

## ***Effective Leadership***

*'As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence; the next best, the people honour and praise; the next, people fear; the next, the people hate...when the best leader's work is done, the people say, "We did it ourselves."' Lao-tsu (circa 500 BC)*

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the Education Reform Act of 1988 brought about considerable changes in the roles and responsibilities of head-teachers as they embraced the local management of schools. No longer were they managing just teachers, pupils and the curriculum but they also became responsible and accountable for finance, premises, support staff and more. As school autonomy increased so the post of headteacher became more complex which, in turn, cascaded into the working lives of other members of staff.

The pace of change continues and schools are set to become yet more complex with Every Child Matters, children's centres and extended schools initiatives. At the same time, schools have engaged with new organisational structures, a national standards driven agenda and the remodelling of the workforce. The traditional image of the charismatic, omniscient, omni-present heroic leader is therefore no longer viable.

ATL believes that effective school leadership in the future will need to be more transformational, participative and adaptable.

Recent research indicates that a large number of headteachers are expected to retire within the next five years. There is currently a shortage of candidates for headship in some areas of the country and in certain types of schools, especially in small schools. ATL believes that the role would be more attractive if headteachers were able to focus on its core business: that of teaching and learning. ATL is seeking to play its part by affirming some boundaries, expectations and models of effective leadership.

### **Adaptable leadership**

ATL recognises that no one single model of leadership could fit all schools; they vary too much in terms of size, catchment areas, vision, culture, intellectual capacity and professional maturity of staff. A leadership style or management structure that works well in one school may be totally unsuitable in another; indeed, they could become unsuitable over time, even in the school where they were once effective. ATL advocates that senior leaders in schools regularly review leadership and management roles, structures, principles, practices and styles so that schools can adapt to changes in their particular circumstances.

### **Transformational leadership**

ATL believes that an effective leader will focus on teaching and learning as their principal aim and core function. Our members believe that the title headteacher should continue as it underscores the primacy of education and should not be replaced by Principal or Chief Executive. However, ATL readily acknowledges that the perception of the headteacher as a leading professional is no longer sufficient to fully describe the role. Rather, the headteacher should be a driving force for improved opportunities for their pupils and they should think and work strategically within and beyond the school community. This involves nurturing a shared vision through motivating, inspiring, influencing, challenging and supporting all members of the school community to develop their own and their pupils' aspirations and expectations.

ATL takes the view that leadership can only be effective if it goes hand in hand with good management. This implies robust, sustainable, consensual systems that are well communicated and easily understood by the relevant stakeholders. It requires fair and appropriately allocated funding and resources. In addition, it implies good order in relation to individual behaviour, as well as good order in terms of facilities and resources. However, efficient systems support effective leadership only if they can also accommodate the individual. ATL maintains that systems work best when the people who implement them are empowered to be both responsive and flexible.

**ATL asserts that to achieve this the overall leader of a school should have deep commitment and an understanding of education derived from their own experience as a qualified teacher. Effective leaders also require leadership and management training that focus on interpersonal skills.**

ATL also stresses the importance of the headteacher and senior leaders tempering idealism with realism. Realism can only be achieved by taking regular soundings, by monitoring progress against plans and principles and by identifying action in response to careful analysis of findings. This process is likely to be most effective when it draws on the expertise of all staff and when senior leaders adopt a participative style.

## Participative leadership

With the increased complexities and accountabilities inherent in the post, headteachers cannot expect to be the expert in all areas for which they have ultimate responsibility. ATL advises that if the demands of headship are to remain at a reasonable level then headteachers must be prepared to delegate.

Delegation to those with appropriate qualification, experience and time further defines the headteacher's role as leader and manager. Headteachers should delegate not only to teachers but also to senior support staff who should have responsibility for areas such as finance, premises and administration. Effective headteachers therefore ensure that they are not distracted from their strategic role by low-level operational or tactical activities.

Hence the principles of workforce reform should be applied to the headteacher role. **ATL believes that the duties of school leaders should be reviewed to bring them in line with the key elements of the role: to define vision and strategy and to support and develop staff.**

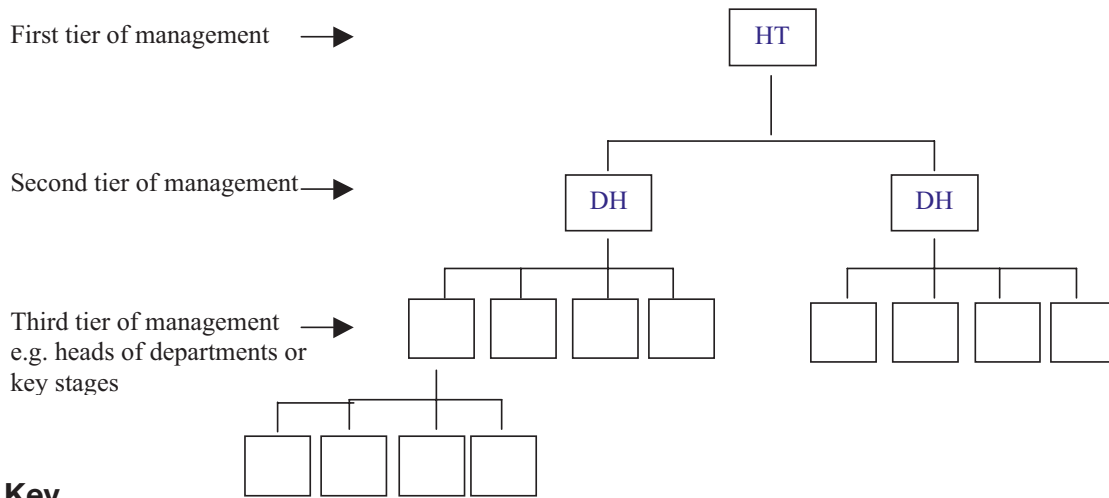
A key to successful delegation is the appointment of suitable teaching and support staff whom are encouraged to undertake professional development, engage with research, learn from and support others and to innovate. ATL expects the headteacher to act as a role model in the area of professional improvement and to support others so that the school truly becomes a learning community. Only then can the headteacher have the confidence to delegate and expect members of staff to be fully accountable and professional in the execution of their duties.

Underpinning effective delegation is a raft of personal and professional qualities that help to generate positive and supportive professional relationships. These include integrity, trust and respect. In addition to this, the most effective leaders will model the behaviour expected of other members of the school community: courtesy, consideration for others and self-control.

## Distributed leadership

Distributed leadership is a term often used loosely to describe the traditional *management structure* redesigned to involve more people in decision-making and leadership roles. It generally refers to a formal organisational structure with a tendency to emphasise line-management. Those with seniority in the hierarchy are sometimes referred to as the senior management team or senior *leadership team*.

**Figure 1. Diagram to show distributed leadership**



**Key**

HT: headteacher

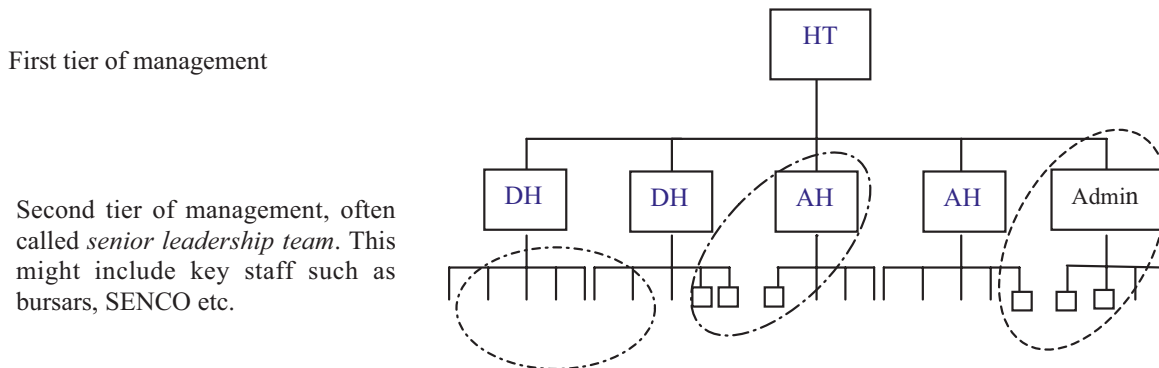
DH: deputy headteacher

**Traditional management structure**

ATL believes the generic use of the term 'senior leadership team' in educational policy and research texts not only implies a recommendation for this particular model but also ignores the large number of small schools, usually rural, for whom this model is not feasible.

Furthermore, ATL is aware of the potentially divisive nature of such a model in the many small to medium sized primary schools, where a distributed leadership model would draw in the majority of staff but exclude a small minority. To overcome this ATL suggests that senior management teams include other staff in decision-making through consultations, taskforces and, where appropriate, open meetings.

**Figure 2. Diagram to show a distributed management structure**



First tier of management

Second tier of management, often called *senior leadership team*. This might include key staff such as bursars, SENCO etc.

**Key**

HT: headteacher

DH: deputy headteacher

AH: assistant headteacher

## Shared leadership

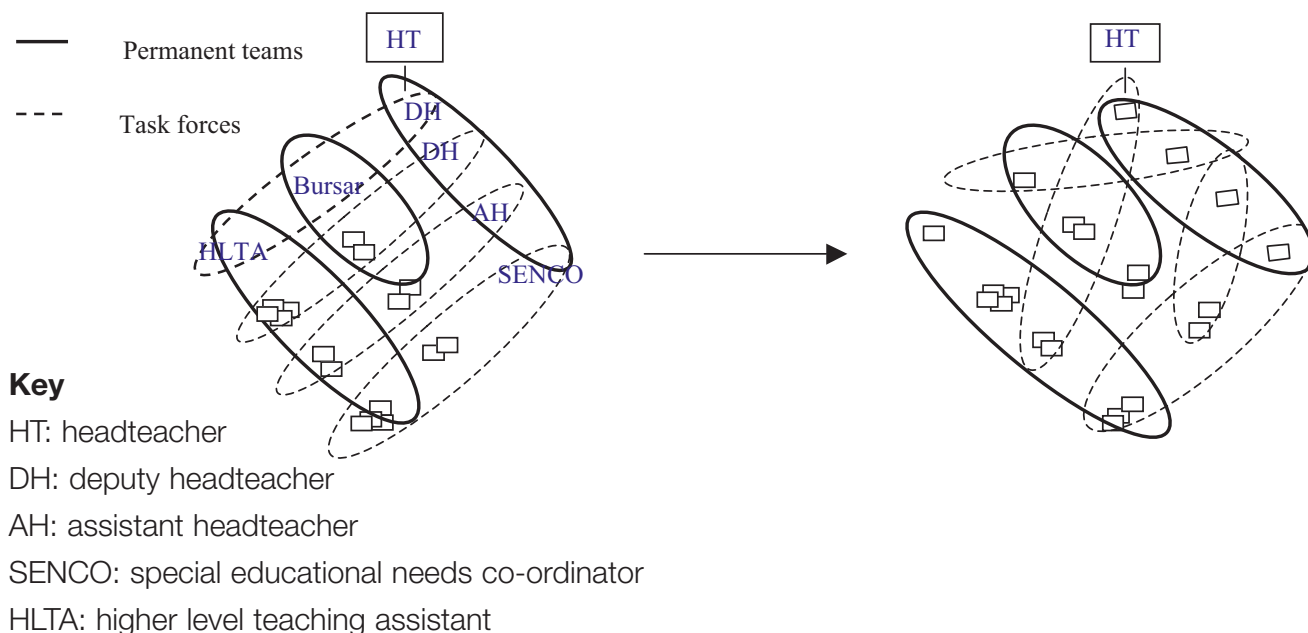
Shared leadership is an explicit principle, not a management structure. It is a way of working that is embedded in the culture of the school. Nor is it a top-down benevolence but an expectation of, and entitlement for, every member of teaching and support staff to exercise leadership. Leadership in this context is defined as influence, which is leadership in its most powerful form, and is clearly differentiated from management duties. It acknowledges that even the newest or least experienced members of staff have a point of view and expertise that can be utilised to support the school or their colleagues' development. It promotes mutual respect, a feeling of being valued and a high level of expectation in terms of professionalism. This approach may or may not be combined with collective decision-making and consultation processes.

## An alternative model of school leadership

**ATL recommends that school leaders aspire to a combined shared leadership with distributed management model.** This does not assume a need for significant changes to management structures, but does imply the delegation of management responsibilities to those holding management posts. It also calls for a comprehensive leadership principle with a shared leadership style. This will generate more cohesion, more widespread ownership of policy and greater in-service opportunities to nurture embryonic leaders.

At its most sophisticated, this combined approach becomes a complex mosaic of interactions. As such, it fits well with an organisational structure that is more organic and dynamic; one that utilises temporary teams and task forces with a specific focus that cuts across other hierarchical strata. The strength of this model is that it can respond very quickly to changing circumstances. It is flexible because it generates a larger pool of staff who are experienced and confident in managing change.

**Figure 3. Diagram to show patterns of working in shared leadership**



## **Shared leadership: a principled approach**

ATL argues that for shared leadership to be effective, all members of the school staff will need to commit to:

- developing a set of shared values and principles that underpin all aspects of school life;
- helping to develop and communicate the shared vision and purpose for the school;
- working together towards the shared goals;
- their actions having direct lineage back to the shared values and principles;
- sharing responsibility for improving opportunities for pupils;
- valuing the individual's views, experience and expertise.

## **Shared leadership; a productive approach**

### *Learning by doing*

- In a shared leadership and distributed management model, staff members share their expertise formally, informally and unconsciously.
- Less experienced staff have the opportunity to try out their ideas and skills in a challenging but safe context.

### *Providing a pool of potential leaders*

- As junior staff work alongside senior staff in a non-hierarchical way, they develop their own leadership skills and identify role models. From this they can begin to visualise their career path and maybe see themselves as potential senior leaders.
- Early CPD includes preparation for leadership.
- The school feeds into system thinking as it cultivates generations of potential middle and senior leaders for internal and external posts beyond the school and its locality.

### *Awareness of levels of responsibility*

- As staff work non-hierarchically in teams and taskforces junior staff gain practical insight into the work of senior staff and begin to understand the drivers, pressures and rewards.
- Senior staff learn more about the challenges and achievements of junior staff.

ATL recognises that schools, like other organisations, move through phases of development, described by Leithwood as:

- declining performance stage
- laissez-faire management
- early turnaround stage: crisis stabilisation
- centralised focused leadership
- late turnaround stage: achieving and sustaining
- shared, distributed leadership.

This model cannot be seen as simply a linear progression moving to a static position but neither can it be viewed as inevitably cyclical. ATL argues that a key factor in the development process is the quality, style, perception and principles of the headteacher. Other factors also impinge on the development process and these might include: a significant number of new staff, staff with limited experience or confidence, a major change of focus or direction.

### **Emerging constructs of leadership**

Approaches to school leadership are influenced not only by new knowledge and understandings but also by social, economic and demographic factors within and beyond the local community. A number of new leadership constructs have emerged in response to these factors. They include:

- co-headship, where two heads share one headship;
- executive headship, one head takes overall management of more than one school;
- federation headship, a number of existing schools have just one head and one or more governing bodies;
- amalgamation, two or more schools are closed and re-opened as one school with a new head and governing body.

ATL acknowledges the possible advantages of economy of scale in grouping together small schools under a single leadership or other staff-sharing, and the need to explore other possibilities for effective leadership of schools. However, ATL cautions against seeing these developments in terms of a quick-fix or a panacea. Leadership is about more than organisational or management restructuring.

*'Leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group towards goal achievement in a given situation.'* Marilyn (1996)

It is a people-centred activity dependent on the culture ('the way we do things here') in the individual organisation. In order for these new constructs to be effective, there must be a considerable adjustment in the cultures of the schools involved. ATL recognises that such shifts in culture can in themselves create stresses, insecurities, uncertainties and relationship challenges when some sectors of the school community feel excluded from the decision-making or are compelled to join a forced march.

Therefore, ATL urges those responsible for managing such organisational and management change to do so in a considered and objective manner. Imposed formal federations are less likely to work than those where everyone affected feels involved and engaged. Indeed, a first step could be a move towards shared leadership.

If you would like further information or to comment on this briefing paper please do so by contacting ATL on [policybriefings@atl.org.uk](mailto:policybriefings@atl.org.uk).

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