duration of, the experimentation/activism stage. He states:

It just may be the case that there are institutional environments in which teachers do not disengage, do not end up tending uniquely in their own gardens, do not feel the stale breath of routine after only 8-10 years in the

\textsuperscript{10} Although it should be noted that the interviewed teachers were only three of 12-23 nominated at each school, and not necessarily the most-nominated teachers (some of these declined to be interviewed), nor were they head and shoulders above many other colleagues in the number of nominations they received – there are likely numerous other similar teacher leaders in these schools.
profession, and in which teachers only hear about mid-career crises in other buildings or other districts. (p. 54)

Perhaps the schools studied here are examples of the institutional environments to which Huberman refers. Reinforcing this suggestion are the findings of Day (2012), who conducted a longitudinal study involving 300 teachers in the UK that identified “variations in teachers’ effectiveness over their careers” (p. 10). This study, highly influenced by the work of Huberman (1989) and seeking to address the broad decline in mid-career teacher engagement described by his model, sought to study more closely the conditions “which contribute to teacher quality, retention, and achievement” (p. 11). Assuming the informal teacher leaders in this study fit Day’s conception of effective teachers, his study highlights a number of factors that might explain why they fall outside the career norms described by Huberman. According to Day, “Teachers from across the professional life phases who expressed a positive sense of agency, resilience, and commitment …spoke of the influence of in-school leadership, colleagues, and personal support” (p. 16). His findings suggest that school conditions (as originally flagged by Huberman) have a significant impact on sustaining teacher engagement. The school environments described by the informal leaders interviewed in this study are characterised by positive leadership and supportive colleagues. Day also identifies disruptive student behavior (an issue rarely highlighted in elite independent schools due to the expectations of highly invested parents) as a major factor associated with declining teacher motivation. Interestingly, he also notes, “the commitment and resilience of teachers in schools serving more disadvantaged communities …are more persistently challenged [to maintain a positive engagement] than others” (p. 14),
suggesting that the socio-economic base of school communities is also a significant factor that influences teacher engagement.

The expansion of the Huberman’s (1989) experimentation/activism phase with some of the more-experienced teachers interviewed is supported by the work of York-Barr and Duke (2004), who suggest that teacher leadership is, “a potential solution to the drift and detachment experienced by many teachers. …Involvement in setting direction and supporting professional and school improvement can increase the meaning of teachers’ work” (p. 282).

The finding that many of the interviewed teachers fall outside of Huberman’s (1989) norms for career stage can be explained by two factors that distinguish the interviewed teachers from the general population of teachers. The first is the unusual environments in which they teach, environments characterised by good formal leadership and supportive colleagues (with typically well-behaved students); the second is the fact that they exercise leadership – a factor claimed to be associated with increased motivation (York-Barr and Duke, 2004).

Differences between the two groups of informal teacher leaders. The discrepancy between the leadership behaviours of the less- and more-experienced groups of teachers may be complicated by the way that the teachers in the initial survey defined leadership. As described in the methodology, respondents to the survey were asked to nominate informal teacher leaders from among their peers based on the following definition provided by the researcher:

Informal teacher leaders are teachers who exercise leadership without possessing a formal leadership designation; on their own initiative (rather than
in response to a request from the administration); they influence others to improve their professional practice.

However, from the responses of a number of the nominated teachers, it is apparent that behaviours that were presumed to fall outside the definition (such as coaching extra teams or taking-on formal roles such as leading committees) also appear to have contributed to some teachers’ nomination (at least according to the nominated teachers’ perceptions of why they were nominated). This may have been the result of survey respondents projecting their own definition of informal teacher leadership upon their responses, including the attribution of leadership to prototypical characteristics (as reported by Leithwood et al, 2009). Alternatively, it is possible that the nominating teachers consider, for example, the creation of a new sports team, or helping with a drama production to be important elements of the ‘professional practice’ referred to in the definition provided. It is also conceivable that the selected informal leaders’ perceived reasons for nomination were not the actual reasons that the nominating teachers had in mind - only one of the nominated teachers identified exclusively activities that fall outside this study’s conception of informal leadership as perceived reasons for nomination; while the informal leaders may have attributed their nomination to these actions, their peers may have been nominating them based upon observed behaviours more in line with the stated definition.

What is clear from the interviews is that the less-experienced teacher leaders attribute their nomination to a different set of behaviours than the more-experienced teachers. Within the more-experienced group of nominated teachers, perceived reasons for nomination are aligned more closely with the researcher’s stated definition of informal leadership.
While the behaviours described by these less-experienced teachers are clearly valuable to their schools and their nomination is not surprising, many of their stated actions fall largely outside the definition of informal leadership outlined in this study and are aligned more closely with two other conceptions of teacher behaviour: distributed leadership and OCB – two conceptions that also overlap with one another. Distributed leadership is most often (but not exclusively) characterised by the distribution of leadership by administrators to teachers (as opposed to leadership initiated by teachers). Leadership actions such as work on committees and co-ordinating programmes, as described by some of the less-experienced teacher leaders in this study, fall into this category. OCB have been described by Organ (1988) as behaviours, “not required by the job, but offered in order to help others in the organization” (cited in Mascall et al., 2008). DiPaola and Hoy (2005) describe those who engage in OCB as: “Teachers who voluntarily help their new colleagues …[who] take it upon themselves to make innovative suggestions, to volunteer to sponsor extra-curricular activities, and to volunteer to serve on new committees” (p. 36). This description aligns closely with the actions to which many of the less-experienced informal teacher leaders attributed their nomination as informal leaders. It should be noted here that there is significant overlap between informal teacher leadership, distributed leadership and organisational citizenship behaviours. For example, while the stated definition of informal leadership in this study excludes acts of volunteering, many scholarly writers (e.g. Leithwood et al., 1999) include such actions within their definitions of informal leadership. The attribution of leadership to these actions by the nominating teachers is neither inappropriate nor surprising.
While the deviation of leadership behaviours from the stated definition of informal leadership by less-experienced teachers has been discussed at length, it should be noted here that many of the leadership actions perceived by the interviewed informal leaders to have led to their nomination do align with the study’s definition. Most of the less-experienced teachers report behaviours such as sharing resources and developing curricula. While members of the more-experienced group of teachers consistently reference behaviours more in line with the stated definition of informal leadership, the less-experienced teachers are still included in the discussion on informal leadership.

In addition to the data the interviews generated with regard to the kinds of leadership activities in which these educators engage, their motivations for exercising leadership and the way in which their leadership has emerged during their careers was also discussed. A commitment to lifelong learning was a common theme across both experience-based groups, as was a generally collaborative approach. These findings would be expected among teacher leaders nominated by their peers. What is more surprising is a disparity between the perceptions of these teachers’ emergence as teacher leaders. A number of the less-experienced teachers suggested that the leadership that they exercise in their schools is simply an extension of a pre-existing tendency for leadership behavior, while the more-experienced teachers were more inclined to see their leadership as something that emerged later in their career (some consider it a ‘natural’ progression) as they became experts relative to their peers. For those more-experienced teachers who identified a specific time in their career when their leadership began, it matched closely with the stage predicted by the teachers’ career literature - after approximately seven years of teaching (Huberman, 1989; Day and Gu 2012). As for the less-experienced teachers who claim to have brought their leadership behaviours
into the teaching context, it would be interesting to track the progression of these
leaders, especially considering that none of the more-experienced leaders claim
similarly to have ‘always’ been leaders. Investigation of this issue is beyond the scope
of this study, but could provide an interesting area for future research.

**Trust and informal teacher leadership.** As discussed in the literature review,
there is a dearth of literature in the area of trust and informal leadership, so there is little
to compare the findings of this study with. Those studies that address trust and
leadership often consider the correlation of particular leadership styles with trust (e.g.
Mascall et al., 2008), recognising the importance of high-trust environments but more
concerned with the effect of formal leadership on trust rather than considering
leadership behaviours resulting from conditions of high trust. While the foci of these
studies are not of great direct comparative value to this investigation, some recent
studies (Daly and Chrispeels, 2008; Chhuon et al, 2008) have considered the role of
various trust facets in predicting formal leadership behaviour and serve to highlight the
value of analysis at this level. Where the relative importance of facets is concerned, the
authors of these studies often underline the relevance of context - a finding that is
reinforced by this study.

With the complexity around defining informal teacher leadership in mind, the
findings of the study concerning the less-experienced group of teachers will be
discussed in relation to existing literature that addresses trust and OCB, then trust and
distributed leadership, before the intended focus on trust and informal teacher
leadership.

**Trust and organisational citizenship behaviours.** A number of authors link
trust with OCB. DiPaola and Hoy (2005), investigating the relationship between school
characteristics and OCB, report that, “teacher trust in colleagues was positively related to the cultivation of citizenship behaviours in schools” (p. 266). Somech and Ron’s (2007) research, considering the impact of individual and organisational characteristics on the development of OCB, produced results suggesting that “perceived supervisor support” (p. 55) by teachers is related to OCB. The findings of this study, specifically in regard to the less-experienced teachers (the group that typically engaged in OCB), are aligned with these previous investigations: teachers’ trust in their colleagues clearly contributes to their inclination to engage in OCB, as does the perceived support of administrators. Somech and Ron (2007) make a collection of recommendations that closely resemble Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) definition of benevolence and, indeed, accurately reflect the comments made by the less-experienced informal leaders interviewed in this study regarding their formal leaders: “Principals would be well-advised to exhibit supportive behaviours towards their teachers, such as ‘being there’ for them when needed, treating them fairly, appreciating their contributions, and caring about their well-being” (p. 59).

**Trust and distributed leadership.** Discussion on trust and distributed leadership in relation to the less-experienced informal teacher leaders is warranted as some of their stated leadership behaviours resemble those associated with this popular conception of leadership. As described in the literature review, distributed leadership is a broad concept involving the distribution of leadership through organisations more widely than in traditional hierarchies – potentially including informal leadership, but more commonly involving leadership roles prescribed by administrators. Of relevance here are the leadership behaviours described by less-experienced interviewees that fall outside this study’s stated definition of informal teacher leadership but are captured by
common conceptions of distributed leadership. Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, and Louis (2009) describe distributed leadership as typically involving, “teachers becoming formal leaders by undertaking tasks they would not traditionally have done, including some that would be perceived as administrative” (p. 167). Behaviours such as leading committees or co-ordinating curricular programmes fall into this category. Leithwood et al. (2009) conceptualise distributed leadership in terms of four patterns of leadership distribution, based upon the extent to which the leadership actions are planned: planful alignment, spontaneous alignment, spontaneous misalignment and anarchic misalignment. They considered the effect of these leadership distribution patterns on a number of variables, including trust, in an extensive quantitative study of an Ontario school board. Their findings revealed that planful alignment was the only pattern that correlated with increased levels of trust - especially with regard to their administration.

Planful alignment occurs where,

the tasks or functions of those providing leadership have been given prior, planful thought by organizational members. Agreements have been worked out among the sources of [formal] leadership about which leadership practices or functions are best carried out by which source. (p. 215)

The leadership actions of the less-experienced teacher leaders that fall outside the definition of informal leadership, and into that of distributed leadership, drop most readily into the ‘planful alignment’ pattern: they are planned by administrators who allocate leadership responsibility to specific individuals. Aligning with the findings of Mascall et al. (2008), the interview responses of the less-experienced teachers in this study suggest that they have great trust in their administrators.
While common conceptions of distributed leadership involve school administrators distributing leadership responsibilities, McBeath (2009) demonstrates a broader interpretation of distributed leadership and discusses the importance of trust in promoting leadership. Drawing upon a small-scale study in England, he states: “Without mutual trust among teachers, the latitude for a more opportunistic or cultural form of distributed leadership was undermined. Getting people to participate in leadership activity, to share ideas and adventure into pedagogic territory is problematic” (p. 55). McBeath’s comments reflect an interpretation of distributed leadership more in line with this study’s conception of informal leadership, and emphasises the importance of trust in promoting such leadership – an assertion supported by the findings of this study.

**Trust, trust facets, and informal leadership.** The following section directly addresses the research questions that drove this study. The discussion will reference existing literature, where possible, in seeking to explain the findings but will otherwise speculate based upon the data collected from the interviews.

The teacher interviews provided rich data with which to address the research questions:

1. What role (if any) does trust play in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership?
2. What specific facets of trust are important in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leadership?

As outlined previously in the findings sections, the interview data provide considerable evidence in relation to the first research question, suggesting that trust plays a significant role in creating supportive conditions for informal teacher leaders.
Suitable conditions for the exercise of informal leadership appear to be environments where teachers trust that their colleagues are supportive, open to new ideas and willing to provide honest feedback – the contribution of the specific facets will be discussed later in this section. The interviewed teachers all acknowledge the importance of trust in their colleagues and their responses were illustrated with examples that evoke images of collaborative cultures, supporting Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) linking of teacher trust with professional learning communities. She states:

Whether or not teachers trust one another can have a significant impact on the climate and effectiveness of a school. A collegial atmosphere, authentic relationships, and the level of involvement of teachers in decision making all play a major role in [developing] faculty trust in colleagues. (p. 112)

Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) statement is representative of the trust literature in that it tends to emphasise the factors that help develop trust, rather than the other way around. However, implicit in her writing is the benefit in having a high-trust environment. In reference to the school in which she conducted a case study, she states:

[The principal’s] trustworthy leadership was contagious; it resulted in more trusting relationships throughout the school community. The faculty clearly came to care for one another. …On a professional level, this faculty looked out for one another. …Teachers freely shared ideas and resources. (p. 184)

The development of trust and the benefits of trust work dynamically. A feature of trust relationships that emerged without provocation from the interviews is the perception of trust being reciprocal. For the purposes of this research, trust relationships were only considered from one perspective – that of the interviewees’ trust in their colleagues and administrators. The fact that a number of the respondents felt inclined to
highlight the reciprocal element is reinforcement of the “mutual expectations” (Bryk and Schneider, 2002, p. 20) upon which trust relationships are built.

The trust literature most commonly identifies components of school environments that affect trust. For example, Leithwood et al. (2009) suggest that particular forms of distributed leadership increase levels of trust, and Tartar, Bliss and Hoy (1989, cited in Tschannen-Moran, 2004) report that a collegial atmosphere plays a major role in developing faculty trust. Smylie, et al. (2007), in their case-study research on trust and distributed leadership, suggest that trust and distributed leadership grow, or diminish, in “virtuous and vicious cycles” (Masuch, 1985, cited in Smylie et al., 2007):

In high-trust contexts, there may be an interactive expansion of trust and distributed leadership development. …This suggests that initial levels of trust may be important to distributed leadership development and may call for proactive efforts to develop a foundation of trust to support that development.

(p. 477)

While existing research primarily describes evidence that various leadership variables affect trust levels, the interviews conducted for this study sought to illuminate the role that trust plays in creating supportive conditions for teachers to exercise informal leadership. Useful data were collected in this regard, adding to the evidence suggesting that trust affects patterns of leadership distribution. The collective body of literature that examines trust and leadership suggests that the relationship between the two variables can operate in both directions; perceptions of the interviewed teachers regarding the reciprocal relationship between the development of trust and informal leadership reinforce this.
Trust in administration is also recognised by the informal teacher leaders, although it is emphasised less than trust in colleagues and tends to emerge through reference to individual facets rather than trust as a whole. All of the facets are represented, but openness emerges particularly strongly from interviews with the nine teacher leaders. Openness aside, divergent patterns of facet strength are evident in the two experience-based groups. Discussion of the role of specific facets will continue in the section that follows, but the broad acknowledgement of the importance of trust by teachers in their administrators, and the emergence of openness, reinforce Tschannen-Moran’s (2010) position on the importance of school administrators having a “professional orientation in their leadership style”; one that encourages teachers to “make thoughtful instructional decisions” (p. 241) rather than having administrators micromanage them.

Interview questions designed to address the second research question, investigating the role of Tschannen-Moran’s five facets of trust, yielded data that further reinforce the importance of trust as a whole concept and provides insights into the contribution of each of the facets in motivating the nominated teachers to exercise informal leadership. At the root of the discussion on trust facets is the importance of context. Tschannen-Moran (2004) states: “Although all [of the] facets of trust are important, their relative weight will depend on the nature of the interdependence and consequent vulnerability in the relationship” (p. 33). In revealing different patterns of importance for the facets in each of four different scenarios (less-experienced teachers’ trust in colleagues, less-experienced teachers’ trust in administrators, more-experienced teachers’ trust in colleagues, and more-experienced teachers’ trust in administrators) the
findings of this study reinforce this assertion and help to illuminate the role that trust plays in creating supportive conditions for the exercise of informal leadership.

The contrasting emphasis placed upon the various facets by the two groups of teacher leaders is assumed to result from contrasting perceptions of the two experience-based groups rather than from the two groups actually experiencing different behaviours in their working environments. While it is possible that less-experienced teachers are treated differently than their more-experienced counterparts, the interviews yield no data that suggests that this is the case. For the purposes of this discussion, it is assumed that the teachers experience broadly the same environments but emphasise the importance of different facets due to personal variables including their level of experience and the nature of their leadership activities (rather than because they are treated differently).

The following section considers each of the facets in turn and discusses the findings in each of those four scenarios (less-experienced teachers’ trust in colleagues, less-experienced teachers’ trust in administrators, more-experienced teachers’ trust in colleagues, and more-experienced teachers’ trust in administrators) in relation to Tschannen-Moran’s research. These findings are summarised in Table 14.

**Competence.** As shown in table 14, the emphasis placed upon competence by the two experience-based groups of teachers is similar when considering trust in teaching colleagues – both groups consider it to be important - but differs markedly in relation to administrators, where more-experienced teachers consider it to be of great importance while their less-experienced counterparts consider it the least important of the five facets.
Tschannen-Moran (2004) suggests that the issue of competence in relation to teacher trust in colleagues is a complex one and reports:

The degree to which competence matters to teachers’ trust in one another is related to how interdependent they feel in the teaching realm. …As perceptions of interdependence increased, judgements of one another’s competence became a more salient part of teachers’ trust in colleagues. (p. 120)

Table 14

*The emphasis placed on trust facets by the two experience-based groups of teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust Facet</th>
<th>Less-Experienced teachers’ trust in teaching colleagues</th>
<th>More-Experienced teachers’ trust in teaching colleagues</th>
<th>Less-Experienced teachers’ trust in administrators</th>
<th>More-Experienced teachers’ trust in administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Less important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benevolence</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
<td>Less important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
<td>Less important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Openness</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Less important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
<td>Highly important</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Important</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on Tschannen-Moran’s comments, she would predict a high level of emphasis placed on competence in the highly collaborative settings investigated in this study. While competence is not the most strongly emphasised facets for either of the experience-based groups of teacher leaders, it *is* considered important by both. Bryk and Schneider (2002) observe that most teaching is done in isolation from colleagues,
making attributions of competence a significant challenge. While it is not strongly emphasised in the interviews, all of the respondents consider their colleagues to be competent, but in many cases they give little evidence of why they make this attribution and they often suggest that competence is assumed rather than observed. In terms of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) assessment, competence is clearly a “salient part of teachers’ trust in colleagues”. Moreover, most of the interviewees relate this perception of competence directly to their leadership behaviours, implying that perceptions of competence are a pre-requisite for the exercise of informal leadership. As Simon, one of the more-experienced teachers, states, “I don’t think we’d expect that everyone knows everything, …[but] we’d expect [that colleagues] are competent enough to put suggestions into action”. Reinforcing this point, a number of teachers make reference to colleagues having a ‘baseline’ level of competence, suggesting that there is a threshold level of competence required for informal leaders to feel inclined to exercise leadership (rather than a linear relationship where leadership possibilities improve relative to the amount of competence present).

When perceptions of competence in administrators are addressed, the less-experienced teachers consider their administrators to be competent but are inclined to refer to that competence in general terms rather than providing specific examples of how their administrators demonstrate their competence. The trust literature describes competence in terms of an individual’s actions aligning with expectations (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). In the case of the less-experienced teachers, this involves being supportive and providing feedback; the kinds of behaviours that help these teachers to exercise their ‘typical’ leadership behaviours (those that resemble the organisational citizenship behaviours and examples of distributed leadership). Based on
the responses of the less-experienced informal leaders, this administrator competence manifests itself in indulging these teachers’ offers to step-up to do more than is expected of them, and giving them feedback on their performance in these tasks.

For the more-experienced teacher leaders, the competence of their administrators is viewed differently and is emphasised to a far greater extent. These teacher leaders are more seasoned professionals and have a clearer sense of what constitutes competence in their administrators. As with the less-experienced teachers, competence is perceived in their administrators having openness to ideas, but with these leaders the expectation is also that their administrators will provide a critical soundboard for these ideas and challenge them to be well thought out. This difference between the two experience-based groups reflects the contrast between the leadership behaviours in which they engage. While the less experienced teachers may simply desire a positive response when they propose, for example, a new extra-curricular activity, their more-experienced colleagues hope for an enriching dialogue with their administrators that will give them food for thought as they try to move a curriculum initiative forward. It is no great surprise that the latter scenario would register as a more significant aspect of the teacher-administrator relationship, resulting in a greater emphasis placed upon competence in their assessment of the trust facets.

**Benevolence.** Tschannen-Moran (2004) reports, in her case-study research on three improving schools in the Midwestern USA, that benevolence “was the single most often mentioned dimension of faculty trust in their colleagues” (p. 113). This mirrors the data collected from the less-experienced teachers in this study. Tschannen-Moran highlights the emotional support provided by teaching colleagues and chooses quotes from newly qualified teachers to illustrate this point. However, while Tschannen-
Moran’s findings reflect those of the less-experienced teachers, the more-experienced teachers in this study do not consider the benevolence of their peers to be of great importance. These patterns are repeated when teacher leaders’ relationships with their administrators are considered; the less-experienced teachers emphasise benevolence, while the more-experienced leaders considered it the least important of the five facets.

Less-experienced teacher leaders make themselves vulnerable when they, in Huberman’s (1989) words, seek to “increase their impact” (p. 34) beyond the classroom. This vulnerability likely resides in their junior status in their schools; they want to feel that they will be supported in their efforts, that colleagues and administrators will assume good will in their actions and will maintain confidentiality where necessary. As proposed in the findings section, the lack of emphasis placed on benevolence by the more-experienced teachers can likely be attributed to greater feelings of confidence and security, especially when it is reasonable to assume that these (nominated) teacher leaders feel well respected by their peers.

Openness. Openness is a facet that both experience-based groups of informal leaders emphasise strongly in their relationships with administrators. However, while the more-experienced teachers consider it similarly important with their teaching colleagues, the less-experienced teachers emphasise the importance of openness less with their peers.

The importance of the openness of administrators has already been discussed to some extent, emerging through the teacher leaders’ attributions of competence in their formal leaders; to these teachers, openness appears to be an important attribute of administrators who ‘do a good job’. It is logical that teachers looking to exercise influence beyond their classroom would require the formal leaders of the school to be
open to these ideas; most initiatives will require permission at a minimum, and many might demand extra resources such as money or time (e.g. for meetings or for professional development activities). Central to this discussion is the leadership orientation of administrators. When discussing conditions associated with developing trust, Tschannen-Moran (2009) advocates a ‘professional orientation’. Such an orientation, as the term suggests, considers teachers to be professionals, holding them to high standards and cultivating norms “that enable teachers to productively engage in collective inquiry and constructively contribute to student needs” (p. 227). The administrators in the schools involved in this investigation appear to possess this particular orientation; they value and support teachers’ ideas in the pursuit of an enhanced learning experience for their students. In a number of cases, both with the more-experienced teachers and where the less-experienced leaders are engaging in leadership behaviours aligned with this study’s conception of informal leadership, interviewees describe their administrators’ role in asking for deeper thought on ideas; actions that can be seen as both valuing teachers’ contributions but also holding them to a high standard. The professional orientation of the formal leaders at these schools, as Tschannen-Moran suggests, contributes to the high trust environment that encourages teachers to exercise informal leadership.

When considering the importance of openness in colleagues, as perceived by the two experience-based groups of teachers, there is a disparity between the more-experienced teachers who consider it highly important and the less-experienced teachers who emphasise it less (but still consider it important). An explanation for the disparity can be found in the examples of openness cited by the less-experienced teachers. As with the comments relating to openness and administrators, where these teacher leaders
do make reference to the openness of their colleagues, it is in relation to behaviours aligned with the stated definition of informal leadership. The less-experienced teachers see the most value in openness when they seek to influence the professional practice of their colleagues. When they are engaging in what has been described as organisational citizenship behaviours or actions associated with distributed leadership, the openness of their colleagues is less likely to be important. Many of these activities do not significantly affect their colleagues and, in some cases, might even reduce their burden (e.g. coaching an extra team or organising student helpers); such activities do not require a great deal of openness on the part of colleagues.

The more-experienced teachers are typically involved in leadership activities that impact their colleagues’ professional practice. To them, the openness of their peers is extremely important, as indicated by these teachers’ responses. One of the defining features of informal leadership is the lack of a formal position and, therefore, lack of power to exert influence. Teachers will only be influenced if they choose to be; in order for informal leaders to influence their colleagues, those colleagues must be open to their ideas.

Tschannen-Moran (2004) describes the importance of openness broadly in teacher relationships (rather than specifically in the context of informal leadership), emphasising the cyclical nature of this particular facet – echoing Masuch’s (1985) ‘virtuous cycles’ of trust. She states,

Openness fosters trust but also grows out of a high level of trust; it is part of a spiral of trust… In an environment of trust, people are more likely to be open with information because they feel more confident that others will not exploit the information for their own benefit. (pp. 116-117)
The reciprocal nature of trust relationships has been touched upon previously, but openness is a facet to which a mutual dimension, as observed by Tschannen-Moran, is frequently applied. A number of teachers highlight the openness of teachers as part of their school culture, with colleagues typically open to one another’s ideas. However, another theme emerging from the interviews is the selective exercise of informal leadership by some of the nominated teachers who disclose that they are not as inclined to share information with those colleagues whom they perceive as not being open. This suggests that Masuch’s (1985) vicious cycles of trust (or mistrust) can co-exist with the virtuous ones in the realm of informal leaders.

Openness clearly emerges as the most emphasised facet by informal teacher leaders. If the lack of emphasis by the less-experienced leaders in relation to their colleagues can be rationalised in terms of these teachers exercising predominantly organisational citizenship behaviours and actions more aligned with distributed leadership that are less reliant upon openness, then it can be attributed even greater precedence over the other facets where this study’s conception of informal leadership is concerned. Informal leaders perceive openness in both their administrators and their teaching colleagues. It gives them the confidence to put their ideas ‘out there’ and receive valuable feedback to enhance those ideas, thus enabling them to share their knowledge and expertise for the good of their schools.

**Reliability.** Reliability is typically referred to by the less-experienced teachers as important with respect to having ‘someone to rely on’ when they are in need of help, a finding similar to that reported by Tschannen-Moran (2004), who describes reliability in terms of colleagues helping one another out in unexpected circumstances. This help is not generally sought in the pursuit of leadership activities, so cannot be considered to
be of great importance when directly related to informal leadership. However, it may well constitute an important element in making teachers comfortable and secure in their workplace and thus helping, indirectly, to create conditions for the exercise of informal leadership. With the more-experienced teachers, reliability barely registers in the interview responses, a disparity that could be attributed to a difference in the relative levels of confidence in the two groups of teachers; less-experienced teachers are more likely to value the confidence boost that comes with knowing they have support close at hand, while more-experienced teachers are more confident in their actions and less likely to feel the need for support. This finding is aligned with the teachers’ responses in relation to benevolence.

The lack of importance placed upon reliability in relation to the other facets is a reflection of the nature of this kind of leadership. Where formal leaders rely upon their followers to respond to their direction if they are to fulfill their role, informal leaders are not relying on the behaviours of others to complete tasks for which they are responsible. This is the luxury of being an informal leader; colleagues are influenced if they choose to be and, if they are not, no one has failed to perform their role. Therefore, while it is generally considered to be desirable to have reliable colleagues - and many of the interviewed teachers clearly do - it does not register as particularly important in the perceptions of more-experienced informal leaders.

With this in mind, the reliability in the teacher-administrator relationship is undoubtedly important from the standpoint of the formal leader who requires the follower to be reliable in carrying out his or her duties. However, both experience-based groups of teacher leaders also consider the reliability of their administrators to be important. Indication of this typically comes through indirect reference to how they can
expect consistency in their administrators’ behaviour; both groups are confident that their administrators will behave in a predictable way, reflecting Tschannen-Moran’s observations:

Reliability implies a sense of confidence that you can ‘rest assured’ that you can count on a person doing what expected on a regular, consistent basis.

…Teachers have greater confidence when they feel they can predict the behaviour of their principal. (pp. 29-30)

The consistent, but indirect, nature of the teacher leaders’ references to reliability suggests that the presence of this facet contributes to conditions that support informal leadership, but it is not a direct influence.

**Honesty.** Honesty is one of the most consistently emphasised facets across the four dimensions, suggesting it is an important feature of conditions that supports the exercise of informal leadership. The value of honesty has been alluded to previously in teachers’ appreciation of the feedback they get from their colleagues and administrators. Most specific references to honesty by the interviewed teachers involve the provision of honest feedback by colleagues and administrators. It is clearly an important input for the kinds of leadership initiatives that this study seeks to highlight – those that affect professional practice. As discussed earlier, where informal leadership is concerned the choice to follow is optional, thus teachers who want to influence others are wise to seek input from those involved before pursuing leadership initiatives. When teacher leaders have an idea in this realm, they typically seek feedback primarily from colleagues rather than administrators. This makes sense, as it is typically other teachers who will be most closely involved. With both experience-based groups, the honesty of administrators is considered important, but with teaching colleagues it is valued to an even greater degree.
– it is the most highly emphasised facet across the two groups in relation to teaching colleagues. A number of the less-experienced teachers link honesty directly to their leadership actions, whereas their more-experienced counterparts describe it more as a general feature of their schools. This could be seen as a manifestation of the theme (described earlier) of the former feeling less secure in their ideas or, perhaps, being more likely to need more amendments to their plans due to their lack of experience.

The value placed in honest feedback from colleagues, above that of administrators, can also be seen as a reinforcement of the beliefs that motivated this study; a belief that teachers possess a wealth of knowledge that can be better harnessed in our schools. The informal teacher leaders interviewed in this study consider the honest feedback of their colleagues a factor that contributes to their leadership efforts and, judging by these teachers’ nomination by their peers, helps to make them some of the more notable informal leaders in their schools. While the greater emphasis placed on the importance of colleagues’ honesty over administrators could be attributed to the greater need for buy-in from those directly affected, the greater accessibility of the former or a greater comfort with sharing ideas with them, the fact that these teacher leaders consider their colleagues to be valuable sources with whom to discuss ideas speaks volumes for the collegiality in the teachers’ schools. Nelson, Deuel, Slavit and Kennedy (2010) suggest that successful collaborative environments are characterised by conversations that go beyond traditional school cultures of congeniality. They state: “Whereas congenial conversations are characterized by conflict avoidance, …collegial conversations are distinguished by ‘honest talk’ (Lieberman and Miller, 2008) and ‘consequential conversations’ (Little and Horn, 2007)” (p.177). It appears that the
teachers in these teacher leaders’ schools have gone beyond those congenial norms and are engaging in ‘honest talk’ with their colleagues.

Another facet that may influence the willingness of these teachers to seek feedback from both colleagues is benevolence, which can affect the way in which honest feedback is presented. A number of teachers reference the respectful way in which this feedback is presented and the general perception that benevolence is a feature of these schools’ environments could be a factor in the teachers’ expectations regarding the manner in which feedback will be offered.

Conclusions

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of literature advocating a broader distribution of leadership and more collaborative cultures in schools. The findings of this study illuminate the work of teachers who characterise these ideals; teachers who actively collaborate with, and positively influence, their colleagues - informal teacher leaders. While one of the objectives of this study is to recognise the informal leadership that occurs in schools, it should be noted again that the schools from which the interviewed teacher leaders were selected were chosen based upon a perceived likelihood of their yielding numerous suitable interviewees for this study. As suggested in a recent article by Patrick Bassett, the president of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS), collaborative cultures are widely advocated in independent schools. He states “A high degree of autonomy, of course, is essential to good teaching - but so are ongoing collaboration, thoughtful evaluation, mentoring, and continuous professional development” (NAIS, 2012). This commitment to progressive practice combined with the extensive extra-curricular activities offered by these schools
provides rich and numerous opportunities for teachers to step beyond their classroom to expand the experiences of their students and to influence their colleagues.

This study highlights some of the meaningful work that informal teacher leaders do and the school conditions that help make that possible. While the number of informal leaders nominated in each of the schools and the comments of many of the interviewees highlight school cultures that support informal leadership from numerous teachers, it is not proposed here that everyone should be expected to be a leader (although, such is the expectation of teachers in collaborative cultures such as those studied here, it can be hard to distinguish between good teaching practice and informal leadership). Just as Anderson (2004) observes that not everyone wants to be a formal leader, not all teachers want to be exerting influence outside their classroom. However, creating conditions in which teachers who feel they have something extra to contribute are able to do so is important. The findings of this study underline the importance of trust in creating these conditions and, more specifically, provide insights into the relative importance of Tschannen-Moran’s (2004) five facets of trust in contributing to teachers’ inclination to exercise informal leadership. The study also yields data that illuminate the profile of teacher leadership in schools beyond the stated intention of the research. What emerges from the data is an illustration of how teacher leadership looks at different stages of these professionals’ careers. From the nominated teacher leaders in the three chosen schools emerge two distinct experience-based groups: one consisting of teachers with three to five years of experience and one of teachers with 14 to 28 years of experience. Both of the experience-based groups of teacher leaders experience their schools as being high-trust environments, and they acknowledge the presence of all of
the facets in both their colleagues and administrators - none of the facets are lacking in their workplaces - but the two groups emphasise different facets of trust as important.

The facets highlighted by less-experienced teacher leaders differ from those reported by their more-experienced counterparts as a result of two main factors: their relative lack of experience and the kinds of leadership activities in which they engage. This inexperience likely contributes to their emphasis, above all other facets, on benevolence. In environments where they are junior to the majority of their colleagues, they value the support and care that they perceive in both their colleagues and administrators, and this contributes directly to their leadership actions. The kinds of leadership activities these less-experienced teachers engage in are primarily (but not exclusively) in the realms of OCB and distributed leadership and this could account for the importance they place upon the openness of their administrators (who allow them to perform extra roles) and the honesty of their colleagues (who provide feedback on their performance in the additional roles they take-on).

The more-experienced teachers are more confident in their actions and, while they typically acknowledge its presence in their workplaces, they do not emphasise benevolence as contributing to their inclination to exercise informal leadership. Instead, they value the openness of their colleagues and administrators above all other facets. These teacher leaders, who personify the stated definition of informal leaders, recognise the importance of this facet in enabling their informal leadership. Their experience in their schools is that administrators are open to their ideas, and support them with provision of the necessary resources. They also recognise that, in the absence of a formal position, the openness of colleagues to their ideas is essential. Strongly associated with openness in this context are two other facets: one with administrators
and one with colleagues. The more-experienced teachers consider the competence of
their administrators and the honesty of their peers to be of great importance.
Competence is attributed to formal leaders who fulfill the role expectations of these
teacher leaders; they are open to, and supportive of, their ideas. As far as colleagues are
concerned, the informal leaders value the honesty of the teachers whom they intend to
influence; the feedback of those individuals will be of great importance in negotiating
the way in which the teacher leaders’ ideas will be embraced.

This study provides evidence that reinforces the assertions of Bryk and
Schneider (2002) and Tschannen-Moran (2004) that trust is an important variable
affecting the functioning of effective collaborative communities. It adds to the growing
body of work addressing the contribution of individual facets of trust (Chhuon, 2008;
Daly and Chrispeels, 2008) and underlining the importance of context in determining
which facets are most important. One unanticipated element of context that emerges as
important from the study is teacher experience. Regardless of whether the teacher
leaders interviewed all accurately fit the intended profile of informal teacher leaders,
they were all identified as such by their peers and, therefore, were recognised as
professionals who bring something extra to their schools. The scale of this study means
it would be inappropriate to suggest that the findings provide a blueprint for the
progression of informal teacher leaders through their careers. However, a progression is
visible in these data and flags an area for potential future study. Do informal teacher
leaders typically begin as educators who frequently step-up to take on extra
responsibilities (organisational citizenship behaviours) before being called upon to take
on minor formalised roles (distributed leadership) and then graduate to informal teacher
leadership status? Somewhat complicating this issue is the finding that a number of the
less-experienced teachers consider that they have ‘always’ been leaders, whereas the
more-experienced teachers have evolved into leaders during their careers. Are these
young informal leaders destined to attain formal leadership positions (and thus slip off
the informal leadership radar)? Do they burn brightly early in their careers before
leaving the profession, or are they subject to declining motivation later in their careers,
as predicted by Huberman (1989)?

The suggestion that members of the two experience-based groups represent
similar teacher leaders at different stages of their careers is speculative. It is also
possible that the two groups of teachers that emerged from the data represent different
categories of informal teacher leaders – some who come to the fore as informal leaders
in their early careers before, perhaps, taking on formal leadership roles or moving on to
different careers, and others who emerge as leaders later in their careers having been
relatively ‘quiet’ in their early years. Detailed data were not sought with regard to this
study’s more-experienced teachers’ early careers. Data regarding these teachers’
leadership contributions in their early years of teaching would have provided an
interesting comparison.

Another possible explanation for the contrast between the two groups is
societal change. All of the less-experienced teachers (at least by observation) in this
study are of a younger generation who may have different inclinations in their
leadership actions and/or different emotional needs in their trust relationships. Acker
(1999) highlights this factor – tied mainly to women and, more specifically, whether
they are parents. Career interruptions for maternity leaves can certainly affect the
likelihood or, at least, the timing of women securing formal leadership positions (and
thus being taken out of the informal leadership pool).
There are clearly numerous factors that come into play when considering teachers’ careers. As Acker states, they “are provisional, kaleidoscopic constructions, made up of everyday events and interchanges, surrounded by dimly perceived structural constraints and characterised by change which – by definition – never stops” (p. 166). Further consideration of teachers’ career stage would provide an interesting dimension to future research in informal leadership.

Other areas worthy of further investigation flagged by the findings includes the reciprocal nature of trust relationships. This study considered trust only from the perspective of the informal teacher leaders – the extent to which they trusted their colleagues and administrators. However, definitions of relational trust hinge upon mutual expectations (Bryk and Schnieder, 2002) – informal leadership could not occur if the ‘followers’ did not trust the informal leaders – and many of the interviewed teacher referred to ‘feeling trusted’. Research considering how the various parties experience trust would be of great value and interest.

Regardless of the reasons for the contrasting patterns of leadership actions or trust facet emphases, the implications for schools that emerge from this study centre upon the creation of suitable conditions for the exercise of informal leadership - conditions that clearly exist in the schools studied. The formal leaders in schools are best placed to influence these conditions (Leithwood, 1999). They should pay attention to creating both general conditions that allow teachers to interact and develop trust, and also consider how their own behaviours can promote the exercise of informal leadership. While the broader school conditions that support informal leadership were touched upon in framing this study, they were not studied directly. Further investigation of the structures that help facilitate teacher leadership, and deeper analysis of the
workplace cultures that support it, would be of great value in informing school administrators how to go about creating suitable conditions. The findings in this study suggest that the greatest support of informal leadership is the influence of potential leaders’ teaching colleagues. The single most important factor that promotes the exercise of informal leadership, as defined by this study (and thus considering primarily the data from the more-experienced teachers), is the creation of a culture where, as a first priority, teachers are open to the ideas of their peers. The “professional limitations of teacher individualism” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 183) are well documented. Educators should be sharing ideas as a matter of routine. Part of this sharing should involve honest feedback that indicates collegial, rather than congenial, discourse (Nelson et al., 2010). If the needs of the less-experienced teachers who engage in OCB and distributed leadership actions are considered - and they should be if we subscribe to the suggestion that they are informal teacher leaders-in-training - then the benevolence of colleagues is of great importance. These teachers need a nurturing environment where their colleagues give encouragement and show a tendency to assume good will.

When considering the behaviours of the administrators themselves, then openness comes to the fore again. Without the belief that their ideas will be heard and can, potentially, affect the school beyond their own classrooms, these teachers will quickly lose interest in being leaders. The less-experienced teacher leaders’ needs dictate that the benevolence of their colleagues should be matched by their administrators. The seasoned informal teacher leaders consider the competence of administrators to be of great importance. To them, a good administrator is one who takes advantage of the great potential in his or her school; one who values and encourages the ideas of the teachers.
The beliefs of these teacher leaders resonate with the distributed leadership literature. McBeath (2005) states, “distribution clearly implies an ability to relinquish one’s role as ultimate decision maker, trusting others to make the right decisions” (p. 355). However, the promotion of informal teacher leadership does not diminish the importance of administrators. While it places some of the decision-making in the hands of teachers, the work of formal leaders is not diminished; creating optimal conditions for an effective collaborative culture is challenging. As Leithwood et al. (2009) observe, “evidence as a whole indicates that distributing leadership to others does not seem to result in less demand for leadership from those in formal leadership positions” (p. 248). A number of the interviewed teachers in this study chose to compare their current, effective, administrators in contrast to their predecessors who did not get the best out of their teacher leaders. The growing body of distributed leadership literature places great emphasis on the importance of formal leaders in making the distribution of leadership effective. However, informal leadership is somewhat out of step with common conceptions of effective distribution of leadership in that it thrives in conditions where there is less control from administrators. Informal leadership, as enacted in the schools studied here, slips between Leithwood et al.’s (2009) distribution patterns; it is not ‘planful alignment’, requiring that formal leaders “coordinate who performs which leadership function” (p. 248), nor does it emerge with “little or no planning” (p. 226) as depicted by their ‘spontaneous alignment’ pattern. Instead, the informal leaders bring the ideas to the administrators who work with them to help them move forward in an effective manner.

This study does not seek to undermine the claims of effectiveness of common conceptions of leadership distribution (Leithwood et al.’s, 2009, planful alignment
pattern clearly serves this study’s schools well in some of their stated leadership functions), but it highlights the valuable role that informal leadership can play in schools - given the right conditions. As with the popular forms of distributed leadership, the formal leaders in the school have a crucial role to play in creating the conditions in which informal leaders can emerge and thrive. One of the features of these conditions is trust, and attention to developing particular facets of trust can help to generate the virtuous cycles that appear to sustain collaborative cultures like those present in the schools considered here.

While the context for this study, elite independent schools, is not one that can be broadly replicated (such is the wealth of resources available in these schools), it is worth noting that this context protects teachers from a number of the conditions that contribute to the disengagement of mid-career teachers, including the “growing demands of bureaucracy and …increasing emphasis on meeting imposed attainment targets” (Day and Gu, 2012, p. 101). The independent schools considered here are environments in which young teachers are supported and nurtured while mature teachers are allowed a healthy degree of professional freedom where administrators listen to their ideas and allow them to contribute to school improvement (what Tschannen-Moran, 2009, would describe as a ‘professional orientation’). It appears that some of these senior teachers are immune to the decreased motivation experienced by the general population of teachers 15 or so years into their careers.

The informal leadership-rich environments studied are clearly supported by high trust conditions and the findings of this study serve to highlight how this trust plays out with teachers at different stages of their careers. Further research in a more generalizable context (i.e. public schools) would provide an interesting comparison,
taking purposeful samples of nominated teachers at various career stages. From a personal perspective, my unexpected introduction to the teachers’ careers literature has deepened my understanding of informal leadership and its importance in maintaining teacher motivation, both for the good of the teachers and for the schools in which they can contribute so much, given the right conditions.
References


Appendix A

Teachers’ Letter of Invitation

To the participants of this study,

I am writing to invite you to take part in the first phase of a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral thesis at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. The study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Anderson. I will be the sole researcher. My investigation focuses on informal teacher leaders – teachers who positively influence the professional practice of others without holding a formal leadership position. I am seeking to illuminate the specific role that these teachers play and investigate the factors that contribute to their inclination to exercise informal leadership. The study will involve three Ontario independent schools; it is anticipated that these schools will provide a rich source of informal teacher leaders for the study. Further information is attached in the Description of Study.

The initial stage of data collection involves the completion of a short survey questionnaire by all elementary teachers at the three participant schools. This can be accessed and completed using the link below. Some teachers will be asked to participate in the second stage that involves interviews. Participation in this study is voluntary and you can refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the study at any time (if you do so, your data will be destroyed). Schools and teachers involved in the study will not be named in the report. You are free to ask any questions about the research and your involvement.

By accessing the survey using the following link, and clicking ‘done’ on completion of the questionnaire, you are consenting to take part in the study:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/3D9FLDN

Yours sincerely,

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steve.anderson@utoronto.ca
Appendix B

Informal Teacher Leadership Questionnaire ( printable version of electronic survey )

1. Please state your name:

2. Position in School ( e.g. Grade 4 Teacher, Head of Music Department ):

3. Are you willing to be interviewed as part of the informal teacher leadership study?
   - [ ] Yes, I am willing to be interviewed
   - [ ] No, I am not willing to be interviewed

4. Please nominate 1 to 3 teachers in your school who you consider to be informal teacher leaders:

5. Within the current school year, I have frequently received useful suggestions for curriculum materials from colleagues in my department/division.
   - [ ] Agree strongly
   - [ ] Agree
   - [ ] Disagree
   - [ ] Disagree strongly
   - [ ] Not applicable/Don't know
Informal Teacher Leadership Questionnaire

6. Within the current school year, I have frequently received useful suggestions for teaching techniques and/or student activities from colleagues in my department/division.
   - Agree strongly
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Disagree strongly
   - Not applicable/Don't know

7. In our school, there is a great deal of cooperative effort among staff members on teaching and learning.
   - Agree strongly
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Disagree strongly
   - Not applicable/Don't know

8. I make a conscious effort to coordinate the content of my course with other teachers.
   - Agree strongly
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Disagree strongly
   - Not applicable/Don't know

9. I meet regularly with colleagues to plan lessons, develop curriculum, evaluate programs, or engage in other collaborative work.
   - Agree strongly
   - Agree
   - Disagree
   - Disagree strongly
   - Not applicable/Don't know
Appendix C

Informal Teacher Leadership
Interview Guide

I am conducting research on informal teacher leadership and your responses will help me to identify some factors that contribute to teachers’ inclination to be informal leaders. Within my definition, informal teacher leaders are teachers who have influence on others’ professional practice without possessing a formal leadership designation.

BACKGROUND

I would like to collect some general information before we get into the leadership questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. How many years have you been at this school?

INFORMAL TEACHER LEADERSHIP

3. Your colleagues have nominated you as an informal teacher leader in your school. What kinds of things do you do that might have led them to have describe you as an informal teacher leader?

4. Can you give examples of actions (of yours) that have had an influence on others teachers’ work?

5. One of the things I’m interested in is how certain teachers come to take on informal teacher leadership roles. Thinking back on your career, is there a particular moment when you began to recognise yourself’s having an influence on other teachers’ work?

6. While I imagine that most teachers can point to one or two times when they have had an influence on other teachers’ professional work, not all teachers do that on a regular basis and come to be recognised by their peers as informal leaders. I’m interested in getting a better understanding of the factors that lead some teachers to continue behaving as informal leaders over the course of their career. What insights regarding these factors can you give me from your experience?

7. Do you think your role as an informal teacher leader has evolved over time? (Do you do more/less than you have previously done? Do you intend to continue doing these kinds of things in your school?)

8. If you moved to a new school, would you engage in similar actions? (PROBE: If respondent answers “yes”, ask if they would from day one?)

RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS
9. What is it that your colleagues say or do that suggests to you that they consider you to be an influential informal teacher leader?

10. What is it about your relationships with your colleagues that makes you feel comfortable engaging in informal leadership? (PROBE TRUST OR FACETS IF THEY ARISE)

11. Has your informal leadership relationship with your colleagues evolved and changed in any way over time? Please elaborate.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADMINISTRATION

12. Is your informal leadership role affected by your administration? For example, do your leadership actions require their approval?

13. How do you expect the school administration to respond to your informal teacher leadership actions? (Does this always happen? Is it always positive?)

14. Has your relationship with your administrators around your informal leadership evolved and changed in any way over time? Please elaborate.

TRUST

There are a variety of factors that can affect a teachers’ decision to take on in an informal leadership role. One of those suggested in past research, and of great interest to me, is the role of trust.

15. Would you say that trust in your colleagues is an important factor that makes you comfortable exercising informal teacher leadership? (PROBE: What do you mean when you refer to trust?)

16. How is trust actually demonstrated or communicated in teacher relations (how can you tell when it exists, or not)?

17. Would you say that trust in your school administrators is an important factor that makes you comfortable exercising informal teacher leadership? (PROBE: What do you mean when you refer to trust?)

18. How is trust actually demonstrated or communicated in relationships with administrators?

OTHER FACTORS

19. What other factors do you think support the exercise of informal teacher leadership? (Are these relevant to your informal leadership?)

COMPARISON
20. Name another informal teacher leader in your school. How do their informal leadership actions compare with yours?
Appendix D

Ethics approval form from the University of Toronto.

PROTOCOL REFERENCE # 26084
February 11, 2011
Dr. Stephen Anderson
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
CIJE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Mr. Mark Baxter
Department of Theory and Policy Studies
CIJE/University of Toronto
252 Bloor St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 1V6

Dear Dr. Anderson and Mr. Baxter:

Re: Your research protocol entitled, "Trust and Informal Teacher Leadership"

ETHICS APPROVAL

Original Approval Date: February 11, 2011
Expiry Date: February 10, 2012
Continuing Review Level: 1

We are writing to advise you that the Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Research Ethics Board has granted approval to the above-named research study under the REB's delegated review process. Your study has been approved for a period of one year and ongoing projects must be renewed prior to the expiry date.

All your most recently submitted documents have been approved for use in this study.

Any changes to the approved protocol or consent materials must be reviewed and approved through the amendment process prior to its implementation. Any adverse or unanticipated events should be reported to the Office of Research Ethics as soon as possible.

Please ensure that you submit an Annual Renewal Form or a Study Completion Report 15 to 30 days prior to the expiry date of your study. Note that annual renewals for studies cannot be accepted more than 30 days prior to the date of expiry, as per federal and international policies.

If your research has funding attached, please contact the relevant Research Funding Officer in Research Services to ensure that your funds are released.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your project.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Sharpe, Ph.D.
Research Ethics Board Manager—Social Sciences and Humanities
Administrators’ Letter of Invitation

Dear (Name)

I am writing to invite (your school) to take part in a research study that I am conducting for my doctoral thesis at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto. The study will be conducted under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Anderson, during the current school year, and I will be the sole researcher.

The investigation focuses on informal teacher leaders – teachers who positively influence the professional practice of others without holding a formal leadership position. It seeks to illuminate the specific role that these teachers play and investigate the factors that contribute to their inclination to exercise informal leadership. The study will involve three Ontario independent schools; it is anticipated that these schools will provide a rich source of informal teacher leaders for the study. Further information is attached in the Description of Study.

Data will be collected between March and June 2011; I anticipate that the final thesis will be completed before the end of the calendar year and I will make a summary of my results available to you.

Briefly, participation will involve:

1. A brief survey (5-10 minutes) conducted electronically (via email) with all elementary teachers at your school. (If you agree to participate, I will ask you to distribute an email to your elementary teachers that includes details of the study and a link to the electronic survey).
2. Interviews with 3 or 4 teachers (approximately 45 minutes) identified in the survey as informal leaders by their colleagues.

Agreement for your school to take part in this study is voluntary, as is the participation of individual teachers. Participants can refuse to answer a question or withdraw from the study at any time. At no time will value judgements be placed on responses nor will any evaluation of the effectiveness of individuals be made. The schools and teachers involved in the study will not be named in the report.

Please review the attached Description of Study and consent forms. If you have any questions about the study, please let me know. Please sign and return the consent form if you are able to accept my invitation for your school to participate. Thank you for considering this request, I hope to be learning from you soon.

Yours sincerely,