

**ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE IN  
NEW ZEALAND PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

**SABBATICAL REPORT**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 1998 New Zealand primary schools became responsible for the distribution of salary units as reimbursement for teachers with roles and responsibilities in addition to their core teaching roles and responsibilities. This change gave each school the opportunity to form its own organisational structure, which is “the ways in which an organisation divides its labour into distinct tasks then achieves coordination among them” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 2). Research in 2005 (Parr, 2005) considered whether schools had responded to this opportunity for change, by examining the organisational structures currently used in New Zealand primary schools and investigating why these structures were used. This follow up study involved three of the ten large, urban primary schools that had been part of the original case study. A qualitative interpretive methodology was employed. Data was gathered through structured, single person interviews, using a set of open-ended interview questions to prompt discussion.

The study showed that since 2004 organisational structure in these schools had become more complex. There was evidence of increased clarification of the responsibilities attached to defined roles, in response to the increasing complexity of the structures. There was evidence of a heightened awareness of the need for effective communication links between roles but this was often linked to discussion about leadership development rather than being seen as a system function within the school. There was evidence of enhanced leadership arising from these changes to organisational structure. The study affirmed an awareness of various leadership models, including distributed leadership, and a number of the changes to organisational structure linked to practices that support the concerteve model of distributed leadership proposed by Gronn (2003).

The study concluded that while the allocation of a significant number of additional salary units, to be distributed in 2009 and 2010, provided the impetus for structural change, professional development opportunities and emerging New Zealand literature on educational leadership and school effectiveness were seen to have informed the change process. The study proposed that ongoing development opportunities for school leaders and future research on educational leadership and school effectiveness would continue to inform decision making around organisational structure in schools.

## **PURPOSE**

This sabbatical allowed me to carry out further study related to my thesis, entitled *A Missed Opportunity: Organisational Structure in New Zealand Primary Schools* (Parr, 2005). The thesis considered how New Zealand primary schools had responded to the opportunity to form their own organisational structure, which is “the ways in which an organisation divides its labour into distinct tasks then achieves coordination among them” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 2). This opportunity arose in 1998 when schools became responsible for the distribution of salary units as reimbursement for teachers with roles and responsibilities in addition to their core teaching roles and responsibilities. The thesis examined organisational structures currently used in New Zealand primary schools and investigated why these structures were used.

The 2005 study concluded that structural change had been minimal; that emerging structures complemented the core bureaucratic structure; and that enhanced professionalism in schools would support the development of higher order distributed leadership structures. It proposed that leadership development on the significance of organisational structure and the potential for structural change would support future diversification and innovation in this field.

Conducting further research on this topic was particularly relevant at this time because additional salary units were allocated to primary schools in the *Primary Teachers’ Collective Agreement 2007-2010*. The allocation almost doubled over two years, for example, a school with a staffing entitlement of forty teachers rose from twenty-seven units in 2008 to fifty-one units in 2010, allowing increased flexibility and variance in organisational structure. This research was completed after the first additional units become available in 2009 and while school leaders were planning how to use the additional units becoming available in 2010, so an investigation into how this was affecting organisational structure in schools was timely.

## **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

The importance of organisational structure, within the wider context of educational management theory and practice, lies in the links between organisational structure and school effectiveness, its impact on the change management process and its effect on educational leadership, especially in a context of school self-management.

Schools are organisations. Organisations work because there are rules and regulations, and systems of authority. This is apparent in the division of work into formally allocated roles and the establishment of linking mechanisms between the roles (Handy, 1993). Furthermore, schools are complex organisations, given the number of students and staff and the extent of the school's interaction with individuals and organisations beyond the school. As complex organisations schools struggle to reconcile the many competing and often contradictory forces if they do not have clearly predetermined structures (Handy, 1993). This organisational structure, or “the ways in which an organisation divides its labour into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 2), is a critical element of school management and, therefore, a critical focus in educational research.

Organisational structure is affected by, and affects, strategic direction, organisational culture, employee behaviour and attitudes, professionalism, communication and technology (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Handy, 1993; Rudman, 1999) and these are all elements that impact on school effectiveness (Owens, 1998; Razik & Swanson, 2001). This connection between structure and effectiveness makes this an important area for educational research.

“Organisations have different structural and design characteristics, and these differences have an impact on employee behaviour and attitudes” (Daft & Noe, 2001, p. 518). This link between organisational structure and employee behaviour and attitudes is particularly important during times of significant change (Rudman, 1999). Rudman notes that although there is a recognition today that structure on its own does not determine an organisation’s effectiveness or success, it is seen as particularly crucial in the change process, when structure, strategy, systems and skills all interact with goals to produce long lasting change. The importance of organisational structure when managing change further endorses its selection as a focus for educational research.

The strong connections between organisational systems, structure and culture, and the impact of these elements on organisational leadership have been widely documented (Gronn, 2003; Southworth, 2004; Daft & Noe, 2001). In countries where school self-management has become the norm, such as New Zealand, there is an emerging tension between the organisational systems, structure and culture that has affected the nature of school leadership (Gronn, 2003), and this makes organisational structure a key area for research.

The recent allocation of a significant number of additional salary units to primary schools makes this a timely study, because the increase provides a further opportunity for schools to change their structure. Prior to 1998 salary units in the primary school sector had been distributed according to a schedule fixed by the Ministry of Education, to a Deputy Principal, Assistant Principal and Senior Teachers. A 1998 Ministry of Education Circular stated that, “A units system has been introduced into the primary sector to enable schools to develop flexible management structures over time to meet their needs” (1998, p. 1). A Ministry of Education resource publication (1999, p. 7) stated, “Changes to the Staffing Orders in Council and CECs have meant that all schools are able to have the management structure which best suits their needs. … The unit system allows your Board, after consultation with your staff, to put in place a system which recognises responsibilities, recruitment and retention. There is no longer a staffing system with designated management positions.”

These salary units, currently worth \$4,000 per year, could now be allocated to teachers with roles, responsibilities and titles determined by the school, the only limitation being the number of designated Deputy Principals or Assistant Principals (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2007). Additional units can be paid for out of the school’s operational grant, further increasing the complexity of the organisational structure and the opportunity for change.

The impact of organisational structure on school effectiveness, on the change management process and on educational leadership, especially in an era of school self management, makes this a critical research focus within the field of educational leadership. The allocation of a significant number of additional salary units in 2009 and 2010 provided a key opportunity for schools to further change their organisational structure. This study is, therefore, important in terms of its links to school effectiveness, change management and school leadership, and it is timely because of the recent allocation of additional units.

## **METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS**

This study used qualitative interpretive methodology. Data was gathered through structured single person interviews with the principals of three large urban contributing primary schools. The research tool was a set of open-ended interview questions used to prompt discussion. Data was analysed within the framework provided by the interview questions. Validity, reliability and ethical issues were addressed.

Qualitative research takes into account less measurable elements of human behaviour and the values and the perspectives of researcher and participants (Anderson, 1998). An interpretive perspective does not presume that the researcher's language or perspective is neutral (Tolich & Davidson, 1999). A qualitative interpretive approach encourages reflection, individual perspectives and rich, detailed descriptions (Denzin, 2000).

In this study a structured one hour interview was used to collect data from a primary source. The interviews involved individuals with a particular knowledge of the subject being discussed. They were held in the participant's office and were free from interruption. No participant consent forms were used but assurance was given that names of the participating principals and schools would not be revealed, based on prior agreement in the thesis research process. Three open-ended questions were used as a tool to gather data within the interview.

1. How has your organisational structure changed since the last data was gathered in 2004?
2. What changes to organisational structure are planned in response to the increased numbers of salary units available in 2010?
3. How have these changes to organisational structure enhanced leadership in your school?

Data was collected in note form during the interviews. The questions provided the framework for subsequent subjective analysis and interpretation of the data. After all interviews were completed the data was collated and analysed. Critical responses in the interview notes were highlighted then grouped together under each of the discussion questions, to enable collective analysis of the data. Recurring themes were identified and recorded, as were significant responses from only one respondent.

There are a number of criteria for judging the quality of research design and these relate to construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability (Yin, 2003). The short duration of this study put limitations on the validity and reliability of the data.

Construct validity considers whether the study measures what we expect it to measure (Cohen & Manion, 2000) and relates to the way the research process is constructed and organised. In this project a number of issues limited the construct validity. Only three schools were studied. Data was collected solely through a discussion based interview. There was no pilot testing of the interview questions. The interview was not recorded and transcribed so there was no opportunity for participants to review the data gathered.

Internal validity refers to establishing a causal relationship, as distinct from spurious, assumed relationships (Yin, 2003). This study does not claim to have high internal validity although this was enhanced by the use of primary data sources. External validity relates to establishing a domain to which the findings can be generalised and this is achieved through replication of the research in multiple studies (Yin, 2003). In this study it was understood that the findings could not be generalised but it was assumed that they would prompt self-reflection, discussion and critique of current practice by readers, as they noted similarities and differences between this data and their own.

Reliability refers to the degree to which the data is truthful and unbiased; it is concerned with precision, accuracy, consistency and the potential for replication (Cohen & Manion, 2000). The limited reliability of this research is recognised. Limitations were the interview being a singular data source, the informal nature of the interview, the data recording techniques, and the lack of formal detailing of the interview process which would support replication.

Tolich and Davidson's (1999) five key principles of ethical conduct were adhered to in this research process: do no harm, ensure that participation is voluntary, gain informed consent, avoid deceit and ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

This study used qualitative interpretive methodology, which incorporates the values and the perspectives of the researcher and participants, and prompts self-reflection and discussion. Validity, reliability and ethical issues were addressed.

## FINDINGS

Data was collected in response to the following questions used as prompts for discussion during the hour long interview.

1. How has your organisational structure changed since the last data was gathered in 2004?
2. What changes to organisational structure are planned in response to the increased numbers of salary units available in 2010?
3. How have these changes to organisational structure enhanced leadership in your school?

The interviews took place towards the end of 2009 so changes to organisational structure arising from the first set of additional units, which became available in January 2009, had already been implemented. During the interviews it became evident that decisions had already been made by schools about allocation of the second set of additional units, which were to be awarded in 2010. All principals reported that the key decisions about changes to organisational structure had been made during 2008 and planning for the second round of extra units simply involved refining that initial decision making. This meant that the answers to the two first questions merged into one response, so these will be reported collectively.

Before reporting the findings, terminology used in this report will be clarified. For the purposes of reporting organisational structure roles, the terms management and leadership are used intermittently, as both these terms are still being used in schools. There was, however, an awareness in the schools that all these roles involve elements of administration, management and leadership, and that the leadership component was critical.

For reporting purposes the following terminology was adopted.

- Senior management is taken to be Deputy, Associate and Assistant Principals.
- Middle management indicates all other management and leadership roles.
- Syndicate leadership indicates leadership of a group of teachers for curriculum planning and delivery across a defined group of classes which function as a learning unit. Other terms used for this role were team leader and lead teacher.
- Curriculum leadership indicates leadership of a group of teachers who manage the budgeting, resourcing and review process, in one curriculum area, across the school.

- The term team leader is used to indicate leadership of project teams with a curriculum or administrative focus, for example sports or environmental education.
- The term lead teacher is used to indicate a mentoring, coaching role where the expertise of the designated teacher is used to support the development of others.
- The term professional learning groups indicates collaborative discussion groups used to facilitate learning. Multiple terms were used for these groups, including professional learning communities, quality learning circles and focus groups.

Responses indicated that the following changes to organisational structure had been implemented in the current year and/or were planned for the following year.

- Increased recognition for senior management through the allocation of extra units.
- Additional person appointed to the senior management team in one school.
- Increased recognition for middle management in syndicate leadership roles, through the allocation of extra units. Two schools moved from one unit to two for this role.
- Increased number of teachers in syndicate leadership roles. In one case this doubled.
- Increased expectation that senior managers would take on more strategic roles, while passing some administrative and management responsibilities to middle managers.
- Wider range of roles and responsibilities for which units were allocated to teachers, resulting in a significant number of additional teachers receiving units.
- Multiple appointments for the same role, to get greater coverage across the school, for example one leader per syndicate for professional development projects and multiple sports coordinator roles.
- Professional development lead teachers being allocated units, or part units, as well as the Project Leader.
- Units awarded for a general mentoring or coaching role where the teacher had exceptional expertise and the willingness and ability to share their expertise.
- Roles that were previously being done by teachers without units were now being allocated a unit, in particular the key curriculum leadership roles listed above.
- Responsibilities were being clustered to warrant allocation of a whole or part unit. Note that payroll does not allow units to be split so some schools were swapping the recipient part way through the year to achieve part unit payments.
- In general, leaders of curriculum teams were still not being allocated units, except in an area under development or where there is a significant administrative workload.

Examples of higher level responsibilities passed to senior managers are as follows.

- student achievement data analysis and target setting
- performance management functions such as induction and exit of staff
- the performance management appraisal process
- international students and review of the Code of Compliance
- professional development programming and project management
- research work and presentations
- publicity and school publications
- appointment of staff with principal involved at interview stage
- supervision of non-teaching staff members

New roles and responsibilities in management and leadership areas.

- leading professional learning groups in a range of contexts
- reviewing and developing student assessment programmes
- developing use of e-asTTle and other on-line assessment and learning tools
- leading a major review and development process
- implementation of National Standards (added during 2009)

New roles and responsibilities in curriculum and learning areas.

- thinking
- inquiry learning
- environmental education
- multi-media
- performing arts

New roles and responsibilities in administration areas.

- e-learning technical support
- school travel including road safety initiatives
- school publicity including year book and website
- timetabling and rosters

- special events
- property
- resource management
- sports or outdoor education programmes

The number of management roles being allocated units has increased significantly but there are still a range of such roles that are not unit based, as follows.

- leading a curriculum team in planning budgets and purchasing resources
- sports coaching and organising inter-school games
- extra curricular clubs and lunchtime activities such as chess and kapa haka
- attending meetings of parent teacher associations
- organising minor school events
- organising social events for staff

Establishing communication links between the roles within these increasingly complex organisational structures was being achieved in a variety of ways.

- Meetings and electronic systems were seen as the primary communication links within schools.
- Additional formal meetings had been introduced in some schools, for example, for the expanded management teams and for lead teacher professional development.
- Some additional formal and informal meetings had been introduced for other sub-groups within the school.
- Electronic communication such as email, shared network files and shared calendars were standard tools within schools.
- Electronic communication such as skype, texts, wikis, blogs, google docs, websites, tweeting and bulletin boards were used extensively for communication with people outside the school and were also being used to some extent within schools.
- Some additional policies and procedures had been created around communication systems in one school.
- Professional learning groups were seen as a communication tool as well as a learning environment, for communication of ideas rather than administrative information.

## **How have these changes to organisational structure enhanced leadership in your school?**

This discussion became quite far reaching and some responses were not directly related to leadership but where these have implications for leadership they have been included.

All principals specifically voiced the desire to grow leadership capability and this intent was evident in the following changes to organisational structure and associated actions.

- Increasing the capability of senior leadership in strategic leadership and mentoring.
- Increasing the capability of middle management in a leadership and mentoring roles
- Highlighting the leadership component in short term roles.
- Highlighting the leadership component in primarily administrative roles.
- Professional development around leadership being extended to include more staff.
- Encouraging staff to view their own learning through a leadership perspective, including encouraging them to attend leadership sessions at generalist conferences.

General observations that indicate awareness of the links between organisational structure, school effectiveness and leadership.

- The allocation of units was clearly connected to the school vision and strategic goals.
- Professional development focus areas were given high priority in unit allocation.
- Distributing some units for a fixed term was valued, because this allowed roles and responsibilities to be linked to current development areas and changed over time.
- Using fixed term units also allowed schools to offer leadership opportunities to a wider range of people as the allocation changed over time.

All principals commented on the variable leadership capability of people in newly created roles and noted that leadership development was an ongoing focus. Discussion around why the leadership had been variable, and what they intended to do about it, is outlined below.

- Expectations were not always clear at the beginning and role descriptions were still being refined for some new roles.

- The supervision, coaching and mentoring of people into new roles was often either lacking or very informal. In many cases this had been initiated or strengthened after the role commenced.
- A number of people in these roles were not currently included in leadership training within and beyond the school as this was aimed at those in syndicate leadership roles.
- The type of development opportunities offered to syndicate leaders, and increasingly to others in leadership roles, were regional or local middle management conferences or seminars, increased subsidy of study costs and in-school programmes.
- The cost of including a wider range of people in such professional development was seen as a major consideration and potential barrier.
- All people with designated roles were seen to need leadership development, even those in primarily administrative roles, because of the need for effective interpersonal and communication skills in day to day interactions and because of the need for innovation and development by the unit holders.

Evidence of increased focus on distributed leadership.

- Renewed focus on structures and systems due to additional units being available.
- Distributed leadership terminology used frequently, for example shared decision making, collegiality and collaboration.
- Increased awareness of the need for development of high functioning teams.
- Attempts to facilitate deep discussion through professional learning groups;
- Meetings almost all development focused, a move supported by development in electronic communications, which now support most administrative functions.
- Increased use of short term project-focused teams.
- Professional development on effective communication.
- Closer working relationships arising from the sharing of responsibilities.
- References to Kiwi Leadership Model (2008) with its higher order leadership skills.
- References to writing on distributed leadership in the Best Evidence Synthesis.
- One school accessing a university paper on mentoring for leaders in the school.
- View expressed that all teachers are leaders in their rooms and within the school.
- Attempts to increase involvement of all staff in key decision making.
- Examples cited of people meeting informally to discuss and initiate an innovation.

- Enhanced feedback and feed-forward for staff on their own performance, a higher order function that requires deep discussion and supports leadership development.

Comments that leadership development has been supported by Ministry of Education courses and publications, with each of the following cited by one or two principals.

- Model of Educational Leadership from *Kiwi Leadership for Principals* (2008).
- Best Evidence Synthesis publication on leadership (Robinson et al, 2009).
- Best Evidence Synthesis publication on professional development (Timperley, 2007).
- Professional material available on Ministry website and TKI.
- Programmes for aspiring principals and experienced principals.
- Events such as APPA breakfast forums and local principals' association conferences being made available to a wider range of leaders within schools.

In this study data was collected using three open ended questions as a prompt for discussion in structured, single person interviews. Interviewees were the principals of three large urban contributing primary schools. The first two questions enquired about changes made to organisational structure in response to additional salary units being made available in 2009 and 2010. Answers to these two questions merged into one response, so the data was reported collectively. The third question asked how the changes to organisational structure had enhanced leadership in the schools. Discussion arising from this question was diverse and all elements with implications for leadership were included in the findings.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

### **Changes to organisational roles and responsibilities**

The fact that all principals had made decisions about their ongoing organisational structure changes prior to 2009 was significant. They had considered the effect of receiving additional units two years running and had made strategic decisions about the nature of changes they would implement, rather than allocating units without an intended longer term outcome. In this regard all Principals talked of growing leadership capability within their schools. They intended to achieve this by including more people in the management structure and by elevating the function of each level of management, to provide more significant leadership opportunities and to include more people in critical decision making.

Discussion took place around terminology for those with designated roles and responsibilities. The traditional term, ‘senior teacher’, was seen to signify a hierarchical status, while the current terms, ‘team leader’ and ‘lead teacher’, signal the leadership component of the role. Two schools were using the term ‘Associate Principal’ instead of the traditional Deputy or Assistant Principal title. Again, this was seen to signal a collaborative approach instead of the hierarchical labelling. Titles such as ‘mentor teacher’ signal a role based on relationships rather than hierarchy. The term ‘leadership’ is now often preferred over ‘management’ and the relative balance and importance of administration, management and leadership in key roles was discussed. Allocation of units for leadership of professional learning circles shows the focus on schools becoming learning organisations, which links closely with the elements of distributed leadership. All of these changes to terminology provide evidence of changes to organisational structure that have the potential to enhance school leadership.

Changes to organisational structure that had been implemented or were planned for the following year, indicated a clear focus on growing leadership capability by providing extended leadership opportunities at all levels and by including more people in the management structures. There was a clear intent to recognise teachers’ skills in mentoring and coaching. Mentoring roles were used to strengthen classroom practice, through teaching observations and feedback-feedforward dialogue, and to support professional development initiatives through the lead teacher role. Appointment of people to lead professional learning

circles indicated a desire for organisational learning and recognised the importance of deep discussion in this learning process.

When considering the additional roles senior managers were taking on, it was noted that they were previously assisting with these roles to varying degrees but many were now seen to be taking full responsibility for this area, with only an element of monitoring by the principal. It is important to note that these were large schools, where the senior managers had a significant amount of management and leadership experience, so they were well equipped to manage these higher order responsibilities effectively. Referring to the allocation of additional responsibilities to middle management, principals commented that many of these responsibilities were previously delegated to these leaders to some extent but the allocation of units made the delegation more deliberate and more extensive and the roles more visible.

At this point there was discussion about whether these changes had shared the workload more fairly or whether it had over-burdened middle managers, who often carried management responsibilities with little or no release from classroom teaching. Increasing middle management responsibilities was seen to be validated by the awarding of additional units and by the fact that additional appointments had been made at this level, enabling wider sharing of the workload, but it was noted that many teachers valued release time as much or more than additional salary payments, when faced with demanding management roles.

As well as disseminating work load, this sharing of responsibilities was seen as desirable because it constituted a development opportunity for senior and middle management. Principals talked of coaching their senior staff in new roles and providing ongoing mentoring to ensure satisfactory outcomes, and they expected senior staff to provide the same support for middle managers taking on new responsibilities. Some leadership development was being provided around coaching, mentoring and communication, but two principals said not enough development and support had been provided so not all transitions had been successful. They had plans to rectify this in 2010. Some performance issues and diminished outcomes were also seen to be related to lack of clarity of roles and this was being rectified.

Overall, there was an awareness of the leadership element in almost all roles within a school; there were attempts to increase the strategic focus of senior and middle managers; and there was a real desire to grow leadership capacity across the school. Roles in these emerging

organisational structures were usually well defined and the need to coach and mentor those moving into new or more challenging leadership roles was becoming increasingly recognised.

### **Linking roles within the organisation**

Organisational structure literature indicates that while the division of labour within organisational structure requires a clear understanding of the nature of the activity being organised, the tension inherent in the management of organisational structure becomes apparent in the linking process (Mintzberg, 1979). The linking process requires the establishment of formal relationships, including lines of authority, defined decision making responsibility, hierarchical levels and a defined span of control for managers, and formal systems to ensure effective communication and coordination (Daft & Noe, 2001). Alongside these formal relationships and systems the existence of informal organisational structures is also acknowledged and explored (Handy, 1993; Parker, 2000) and the increasing role of informality in organisational structure is well documented (Daft & Noe, 2001).

In the interviews, two principals spoke of holding meetings involving the additional syndicate and team leaders but communication with many of the additional unit holders remained informal. There was a resistance to holding more administrative meetings, and electronic communication methods were used primarily for this purpose. There was discussion about whether the increased use of electronic communication had coincided with the development of these increasingly complex structures, or been brought into schools in response to them. The opinion prevailed that electronic communication had come into schools anyway, but that it was a timely development for schools that were extending their organisational structure.

There was a high dependence on emails and shared network files for communication and shared calendars were being used, or were about to be set up, in the schools. These modes of communication, whether emails, appointment notifications or interactive files, were seen to be instant and flexible, so they supported formal or informal communication.

Discussion indicated that where new roles were created that had strong links with other roles, the interactions and the levels of responsibility were being defined. As structures became increasingly complex, the importance of clearly defined lines of communication was

acknowledged by participants but usually in relation to the collaborative communication, and mentoring or coaching skills needed by leaders, rather than in the context of systems development. Where formal communication channels were set up, barriers to their effectiveness were noted but solutions were not forthcoming.

It was evident that changes to organisational structure had focused more on developing roles and responsibilities than on creating links between the new roles. Participants showed only an emerging awareness of this critical part of effecting structural change. However, recognition that some of the change had not been successfully implemented was prompting reflection and a greater consideration of the importance of effective linkage between roles.

### **The impact of organisational structure changes on leadership.**

The final section of the interview produced wide ranging discussion on links between organisational structure and leadership. There was an emerging awareness of the fact that all teachers are leaders within their classrooms and in their interactions with other staff members, so leadership development should be aimed at all staff. There was also an awareness of different leadership models and reference in particular to distributed leadership. Data has been provided on changes that were giving rise to, or supporting, elements of distributed leadership and there was considerable discussion around this leadership model.

The distributed leadership model emphasises shared decision making, collaborative management and organisational structures based on collegiality and high functioning work groups or teams (Gronn, 2003). Every member of the staff has an active role to play in the formal organisation and a renewed emphasis on structures and systems is required as schools move towards implementing this model (Southworth, 2004).

In 2004, emerging literature was challenging the existing interpretation of distributed leadership, where multiple people perform the leadership role together but in such a way that it is simply a multiple form of the previous heroic leader paradigm. The literature was highlighting a more holistic distributed leadership, made up of one collective, concertive effort rather than aggregated, individual acts. This model requires high levels of interdependence, collaboration and collegiality, and deep discussion, rather than simple

sharing of information (Gronn, 2003). The implications of such a model are significant. The interdependency of the different roles within the organisation is crucial and the connecting mechanisms are more complex, because of the emphasis on shared decision making, collaborative management and high functioning teams (Gronn, 2003).

By 2009, in this limited sample of schools, there was evidence of a growing awareness of the deeper features of this concertive distributed leadership model proposed by Gronn. Schools were providing more teacher modelling, observation and feedback-feedforward opportunities, which require collegiality and highly effective communication. Principals spoke of their emphasis on coaching and mentoring, which are dependent on collegial relationships and deep discussion. They talked of professional learning circles being established to facilitate these deep discussions. There was specific mention of the value of learning conversations and the need for structures and systems which facilitate this process. There was talk of the school as a learning organisation, signalling an awareness of leadership as one collective, concertive effort rather than a set of aggregated, individual acts.

While these practices were seen to be extremely valuable in lifting school effectiveness, and essential elements in creating an organisational structure that would support change and ongoing development, the participants all talked about the challenges involved. The need for deliberate teaching and modelling of the leadership skills involved was noted. The difficulties of building quality, in-depth encounters into the hectic daily schedule of a school was acknowledged and seen as a significant challenge in the future. All participants, however, appeared committed to developing structures and systems that support the interdependence, collaboration, collegiality and shared decision making that characterise the concertive distributed leadership paradigm described by Gronn (2003).

Throughout these interviews there was a clear focus on the differentiation of tasks. There was a heightened awareness of the importance of explicit role descriptions and the identification of specific responsibilities in designated roles, all key elements in organisational structure theory. There was a developing awareness of the need for increasingly effective communication links between roles but this was often linked to discussion about leadership development rather than being seen as a system function within the school. A future challenge for schools is to understand the importance and complexity of this linkage and to strive to develop clear systems that support effective communication and coordination.

## BENEFITS

The benefits of this study lie in the importance of organisational structure in schools. Organisational structure, which is “the ways in which an organisation divides its labour into distinct tasks and then achieves coordination among them” (Mintzberg, 1979, p. 2), is significant because it impacts on school effectiveness, change management and leadership.

Schools are complex organisations and without rules and regulations, systems of authority and clearly predetermined structures, they would struggle to reconcile the many competing and often contradictory forces (Handy, 1993). The importance of systems for ensuring an orderly and supportive environment within a school is well documented in current New Zealand educational leadership literature (Ministry of Education, 2008; Robinson et al, 2009).

Organisational structure is affected by, and affects, strategic direction, organisational culture, employee behaviour and attitudes, professionalism, communication and technology (Bolman & Deal, 1997; Rudman, 1999) and these are all elements that impact on school effectiveness (Owens, 1998; Razik & Swanson, 2001). Structures and systems in schools ensure consistency in practice, and provide a vehicle for school self-improvement practices, critical factors in school effectiveness. Whether formal or informal, structures add organisation and cohesion to the school setting, enhancing the communication, collegiality and collaboration of a positive school culture and enabling professional learning to flourish (Southworth, 2004).

Organisational structure impacts on employee behaviour and attitudes (Daft & Noe, 2001) and this link between organisational structure and employee behaviour and attitudes is particularly important during times of significant change (Rudman, 1999). Rudman notes that although there is a recognition today that structure on its own does not determine an organisation’s success, it is seen as particularly crucial in the change process, when structure, strategy, systems, skills, staff and style all interact with goals to produce long lasting change.

The importance of a flexible organisational structure in times of rapid change is well documented. To solve short term problems and lead change, temporary project teams are set up consisting of people from across the organisation, which increases coordination throughout the organisation (Rudman, 1999). Higher order mechanisms and more horizontal linkage increase adaptability, allowing employees to participate fully in the learning process needed

for successful change management (Daft & Noe, 2001).

The importance of structures and systems in schools has been the focus of renewed interest as leadership theory moves away from a strong belief in the power of the individual leader to recognise other influences on school effectiveness. The distributed leadership model, with its accompanying organisational structures, supports considered judgement, reflective thought and creativity, while the collaborative element in this model leads to greater confidence and risk taking (Gronn, 2003; Southworth, 2004).

This study of organisational structure in schools will prompt school leaders to reflect on their current practice. It will inform them about possible adaptations to their structures and the implications of such changes. The discussion will enhance their appreciation of the links between organisational structure, culture, leadership and school effectiveness and this will inform their decision making as they seek to achieve ongoing improvement in their schools.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study involved three large urban contributing primary schools in New Zealand. The schools had been part of a group of ten schools used in a case study for the thesis entitled *Organisational Structure: A missed opportunity?* (Parr, 2005). Only three schools were involved in this study due to time restraints. Schools were selected that had the same Principal as in the original study, to enable discussion about changes to organisational structure in the intervening time.

A qualitative interpretive methodology was employed, which incorporates the values and the perspectives of the researcher and participants, and prompts self-reflection and discussion. Data was gathered through structured, single person interviews, using a set of open-ended interview questions to prompt discussion. Data was analysed within the framework provided by the interview questions. Validity, reliability and ethical issues were addressed.

The questions used to prompt discussion in the hour long interviews were as follows.

1. How has your organisational structure changed since the last data was gathered in 2004?
2. What changes to organisational structure are planned in response to the increased numbers of salary units available in 2010?
3. How have these changes to organisational structure enhanced leadership in your school?

Data collected during the interviews showed that since 2004 the organisational structure in these schools had become more complex. The immediate impetus for these changes was the allocation of a significant number of additional salary units in the *Primary Teachers Collective Agreement 2007-2010*. These units allowed additional management and leadership roles to be identified and rewarded in these schools and prompted the elevation of some existing roles through the allocation of more units.

There was evidence of increased elaboration and clarification of the responsibilities attached to these roles, in response to the increasing complexity of the structures. There was evidence of a developing awareness of the need for effective communication links between roles but this was often linked to discussion about leadership development rather than being seen as a system function within the school. A future challenge for schools is to understand the

importance and the complexity of this linkage and to work on developing systems that support effective communication and coordination.

There was evidence of enhanced leadership arising from these changes to organisational structure. The discussion showed an awareness of various leadership models, including distributed leadership. A number of changes to organisational structure linked to practices that support the concertive model of distributed leadership proposed by Gronn (2003).

In the five years between gathering data for the thesis *A Missed Opportunity? Organisational Structure in New Zealand Primary Schools* (Parr, 2005) and undertaking this 2009 study, change has occurred in the schools studied. There appears to be an increased awareness of the significance of organisational structure in raising school effectiveness and an increased focus on using structures and systems to support the development of concertive distributed leadership (Gronn, 2003). The awarding of additional salary units to primary schools provided the impetus for change. Professional development opportunities and emerging New Zealand literature on educational leadership and school effectiveness informed the change process. Ongoing professional development for school leaders and future research on educational leadership and school effectiveness will continue to inform the decision making around organisational structure in schools.

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