

Governor Experiences of the Strategic Development Process of English Free Schools

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Phillip Lawrence Mason

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Abstract

Free Schools entail increased involvement from civil society actors in the provision of State-funded education in England. The increased devolution of freedoms and responsibilities to these 'self-governing' schools is reflected in a significant range of strategic decisions made through the development process. These include decisions over such issues as religious character, social purpose, educational priorities and innovations in organisation. However, which factors influence the exercise of these strategic freedoms within local experiences of the strategic development processes remains unclear. Existing literature and media debate has predominantly focussed on justification for these structural reforms and their educational and social outcomes. In maintaining focus at the macroscopic level the link between policy and outcomes is assumed. Furthermore, discussion at this level may ignore important features of the provision within Free Schools at the local level. This study focusses on how the social experiences of governors provide an alternative narrative within the broader debate on structural reform. It presents empirical findings focused on the reported experiences from 21 governor interviews with those responsible for the development of three Free Schools. Analysis followed a grounded theory methodology in which theoretical sampling was influenced by a broader range of interview, survey and secondary data. Coding of the data revealed that the formation of the vision and purpose, diverse relationships, continuous reorganisation and the positioning of oneself relative to others were recurring themes in the experiences reported within and between the schools. In order to explain the diversity of experiences in relation to these themes three categories were developed, namely motivations, relating and power. Similarities and differences in motivations (including personal relationships, vested interests and subjective judgements), relations (including social groupings and experiences of specific interactions) and power (including its configuration, perpetuation and dynamism) were analysed across the participant accounts. Diverse and manifold motivations and relations emerge in complex responsive processes of relating through which tacit hierarchies, sub-group identities and individual interests emerge in the conduct of loosely defined roles. It is concluded that the freedoms to self-define expose governors to diverse social influences on development. The enduring influence of founding relationships challenges the capacity of governors to maintain the balance required of the critical friend role. Furthermore, the local reallocation of diverse value propositions in school provision does not guarantee the relevance of schools to their communities, or democratic accountability over public spending.

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Glossary

AT	Academy Trust
Board of Directors	Board of Governors
CAS	Complex Adaptive Systems Theory
CRP	Complex Responsive Processes Theory
CTC	City Technical College
DfE	Department for Education
Directors	Referred to as Governors – See below
EFA	Education Funding Agency
EFS	Everything Free School
Governance	Used to indicate corporate governance (as characterised in Section 2.3), unless otherwise stated
Government	The UK Central Government
Governors	Individuals in schools responsible for strategic direction, oversight of financial performance and holding the head teacher to account
LA	Local Authority
LGB	Local Governing Body
LSN	Local Schools Network
MAT	Multi-Academy Trust
Members	Legal ‘owners’ of the charity trust. Signatories of the funding agreement. Ultimate control over appointment and removal of governors. Receive the school accounts. Can change a school constitution.
NAO	National Audit Office
NPG	New Public Governance (as characterised in Section 2.3.1)
NSN	New Schools Network
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
Responsible Officer (RO)	An, originally optional, internal financial audit mechanism. Since subsumed under the compulsory Academies’ Accounting Officer role – accountable to the EFA and parliament for overseeing value for money, propriety and regularity of the trust (EFA, 2015)
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator
Trustees	Used to denote Members – See Above
Vision	The rationale of a school; its ethos and what it aims to achieve.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A Context of Change

Amongst the breadth of transformations produced by the 'Butler Act' of 1944 was the entrenchment of a framework of educational responsibility that encompassed central government, local authorities (LAs) and schools (Education Act, 1944). The distribution of responsibilities and accountabilities marked a significant historical milestone in the emergence of a broad system of corporate governance in education. The 1970s and 80s saw the beginning of the increased inclusion and responsabilisation of parents in school governance (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016). This simultaneously marked the beginning of the decline in Local Education Authority (LEA) influence and a significant shift of responsibility onto parents to manage the risks, liabilities and inequities associated with the provision of education (James, 2014; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016). The introduction of schools entirely outside of LEA jurisdiction (City Technical Colleges in 1988, City Academies in 2000, and the current Academy School program that emerged in 2002 and expanded in 2010) would mark the beginning of what has since become a considerably degraded Local Authority role in the planning, provision and performance of state funded education (West & Bailey, 2013). Yet, despite this shift Local Authorities maintain an overarching duty with regards to the provision of public services to those within its designation, including the responsibility to ensure sufficient school places, the coordination of admissions and strategies to support school improvement (Hatcher, 2014). Lacking the powers to compel these emerging autonomous schools, or to provide new places themselves, there remains a clear tension with LA's vested interest that policy is yet to resolve. Changes that started slowly (with only 203 academies in May 2010) rapidly expanded (5516 academies by February 2016) through the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition program of converting established schools and developing new provision (c.f. Butt & Lambert, 2014; Gov.uk, 2016). Of these nearly 400 are Free Schools (ibid.). Both of these figures are

set to rise significantly as a consequence of current government policy. Despite the Department for Education's reversal of a proposal to force the academisation for all state funded schools, it remains the Central Government agenda to pursue academisation through other means, including through the enduring principle that new schools can only be founded through the Free School and Academy route (DfE, 2015; Sellgren, 2016; Weale, 2016).

The decreasing role of Local Government and increasing role of market mechanisms have been captured in international trends in state funded education system transformation (c.f. Ball, 2009; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Hursh, 2005). A vast literature from countries ranging from Swedish and Danish Free Schools, American Charter Schools, through to Italian, Spanish and Argentine schools is consistent in identifying these trends. Areas of emphasis can be found on policy and policy justification, implementation and policy outcomes in relation to increases in market structures and local autonomy (e.g. Rouse, 1998; Sandström and Bergström, 2005; Sahlgren, 2011; Hoxby, 2003; Eskeland & Filmer, 2007; Gray, 2012; Agasisti, 2013; Black, 2013; Doncel et al, 2012; Booker et al, 2011; Holyoke et al, 2009). Located within the much broader international context of reform, studies have explored and analysed the consequences of the precise structural changes in the English education system. Performance, social equality, and democracy have emerged as pervasive themes within debates concerning the increasing role of choice, the privatisation of services and the marketization of education relevant to the English school context (e.g. Ball, 1998; Ball, 2007; Coldron et al. 2015; Gorard & Fitz, 1998; Green et al., 2015; Griffin, 2014; Hatcher, 2011). Structural change within the English context is rooted in a context of longstanding historical progression. Specific changes involving the rise of school autonomy, the liberalisation of governance arrangements and the corporatisation of the Government–School relationship can be traced back to the 1960s (Bush & Crawford, 2012; Higham & Earley, 2013). These changes have had the effect of supplanting the role of local government, most notably through LEAs, as the purveyor of state funded education (Ball, 2013). This marks a significant shift from the formal role of LAs dating back to the turn of the 20th century.

1.2 Neo-Liberal Structural Reform and Provision

The new generation of 'autonomous schools' are defined by their independent operation under the control of 'Academy Trusts'. These independent legal entities are bound by their registration with Companies House and the terms of their 'Funding Agreement' contracts held with the Department for Education (DfE), and compelling adherence to an Academies policy framework (c.f. Academies Act, 2010; EFA, 2015). Under this broader banner 2011 marked the introduction of Free Schools as an extension to the academies program (Hatcher, 2014). Academies and Free Schools are both independent from Local Authorities, able to set their own pay and conditions for staff, make choices around the delivery of curriculum and can change term and school day lengths (Gov.uk, 2016d). Following changes to policy in 2012 Academies have joined Free Schools in their entitlement to employ teachers, except Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCO), without Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (DfE, 2012). However, Free Schools (predominantly, although including some new provision academies) are able to prioritise by up to 50% faith in their admissions procedures where they are oversubscribed (Long & Bolton, 2015). Converting (and sponsored) academies are not allowed to acquire or remove an existing faith character, expand, alter the student intake gender mix or introduce selection as a part of the conversion process (Gov.uk, 2014). This is of significance as although this results in great similarities between the freedoms of Academies and Free Schools post opening, Free Schools are also characterised by a significantly greater range of strategic decisions to be made *through the development process*.

In relation to this Higham and Earley (2013) reveal that the increased autonomy and freedoms notably associated with academy status tend to be reflected particularly in areas of management rather than in terms of overarching strategic purposes behind education. This is seen as related to the enduring degree of control of central government over educational purposes contrasted against the impact of decreasing influence from Local Authorities. Of interest to the current study is the potential implication of this finding for those developing entirely new Free Schools. The capacity to exercise

strategic autonomy may similarly be constrained by factors including the enduring influence of government or the confidence and capacity of founders and governors. It is further unclear what the impact might be of opting to exercise freedoms in such a way that is inconsistent with the local operating context or established institutional norms. The degree of variation between experiences of capacity and freedom to act is also therefore of significance (C.f. Higham & Earley, 2013). This includes not only the variations that emerge in relation to school size, phase and inspection judgement but also differences in local perceptions reflecting their confidence, caution, concern or constraint (ibid.). Furthermore, even within the context of increasing autonomy and freedom over aspects of decision making capacity and freedom to act is likely to be influenced significantly by context dependent perspectives. In the case of Free Schools it is even less clear which factors are likely to drive experiences of freedom and capacity to act within the strategic development of such schools.

Free Schools are notably distinguished from other types of Academy in terms of their being founded as a new school, as opposed to the conversion or substitution of an existing one. In doing so the Free School program opened up the development of new education provision to a broad range of civil society actors (c.f. Higham, 2014). This variation in initial conditions has therefore been associated with the general, but not universal, inclusion of a broader range of stakeholders in the founding and development of new school provision. How this impacts on the local experiences of developing new autonomous provision has not yet been clearly addressed in the literature. The invitation of civil society actors into the development of new school provision is associated with the pursuit of increased choice and diversity (Ball, 2012). Emerging from this is significant debate over the potential attainment of pedagogical innovation, efficiencies and social justice through this trajectory in structural reform (see: Miller et al, 2014). Miller et al (2014) demonstrate that it is therefore of great significance to understand factors including proposer's motivations, activities, support and opposition. However Miller et al's (2014) methodological focus is on evaluating the extent to which individual experiences reflect efforts towards the policy's ostensible aim to empower groups interested in improving education. There remains a significant gap in current understanding regarding how founders' and

governors' experiences of motivations interrelate within the school context, and the implications for the strategic development process emerging from how they perceive themselves and others. In inviting a broad range of civil society actors into the founding process it is of great significance to the evaluation of school provision to understand the social processes through which the diversity of values are incorporated into the development and governance of Free Schools. This is of further importance to understanding how agency bridges initial conditions and outcomes. Addressing this is of significance to critically evaluating the extent to which claims made about the practices of Free Schools should be traced back to policy intent or other factors. This is of significance in contributing to broader ongoing debates relating to the further claims that Free Schools satisfy school shortages, raise standards, provide desired choice, support specific needs and support the most deprived (NSN, 2016a). It is also of importance to understanding *what else* might emerge from the Free School experiment as a consequence of the capacity for diverse founders to bring values into strategic development and governance processes.

In the years since the Free School program first launched research has revealed Free Schools as having a diverse range of founding groups composed of parents, teachers, faith groups, charities and social enterprises and private schools (Higham, 2014; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016). As well as the potential founders above established Academy Trusts are able to launch new schools under the same program. Newly launched Free Schools are also presented an opportunity to expand and establish additional schools. Amongst a variety of structural configurations Free Schools may therefore see themselves operating as individual or multi-academy trusts (alongside other Free Schools and/or academies) (NSN, 2016b). One significant dimension to conceptualising Free Schools is therefore in relation to their role in extending the (neo-) liberalisation of school provision through the initial inclusion of an expanding range of civil society actors in the development of new schools and/or conversion of existing ones. The characterisation of structural reforms as 'Neo-liberal' by itself adds little to the process of conceptualisation (c.f. Exley & Ball, 2014). The results of Neo-liberalisation are characterised in terms of increased performativity, privatisation, marketization, decentralisation and

corporatisation (Exley & Ball, 2014; Wang & Ho Mok, 2014). However, in characterising the new, as opposed to hollow, role of government in relation to the provision of state funded education it provides a banner under which new questions arise in relation to the educational 'front-line' (Exley & Ball, 2014; Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016). The result has already been seen in the continued increase in local autonomy and subsequently in the increasing diversity of provision (Woods & Simkins, 2014). This can be seen to resonate with the general shift from central welfare state to individual and economic liberty captured in the discussion above.

The institutional redistribution and delegation of power to local agents brings with it new subjectivities with the potential to redefine value at the local level (c.f. Ball, 2007; Foucault, 2011; Jessop, 2004). The apparent emancipation of liberal actors in the development of new school provision is conceptualised according to diverse, disaggregated and differential religious, pedagogic, community and financial incentives (c.f. Ball, 2007; Bunar, 2012; Bunar & Ambrose, 2016; Higham, 2014). In parallel the evolution of structural reform is evident in the well-documented characterisation of the self-governing state school (c.f. Whitty, 2008; Glatter, 2012; Higham & Earley, 2013). Within this context a legislated governance framework bound in financial contract, inspection regimes (e.g. Ofsted), regional agents of government (e.g. School Commissioners) and the perpetuation of the modern governor role, the critical friend, through multiple mediums serve as the technologies through which power is vicariously asserted by state (NSN, 2015; Ofsted, 1999; EFA, 2015; Gov.uk, 2016a). These reflect the redevelopment of geo-political cartographies of power through which Neo-liberal governmentality re-extends its influence over local autonomous schools through their observation and normalisation (c.f. Foucault, 1977; 2010; Harley, 1989; Ong, 2006; Wilkins, 2015).

Yet, civil pluralism in provision and state oversight cannot be conflated with increasing democratisation. The shift from panoptic forms of oversight to an omnioptic principle of 'everyone surveils everyone' does not appear manifest in what has been described in the Neo-liberal education reforms (c.f. Grünberg, 2013). The consequence can be seen in the perpetuation of 'hub and spoke'

systems of governance, both in the oversight typified in multi-school chains and in characterising the relationship with central government (c.f. Salokangas & Chapman, 2014; Wilkins, 2015).

1.3 A Research Rationale

The above sets out a context characterised by seemingly paradoxical tensions. On the one hand structural reform entails the increase in local discretion over significant aspects of strategic decision making. This is heightened by the diversity of those potentially involved in the founding and oversight of Free Schools, and the potential diversity of motivations and values coinciding in liberalising reforms. On the other hand, the discussion above reveals the emergence of new, and reinforcement of old, technologies of power through which state seeks to maintain influence and oversight over local schools (Rose, 1999). It is to this extent that the current conception of (post) Neo-liberal transformation is one in which the State gives with one hand, yet takes with the other.

This tension is equally captured in established research that reveals the conflicting priorities generated between central and local perspective. Authority and accountability devolved to schools has been seen to result in a balancing act for school leadership between the differing local and central influences, including those arising from increasing parental choice (Simkins, 1997; Higham & Earley, 2013). Glatter (2012) further contends that a paradox can be identified between the increasing autonomy witnessed through policy and the experiences amongst practitioners that government requirements are a source of increasing constraint. In the case of Free Schools, and academies more broadly, the paradox between central versus local locus of control can be seen in the identification of central narratives and prescriptions concerning the social and educational outcomes expected of schools that are also meant to be free to define their own local strategies (c.f. Hatcher, 2011; Higham 2014; NSN, 2016a). Underpinning Free School policy justification is a series of assumptions about the cause and effect relationship between policy and the broader outcomes of education provided by new Free Schools (Gov.uk, 2016b; Gov.uk, 2016c). Firstly, is the assumption that there is sufficient central control over new school provision that their operation can be adequately predicted to satisfy those

outcomes. If such a causal link is not evident, then the justification for policy based upon those outcomes would be unfounded. Higham (2014) demonstrates that factors including the motivations of founding groups and the combination of high levels of social capital and Central political expectations of founding groups guide the likelihood of successful applications. The consequence of this selection process is seen in the diminished likelihood for disadvantaged or minority demographics to succeed in the development of new school provision that reflects, or is embedded in, those communities. Even where schools are developed in those communities those responsible for founding and leading those schools are not self-evidently aligned to those local interests. This account is further supported by Green et al (2015).

A second assumption can be seen in the disregard of other complicating factors likely to be of significance to understanding how these schools develop. Echoing the above is the concern that the motivations brought into the development of new school provision have the potential to shape the local strategies adopted by these schools and therefore their contribution to those local communities and the broader education system. Furthermore, to maintain the focus of Free School debate on specific or predetermined social and educational outcomes or performance indicators may be to ignore 'what else' may arise from the development process of autonomous civil society actor-led schools. To further develop an understanding of Free Schools, and the processes through which they strategically develop, requires empirical investigation into the local experiences of those responsible for their development. Within other educational contexts the significance of school-level governance in shaping local outcomes has been well established (c.f. James et al, 2011; Marino, 2011; Sommers, 2011; Creese & Bradley, 1997; Peterson, 2000; Carver, 2009; Earley, 2000). As such, board composition can have a potentially significant effect as a consequence of the differing configurations of individuals (c.f. Du Bois, 2009). Not only does this suggest that governing boards have an inherently relational element (i.e. that particular configurations may be as significant as particular actors within a given context) but how and why actors become involved or engaged may be just as consequential as policies

and procedures to the outcomes of governance. Therefore, it is only by developing an understanding of the local experiences that a more holistic and balanced debate about Free Schools can emerge.

Research discussed above captures the current state of academic research in relation to this field. What is revealed is a current lack of understanding in relation to experiences of the strategic development process. Miller et al (2014) present some of the only research to explore this area. However, in doing so the emphasis of their study relates to the experiences of the administrative process involved in setting up such schools. As a result, the authors acknowledge that the constant development and redevelopment of the application process means that any analysis is bound to the particular stage of evolution in the application procedures (ibid.).

Furthermore, in light of the research's focus on experiences of the administrative process the analysis does not consider the issues pertaining to strategy and oversight highlighted above. However, their analysis further supports the view that motivations and local social processes are of significance to understanding Free Schools within their context (ibid.). Free Schools, as discussed above, are characterized as being amongst the representations of the forefront of transformations in English education. The increased role of civil society actors and the devolution of responsibility and autonomy provide a setting in which the experiences of strategic development offer a significant potential contribution to knowledge. In line with the governance framework outlined earlier it is the founders prior to opening, and governors subsequently, who are charged with the oversight of strategic development. Research is therefore required to analyse the processes through which these individuals experience themselves coming together in the development of these schools and how this shapes the strategic development process. By analysing the experiences of those responsible for school development it may also be possible to explore broader implications concerning the strategic management and oversight of such schools.

Within the governance context those who go on to govern these schools (through the founding process) are responsible for their school's strategic vision, financial probity and in holding their school

to account (DfE, 2015a; Ofsted, 1999). Analysis of governors' experiences within this context is therefore of further significance to understanding the processes of organization and formation of self-governing relations within such schools. Connolly and James (2011) maintain that agency must be considered in parallel with structure in diagnosing the successes and failures of governance arrangements. This therefore requires understanding experiences of agency within the relationships amongst those involved in the development process. James et al (2011) further demonstrate the significance of governance capital (networks of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations) and agency (the capacity to act) in assessing governance practice. Exploring experiences within the emergence of governance and oversight of the development process further entails understanding how particular individuals come to influence and shape their schools in particular ways.

The potentially diverse motivations considered in relation to new Free School provision, coupled with the complexity and novelty of governing within the context, provide the research presented below both its justification and defined area of theoretical contribution. In line with these areas of interest and significance the next chapter therefore presents established research and theoretical discussion pertinent to considering motivations, relations and power in relation to the governance and strategy involved in Free School development. Connolly and James (2011, pp 506) note that 'empirical evidence on who the parent representatives are and what role they see themselves playing is important yet it is at present lacking....How they view their identity is likely to influence the role they play in governing.'. Within the context of newly developing Free Schools it is argued that this may be true of a much broader set of civil society actors involved in the governing process.

1.4 Research Problem, Aim and Objectives

The discussion above highlights a lack of current understanding of the experiences of those responsible for the development of Free Schools. Yet it has also been argued that these experiences are of significance to the broader debate surrounding Free Schools. Whilst research and theory has been identified that 'surrounds' the issues identified, or emerges from parallel contexts, there is

limited theoretical grounding from which to generate meaningful predications about what might be significant to experiences within the strategic development of Free Schools. The gap in current understanding, identified in this chapter, concerns how the strategic development process is experienced by those responsible for its oversight and implementation. This is of significance in informing the development of a research aim, objectives and a methodology below. Whilst the analysis of founder and governor experiences does not offer a direct critique of policy or structural reform such analysis does provide an important contribution to the debate by generating a distinct narrative. A narrative reflecting the perspective of those involved in policy implementation can be usefully compared and contrasted against established areas of discussion. Where analysis of those experiences might reveal novel perspectives in and influences on the development of new Free Schools then this would be of significance to critiquing any inferences about the causal relation between Free School policy and outcomes.

A paradox has been presented reflected in structural reforms to English education that simultaneously seek to redistribute strategic decision making to civil society actors whilst making claims about the expected outcomes of such processes. Either founder/governor experiences do not reflect the liberation and strategic discretion espoused as one of the roots of school improvement or such schools have the freedom to act outside of the intentions reflected in policy justification. Both scenarios would be of significance to understanding the trajectory of English education. Both scenarios also reveal the importance of understanding how the individuals responsible for Free School development experience themselves and others within their shared school contexts. Founders and governors have been identified as responsible for the extended strategic development process; including organization and local self-governance practices (see: DfE, 2015a; NSN, 2016c). However, in light of the espoused benefits of analysing the experiences of those involved in the development process of schools that have successfully navigated the application process the following research aim has been developed:

To analyse governor experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools

In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives have been developed:

- *To investigate governors' reported experiences of the strategic development within their schools*
- *To analyse key issues emerging from governors' narratives across schools in relation to the strategic development process*
- *To generate an original theoretical account grounded in the reported narratives and reconciled with established theory and research*
- *To draw out theoretical implications contributing to the conceptual development of research on organizational governance and the strategic development process in comparable settings*

1.5 Research Approach

In order to achieve the aim and objectives highlighted above the following research develops an in-depth analysis of governor experiences from across three schools. Qualitative surveys distributed to all open Free Schools (in 2011/12) were used initially for the purposes of scoping the research and the selection of participants, and in sensitizing the researcher to the potential breadth of attitudes and dispositions of Governors. This was followed up by the use of semi-structured interviews in order to explore experiences in line with the research problem outlined above. In order to generate insight into the themes emerging across these experiences they are compared and contrasted.

In recognition that governors' experiences co-exist with others within shared development processes the findings (see *Chapter Four*) are initially presented such that these experiences are reflected within the three networks of actors (and other participants) they emerge in (i.e. within 'schools'). This enables the research to analyse the similarities and differences amongst individual experiences in

relation to other experiences within the same social setting. It also means that these experiences can then be compared and contrasted with experiences across different settings in the *Analysis Chapter* (see *Chapter Five*). This enables the research to generate additional levels of depth by acknowledging various perspectives and subjectivities with regards to specific school development processes as well as analysing how this relates to commonalities and differences emerging across multiple settings. In order to achieve the above a grounded theory approach is adopted through which theoretical categories emerge from the empirical data, which can in turn be compared and contrasted against established theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). *Chapter Three* explains this approach in further detail; demonstrating more specifically how this enables the achievement of the research objectives and aim considered above.

In focusing on governor experiences the research adopts a moderate (pragmatic) constructionist philosophy, emphasizing how experience is socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bevir, et al., 2003). This includes acknowledging the role of the researcher positioned 'inside' the research process, whereby the findings and analysis are inescapably bound by both the researcher's sensitivities and their direct involvement in shaping the interactions through which the data was generated (Mead, 1912; Stacey, 2011). In doing so the discourse and narratives generated within interview are regarded as extensions of the construction of the experience itself, as imbued with affections, conations and dispositions (c.f. Blumer, 1936; Mead, 1934; Shotter, 1993; Stacey, 2011; Wittgenstein, 1958). In doing so such discourse is itself an extension of the power relation constructed between interviewer and interviewee, and as an extension of the process through which the narration of history is endowed with future intent (Foucault, 1972; 2010).

1.6 Key Contributions

In line with the research rationale and problem stated above the research makes a number of specific contributions that have a number of broader implications. From the findings three core theoretical categories emerge, namely motivation, relating and power. Rather than being presented as concepts

endowed with a specific linear causation they are conceived of as interrelated components of a socially complex set of experiences of Free School strategic development. A conception of motivation is presented that reveals it not only as an initial condition for involvement but as a reflection of an enduring, manifold and complex set of values that drives and shapes individual contribution. Participants are revealed as having the capacity to hold multiple competing motivations that shape governance practice. Relations are revealed initially in terms of the professional and personal relationships through which recruitment to founding groups takes place, with implications for the convergence of particular dispositions and values in the development process. However, relations are also revealed in terms of the experiences of ongoing interactions through which identities are formed within and form the strategic trajectory. The multiple ways in which individuals are seen to relate to others reveals the capacity for conflict. The implications are seen in terms of a conception of governance in the data as a process of mediated value, where the values brought into the schools can be defined through the numerous motivating forces resulting from civil society actor involvement in 'Free' schools. Finally, the formation and distribution of power is revealed as a dynamic and ongoing property of the relations identified. Most notably power is not experienced in its emergence within established formal structures but in the multifarious ways in which individuals enable and constrain one another in the pursuit to realise particular values within school strategy. Implications for governing are seen in how governors draw on diverse personal experiences, values and relations in determining how, and when, they hold others to account. Further to this governing is seen to reflect a permissive relational element that emerges from governors' support of particular individuals due to the convergence of motivations or a lack of knowledge or capacity to act. The resulting theoretical account has broader implications for how formal structure and the critical friend role are conceived of in practice within the context. It also contributes to a conception of strategic development of new autonomous schools that rejects their reduction to linear accounts of causality.

1.7 Research Outline

This thesis adheres to the following structure. The current chapter outlines the educational context in which Free Schools operate. In doing so it has presented a gap in current understanding and an account of how the current research seeks to fill it. *Chapter 2* presents a critical literature review. However, rather than being regarded as a framework for analysis the theories and concepts are held up critically against the findings and theoretical categories that emerge from the empirical data collection process as presented in *Chapter 5*. *Chapter 3* provides a detailed account of the methodology and methods employed by the research in line with the section above. *Chapter 4* presents the findings from the interview data structured according to the three school contexts in which they are all located. The findings are presented to ensure consistency with the stated focus on individuals' experiences whilst grouping them such that the codes, reflecting their subjectivities and intersubjectivities, can be compared and contrasted according to the themes emerging within and between schools. From summarizing the similarities and differences across the themes and schools the significance of the three core theoretical categories is revealed. These are, in turn, developed and explicated in *Chapter 5*. These categories are refined through the critical comparison against the literature review which is presented and discussed in *Chapter 2*. *Chapter 6* provides a discussion that further integrates the categories into a single theoretical contribution that draws both on established theory and returning the discussion back to the research purposes. *Chapter 7* develops the theoretical and practical implications of the research whilst clearly summarizing how the research objectives and aim have been satisfied. The chapter finishes by drawing on future research directions emerging from the dissertation.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The introduction chapter provided an overview of the development of Free Schools within the context of Neo-liberal structural reforms. It demonstrated that whilst research pertaining to Free Schools is growing, a comprehensive understanding of the development of these schools has yet to emerge. It was also seen that, against a backdrop of broader national debates concerning performance, social justice and the impact of marketization, an empirically informed narrative from the local school level is of significant potential valuable to the discussion. By analysing experiences of the development process it is possible to determine why particular schools come to be a particular way, thereby bridging the gap between policy and policy outcomes. Whilst some of the initial conditions involved in Free School development are now understood, research is needed to understand what other influences are at play in the development of new Free School provision, and what the implications are for the processes of strategic development and oversight at a local level. This offers the potential for areas of discussion to emerge that might otherwise be overlooked when focused purely on national level outcomes. As the work of Higham (2014) and Miller et al (2014) demonstrate, dependence on macro-level outcomes in assessing structural reform may limit the extent to which research can support the pre-emption and mitigation of weaknesses and challenges inherent in the system but realised in local interactions (C.f. Blackmore & Lauder, 2005). Inferences about cause and effect at the policy level can therefore be accompanied by an understanding of actors in local processes through which ‘causes’ are enacted and ‘effects’ are realised. As such, the following literature review seeks to explore and present literature that allows the research to make sense of those perspectives operating at the local level. In doing so it provides a critical academic context for the study, addressing the themes the research also ultimately contributes to.

The focus of the chapter is a critical exploration of literatures organised around the concepts of motivation, relation and power. As will be discussed throughout the chapter these concepts and their connexions cover areas critical to casting light on the local processes through which Free Schools are developed. The relevance of these areas in linking strategic and governance processes in founding has already been introduced in the previous chapter. Whilst it may be possible to draw from many concepts in relation to the governance of Free Schools this chapter illustrates the relevance of these concepts to the current research through the critical consideration of literatures that inform and define them. In doing so the chapter illustrates how and why they are well suited to guiding exploration in support of the research aim and objectives. To do so the chapter will reveal the connections between the current research and established views on motivations, relations and power that draw more broadly from educational management, governance, strategic and sociological/anthropological publications (c.f. Foucault, 1991; Higham, 2014; James et al, 2011; Stacey, 2011). These views can therefore be usefully compared against the findings in the current research, with initial confidence about their relevance to an exploration of strategy and governance in the Free School development process. Of importance to the development of a clear research focus the chapter ends with a critical discussion of literature concerning experience.

2.2 Motivations

2.2.1 Introduction

Free Schools (and Academies more broadly) have been considered as a part of the documented trajectory of English education involving the transition towards increased school freedom and autonomy. The consequence is the potential for the increased individualisation of specific schools (or schools within a given trust), as they are afforded the authority to define themselves through their self-management and self-governance. In the case of Free Schools more specifically self-definition is potentially shaped further by the inclusion of an increasingly broad range of civil society actors in the

development of new school provision. In line with this trajectory, education management literatures have increasingly concerned the motivations of those becoming involved in school provision, and the impact this has on individual schools and the education system as a whole (c.f. Ball, 2007; Higham, 2014; James et al, 2012; James, 2014). The significance of motivation and activism, for example, has been echoed in international literatures concerning schools with comparable features i.e. autonomy and broad stakeholder inclusion (Bifulco & Ladd, 2006; Eskeland & Filmer, 2007; Henig et al, 2005; Sahlgren, 2011). Motivation is similarly seen in the broader non-profit literatures concerning volunteer boards in relation to board composition, recruitment and retention (Dougherty & Easton, 2011; Newton et al, 2014; Wellens & Jegers, 2014). For these reasons academic literatures on the role of motivation offers important theoretical constructs for critical comparison against the findings of the current research. However, to generate a consistent and coherent account of motivation the following must first account for how the concept can be understood within the proposed research approach laid out in the introduction.

2.2.2 Understanding Reports of Motivation

The research seeks to examine governor experiences and the conception of motivation therefore has implications both for the comparative analysis in *Chapter Five* and for the methodological assumptions incorporated in the research. There has been significant convergence in theory on motivation defined in terms of being 'moved to do something' (Müller et al, 2009; Nilsen, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Such a view of motivation has been widely researched in educational literatures in relation to learner (and teacher) behaviours (c.f. Alderman, 2013; Midgley, 2014; Pintrich, 2000; Wigfield et al, 2000). Such approaches are often seen to draw on the distinctions between intrinsic motivations and extrinsic motivations (e.g. Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, such psychological accounts of motivation are therefore also dichotomising; offering up dualisms through which phenomena are understood in terms of their being one type or another (Clarke & Hennig, 2013). Yet the study of motivation, when understood in terms of its deconstructed constituents, entails a study of cause and effect

relationships. It thereby fails to capture anything in the nature of the action through which motivation is reconciled with outcome, including the manner of its communication. In relation to governance and strategy, the analysis of reports of motivation may therefore result in an assumption concerning the efficacy of agency and a lack of concern for the emergence of social entities in process itself (c.f. Rescher, 1996; MacKay & Chia, 2013). An examination of motivation by way of the reports of actors is therefore subject to methodological critique associated with the indirect analysis of internal states (displaced by proximity in time or to the mental states themselves). Adopting such a view may also lead to a lack of appreciation for what might be discerned from the analysis of that which is directly accessible in the case of actors' self-reports. The view, to be discussed, is that actor's self-reports offer the opportunity to examine the manner in which meaning is created by the actors themselves.

An alternative school of thought questions the notion of motivation as being something innate to an actor, and operating prior to the action or heralding its future happening (Mills, 1962). Burke (1992: 23) suggests that 'when we see a man explaining his conduct by the favoured terms of his social code, we may say that he is making exactly the same kind of rationalization as when he, having lived among psycho-analysts, begins discussing his interests solely in terms of libido, repression, Oedipus complex, and the like. This, too, is a rationalization, a set of motives belonging to a specific orientation...'. Motivation is, in this respect, constructed; bound entirely to the context in which motives are discerned and presented as an account of action. In this respect, the expression of motivation cannot be detached from the manner in which it is expressed. Motivation can be regarded as emerging within the nature of the action itself (Griffin et al, 1999). That is to say that both have the character of *process*, in which motivation (expressed across actions) is identical to the self-actualisation of the actor (Stacey, 2007). Parallels can be made with Elias's (1978) illustration of when one speaks about the wind blowing the tendency to distinguish the 'wind' from its 'blowing' is a reflection of the tendency to fallaciously deconstruct characteristics of process to isolated states. Yet to 'possess' a motive can be seen as confined to the process of rationalisation through which a motive is given form, and through which it might be seen to serve a purpose within the context in which it is presented. Brissett (1971)

contends that "Only when activity is interrupted does man become conscious of himself". On such a view motivation can be seen as a part of the broader set of rationalisations through which one seeks to socialise their given perspective (Burke, 1992). These views remain consistent with Mead's (1934; 1938) contention that meaning is derived and constructed through on-going interaction, where the study of that meaning is therefore a study of the on-going interaction as opposed to some forces that precede or exist 'behind' it. This area of discussion is of significance to understanding expressed motivations in terms of the act of expressing them. This is of importance to understanding the experiences under study. It is also of importance to understanding how the communication of motivation captures individual positionality in the manner of its expression. The expression of motivation conveys subjective value as an extension of self within interaction with the researcher.

In line with the above, if affection is significant to understanding motivation this demonstrates that there is more to actors' self-reports than their cognitive content (Blumer, 1936; MacKinnon, 1994). For this reason, an account of motivation can be offered up that is itself a form of identity-work, in which individuals construct a broad and enduring view of self in relation to a given subject of motivation under discussion, which can likewise be understood as an action like any other. It is worth noting that within the social sciences motivation and identity offer a potentially significant grounding on which to reconcile psychological and sociological theories (e.g. Oyserman, 2009; Ushioda, 2009). It may therefore be possible to present an understanding of motivation as the self-construction of identity within social contexts, where motivation manifests as the symbols and affections of communication (c.f. Oyserman, 2009; Blumer, 1936). Whilst it is not within the remit of the current discussion to map such an account in full it is significant to directing focus towards this form of solution to the theoretical and methodological challenges raised above. Parallels may be drawn with a Foucauldian conception of self-formation, where motivation can be seen as the manifestation of agency (Clarke & Hennig, 2013). This may be seen as consistent with views expressed above, and below, in locating motivation within action as opposed to preceding it. To the extent that agency arises in everyday practices within social settings the realisation of motivation may be seen as situated within

the social constraints that operate, including the exercise of others' agency (Clarke & Hennig, 2013; de Cereau, 1984). There is therefore some resonance with Mead's view of the 'I' operating within the context of the 'Me' (Mead, 1934). This conceptual element of motivation and action, and its confines, is therefore closely linked to the discussions below concerning relations and power.

2.2.3 Motivation in Neo-Liberal Governance Reforms – Freedoms and Constraints

Discussed in the introduction chapter was the manner in which corporate governance within the Academy and Free School system addressed the tension between local freedom and conformity to a central education agenda. Potential challenges arise for conceiving of Neo-liberal public management where universalised school governance principles become entwined with local freedoms to enact it that schools are afforded. Decentralisation and deregulation that serve as the foundations of strategic freedom have also served as the foundations of increased self-governance at the organisational level (c.f. Higham, 2014; Higham & Earley, 2013; Smyth, 2011). Consequently, organisational governance can be seen as increasingly taking on the character of the Neo-liberal movement. This is manifest in the increased responsabilisation of founder-governors for both strategic direction and oversight of both self-determined and centrally established expectations. Important to the critical examination of the governance arrangements is the extent to which self-determination and centralised expectation are harmonious in their realisation; or are conflicting or subject to local prioritisation within a given school setting. It is in this respect that the motivations and values underpinning such processes emerge as an important area of analysis in relation to Free Schools (c.f. Higham, 2014). Again, to explore these phenomena requires appeal directly to the perspectives of those subject to this responsabilisation. This was echoed in the 'balancing act' considered between experiences of local and central pressures (Glatter, 2012; Higham & Earley, 2013; Simkins, 1997). In such circumstances 'freedom' and 'responsibility' may be difficult to differentiate. In this respect freedom and autonomy are not necessarily manifest through the reduction of governance structures, but rather governance structures become focused within local schools. The endurance of forms of social control and

socialisation may, in such circumstances, be seen to emerge as the central platform for ensuring that school-level actors maintain their 'governability', in so much that identity formation retains an institutional character (Olssen, 2005). That is to say that governmentality exercises itself through more than just the structural nature of governance (Foucault, 2010).

However, enduring uncertainties about the extent of 'control' and prospective renegotiations of power in governance arise from the inclusion of actors in the founding process not so significantly influenced by the established processes of normalisation. In inviting civil society actors into this process there is good reason to question any assumption that their motivations, embodied in their actions, are habitualised in the same ways as actors in traditional maintained schools (c.f. Olssen, 2005). As ideology in practice, Neo-liberalism marks the sacrifice of State reason for the purposes of avoiding its own self-destruction (ibid.). It is therefore unclear whether the actors in positions resulting from this process can be expected to develop the same 'governed' identities as those yet to transition from 'traditional' Local Authority schools. Any intention to increase the 'constrained-freedom' of Free Schools and Academies may be seen as also leading to a degree of unintentional emancipation from engagement with established forms of political power (c.f. Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991). Self-governing capabilities, namely autonomy and enterprise, are not dichotomous to political power; but neo-liberal governmentality entails restructuring power relationships in society (Foucault, 2000; Rose, 1996). In relation to the organisational governance of Free Schools, and the wider governance of that organisational governance, it is not clear how, or the extent to which, formal structures at the national or local levels address the consequence of new power configurations that may be experienced by Free School governors. This provides an important aspect of the justification for examining the experiences within schools themselves. The broader debates are increased in complexity by considering how 'meta-governance' is redefined by the values, norms and principles that guide those systems and approaches (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). The discussion emerging here concerns how one understands motivation embodied in ongoing strategic actions and positions constrained by different, if not conflicting, aspects of the context in which Free Schools are being governed. If Neo-liberalism has

reconfigured those constraints then questions arise concerning how the resulting motivations are instantiated in the actions of school actors, and what other constraints might be experienced on their agency. Connected to this is the question of which values, norms and principles underpin the actions that shape the system? If the system of corporate governance increasingly relies on its enduring socialisation within organisational governance are the enduring characteristics of governance (see DfE, 2015a; Ofsted, 1999) sufficient to mitigate the challenges posed by the potential increase in diversity of motivations that emerge from Neo-liberal inclusivity? These questions form a significant interest to the research. The discussion indicates the importance of analysing the potential breadth of governors' motivations and whether this relates to their experiences of developing Free Schools.

2.2.4 Motivation in Governing

James et al (2012), represents one of the few current studies to consider the role of experience in governing. The research characterises the role of the Chair of Governors as multifaceted, and draws upon experience, employment and motivation as factors affecting the Chair's conduct (ibid.). Experiences in this discourse are often reported in terms of their subjectivities; whether particular functions and activities of chairing have a positive or negative character in terms of how participants experience them. Doing so reveals the contingent nature of such experiences, where the character of individual experience is inextricably linked in the analysis to their perceptions of others (e.g. James et al, 2012: 12). This contingent relational element to experience is not the main focus of the analysis, but is also acknowledged in discussion on the potential capacity of Chairs to act as a source of motivation to other governors (James et al, 2012; Yukl, 2009).

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions to conceptualising motivation in relation to other aspects of governing is seen in James et al's (2011) discussion on governance capital and agency. The article indicates that levels of motivation are linked to factors such as the Socio-Economic Status (SES), where a high local status is linked with increased eagerness to engage in governing, which translates into a greater willingness to engage in induction and training (ibid.). Parallels may be made with

Bourdieu's (1984) conception of capital that perpetuates non-economic forms of inequity in the distribution of power across society through conditions associated with class, language, methods and activities. It is suggested that motivation to govern can be seen as an extension, or perhaps manifestation, of how those with the social capital to do so seek to contribute to the community. The fact that governors at low (SES) schools could also have high levels of motivation demonstrates that the sources of capital that shape motivation are diverse (ibid.). Governance capital is characterised as the 'network of individuals and their capabilities, relationships and motivations that are available for the governance of any particular school' (James et al, 2011:429). This draws from a broader conception of social capital including 'intangible resources, shared values and trust' (Field, 2003: i). This conception is therefore of significant value to a critical comparison with current research findings, where understanding how and why individuals produce and draw from these different relationships and values is of great potential significance to understanding how governing is experienced within the context under study. The research is also of importance in recognising that individuals must be regarded individually in an analysis of governing, with parents, 'affluent professionals' and representatives all engaging in governing potentially for different reasons and in different ways. In a later publication examining the differences between governing in primary and secondary school contexts James et al (2014) discuss the 'antecedents' of governing. Their analysis reflects the influence of perceptions of the school and governing role, in terms of school image, complexity, degree to which governing is 'hands on' and student attitudes (ibid.). The differences between primary and secondary context are significant for framing the current research's participant selection and focus, suggesting that comparisons between school levels may influence conclusions about governor experience.

Kooiman & Jentoft (2009), in discussing interactive governance, distinguish between images, instruments and actions as the components of governance interactions. Images are drawn on in describing the 'visions, metaphors, models, knowledge, facts, judgements, presuppositions, hypotheses, convictions, ends and goals' of governance that are instantiated in value and knowledge systems (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009: 820). Action is seen as mediated through instruments that,

although are not passive, link images to their instantiation. The framework from which these components are drawn may therefore be construed as a socio-political lens. Instruments, such as policy and structure, are themselves active to the extent that they both influence action in a particular way and are also themselves shaped by particular images. Images, in turn, might equally be understood as being influenced by actions. To this extent the framework is interactive in the manner in which it seeks to bridge multiple perspectives and governance. However, the framework may best be understood for its analytical use, in allowing interactive governance, or interaction in governance, to be examined. This can be done whilst avoiding an ontological position that separates out the analysis of 'images' and their instantiation in action, which would suffer the same challenges as other reductionist accounts. What is of significant value to understanding experience in relation to motivation is the potential for a breadth of prior knowledge, perspectives and judgements, from across individuals, to shape judgements and actions in the present (c.f. James et al, 2014). That the governance and founding of Free Schools might draw from a broad set of skills is a clearly sought outcome in policy and guidance (see NSN, 2015a). However, the ramifications of drawing on a much wider range of historical experiences, including those that are value-laden, emotive or normative in nature, are potentially of great significance to understanding what 'interactive governance' actually entails within the Free School context. The examination of how 'first-order governance' (experience of day to day affairs, subjective problem solving etc.) interplays with experiences of institutional arrangements (rules, rights, norms, procedures - 'second-order governance'), and how this influences understandings of meta-governance, forms a direct concern of the current research (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009).

This view to meta-governance is also of value in reducing the emphasis that other theories have placed on the state in understanding meta-governance. The consequence, of relevance to the current investigation, is a conception of meta-governance as 'The governance order where values, norms and principles are advanced according to which governance practices can be formed and evaluated.' (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009:823). Discussed in detail in subsequent sections is the recognition that the

'images' or values that shape governance may be influenced by a much broader set of stakeholders' values than government alone. Stakeholders traditionally assumed to be distanced from the underlying value propositions in education provision that shape the 'needs' of governance arrangement are increasingly influential within the Neo-liberal system. For instance, Ball (2007, pg. 11) notes that private sector participants in schools 'represent subjectivities which fit within the complexity of new forms of governance and these are blurred and elude simple categorisations.' He goes on to note the role of motivations, values, purposes and new sets of strategic capabilities of such actors in relation to governance processes (ibid.). This is expanded upon in later sections. However, it is worth acknowledging that to the extent that the strategic development process concerns how individual schools come to be a particular way the discussion has revealed a complex web of potential influences on the actions through which a school is formed. Saj's (2013) application of strategic choice theory within the charitable sector demonstrates that governance forms around models of power-sharing that extend to executive director activities, top management, informal groups of individual board members and staff (Saj, 2013; Ostrower & Stone, 2006). In exploring processes of strategic development, the values and judgements of different formal and informal groups may affect which strategic decisions come to fruition, and how. This echoes the view that leadership becomes about how leaders implement their own visions or influence strategy (Earley, 2003). Strategic leadership can therefore be understood in terms of its mediation within 'first-order governance'; and how this becomes reflected in Free Schools.

2.2.5 Free Schools and Motivation

The discussion earlier demonstrated that the capacity exists for a principal-agent problem within the research context, because of increased school discretion (c.f. Ferris, 1992; West et al, 2009). Higham's (2013) research represents some of the first empirical work to explore Free Schools at the level of individual school groups, and in doing so exposes the importance of understanding Free School proposers, their motivations, aims and physical locations. Echoing the concerns raised above it was

demonstrated that ‘the motivations, aims and actions of accepted proposers are found not to support the specific involvement of disadvantaged communities’ (Higham, 2013: 123). Even where it was recognised that an area had a high level of deprivation the motivations were rather expressed in terms of the opportunity to gentrify the area, rather than social mobility. The broad conclusions of the research were supported by the quantitative analysis of Green et al (2015). Also of interest to the current research is the role of the ‘perceptions’ of the local context with regards to how this shapes the motivations in relation to that area (Higham, 2013). This echoes the views above that motivation has a relational element, and that relation is shaped by the relative positions of those involved. However, motivation is also argued to be self-serving for some, whether that be career advancement or benefits for a child; or the advancement of some alternate cause (e.g. religious). Higham (2013) also notes that motivations shape the formation of educational aims, thereby seeming to extend a cycle of action in which perception, motivation and school development activities take on this enduring attitudinal form. However, the processes through which individual motivations develop into school level visions is not a key focus of Higham’s study, and forms an important consideration for the current research. Another significant finding relates to the disconnect between stated group motivations, as reflected in strategic intentions, and the engagement in activities that might best support the achievement of those aims (ibid.). One possible explanation is addressed in the section on relations, where group formation is considered in relation to identity work. Higham (2013) does note that this may reflect elements describable in terms of convenience, or preference for types of professional skill over and above representation and inclusion of local actors. This, can be seen to have implications both for strategy, and the broad shift in the purposes and practices of governing (c.f. James, 2014; Ranson, 2012; Sharma, 2013).

Similar conclusions regarding the motivations of Free School groups were presented by Miller et al (2014), supporting the view that schools are indeed reallocating value judgments in terms of their personal motivations. Both pieces of research echo the view that different groups are driven by different things. Although not an aim of the current research it remains unclear as to whether this

reflects an enduring feature of Neo-liberal education provision or whether this diversity is associated with the infancy of this form of provision. Both studies also demonstrate multiplicity in motivation, in respect of participants seeing themselves and their schools seeking to achieve multiple outcomes. However, outside of the interests of both of these studies is how these reflect the contributions of individuals to forming these broad aims. In line with the emphasis on individual (rather than group) experience the current research seeks to address the extent to which individual perspectives on the motives arising within such schools are in consensus, and what the implications are for experiences of strategic implementation. The potential for varying experiences is recognised in the fact that strategic planning, and strategic plans, are inherently ambiguous (Abdallah & Langley, 2014). Variations in how strategic planning and strategic plans are interpreted by individuals may lead to internal incongruity and over-extension, which may in turn have implications for outcomes. Indeed, such a conception might even allow for disparity between perceptions of processes and perceptions of outcomes within groups. Another key distinction between the current research and that of Miller et al (2014) relates to the differing emphases in analysis. Miller et al (2014) discuss their conclusions in administrative terms, directing the reader to the inefficiencies of the system and consequences for policy outcomes. This research, in relation to the remaining gap in current understanding, focusses on how the social experiences of governors provide an alternative narrative within the broader debate.

2.2.6 Summary

The discussion in this section has considered a range of perspectives that cast light on motivation relevant to the research context. In doing so frameworks and perspectives have been considered that offer insight into the reciprocal relationship between governing and governance, and between agency and structure. The concerns raised in the process, and questions that form the heart of the current research, relate to how founder-governors experience the myriad forces that shape their contributions to school development. The critical review of the literature offers insights into both how individuals might come to see the 'images' driving their involvement, and the relations, formal and

informal, institutional and complex, that act upon agency within such processes. Motivation has been considered in terms of its synonymy with action, and with the purposes and forms of its expression. In doing so the role of motivation is reflected in the interests pursued, progressed or expressed through actions within social processes. The expression of motivation is itself an action that pursues particular interests within the context of its expression. The discussion has illustrated the concerns of this research with understanding local experiences of governing and the relation this has to how one conceives of governance. In order to achieve this the research has also been seen to require as explanation of the how values are adopted in Free Schools from the perspectives of those involved. If motivation is conceived of as something other than the cause preceding effect, then the current research must also remain sensitive to the pervasive nature of motivation in process. If motivation is subject to flux according to the processes in which it is embodied in action, then this would have further implications for understanding the enduring involvement in Free School governance and strategy. Building on the issues addressed here the following section seeks to consider the processes of relating and relationships that underpin governing, governance and strategy within relevant contexts.

2.3 Relating and Relationships

2.3.1 Introduction

The discussion above explored motivation as bound up in both the cumulative influences on individual subjectivity and its manifestation in action and interaction. Relations were most notably seen for their prominence in explaining the constructive nature of motivation as a linguistic and expressive device. Yet it is also important to understand motivations reflected in how individuals maintain continuous relations with one another. Emotional attachment, commitment and interest regarding others forms a potential basis on which one might continue to act freely yet in the interests of others. The accounts discussed above also echoed the mechanisms through which actors might seek to restrict the agency

of others. This provides an important connection between motivation and relating that also incorporates the concerns of power addressed later. Both former and successive areas of discussion can therefore be seen to contrast differing, but interrelated, conceptual areas bound together by the different sociological, educational and strategic discourses that have sought to address them. This section can be regarded as extending the understanding of previous concepts to the same extent that it offers insight into new ones. In developing an understanding of relating theory is considered that regards it not solely as restrictive, but also productive or constructive (c.f. Foucault, 1982). Theory is also addressed that concerns the processes of relating as possessing a fluctuating, non-linear and emergent character, as found in comparable domains to that which is under study (c.f. Elias & Jephcott, 1982; Goudsblom, 1977; Stacey, 2011). Relations are also considered within the discourse on structure and agency, strategy, governance and governing (c.f. Ainbuli, 2012; Barbieri et al, 2013; Du Bois et al, 2009; Heystek, 2004; James et al, 2011; Ostrower & Stone, 2006; Saj, 2013; Simkins, 2013; Thorpe et al, 2011; Van Wyk, 2004; Zajda and Gamage, 2009). The section also explores relating in complex social processes and systems (c.f. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Elias, 1991; Mead, 1934; Rhodes et al, 2011; Stacey, 2011).

2.3.2 Understanding the Social in Context

Challenges for understanding the self in relation to others have already been noted in the introduction and the discussion above, especially in relation to understanding how individuals might experience freedom and capacity to act versus the forces that compel and restrict action. Bourdieu's (c.f. 1989; 1994) post-structuralism forms the basis of one account for reconciling structure and agency, where the debate may be seen to contrast agency as the extension of free will from structure as the extension of the processes and influences on socialisation. As such, the relation between the two is one of interdependency and fluidity. Whilst Bourdieu's (see: 1977) primary concern was the anthropology of social behaviours (e.g. Kinship) his seminal work offers an important critique of those accounts seeking to remove language from the context of its use, or discourse from its affective 'iconography'. The

relevance to the current context concerns the limitations of objectivism concerning the linguistic content of interaction within relations. It offers a rejection of the kinds of dualism that might otherwise afford research the independence required to attribute truths to the analysis of context dependent communication (Bourdieu, 1977). This therefore draws on an understanding of 'relations' as lacking any clear distinctions between 'structure' and 'agency'. Concerning conceptions of the social, the 'unitisation' of both agency and structure may bring with it an unjustified generalisation about the capacities and experiences of the self that attempts to remove the specific contexts that define it. Field can be seen to give form to the educational, cultural, economic and ideological factors that give rise to some of the enduring character in which complex social relations take place (c.f. Bourdieu, 1977; Navarro, 2006).

Whilst such fields do not form a major element of the current focus of the study (to the extent that the current research seeks to draw its conclusions from experiences of specific social relations of governing) there is therefore a necessity to remain critically aware of the coincidence of such forces that shape and contextualise local behaviour. The endurance of these 'objective' (according to Bourdieu) conditions informs the endurance of subjective structures of action, understood in the form of the dispositions characteristic of habitus (ibid.). Contrasts may be made with the dispositions that might be seen to subconsciously arise in school governance as a reflection of the structures of the relevant fields embodied in the conduct of governing i.e. comparable to the forms of socialisation previously discussed. But within this research context, conduct is characterised by such freedom, autonomy and broad inclusion of civil society actors as to reduce the certainty of conclusions drawn about the relevant fields under study. Whilst future research may be afforded the capacity for such retrospective attributions the current examination may be said to draw parallels with an examination of doxa, in so much as it seeks to understand the values and beliefs that drive individuals within the strategic development process (Bourdieu, 1977). To the extent that the local and global can be seen as coinciding, to reveal something about doxa (within differing fields) is to reveal something about habitus, without making claims regarding its exhaustion or generalisation (c.f. Mowles, 2014). Of

further significance to the current study is the view that as individuals may operate within different fields meaning power and other such relations can therefore equally be experienced differently as context shapes habitus (Bourdieu, 1984; Gaventa, 2003). Furthermore, the research does not seek to base its theorisation on a pre-determined conception of power as either ubiquitous (c.f. Foucault, 1991) or culturally entrenched in structures through the perpetuated socialisation of agency (Bourdieu, 1994).

One may therefore begin to see sociological theories on relating as viewing the self and others as elements of the same things, rather than self and others as isolatable and independently definable. However, to the extent that Bourdieu's writings are bound up in a socio-anthropological analysis the emphasis of theorising can be seen as maintaining an inherent macroscopy. Transition, change and flux are reconciled with a collectivistic view of agency which appears not to take as its aim the interest in addressing the individuality of mutable experience within such settings. Contrasted against the current aims are the tendencies of bodies of theory emerging in relation to Bourdieu (and others) to adopt an institutional perspective (c.f. Atkinson, 2011; Reay, 2004, Thomas, 2002). As Atkinson (2011: 332) contends 'there seems to be a growing feeling that, useful as they may be, Bourdieu's concepts as he elaborated them are not quite enough on their own to capture the messy complexities and myriad nuances of concrete social life.'. Further incongruence with the current research emerges from the weight of the ontological claims Bourdieu's Critical Theory places on the context in which experience emerges. However, of consensus across multiple sociological perspectives is the view of self as bound to context, where that context is (to varying extents) defined by those other individuals that operate within it. Claims about whether the context is anything *in addition to* the other individuals within it does not impact significantly on that which is under analysis in the current research. The focus highlighted in the introduction is on individual experiences. What the current discussion reveals is the need to consider those individual experiences as co-existing with and co-dependent on others within their shared social contexts (including the researcher). This is important for the current research in regarding participant narratives as standing in relation to their school (and interview) context where

habitus may both continue to emerge and influence. For the purposes of the current research, that school context represents a shared social setting with other participants and individuals equally endowed with enduring experiences and dispositions.

2.3.3 Complexity and Relating

Contrasted against the approaches discussed above a range of theory has emerged that examines relations and interactions in terms of its inherent complexity. Systems theories incorporate relations as a mechanism in explaining macro phenomena, where such phenomena are seen as a consequence of multiple simultaneous micro-level interactions. Complex systems, within the definition ascribed by Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theorists, are understood as adapting and evolving systems containing multiple parts that interact both with themselves and their environment (c.f. Morel & Ramanujam, 1999; Holland, 2006). As a result, such systems also embody processes of self-organisation, feedback and emergence (Aritua, 2009). Emergent phenomena therefore occur at a level above the micro-level components from which they arise (Goldstein, 1999). Cilliers (1998) contends that it is the manifestation of the relationship between components and between the system and its environment that forms the grounds of complexity. The temporary stability resulting from processes of self-organisation emerging from these interactions offers a set of characteristics not otherwise captured in the description of the components of the system (ibid.). Once a complex system is in operation it can perform consistently in varied and varying circumstances and arrangements (ibid.). In line with non-reductionist accounts, and also consistent with schools of thought otherwise opposed to systemic accounts, is the view that emergence is a fundamental character or consequence of social interaction. Should such relations be evidenced in experiences within Free School development there are a number of potential implications. Firstly, is the rejection of simplistic accounts of cause and effect in policy implementation. Secondly would be a need to reconsider the impact of structural reforms on the experiences of defining the local systems through which new school provision emerges. Thirdly,

agency in the development process would need considering in terms of its distribution across multiple ongoing interactions.

For something to be a system requires there to be a boundary distinguishing that system from that which is not in the system (Stacey & Griffin, 2005; Stanley, 2009). Even in the case of fuzzy and open systems, such as where individuals are thought of as open systems intersystemically linked within wider open systems involving those with whom they interact or are organised, the issue remains in fundamentally creating a divide between the individual and the social (Stacey, 2001). Theories on Complex Responsive Processes of Relating (CRP) are heavily informed by the sociological arguments of Elias (1991:45) who argues that “concepts such as ‘individual’ and ‘society’ do not relate to two objects separately but to two different yet inseparable aspects of the same human beings.... Both have the character of processes, and there is not the slightest necessity, informing theories of human beings, to abstract from this process character.”. In this respect Elias’s account forms the cornerstone of a sociology of relating that both captures the complexity of the social whilst avoiding the reductionism of the approaches that address the ‘state’ of social entities.

Within the context of this figurational sociology, process is therefore not seen as being of a system with the observer located outside of a closed structure that they in turn may diagnose and manipulate (Elias, 1969; Stacey, 2011). Thinking in this way risks leading to a ‘doubling of process’ in which process, an unqualified term, is divided into the bounded process under study and the distinct process of studying it (Griffin, 2002; Stacey, 2011). Rather, it is argued that individuals should recognise such paradoxes as are involved in all human relations and experiences (Stacey, 2011). Experience is plagued simultaneously by the desire for freedom and risk taking and yet fears of the unknown and desire for order (ibid.). Likewise, whilst one attempts to detach from processes of management, to manipulate and act upon them, one is fundamentally bound up in the process (ibid.). Paradox is therefore seen in coinciding self and other, stability and instability, local and global interaction, general and particular. One therefore regards the emergence of patterns of self-organisation as simultaneously informing

and informed by micro-level interaction (Mowles, 2014; Stacey, 2011). Likewise, the macro-micro divide in the study of policy and implementation may be rejected, as their embodiment in one another forms a part of the single social process instantiated and differing only in geographies rather than hierarchies. As reduction and distinction are rejected agency can likewise be seen as a property of structure, and structure a property of agency; and so too for actor and action, object and relation (Elias, 1978). In this respect there is a shift *away* from conceiving of 'structure' and 'agency' as being arbitrary distinctions in one and the same socio-historical process in which previous relations inform the latter (Iterson et al, 2002).

2.3.4 Relating and Interaction

Accounts based on the above form of social complexity regard human communication and interaction as a gesture by one body that elicits a response in another (Stacey, 2011). Conceptions of 'gesture-response' were established in Mead's (1934) social behaviourism. Language, in its broadest sense, may be captured in all of those signs and symbols, expressions and representations, that can be interpreted by individuals as arising in the gestures of others (Mead, 1934). The response by an individual is simultaneously a gesture back to the first body and itself, leading to the understanding of a temporal social process in which meaning is discerned from the whole social act rather than in the gestures alone (Stacey, 2011). Such social process entails potential differences between the intentions of and responses to the gesture. Communication, and relating, draws not only on the immediate intentional content of gesture and response but on the respective experiences and contexts of those doing the gesturing and responding (Mead, 1912; 1934). Social objects can be understood in terms of social conduct, where conduct appeals to the historical gestures through which understanding is developed. The processual character of Elias and CRP can therefore be seen in parallel in the works of Mead, in respect of the fact that action and interaction are bound up in complete histories. This further echoes the method offered up by Foucault's (c.f. 1977; Garland, 2014) 'History of the Present' in which the richness and hidden character of the contemporary world is revealed in its *genealogy*. The

comparison offered here is that such genealogy is as much a phenomena of local interaction as Foucault's interest in broader social phenomena. On such sociological accounts as are presently discussed response (as well as gesture) are seen as understood or exposed in terms of the revelation of the social and personal histories that shape interpretation (c.f. Foucault, 2003; Nietzsche, 1994). Social objects are therefore simultaneously, and subjectively, constructed along the trajectory of both shared and differing genesis. The convergence of genesis may be seen as the construction of group identity as those objects take on an intersubjective character. The academic pursuit of history and process are therefore seen to give character to the conditions of present understanding of social phenomena rather than giving rise to the pursuit of causality; as the genesis of the researchers' understanding become entwined with that which is under study. This is of significance to the current research in providing a way in which to understand the content of participant's accounts as bound up with the purposes and subjectivities involved in its construction. Rather than conceiving of participant accounts as post-hoc rationalisations they are understood and analysed in terms of their relativity and intent.

What results from the discussion above is a temporal account of gesture-response that embodies both the individual and the social as one in the same. The implication for the exploration in this research is that the particular part of process that is studied has significant impacts on the focus of analysis. On such processual accounts the job of the researcher includes recognising the implications of the chosen 'start' and 'finish' points of the study of process (McMullen & Dimov, 2013). Stacey (2011) argues that CRP concerns how one refocuses attention towards one's own, direct experience of the relations with others in organisational life, and the implications for managing under this understanding. Luoma (2007) argues that the role of observation brings with it its own set of values, and is rightly seen as a part of the intervention within a social context. The research itself is therefore seen to impact development. This has methodological implications, considered in the next chapter, concerning what the current research is thought of as achieving. In concerning oneself with only one's own experiences and appreciation of the social entails a potential restriction on the capacity to abstract in a way that

separates self from theory. Intervention may not prove problematic, so long as it is recognised and accepted as a quantum component of all and any research.

2.3.5 Self and Others

In parallel to some of the discussions seen already in this chapter a view of identity emerges that is directly informed by the similarities and differences arising in processes of relating. Emerging from the discussion above social identities, interconnected with structural properties (formal or entrenched relations that reinforce inequity in the distribution of power), are central to the way in which complex social theories seek to explain organisation, power and action (see Stacey, 2011). How individuals see themselves and others within the strategic development process is therefore a fundamental feature of the process itself. Stacey draws similarities with social identity theories (c.f. Hogg, 2006; Ashforth & Mael, 1989) in which individuals develop identity through alignment of self-perception and behaviour with perceived 'in-group' stereotypes, thereby assimilating themselves within the group (Stacey, 2011). The distinction for CRP lies in regarding identity as "ongoing habitual responses, emerging in social interaction, which constitute a felt unity of self as embodied histories of mutual responsiveness between the persons" (Stacey, 2011:217). It is in this respect that identity might be seen to reflect the genealogical character. However, a further implication of this social conception being that one might embody different identities that emerge depending upon the groups one is interacting with. Through shared histories and contexts shared identities begin to emerge, where immersion in a particular context therefore precipitates the emergence of the associated identity in interaction. Mead (1934) argues that individuals may contain a "parliament of selves" that are governed by social context. However, such accounts represent a competition of identity in which one necessarily overcomes the other e.g. when faced with a specific social context. This *immediacy* is important in understanding how these established social theories engender the relationship between identity and processes of relating; that like the individual and the social they are one in the same in the immediate instances in which they arise. Strategy, and thus strategic process, is to be understood

within this theoretical construct as the patterns of identity that transform over time. This area of discussion is significant considering the research interest in comparing and contrasting multiple perspectives emerging with the same and differing contexts. Understandings of the role and complexity of identity work supports the critical analysis of converging and diverging experiences within and between different schools.

The social aspect of identity presented here gives identity a sense of presence, as it is bound up in the groups in which one is engaging and aligning. Parallels are drawn between the work of Complex Responsive Processes and the work of Mead (e.g. 1934) (Stacey, 2011). Mead's work describes how 'I' and 'Me' become embodied in sense of self. Identity on this view is partly grounded in the internalisation of the attitude of and interaction with others in developing 'Me' (Mead, 1934). The 'I' becomes constrained by the 'Me', whilst still able to act creatively within and because of those confines (ibid.). The symbiosis of each and every 'I' and 'Me' echoes the same relation between structure and agency. It equally resonates with the forces that enable and constrain discussed by both Bourdieu (1977) and Lewin (1951) in their respective analyses of field.

Much of the literature pertaining to identity considers the role of 'in' and 'out' groups (Ashforth et al, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Stacey, 2011). Social Identity theorists regard role conflict as emerging from conflicting values, beliefs, norms and demands inherent in identities formed across differing groups (c.f. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Sluss & Ashforth, 2008). Self-identification with a particular group identity therefore shapes the activities that individual engages in, the stereotyping of self and others, and the targeting of self-reinforcing outcomes (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This is of potential significance to linking narratives about one's own motivations with how they perceive their allegiance or alignment to particular social groups. Social Identity Complexity theorists argue that the complexity associated with identity concerns the perceived overlap in membership across different groups, where decreasing overlap is associated with higher complexity i.e. through incongruity (Roccas & Brewer, 2002; Miller et al, 2009). However, these accounts take as their concern broad social categories based

around age, gender, ethnicity, religion etc. The decrease of identity complexity associated with overlaps between such groups is founded in the fact that such social groups need not inherently conflict. However, where different facets of self-identification are linked to an individual's different affiliations and loyalties then it appears that conflict may be inherent. Yet, the social accounts discussed above offer a view of the 'parliament of selves', internal multiplicity, that only meets the espoused definitions of what it is to be complicated, rather than complex. To the extent that one can understand the 'self' solely as an extension of the specific social relations under consideration appears not to address any emergent sense of self as arising from the interactions and conflicts between selves that is not associated within any one social context. The internal social processes of relating to oneself presents a potential mechanism that would distinguish self from any and all social groups one is a part of. That is to say that convergence of group identity can never be absolute. Of interest is that the notion that individuals hold internally conflicting points of view, beliefs, values and ideas is an established phenomenon in psychology literatures concerning cognitive dissonance and self-perception (Festinger, 1957; Bem, 1967). Cognitive dissonance has since been used to describe the conflicting states involved in decision making affecting organisational behaviour, economic fairness and consumer choice (e.g. Buchanan & Huczynski, 1985; Konow, 2000; Gbadamosi, 2009). In pursuit of the complexity of both societal issues and local interaction sociological accounts may therefore have neglected the internal complexity that psychological accounts have sought to address. The current research, in seeking to understand the individual experiences that are contextualised by local interactions and broader socio-political shifts, seeks to critically acknowledge that complexity might span both some 'individual' and 'social' sense of self.

Becoming embedded within a social identity related to a new setting does not necessarily suggest that an understanding of identity within that social setting can be understood entirely through an understanding of the social setting itself. This may stand counter to a number of the views discussed in which identity is seen as convergence of selves in specific social settings. Yet this alternative is recognised in literatures that regard identity as contingent and at the level of the individual when

looking to reconcile minority status and workplace situations (c.f. Dennissen, 2010; Hines, 2010; Croteau et al, 2008). Identity on such accounts might be understood as a perpetually emerging feature of the process of an individual's own life. In this respect identity remains 'of the person', as emerging from the multiple aspects of socially formed self. Social circumstances are interpreted through a lens comprising one's identity, from which conflict or harmony may emerge. Such a view sits in agreement with the discourse on intersectionality which contends that one cannot isolate features of identity (e.g. gender from race) in understanding how such features shape experience (e.g. Kvansy et al., 2009; McCall, 2005; Dhmoon, 2010). The discussion in this section has sought to provide a critical review of the differing theoretical accounts of individuals as social beings. In seeking to understand governor experiences of the strategic development of English Free Schools the current concerns relate to the complexity that might emerge from the comparative analysis of multiple accounts. How experiences of process are analysed is significantly affected by the acknowledgement that experience does not emerge in isolation. The inherent complexity of the self, and the self in relation to the social, is of great importance to understanding how governors see themselves engaging in strategic and governance activities within autonomous school settings.

2.3.6 Relating in Governing and Governance

Sections 1.3 & 2.3 demonstrate that to understand the 'outcomes' attributed to particular schools requires acknowledging those schools as at least in part defined in terms of the broader interrelationships between their governance and their socio-economic context (Balarin et al., 2008; James et al, 2011). As informed by such social perspectives governing must be understood as a phenomenon with influences extending beyond a school's conceptual and physical boundaries, and beyond policy and guidance. The perceptions of governors of both school and surroundings influence how the governing task is perceived and conducted (James et, al, 2011). This includes the manner in and extent to which external stakeholders, and their representation, shape the governance (and therefore strategy) of a school. Where such research also considers the complex relationship with

attainment this reveals the relevance of different kinds of relations to school outcomes. Questions of who interacts with governors, how they interact and how the perspectives of governors in and after these interactions shape the conduct of their roles is a significant and yet little understood aspect of the school governance debate. Governance capital and agency offer a significant inroad to understanding governing in relation to differing histories, social standings and experiences. Governance capital, understood as including the individuals comprising the social networks, relationships and capabilities locally available, provides a view of governing as a process of socialisation that includes both the manner in which control becomes socially manifest, but also capacity is borne (c.f. Foucault, 2010; James et al, 2011; Olssen, 2005). The involvement of increasingly diverse stakeholders in public sector governance is also reflected in discussions surrounding network and pluralistic governance accounts (c.f. Ryan & Walsh, 2004; Andresani and Ferlie, 2006; Acar et al, 2008; Coule, 2013). However, those accounts of governance seeking to reconcile wider stakeholder inclusion and debates on the distribution of authority and accountability arguably have an unfinished task in front of them. An epistemic risk emerges in making broad assumptions about the nature of the converging or constructive interests of those involved, and the extent to which stakeholder involvement, representing diverse interests, would support the stability and unity required for consistent provision of services at an operational level (c.f. Coule, 2013; Beaumont & Nicholls, 2008; Acar et al, 2008; Fryer et al, 2009).

Gnan et al (2013) characterise the distinctions in relationships boards hold with 'external' stakeholders, and those that are held with managers. They argue that important and recognised issues concerning the dimensions affecting governing body effectiveness have not been investigated (Gnan et al, 2013; Hinna et al, 2010). In further understanding what experiences of governing might look like within Free Schools a slowly emerging body of literature on the human side of governance exists. A large proportion of this literature remains informed by research into the private sector where the resulting frameworks for examining behaviours epitomise the specific challenges to internal corporate governance (e.g. Huse, 2005; Forbes & Miliken, 1999; Zona & Zattoni, 2007). Forbes & Miliken (1999),

for instance, develop a conception of board processes through integrating the body of literature on boards with that of group dynamics and workgroup effectiveness. In so doing, the paper illustrates the roles of board demography, knowledge and skills in generating varying efforts, cognitive conflicts and cohesion, and the subsequent impacts this has on performance (ibid.).

In line with the discussion in the section on motivation (*Section 2.2*) James et al (2011) have also noted that the relationships between senior leaders and governing bodies, and especially how each group sees each other, can influence process significantly. The importance of senior leader and governor relationships is echoed in discussions from the South African context, where it is also remarked that the exact distinctions between senior leaders and what are majority parent governors is unclearly defined (Heystek, 2004). From the same context Van Wyk (2004) raises the issue of senior leadership concern over areas of governor responsibility, as well as the risk of principal dominance of this group undermining their ability to serve as effective accountability mechanisms. Such concerns are echoed in managerial hegemony theories, in which the voluntary nature of the governing role, coupled with the time constraints, leads to a largely symbolic governance structure in which boards actually possess limited power, often deferring to senior leadership and staff (Mace, 1971; Cornforth, 2003). Whilst these discussions clearly support the relevance of the micro-context to broader discussions of governance, there remains little in the way of theory to explain the implications of this for the governing process. The current research seeks to understand the relationships experienced between governors and senior leadership, and thereby establish how strategy and operation emerge as distinct or overlapping activities from different perspectives. This will include how the informal and social distribution of power may influence attitudes towards the development process.

Contrasted against some of the pluralistic conceptions above, the governance relations pertaining to Free Schools do not appear to represent the shift away from authority based hierarchies expected in contracted services (Osborne, 2010b). The contract relationship discussed in relation to Free Schools (see *Section 1.2*) reflects an enduring authoritarian relationship between the Department for

Education and Free Schools, manifest in the funding agreement (NSN, 2015). Whilst Free Schools represent a shift in increasing autonomy at the school level decisions to maintain that level of freedom, and over how that freedom is manifest, exist in a largely hierarchical relationship with government. The transformation of governance relations is more clearly evident in the shifting of Local Authority involvement in education provision towards one of 'observer' or competitive service provider, as they lack the structural power to influence or intervene with Academies and Free Schools through formal channels (Hatcher, 2014). Yet confined to a new relation of 'toothless responsibility' it is not clear how, in practice, Local Authorities can be understood as engaging autonomous schools in new forms of governance.

Hatcher (2014) illustrates the emergence of quasi-formalised network governance partnerships to support collective moral purpose e.g. school improvement. Emerging from this are new questions about how to conceive of the autonomy and purpose of different bodies as the formal performance agenda maintains itself as the pervasive technology of control that positions the state over individual 'collaborative' local partners (ibid.). In understanding the historical progression of government and governance Marinetto (2003) similarly questions the extent to which government has really lost power in terms of its formal distribution to the local level. The repatriation of powers from Local Authorities might suggest quite the opposite, to be described if anything as the 'hollowing middle'. However, the pursuit of governance as established through formal and quasi-formal structures and relations alone is to dismiss the precise kinds of relation through which power and influence is exercised according to many of the theories discussed above. Conversely, this research seeks to address how governors' experiences represent the influences such 'external' stakeholders have in a broader conception of governance. That is to say that actions and agency must be considered in parallel to structure in diagnosing how relations influence strategic development processes (c.f. Connolly & James, 2011). What the current discussion demonstrates however is a lack of empirical evidence relating to experiences of how structure and agency are manifest in the relations between individuals within the specific context of self-governing schools. This is discussed in detail in the section on power (*Section*

2.4). However, in relation to the current discussion is the interest in how and whether governors' perceptions of their multiple relationships within the context of structural reform shape their understanding of the development of these schools. One of the central interests of the current research concerns whether such relationships within and extending out of the schools are experienced as central to the strategic development process. This is of importance to an understanding of the holistic contexts in which particular paths of development and oversight emerge.

2.3.7 Summary

Various perspectives on relating, relationships and subsequently identity formation have been considered in this section, alongside their significance to understanding of governing and governance. To understand 'self' has been argued to rely on an understanding of the social. Yet where some accounts have been seen to struggle with social complexity they have pursued a rich understanding of psychological complexity. Conversely, where many sociological accounts have pursued the complexity of social dynamics and figurations that form the basis of a conception of society, they have not fully captured the complexity and richness seemingly reflected in individual experience and perception. This research seeks to consider the former *in relation to* the latter. Any conclusions this research may draw pertaining to social complexity arise within the context of the experiences of the participants; and how they perceive themselves in relation to others. Such an approach has been seen to have relevant parallels in established theories emphasising a process perspective (c.f. Elias, 1991; Stacey, 2011). One area of common ground across many of the theories discussed has been the manner in which individuals are situated in relation to others in terms of their affections and conations. In line with the discussion on motivations in the section above this reflects how language, as an extension of experience, is endowed with the biases and emotions that reflect the human condition (c.f. Blumer 1936; Mead, 1934). This forms a basis for understanding individual subjectivity and boundedness as a condition of their positionality within relations. Discussed in further detail in relation to experience (see Section 2.6) this further reflects not only how individuals reflect on the

past but on how this experience shapes projections and desires onto the future (c.f. Mead 1934; Foucault, 1972). It is in this respect that language possess a conative character. This is also of methodological significance to the research in understanding both the role of the researcher's own positionality, and in informing an understanding of the nature of qualitative data collection. Discussed in further detail in the final section of this chapter is the manner in which the qualitative content gained through interview reflects an exploration of the positions that participants adopt. That position must be understood as being *in relation to the researcher*, as an extension of individual experience manifest in the process of sense-making and as revealing something about individual affections.

2.4 Power

2.4.1 Introduction

Embedded in much of the theory and discussion preceding this section are considerations and assumptions related to power and its exercise. Although historically power has been conceived of as a quality, characteristic or possession of individuals, current discussion focusses on those views, related to the above, that conceive of power as a relational construct. Not only does this enrich the processes of comparative analysis (introduced in detail in *Chapter 3*), it also reflects the very character of governing and governance discussed thus far. Firstly, is the concern for agency as the individual capacity to act and influence within the strategic development of Free Schools, where capacity is understood in terms of the extent to which others enable and restrict it. Secondly is the exercise of power in relation to structural properties embedded within conceptions of governance. For instance, this can be understood in terms of the relation between power and accountability that emerge within conceptions of governance hierarchy. Thirdly, it can be understood in terms of the dissemination or distribution of power within diverse configurations and arrangements that reconcile our understanding of structure with agency. As such, this section seeks to introduce an understanding of power as a relational concept that covers the formal and informal, tacit and explicit, inclusive and

divisive, restrictive and productive, constraining and emancipatory. In doing so it becomes possible to critically reconsider the processes of relating that are integral to governing and governance, and how this provides a basis for understanding the realisation of individual and group motivations and visions within strategic development processes.

2.4.2 Relational Power

In a similar manner to the discussions in previous sections social psychological, sociological and philosophical accounts have generated mutual ground in relation to conceptions of power as relational. French and Raven's (1959; Raven, 1965) conception of the five, or six, bases of power has maintained its position as a cornerstone of the concept in social psychology. Informed by Lewin's (1947) conception of group dynamics power may be understood as other than the individuals themselves, and thus as a property that emerges from the relation itself (Raven, 1993). Lewin (1964; Raven, 1993) define power in terms of 'the possibility of inducing forces of a certain magnitude on another person'. Kotter (1979) added to this definition in terms of the capacity of the powerful to avoid being forced to do that which they do not want to. Weber's (1978: 53) conception, in recognition of the multiplicity of sources of power, contends that power reflects 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests'. Furthermore, power may not only be understood in terms of an individual having power over another, but also a group having power over an individual (Raven, 1993). Again this can be seen as a reflection of the power of group norms, and the capacity to change them through stimulating the kinds of social interactions conducive to change.

The bases of power conceive of social power as 'potential influence', and as such maintains a defining feature of power as reflecting the capacity to induce others to act or think in particular ways (ibid.). According to such views an important distinction emerges between power in terms of compelling an individual to act in particular ways and power that results in a change of beliefs i.e. internal acceptance (c.f. Festinger & Katz, 1953). The bases of power therefore reflect the kinds of resources one might

draw upon to ensure the compliance of another. Legitimate power concerns status, and is therefore embedded in the perception of the individual(s) whose action(s) or beliefs might submit (Willer et al, 2012). Legitimacy therefore extends power to the legitimate; reflected in the beliefs of others that an individual is 'legitimate' (Beetham, 2013; Weber, 1978). Raven (1993) went on to include reciprocity, equity and responsibility/dependence as sources of legitimacy. This is to say that legitimacy may be seen to emerge both from formal position, and also social (arguably moral) norms.

Expert power, positively enforced, can be seen to evoke a sense of trust, faith or admiration as the authority of the expert compels action or belief even in the absence of further explanation (Frost & Moussavi, 2011; Raven, 1993). Yet where knowledge becomes routinized or laid down in rules and norms the power of expertise dissipates (Pennings et al. 2014). Referent power arises as a result of a sense of identification, or the desire to be associated with, with an influential actor (Alshahrani et al, 2013; Raven, 1993). As such this base of power can be seen paralleled in those social identity theories discussed above. The desire to be included within a social group, a desirable 'in-group', entails a sense of power instilled in that group such as to modify the behaviours and beliefs of those seeking to identify with it (c.f. Ashforth et al, 2008). Raven (1993) contends that these latter bases can result in a 'negative' power effect, where the desire not to be associated with expertise or identities can lead to opposing behaviours emerging. The bases of power, as discussed here, offer insight into the relational functions that serve as the source of power along the lines described. However, within complex social situations the nuances that shape power relations may not be effectively captured within isolated or static descriptions. Whilst the current research does not seek to apply any particular 'typology' of power the discussion is pertinent to understanding the kinds of relation that may be influential within strategic and governing processes.

Due to the contingent nature of the relations described above the possession of power cannot be conceived of as immutable. The pervasive nature of an absolute description of power disregards the very contingency and flux that is characteristic of the social relations in which it arises. What is missing

is the precise character of processes in which relating is understood (Elias, 1978). Power can therefore be understood as unbounded in the same way as the 'I' within the 'me'; the 'self' within the 'social'; the 'local' within the 'global' (Elias, 1978; Mead, 1934; Mowles, 2014; Stacey, 2011). Elias (1978) demonstrates that it is through the historical processes through which one understands the emergence of 'structure' and some 'present' agency that one is able to understand how particular configurations of society emerge. CRP extends this characterisation of relational power as a structural property of human relations which leads to individuals enabling and constraining one another (Stacey, 2011). It is, to this extent, a functional component of relating, in which ideology and politics attempt to purposefully narrow and focus the ways in which the world is being seen.

Power is therefore inextricably linked with its use, only existing when it is exercised through dominance and the structures that maintain it (Griffin & Stacey, 2004). The balance of power is seen to favour some over others, which in turn influences the development of belongingness through shared identity between those who have it, or don't (ibid.). Concerning strategic development, the nature of the social described is characterised by the perpetual interdependence of individuals. Where inequalities in individuals' respective strengths decrease the less it can appear that strategic plans result from one individual's control over implementation than another (Stacey, 2011). Power on this view is therefore seen as dependent on the maintaining of unequal but reciprocal relations. In seeking to understand and expose power relations the language of structure and agency continues to offer a useful platform. Structure may be understood in terms of its appeal to the social whole, all of process, through which it becomes possible to understand specific local elements (Kecskemeti, 1953; Mannheim, 1952). In this respect structure itself may be considered dynamic. Kecskemeti (1953:1) explains 'Antagonism and conflict was of the very essence of structure: the structure of social reality *was* the configuration of antagonistic forces which contended for supremacy and mutually shaped and influenced one another while locked in combat'. Again, this echoes the coincidence of local and global in terms of the intra-influential dynamism that manifests in processes of change. Whilst still possessing the character of change structure as a 'global' concept may still be understood as the reflection of

how locally emerging figurations become formalised, entrenched in norms, rules and expectations that perpetuate power inequality.

These views represent power, to some extent, in terms of the sacrifice of agency and self to the will of others. Even where power is defined in terms of capacity to act unhindered by resistance the assumption must be held that for power to exist in this relation is an exertion on or over the resister. Power may appear reflected as a zero-sum game where the 'will-to-power' exercised by some is offset by the deference of others (c.f. Nietzsche, 2014). Nietzsche (2014) may even accuse those guilty of such deference of a form of *akrasia*. Although Nietzsche (1968) conceives of the will-to-power as the overcoming of self, within social systems this forms the basis on which equilibriums must necessarily emerge and allegiances between similar wills leads to the conspiracy of power. Social identity may be understood in terms of such collusion, leaving open the potential for individual will to prevail where opportunity arises. Structure, law and the pursuit of universal equality are in themselves subjugations, and therefore to the extent that these provide the basis of formalised relations in society the overcoming of these subjugations is an overcoming of others. Two issues emerge from this discussion that inform the subsequent sections. Firstly, is the understanding of such views of power instantiated in practice, where 'descriptions' of the power relations that emerge between individuals or groups must also be able to capture the level of complexity that has been recognised in *processes* of relating (c.f. Elias, 1978; Stacey, 2011). Secondly is the need to question whether power must necessarily be conceived of in terms of reciprocated 'submitting' and 'seizing' in the ways so far described.

2.4.3 Freedom and Autonomy in Structural Reform

To understand how strategic freedom is manifest requires a critical consideration of the ways in which power and influence within strategy become manifest. Autonomy, when conceived as a form of positive liberty ('freedom to') within the context of liberal movements in governance, risks fallaciously reducing the term to the notion of 'acting freely' (Olssen, 2005; Reich, 2002). Liberalism, on such a narrow definition of liberty, becomes entrenched in a pattern of governance in which power is gifted

to the autonomous. Empowerment, on such a view, is a technology of governance that provides the empowered with authority in a particular set of relations i.e. *'freedom to'*. Where Neo-liberalism progresses positive liberty in a democratic society such freedom affords equality of opportunity (Rawls, 1971). In the case of Free Schools this may be seen as echoed in the opening up of education provision to civil society actors, which at least in principle intends that all (or nearly all) are afforded such an opportunity to engage in education provision in both its production and use. However, empowerment does not, on such a view, necessitate any form of irreversibility. The sovereignty of the one who empowers another with the *'freedom to'* act is not implicitly undermined. It is, in this respect, inappropriate to conceive of power as a zero sum game. The empowerment of Free Schools, as understood in terms of the provision of positive liberty, requires the perpetual permission of the institutionally more powerful. A permissive relational view of power and liberty may subsequently be demonstrated in any of the relations that adhere to these mechanisms of governmentality. As discussed above, liberalism, in this respect, echoes the deliberative restructuring of power in society (Foucault, 2000; Rose, 1996).

Permissiveness and responsabilisation go hand in hand in the process through which central government empowers trustees and directors, which in turn leads to the empowerment of head teachers and senior leaders. One might perceive this purely in terms of the panoptic relations that emerge between successive senior figures of state and respective figures of authority within schools (see Foucault, 1991). Yet in terms of governance and accountability the precise transparency afforded by truly panoptic relations is not self-evident in the self-governance agenda. Discipline as a technology of power becomes self-discipline, and it is rather in this respect that a more accurate portrayal of the permissive nature of power in these neo-liberal governance relations emerges (c.f. Foucault, 1991). Power is seen by Foucault to act on the actions of others, rather than on the individuals themselves (Foucault, 1982). In this respect power not only restricts, limits and binds others but also 'it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult' (Foucault, 1982:220). As such power is bound up in individual freedom, where, to the extent that power is always exercised in relations one can never

be absolutely autonomous. Power, according to the present discussions, is not only present in the macroscopic 'legitimated' political and economic processes through which individuals are restricted within society.

Power is also in the manner of complex social relations in which the modes of actions of an individual are bound to have influence on the modes of action open as possibilities to another. Empowerment through institutional mechanisms therefore serves as only one of the many technologies that may shape individual action within such processes as are currently under study. One's freedom to act (positive liberty) is bound by the extent to which one cannot maintain their freedom from others (negative liberty). This presents itself as a paradox of liberty, where the social processes through which freedom is locally enacted or constrained cannot be separated from the processes through which freedoms are given or taken away (Stacey, 2003). The current area of discussion is significant in bridging an understanding of theoretical conceptions of power in relations and interactions with the current research context in which structural reform may be seen as repatriating power to central government whilst providing an increasing freedom to act in local schools as a result of the authorizing environment. What this chapter and the last have contended however is that in understanding how governing and governance is experienced within local Free Schools it is important not to assume that this authorizing environment is the only determinant of the relations through power, autonomy and agency are defined. A key priority of this study is to examine how governors experience the development process, and therefore seeks to remain open to other influences on the freedom to act that might define this. In line with discussion in the Introduction chapter (*Chapter 1*), this offers a counter narrative that may be invaluable to the wider debate concerning 'Neo-liberal' structural reforms.

2.4.4 Power in Educational Governance and Governing

So far this section has continued the assumption that the fundamental principles of the Neo-liberal redistribution of power associated with the 'hollowed state' are evident in the governance of Free

Schools. However, there remains good reason to believe that the geo-political cartographies of power often associated with Neo-liberal governmentality are not themselves self-evident (c.f. Harley, 1989; Ong, 2006). The shift from panoptic forms of oversight to the omnioptic principle of ‘everyone surveils everyone’ does not appear self-evident in what has been described in the Neo-liberal education reforms (c.f. Grünberg, 2013). Literal surveillance has as its roots in the same principles of knowledge acquisition as have been argued to be required for effective corporate oversight in education. To maintain that this represents a neo-liberal shift in education places the emphasis of Neo-liberalism purely on market liberalisation and individualism. This is, in turn, to de-emphasise ‘entrepreneurship in a wider inter-disciplinary context built upon a more pluralistic and diffused view of society and the cultural nature of markets’ (Komulainen et al, 2013:346). Yet it is on this latter perspective that the capacity for ‘freedom to’ act may be advanced without assuming that such individuals also maintain ‘freedom from’. Self-governance may therefore be conceived narrowly in terms of organisational self-governance rather than societal self-governance regarding education reforms. It is acknowledged that this narrow conception of Neo-liberalism has emerged as an accepted definition within education landscapes, with consequences including a decline of democratic practices and systemic inequity (Portelli & Konecny, 2013). The current discussion seeks to explore established understandings of the forces that might be experienced as defining governance and strategic practices in structural reform at a local level. In doing so it acknowledges tensions that arise from the current policy context that entail that, at best, the nature of the relations with and influences from local stakeholders is unclearly defined. How governors see themselves positioned in relation to other interested parties contributes both to understandings of the local strategic processes under study and to broader debates about the ‘patterns’ of educational governance that could emerge at a broader scale.

The formal procedures laid out in relation to the corporate governance of Free Schools (c.f. EFA, 2013; NSN, 2011; DfE, 2014) fundamentally orientate themselves away from governance through stakeholder engagement and representation, or benchmarks for local transparency (c.f. James et al, 2010; Healey, 2006; Osborne, 2010a). Where power can be conceptualised in terms of influence over

action, and within process, this embodies perpetuated aggressive state intervention in 'Free' schools. This may be understood as a consequence of the fact Neo-liberal education policy fails to mediate individual liberty and collective responsibility. Neo-liberal governmentality may be conceived of as having regressed back into sovereignty; where practice fails to emerge effectively from ideology. Brenner and Theodore (2002:349) distinguish between Neo-liberal ideology 'in which market forces are assumed to operate according to immutable laws' and what they refer to as 'actually existing neoliberalism'. The latter requires understandings of path-dependent, contextually specific interactions (ibid.). It remains unclear whether centralised governance oversight is sufficient to mirror the diversity of ways that autonomous actors may seek to define themselves in quasi-markets – not for lack of authority, but for the lack of government knowledge, and therefore power, inherent in liberal market reform. It is in the context of this uncertainty that the current research seeks to understand the experience of processes of self-definition; rather than through the lens of a governance framework established at a distinct 'level' of the political geography.

The three core functions of school governing in recent history, as previously discussed, include setting strategic direction, financial probity and holding the school to account (Ofsted, 1999). These remain embodied in the expectations of Free School governors today (NSN, 2015). Delivering on these functions reflects the 'Critical Friend' role. Yet, within the context of increasing school autonomy discussed above the implications for continuing this framework are not fully considered. The increase in freedoms and independence may have significant ramifications for the continued development of individual schools where the strategic processes simply reflect the implementation of the visions of dominant leaders. Within a Free School why a particular leader's visions are pursued is in need of exploration. This leaves open the possibility that strategic processes cease to reflect the views for the school espoused at the time of application or representation of the school to prospective parents. In the context of increased autonomy, it is unclear whether government would regard any such deviations as problematic or misrepresentative. That Free Schools represent an increase in

entrepreneurial leadership brings with it questions of how meaning and value are assigned (Woods, 2013).

In recognising the very limited amount of research on the topic Grissom (2010) demonstrates the relationship between a number of micro-level factors and conflict on American school governing boards. The research shows that whilst some components of complexity pertinent to increased conflict are well expected, many are not. For instance, the research could not prove that the complexity within an urban environment would lead to higher levels of division on boards than in rural settings (ibid.). This resonates with the previous discussion to the extent that the forming and negotiating of power within processes of relating is a commonality across governing regardless of context. Furthermore, interest groups were also found to have a high level of influence on the boards (ibid.). What the above concerns may suggest is that the level of analysis of the governing board ought to be distinguished from the level of the individuals involved in the governing board (including senior leadership). Distinguished again by these levels of analysis is the concern for the roles embodied in the governing board and governing.

An earlier study by Earley (2000) questions the role that a governing body can play, especially where such individuals may have limited or no expertise within a relevant educational area. This may be seen to echo the role of knowledge as a vehicle of power (and/or its consolidation) that has emerged in forms of social control (Foucault, 1991). The form of control that governors are *intended* to exercise in governing arises out of the knowledge governors are intended to maintain about their schools. Yet the exclusion of outside parties from this knowledge, and variations in the retention of, transfer of and capacity to deal with knowledge inside of an organisation, means that power becomes wielded in dynamic ways that may not clearly reflect traditional conceptions of governance hierarchies. In essence, whom a governing board is comprised of may stand in contrast to the role the governing board is expected to play, characterised by the three functions mentioned above. It is this form of knowledge/power that is sacrificed by central and local government in the process of emancipating

school management and governance. Such concerns are echoed in managerial hegemony theories, in which the voluntary nature of the governing role, coupled with the time constraints, leads to a largely symbolic governance structure in which boards actually possess limited power, often deferring to senior leadership and staff (Mace, 1971; Cornforth, 2003).

Xaba (2004), within the South African context, supports the notion that compartmentalising governors may be problematic, including into roles as 'parent', 'educator' and 'learner-governor'. It is suggested that maintaining these labels may affect how governors see themselves, and therefore what they do (ibid.). Being a 'parent governor' entails a lack of expertise to become involved in the very decisions they are responsible for according to policy (ibid.). In balance, some educational governors are reported as seeing themselves responsible simply for listening and reporting back to staff on the outcomes of such meetings (ibid.). The extent to which these issues apply within the English context is in need of further investigation, although the segmentation of roles is echoed to some extent in government requirements for parent representation. Earley (2000) has historically concluded that not enough is known about where and how governors can best contribute and what might be done to support their operational effectiveness. These issues are echoed in the earlier work of Brehony & Deem (1995) whom question the involvement of lay people in what might be regarded a specialist educational governance role. These challenges may be seen to re-emerge in Free Schools where governance takes on additional characteristics.

James (2014) argues that there are issues that continue to challenge governance and governors. This includes the tension between central government authority and devolved autonomy that permeates current discussion. This tension reflects a grey area between the prerogatives of these different groups and actors, especially where their interests diverge. He also notes a second theme that surrounds the move towards stakeholder involvement and democratic accountability as mechanisms for improving school performance, and the implications for legitimacy (ibid.). This appears to closely echo the conceptualisations of power, knowledge and perception that have been considered. The stakeholder

environments facing governors of Free Schools remain an important consideration for the research in light of their independence from bodies such as LAs; and subsequently their sole responsibility for managing these groups and individuals. To what extent do such groups simply not exercise power over Free School development (as a consequence of their exclusion from formal governance procedure)? To what extent do they adopt new vehicles through which to exercise power that are simply unchecked by the relative transparency and legitimacy of formalised governance process? To understand governor experiences of the strategic development process therefore requires specific consideration of how they experience their agency as restricted by the informal processes through which power is wielded. An explanation of how individual perspectives influence the governing process appears underdeveloped in the discussions on governance, policy and educational development. It therefore remains unclear how differing governor perspectives on the roles they play, and how they see the strategic process, shape their schools. The current study will contribute knowledge directly to these areas of concern.

2.4.5 Summary

Power has been presented in this section as fundamental to processes of relating. Formal and informal processes of governance have in turn been framed as forms of relating that impart power in different ways amongst various stakeholders. These figurations of power can be seen to emerge at the level of local interaction and simultaneously within wider patterns of societal hierarchy. The resulting conception of power continues to reflect the sociology of influence, and as a result provides some of the parameters to individual agency. However, it has also been contended that this provides a somewhat negative view of power as restrictive and constraining. It has also been suggested that power has a constructive and enabling quality. It is in this respect that interactions and relations can be understood as a source of creativity and innovation in development processes. As a consequence of the discussion the close synonymy of power, relating and the positionality that defines personal motivation has been considered. As well as offering conceptions of power this section has also sought

to deepen the understanding of the specific configurations that shape the Free School context. Differing conceptions of liberty have been offered to draw out an understanding of autonomy in terms of decentralisation over elements of decision making. At the same time, critical consideration has been given to the capacity for the leaders of Free Schools to act independently in strategic processes such that their agency is not infringed upon by other stakeholders, regardless of whether this is formalised in policy. The resulting conception is one in which structural reform has been argued to result in heightened emphasis on centralised formal governance hierarchy. Yet on the other hand the experiences of local strategic action require examination from beyond this hierarchy if one is to develop a sufficiently rich picture to make sense of how broader social configurations shape Free School development. The ways in which power becomes mapped across individual schools and the education system as a whole may be understood as reflecting both the deliberate and emergent processes of self-organisation. Power, from this perspective, permeates agency and structure in such a way as to make them indistinguishable parts of the same social processes.

2.5 Experience

2.5.1 Introduction

The final section of the literature review pursues conceptions of experience that emerge as a necessary consequence of the theoretical debate offered up to this point. As such, experience is not a 'fourth category' of the research but rather the concept that unifies the discussion and reconciles the research approach offered in the following chapter with its domain of theoretical contribution. It is therefore acknowledged that whilst the research seeks to reduce bias from the exploration of 'governor's experiences' it cannot unbind itself from the manner in which understanding of the research context is laden with the social constructions it seeks to examine. This has significant implications for both the philosophical underpinnings of the research and for an understanding of what is under examination in practice. The discussion further bridges the understandings of

sociological, political, social-psychological and organisational characteristics of governance and strategy by making it explicit that the empirical analysis pertains to 'governor experience' within the research context.

2.5.2 Experiencing Governance

The significance of the examination of experience within comparable contexts is evident in the small but influential base of research that captures its implications. James et al (2011), for instance, characterise the relation between perception and experience and how this has implications for e.g. governor recruitment. Here, experience is characterised as temporally extended; it is the culmination of past perceptions that are present in and shape current judgements (ibid.). Expectations borne from prior (patterns of) experience inform the predictions of personal and organisational futures that in turn influence behaviour in the present (c.f. Stacey, 2007). This reveals all experience, and decision making, as possessing an inherent positionality. Current position reflects the combined experiences that shape individual consciousness and sub-consciousness in the present drawn from the complete socio-historical contexts in which individual experience is located. This might be argued to further resonate with Foucault's treatment of the history of the present, previously discussed, and archaeological pursuit (c.f. Foucault, 1977; 2003). However, also of importance here are the assumptions about cause and effect that emerge from patterns of experience (Hume, 1993). The expectation that a particular circumstance will be associated with a particular outcome, whether it is an emotional, cognitive or physical response, guides behaviour in a way that may otherwise be obscured to an observer. James et al's (2011) analysis further reveals some of the 'sources' of experience that feed into understandings of governing. This includes experience that draws from both educational and non-educational settings, both of which may be seen to provide expertise pertinent to the governing role (see also: Scanlon et al, 1999).

Earlier research by Kogan et al (1984) and Farrel and Law (1999) further discusses the experience of co-opted governors in terms of their awareness of the element of their role related to representation

of community stakeholders. In this respect 'present' experience can be seen to be shaped by the understanding of those formalised roles that inform the lens through which particular functions are conducted. This suggests that tacit sociological factors e.g. culture and more explicitly identifiable institutional devices of social control (c.f. Olssen, 2005) may work to shape experience in phenomenologically more similar ways than might otherwise be expected. However, Kogan et al. (1984: 137) go on to note that such governors were also seen to have 'surrendered their interest by joining the governing body, and were concerned only to use their affiliations and experience to support or advise the other governors and the school' (1984: 137). This is echoed in further research by Farrell (2005) that reveals the head teachers' perspective that governors rarely ever reject strategic proposals and documentation put to them. This may be a reflection of the particular configurations of power that arise from sources such as e.g. head teacher expertise. However, it may also be understood in terms of how such actors' experiences form a reflection of the enculturation process within such groups. This may be understood to be indicative of the forms of social complexity that shape local interaction as have previously been discussed (See *Sections 2.3.3 & 2.3.5*).

Experience, in the broadest sense, can be understood as drawing on personal expertise and praxis, but also on understanding of role and function, and on knowledge of established relationships that may be utilised directly or indirectly within an immediate social context. This willingness to shift attitudes and behaviours is also indicative of the kinds of identity work previously discussed that result from engagement within particular social formations. Furthermore, Mncube and Mafora (2013) contend that conflict between governors is central to the experience in the context of school governance, in part because of the existing social identities that governors bring into the governance process. However, within this inherent complexity no clear picture emerges regarding how governors themselves experience the multifarious forces identified in this discussion. It fails to reconcile phenomenology with sociology. The challenges for research in capturing this level of internal complexity without arbitrarily unitising it forms one of the precise reasons Complex Responsive Process theorists seeks to emphasise and pursue practitioner reflexivity rather than broader

theoretical generalisation (see Stacey, 2007; 2011). However, the above also demonstrates the pragmatic benefits that may be taken from analysing strategy and governance at the level of individual experience. An understanding of what arises from the complementarities and conflicts arising in such experiences forms a primary interest of the current research and has significant implications for how governance and governing practice are understood. There is further need to understand which experiences are at play within the development of Free Schools.

Consistent with the discussion above Baez and Talbert (2008) contrast governmentality and governing in terms of the disciplinary techniques (associated with hierarchies and surveillance) and the pastoral techniques which serve as the connection between individual responsibility and the collective good (associated with consensual rules that guide participation and individual action). In this respect it is argued that 'as individuals come to embody certain qualities, they experience themselves through the capacities they have developed. Modern forms of government individualize in such a way that subjects understand their actions as based in autonomous choice and freedom to act.' (Baez & Talbert, 2008; 29). For governors to truly engender qualities of governance may require them to do so freely; so that embodiment and experience can emerge synonymously as a single consistent process of internalisation and action. This appears simultaneously at the heart of processes of responsabilisation and liberalisation, and characterises something important about the shifting relation between individual local experience and the redistribution of state across society. The issue this chapter has previously raised however is the inherent conflict between such processes and the experiences of actors of central government; responsible and accountable in Western democracy and potentially still socially invested in their own maintenance of power. It is in this respect that the pluralism and equality inherent in a coherent form of Neo-liberalism may simply not be feasible when the impact of socio-political and historical context are actually acknowledged.

Discussion of experience within school governance research reveals the capacity to draw insight regarding the role of experience in shaping the behaviour and attitudes of those involved in such roles.

In this respect experience refers to the kinds of capabilities and connections that are experienced *through* time and inform current decision. It is here that parallels may be drawn with James et al's (2011) conception of governance capital. Experience may be conceived of as something that may be brought into governing. Yet it is here that additional questions emerge about how and why individuals bring particular experiences into the development of Free Schools and what the implications of this are. Discussion above adheres to the conclusions elsewhere in this chapter in suggesting that current patterns of experience and behaviour are characterised by that which precede them. In the current pursuit of governor experiences it is therefore pertinent to openly and critically investigate experiences of the strategic development of Free Schools with sensitivity to the role of history. Consistent with Foucault's (see 1977; 2003) position espoused above this is not to say that the purpose of research is to examine the histories of governors in this research context but to seek to understand and explain the histories *of the present*, as they are represented. To do so entails engagement with the individual discourse of the participants involved. Such narratives can therefore be seen to convey the participant's constructions. In line with previous discussion such constructions can be seen to reflect the relations past and present that characterise individual positionality within a given moment. Where experience within the context of governance discourse is conceived of in the broad light captured here experience may therefore concern any of the values and principles guiding thought and action in the present.

2.5.3 Experience and Discourse

Central to the current research is the critical analysis of how founder-governors of schools launched in the first two waves report the experience of developing new Free Schools. This is seen to provide insight into how elements of governance and strategy implementation are rationalised. On the basis of the discussion above such understandings may be seen to go on to influence future action within the paradigms of governing locally constructed over time. This forms the basis for addressing methodological concern arising from any 'gap' deemed to exist between such narrative and some

distinct set of events. Mead (1938) rejects the view that there are such 'presents' that form the basis of distinct units of analysis. The 'present' that forms the basis of what is typically referred to in relation to experience is only itself given shape by the interpretations of the past, present and future (Desmonde, 2006; Flaherty & Fine, 2001; Mead, 1934). This reflects the insight offered by Mead's analysis that 'all being is becoming' and 'that which marks a present is its becoming and disappearing' (Flaherty & Fine, 2001:150). The ever-presence of the present reflects the perpetual novelty that arises from the present which has been before. All of experience is, in this respect, part of the instantiation of self. That emergence is characteristic of the present is the basis on which basic determinism is rejected (ibid.).

The analysis of what might otherwise be regarded as 'post-hoc rationalisation' is not therefore intended to reveal the unattainable complex internal states through which human decision making and experience instantaneously emerged in an historic moment and is held unreliably in memory. Rather it provides insight into how individuals make sense of and narrate their enactment of roles within the series of interactions that shape their schools. The manner in which individuals rationalise the relationship between structure and agency, and the languages comprising multifarious discourses within and between settings, provide insight into the subjectivities of experience and the forms of power arising within unexplored social contexts (c.f. Wilson, 1992; Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Connolly et al, 2000; Lehman, 2005). In this respect narratives are not merely the reflection of how one speaks about their experience, but a constitution of experience itself (Wittgenstein, 1958; Shotter, 1993). In a similar vein Mead (1934: 191) contends that there is no 'mind or thought without language' and that furthermore mind only emerges in and because of social interaction.

The extension of language may therefore be seen to reflect the extension of experience; and in this respect does not invite a distinct phenomenological ontology or reducibility to the brain. Power, as discussed, is a concept bound up in the relations through which it is exercised and the narratives in which it is manifest (Stacey, 2011). More importantly for current purposes is power as becoming

embodied through the notion of 'development'. Constructed narratives seek to unify events in such a way as to take possession of past, present and future trajectories, thereby constructing the self in relation to others (Foucault, 1972). To the extent that the interview is itself a process of relating between two people, the position of the researcher and inconsistency in how power emerges between interviewees is also to be acknowledged and factored into how the resulting discourses are interpreted and presented (Deem, 1994).

“The problem is not therefore to ask oneself how and why it [discourse] was able to emerge and become embodied at this point in time; it is, from beginning to end, historical - a fragment of history, a unity and discontinuity in history itself, posing the problem of its own limits, its divisions, its transformations, the specific modes of its temporality rather than its sudden irruption in the midst of the complicities of time.” (Foucault, 1972: 117)

The pertinence of this conception of discourse may be seen to be equally reflected in research amongst increasingly diverse schools in terms of the individuals/groups involved in their development, their organisation and their visions and values (Woods et al, 2007; Chapman & Salokangas, 2012; Higham, 2014; Woods & Simkins, 2014). For the purposes of the current research it is also prudent to clarify the use of the terms discourse and narrative. Narrative, as reflected in the use of language described above, loosely reflects the Aristotelean manner in which individuals structure their communication in order to construct storylines that convey their perceptions of causation, chronology, other actors and circumstances. Discourse is used more closely in line with the representations of Foucault and Mead in reflecting the use of language to convey meaning and attitude. It is at this level that one not only incorporates the reported experience but also the position and power in relation both to those captured in the narrative and to the researcher. An examination of governor experiences engages with both discourse and narrative to the extent that it concerns both the content that is compared and contrasted across schools and the manner in which its conveyance seeks to construct particular 'realities' i.e. the affected judgements about others or their school.

'Regimes' of truth perpetuate power, and power perpetuates 'regimes' of truth (Foucault, 1988). Truth-telling is an activity of candid subjectivity, *parrhesia*. Where Foucault's explication makes limited progress is in the consequences for the immediate interactions that characterise the social complexity of forms of governance such as are under study. It is also not the current task to provide a holistic framework for analysis founded solely on Foucauldian power analysis. However, where truth and power can be seen to relate in such a way there are significant implications for understanding and appreciating the individual relative 'truths' that are projected in individual discourse. The research itself is a procedure for producing, regulating and distributing (the researcher's) 'truth' grounded on that which participants seek to project. In the same manner participant accounts may be seen as extensions of the processes through which individuals seek to establish and perpetuate their own power, or offer up the forms of 'truth' that enable the rebalance of power within the governance relations under study. This demonstrates why truth and power are not identical, as the construction of narrative is as much a technology of power as the parrhesiastes achieve through their pursuit of the freedom of 'truth-telling' (see Foucault, 1988). The current research accepts the important implications of this. In the study of individual discourse the principles of evidential necessity are subject to infinite regression (Foucault, 1983). Rather, discourse can better be understood as self-evidential, and the focus of analysis shifts purely from its emphasis on the meaning of content to the broader examination of the (power) relations it represents (Given, 2008). An exploration of experience as discourse therefore enables meaningful insight into processes of (self-) legitimisation and the capacity to reveal the relative positions of power that participants seek to adopt or maintain. Such social research cannot, and would not want to, examine the 'truth' of 'truth', but rather the purposes and implications of the telling. Again, this provides a theoretical viewpoint pertinent to that which is under study. In this respect, Foucault's arguments on discourse can be held up critically against the findings of this research, rather than being treated as a methodology through which they are revealed. Blumer (e.g. 1936; 1969) extended Mead's conception of social interaction to characterize both their symbolic and non-symbolic substance. Although this extension has been critiqued for in fact

downplaying importance facets of selfhood (see Puddephatt, 2009) it also offers an important extension to the understanding of the complexity of interaction itself. Acknowledging the complexity of social interaction is of importance to critiquing any conclusion drawn from the above discussion that experience is *reducible* to the spoken word. To do so would be to dismiss the affective and conative character of human experience that enriches the understanding of subjective and relative positions within the social world. In this respect an important characteristic of experience is captured through the attempt to understand the *attitudes* individuals have in relation to the symbols of interaction. Attitudes, according to Blumer (1969), must be inferred as a consequence of their empirical ambiguity. The methodological consequence of importance here is that one cannot seek to isolate participant attitudes. Rather, meaning may be discerned and enriched because attitudes are dynamic and value-laden. Attitudes may be loosely shared, oppositional or the subject of ambiguity within groups. It is in this respect that one cannot seek to distinguish language in discourse from the other intended and unintended forms of communication that reveal attitude in relation to content. The current research, in seeking to understand the richness of experience, remains sensitive not only to contradiction in logics but to contradictions in the emotional and motivational states that are bound up in participants' rationalizations.

2.6 Summary

The literature review has provided a context to the current study and a discussion of the state of the art in relation to the issues and themes identified to be of potential significance in the introduction. To do so a frame has been offered through which relevant issues can be understood and, more importantly, critically compared. In this respect the literature review does not provide the necessary lens through which the data will be viewed but rather a mirror against which the researcher's independent understanding of the findings can be reflected. The critical analysis of multiple perspectives has yielded numerous ideas which are self-evident in their relevance to the current research. These ideas, concepts and the conclusions they have afforded further reflect that which the

researcher maintains sensitivity towards. As discussed previously this enables the researcher to communicate the theoretical debates towards which the research ultimately seeks to contribute. At the centre of this study is therefore an understanding individual experiences of strategy and governance within the context of reform. As discussed, by focusing on such experiences it may be possible to generate a novel contribution to the broader debates mentioned in the chapter. This chapter also supports the argument that the research aim presented in the introduction is of value in itself by addressing the gaps identified in current understanding of the social role of experience in governance practice.

In summarizing the arguments presented in this chapter motivation has been seen to draw on the language used to project experience in relations. On some accounts motivation is bound up in how individuals make sense of social interaction, past and present, in relation to interpretations of the potential futures these narratives might entail. Processes of relating have therefore been considered as extensions to or manifestations of power. In relation to school governance and governing the patterns of power that emerge in local interactions have been revealed in parallel to the figurations of power that emerge at the level of society and through which broader shifts in education can be understood. This has been argued to offer the basis on which one understands the relationship between policy and implementation as fundamentals of the same process character. Whilst power has therefore been presented as inherently relational it has also been noted that those relations may not be usefully restricted to the ways in which individuals bind or limit one another. The constructive and enabling capacity of power, even within governance relations, forms an important comparative tool in a context pertaining to strategic processes of *development*. How individuals relate and the impact on the capacity to act freely are important elements of analysis within a policy context that engenders increasing autonomy and increased participation of diverse actors. The current chapter has also provided an account of experience that is consistent with earlier mentioned theories of motivation. Experience has been considered in relation to the language and discourse. The following

chapter therefore seeks to lay out the implications for the empirical examination of experience within the context considered.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methods adopted to explore governor experiences of the strategic development process in English Free Schools. The preceding chapters have illustrated the significance of this level of analysis. Of particular note is the potential to reveal how governors understand and enact their own positions within the development process. How governors interpret and convey their experiences in the process has been argued to have implications for their perspectives and decision making in the present and future. As such, the following methodology aims to facilitate the analysis of governor's experiences of the governance process and the strategy that emerges (from empirical data reflecting the sense-making and construction of those processes). The focus of analysis is the individual narratives that emerge (as the extension of mind) through both historical accounts and present experience of the interview context. As such it remains impossible to separate the methodological position from the empirical content it generates. The methodology consequently presents its own limitations, arising from the epistemological status of the resulting discourse. The response to this limitation being that the limitation is therefore inherent in all such interpretive research. By recognising the resulting forms of relativism, intersubjectivity and social relations that underpin data collection and analysis it is possible to generate rich inferences about the figurations of power that shape the narratives and attitudes the research is able to capture. Such inferences are drawn not only from the interactions between the researcher and each participant in isolation, but through the comparative analysis of the content and affections of narratives located within shared localities and socio-historical contexts. It is in relation to the philosophical position outlined here that the current chapter will be seen to resonate with principles associated with pragmatic social constructionism (used synonymously with moderate social constructivism).

The preceding chapters have demonstrated the methodological significance of the concepts under study both in relation to how the research is conducted and in relation to understandings of governance and strategy within the relevant context. The previous chapter presented areas of literature that have shaped the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher. This goes some way to revealing the researcher's inherent theoretical bias. The authenticity, plausibility and criticality required of this form of research is achieved in part through the critical comparison of established theoretical constructs against the themes and theoretical constructs that emerge from the empirical evidence. As such the approach laid out in the current chapter will be seen to resonate with the principles of Grounded Theory.

3.2 Research Aim and Questions

This research focus is on individual experience. In the preceding chapter experience was conceived of with such breadth as to incorporate individual perceptions, perspectives and capabilities that shape interpretation and decision making at any given time. Governor narratives are further seen as reflecting the construction of experience within the data collection process (see Section 2.5.3). In understanding experience in relation to governance and strategy the research has drawn on notions of motivation, as the purposive, emotive and/or conative expression of action and position. It has also drawn together conceptions of experience and governance that emerge from an understanding of the processes of interaction and relation that shape the social world that governance and strategy occupy. This therefore extends to how individuals seek to influence each other and the trajectory of the strategic development process. As such, the current research seeks to understand subjective experience within the context of strategically developing English Free Schools. The perspectives adopted as the primary interest of this research are of those responsible for their founding and governance. The conception of responsibility relevant to the context under study has been argued to relate to the founders and governors required to fulfil the legal and practical functions entailed by

launching a new Free School. The previous chapters have demonstrated that an analysis of the experiences of those responsible has the potential to yield novel insights into contemporary accounts of school governance, governing and strategy. These insights have potential consequences for both policy and practice, whilst posing new questions in need of addressing. Sensitive to the issues and theoretical concept discussed above the aim of this study is:

To analyse governor experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools

In order to achieve this broad aim four objectives have been developed. These objectives provide the sequence of tasks that must be accomplished in order that theory may emerge grounded in the rich empirical data the research seeks to generate. The objectives therefore maintain the open mindedness and flexibility reflected in the aim, whilst providing a systematic, rigorous and coherent structure through which the interpretation of participant narratives leads to original conclusions.

- To investigate governors' reported experiences of the strategic development within their schools
- To analyse key issues emerging from governors' narratives across schools in relation to the strategic development process
- To generate an original theoretical account grounded in the reported narratives and reconciled with established theory and research
- To draw out theoretical implications contributing to the conceptual development of research on organizational governance and the strategic development process in comparable settings

3.3 An Interpretive Research Approach

3.3.1 A Moderate Constructivist Account

Central to the research purpose outlined is the understanding of the perspectives and experiences of those involved in the strategic development process. The already explicit emphasis on strategic development processes, as analysed within the reported experiences of those responsible, clearly resonates with social constructionist accounts that have informed contemporary approaches in the management field (c.f. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bevir, et al., 2003). According to such accounts experiences within organisations, including Free Schools, cannot exist in isolation of each other (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bevir, et al., 2003). Rather they result from the combined engagement of those individuals involved in a shared reality sat within their own unique context (ibid.). The consequence of this view is reflected in the first and second objectives. The position adopted here requires the analysis to move beyond the reporting of isolated experiences to analysis across the multiple perspectives within the shared social contexts of each school. The term moderate social constructivism, as used here, is used synonymously with the underlying principles of constructionism.

Substantial debate has focused on the distinctions between and use of the terms constructivism and constructionism (c.f. Crotty, 1998; Gergen, 1985; Lynch, 1998). The literature review presented a range of perspectives emphasising the significance to the current research context of interaction, the use of language and mind in relation to the social. The most appropriate espousal of the constructivist position, as presented here, must therefore result in an epistemological account that reflects the manner in which knowledge is created socially, contextually and consistent with defensible accounts of discourse. That is to say that in order to achieve the research's third objective the knowledge produced in this study must be consistent with the ontology of that which is under study i.e. governors' constructed experiences. A moderate social constructivist position that acknowledges the processes of acculturation that shape experience therefore maintains consistency with the discussion laid out in

the previous chapter in its characterization of experience. This may be seen as highly consistent with the underlying principles of social constructionism in its emphasis on criticality, context and the social (Burr, 2003). Constructionism has, in this respect, been engendered as the differentiation from a psychological view of strict constructivism by clarifying its emphasis on the social; a move that was also largely seen as prudent for this study in the previous chapter (Doolottle, 2001). However, to the extent that the underpinning philosophy is clearly explicated in this chapter appeal to the overarching 'constructivist' language preserves the clarity of the discussion contrasted against more radically different approaches. This closely echoes established views on the terminology (Crotty, 1998; Lynch, 1998; Scwandt, 2001) and its use in accordance to preference across domains (Engler, 2004).

The decision to adopt an interpretivist philosophy, and more precisely the moderate constructivist position advocated, was based in part on a core limitation in a number of alternative accounts. This limitation was deemed to sufficiently increase the convolution of the research that such positions could not be justified within the current context. Philosophies with a realist ontological stance, regardless of whether their epistemologies are objectivist or subjectivist, were seen to reflect this concern. Such examples include classical positivism (naïve realism), neo-empiricism and critical theory where, pertinent to the management research context, all three assume some aspect of social reality prior to human cognition (Johnson, et al., 2006; Reed, 2005). They therefore share the view that social reality has at least some independence from mind. Critical realism offers an effective manner for examining the experiences of governors in recognising a distinction between stable objects and mechanisms and empirical experiences (Modell, 2009). However, within the context of the current research aim to make claims about distinct stable objects and mechanisms is to swell the research's ontology in such a way that Ockham's razor would deem untenable. With the research interest focussing on governor experiences to postulate additional entities is burdensome without fruitfulness. The rationality for adopting the currently espoused philosophy can therefore be seen as a pragmatic one (not to be confused with philosophical pragmatism). The methodological approach chosen is

consistent with the perspective of Burningham and Cooper (1999) in maintaining that wider philosophical arguments can be bracketed out without restricting the ability of the research to engage in relevant debate. What is entailed by this is an agnostic position (Newton, et al., 2011) about the independent nature of processes, Free Schools and events outside the social processes through which they are constructed in governor narratives. The study aims to develop a depth and richness of understanding focused on the analysis of the experiences of governors. Their experiences, including both that which has shaped them and their inherent positionality within the social milieu, are of inherent interest because they hold political, legal and social responsibility for Free Schools' strategic directions. This is therefore significant to contributing to the final objective of the research, where the contribution made by the current study relates to a social and phenomenological perspective on governance and strategy.

This research design therefore pursues an explanation of the social, relational and constructed contexts that emerge from the analysis of multiple perceptions and interactions between individuals within Free School development processes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Recognising the subjective and intersubjective experiences arising within such social processes informs a richer construction of that which has, and will, shape strategic development within given school settings (Bevir, et al., 2003; White, 1999). This is therefore done without reducing the explanatory power within contexts to a singular cause and effect relationship (ibid.). Doing otherwise may not be fully representative of the complexity and diversity of experiences (ibid.). A moderate social constructivist position also takes the aim of research to be the creation of new, usable knowledge through multiple viewpoints of the truth (Jarvensivu & Tornroos, 2010). Such a moderate approach to constructivism is also echoed in pragmatic accounts, in which organisational reason and sense-making are seen as tools supporting the construction of viable profiles (Mead, 1982; Mitchell, et al., 2013). It utilises data, regardless of format, as measurements and instruments useful to interpretation (Mitchell, et al., 2013).

This study seeks to analyse the interaction and the constitution of experience through language whilst remaining critically aware of, and sensitive to, all the manners in which diverse intentions may be seen to shape those narratives (c.f. Blumer, 1936; Shotter, 1993; Stacey, 2011; Wittgenstein, 1958). The focus of analysis is the participant's discursive narrative, where the espoused methodology and discussion in the *Chapter 2* acknowledges this as an extension of experience. The methodological position described is founded on an understanding of socialness. This has been well supported in the preceding chapter for its relevance to an exploration of experience whilst overcoming the challenges of accessing other minds where they are not regarded as synonymous to the social world. Karataş-Özkan and Murphy (2010, p. 455) argue that, within this paradigm, "the aim of social inquiry shifts from structures or outcomes to processes – more specifically from organization to organizing...How knowledge is generated and exchanged by people in interaction within organizations forms the main focus of inquiry". This emphasis on the experiential nature of process, and the social contexts that both define and create it, are equally reflected in Easterby-Smith et al (2002) and Newton et al (2011).

3.3.2 Positionality and validity

It is recognised that adopting the position above is not without limitation. Preissle (2006, p. 691) explains that "we are studying ourselves studying ourselves and others". The researcher becomes 'embedded' in the relevant political community and emerging narratives, in order to acquire and represent authentic beliefs and meanings (Hay, 2011). The view here that the researcher is indistinct from the socially constructed narratives emerging within field research presents a further challenge. A way out of the 'vicious circle which would make interpretation impossible' is required (Silva, 2007, p. 167). This vicious epistemic circle emerges from the potential perpetuity of the hunt for what is regarded the 'right' interpretation. However, in maintaining consistency within the constructivist position it is important to recognise that the 'right' interpretation is a question of truth, and truth within such an ontological account is also based within the same processes of social construction. The response to this issue therefore arises from the intersubjective construction of reality through the

meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Through emphasising trustworthiness through authenticity, the aim is to achieve a presentation and interpretation of data that is consistent with both the participants' accounts and the audiences' own interpretations (Walsham, 2006; Al-Habil, 2013). To ensure the researcher does not therefore cloud the research requires adherence to strict and rigorous qualitative principles (see below). It also requires transparency to the audience both in terms of revealing the researcher's established theoretical disposition and sensitivity, and the role this has in generating the initial areas of interest in developing questions. *Appendix 9.1* illustrates areas of theoretical sensitivity (to literature) at the time at which the study was developed and the methods laid out in *Section 3.5.1* were produced. To capture the impact of the researcher within the interview context also requires interpretation of the power relation that emerges between participant and researcher (see *Appendix 9.2* for illustration of transcription memoing). Immediately after each interview (as discussed in *Section 3.5*) the process of documenting the researcher's own experiences of the interview and interview setting was of importance to subsequent interpretation of the data. This too is an extension of the sensitizing process (Glaser, 1992).

That the generalisability of theoretical claims cannot emerge from generalisation of the empirical data means that alternative values must be used in the research. Three alternative benchmarks have been used in planning and enacting the research design. These standards, adopted from highly relevant qualitative research literature, can be seen to bridge the philosophical position characterised with the methods employed (Walsham, 2006; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Walsham & Sahay, 1999; Lukka & Modell, 2010; Stahl, 2014). The first criterion, authenticity, requires maintaining a close and consistent alignment with experiences from the field and from the accounts of those interviewed. The Findings and Analysis Chapters (*Chapter 4 & 5*) therefore closely reflect the empirical findings. Plausibility requires that the findings connect intersubjectively with the reader at both a personal and professional level. By drawing closely on the empirical findings, theoretical interpretation remains firmly grounded in the next chapter. Subsequent abstraction similarly adheres to data so that the

pattern of interpretation may be closely followed by its audience. Finally, criticality within the research and its presentation should encourage the reader not to take for granted both their own ideas and beliefs and those individual perspectives represented from the field.

The research philosophy described, and its stated implications for the research approach and design require thick and rich descriptions of perceptions in real-life contexts that both reveals and preserves the meanings that those involved ascribe to them (Leitch, et al., 2010; Gephart, 2004). The nature of theory that subsequently emerges under these conditions is closely aligned with the understandings of the grounded theory and case study research to be discussed presently.

3.4 Adoption of a Grounded Theory Approach

Grounded theory has been regarded with increasing legitimacy over the past 50 years. Simultaneously the attitudes towards qualitative research methods have broadened beyond the techniques used under the predominance of positivism (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). This section provides a brief overview of the theoretical underpinnings of the grounded theory approach used in this research. This account frames the precise stages of data collection and analysis detailed in the next section. According to one of grounded theory's key scholars the approach reflects "analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area" (Glaser, 1992, p. 19). The constructivist grounded theory approach supported here entails the incorporation and constant comparison of multiple governor narratives in the form of individual codes and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 2012). The data is regarded as contributing to the multiple perspectives that inform a (researcher) constructed paradigm (Charmaz, 2009). In line with the philosophical position outlined above the construction of the findings and analysis in subsequent chapters reflects the process through which multiple 'relative truths' are compared and contrasted (c.f. Foucault, 2010). This enables the research to cast light on both the subjectivities and positions of different discourses within and between schools and to evaluate these similarities and differences in terms of the relations of power and identity being constructed. In this sense the procedures of data

collection and analysis used within this research will be seen to have followed the rigour of grounded theory and the outlined constructivist philosophy. The adoption of a methodology involving elements of an interpretative philosophy and grounded theory approach is well founded within contemporary academic management research (e.g. Jarvensivu & Tornroos, 2010; Mills et al, 2006).

The precise iterative steps used within the data collection and analysis are discussed in *Section 3.5*. What this iteration reflects however is the constant process of comparison and theory generation that guide the development of authentic accounts (Urquhart & Fernández, 2013). This therefore provides the process through which the third research objective will be achieved. In line with a central practice of grounded theory memoing has served to support the process of analysis and sense making (Charmaz, 2014). This has firstly enabled the compilation and summation of data sets required to identify and describe the experienced events, properties and dimensions, as well as how they compare and contrast (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This process has been vital to the bringing together of multiple perspectives in the development of complex narratives that describe processes bound by chronology. Memoing was utilised to record the researcher interpretation of the interview process, thereby revealing an important part of the subjectively experienced positionality of the researcher that may, intentionally or unintentionally, influence the interpretations offered in subsequent chapters (See *Appendix 9.2*).

Interpretation of the research data was therefore influenced and enriched by an understanding of the context of the interviews and the impact that this has directly on the processes of self-construction under study. The use of memos has also then guided the theoretical sampling process that initially directed the development of second round interview questions and subsequently supported the theory building process (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The precise links between the development of interview questions is discussed further in the following sections. Memo generation has been highly iterative, which has allowed for the building up of the complexity and accuracy of key categories pertinent to generating a theoretical account of that which is under study. Complementary to the researcher's own preferences the use of computer generated imagery has formed a core

element of the process through which themes and categories were mapped out alongside the coding process. This is illustrated in *Appendix 9.3*.

Consistent with the discussion in the previous sections and chapters, grounded theory acknowledges the role of socio-historical context that necessarily positions the research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The previous chapters likewise acknowledged that differences in the perceptions of the respective development contexts are an important facet of the study of the experience within them. The sensitivities of the researcher are also considered as an element of this social history. This includes the consequences for how the researcher separates the meaningful and valuable from that which is regarded as less so. Researcher sensitivity also includes the degree to which they are attuned to the subtleties and complexity of the subjects under study (Mills, et al., 2006). Theory is grounded based upon the extent to which the researcher is able to immerse themselves within the perspectives and narratives that emerge within the field (*ibid.*). Equally however the researcher works to avoid bringing pre-existing assumptions, hypotheses and biases into the research process. A familiarity with, and consideration of, existing literatures is seen as a potential part of the sensitising process through which the researcher seeks to stimulate their thinking about properties and dimensions that can be used to examine new data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Mills, et al., 2006). This stands distinct from bringing the assumption that phenomena or explanations seen in other research ought to be relevant or necessarily revealed within the current context. In recognising one's bias one develops their capacity to avoid imposing particular expectations on the data that do not arise from the data itself.

Theory emerges in close reflection of the initial data by following the stages of iteration outlined below. This supports the authenticity of the accounts. What the below illustrates are the processes of moving from initial/open coding (fracturing and analysing incidents in the data), to the (selective) re-coding and re-organisation of those codes to generate themes (Charmaz, 2014). Those themes were also subject to the constant comparative techniques in order to generate the conceptual categories that form the foundations of theory development. As laid out in *Section 4.5* this reflected the offering explanation for the similarities and differences seen within participant experiences *across schools*.

Theory formation through the Grounded Theory approach follows the abductive ‘process of forming an explanatory hypothesis... It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea’ (Peirce, 1903: 216). The generation of novel theoretical explanations emerges from the patterns observed in the data and reaffirmed in terms of its capacity to explain new data as it is introduced (Suddaby, 2006). This process ceases at the point of data saturation, discussed in *Section 3.4.1* and *3.5.3.2*. It is in this respect that Grounded Theory can be seen as consistent with philosophical pragmatism (see Mead, 1982) concerning how new knowledge is formed to serve a social purpose. The above highlights how the research is able to transition through the objectives stated earlier in the chapter in order to achieve the research aim.

3.4.1 Theoretical Sampling

The grounded theory approach outlined reflects a research process that transitioned from the inclusivity and openness in the earliest data collection processes towards focus and specificity in eventual theory. Theoretical sampling within the grounded theory approach reflects a process of sampling or selection designed to support theory construction, as opposed to representation of a given population (i.e. all Free School governors) (Charmaz, 1996). The purpose therefore is to support the researcher in checking and refining the developing conceptual categories on which theory is built (ibid.). This section therefore outlines the principles on which this was done. However, theoretical sampling is reflected in all of the ongoing iterations of data collection and analysis. Therefore, the precise course of the sampling process used in this research is outlined in *Section 3.5* below.

The data collection and analysis followed an incremental pattern, reflecting a funnel approach (Marschan-Piekkari & Welch, 2005). *Section 5.3* presents these increments according to the iterations of data collection and analysis that were followed, and how, in line with the Grounded Theory approach described this supported theory generation. This funnelling transitioned the data collection systematically from the greatest breadth possible to the greatest depth and detail, to ensure the research maintains the balance between authenticity and relevance. Consistent with the definition of

theoretical sampling, and as outlined in detail below, the multiple stages of selection leading to the focus on specific participants within three schools was done so with the intention of supporting theory generation. This reflects the iteration discussed above, where the development and testing of theoretical constructs at each stage of data collection and analysis informed the subsequent stage by realigning the research focus towards the most pertinent issues in need of explanation (Charmaz, 2014). This process began following the first stage of primary data collection, a qualitative survey, at which point emerging themes began to guide the direction of further enquiry.

The data analysis began with its focus on governor experiences grouped together in the networks of actors within their specific shared school settings. Subsequent analysis of governor experiences across schools can be understood as an extension of this process, as governors reporting their experiences within the shared context of being amongst the first and second waves of Free Schools to open in 2011/12. The constant comparative methods shaped the process of theoretical sampling by enabling themes of significance to emerge from the comparison of codes that were specific to experiences within each school context.

The depth of the data subsequently collected enabled the refinement of the resulting theory as it was forced to take account of the increasing levels of complexity revealed by the data. The continued collection and analysis of data reached a point when the incorporation of new data ceased to generate significant new insights that had not already been accounted for by the emerging themes and categories. When further data collection failed to generate new insights that the emerging theory could not account for it was concluded that the research had reached saturation (Suddaby, 2006). The point at which this was reached is laid out in *Section 3.5.3.2*.

Narrative and discourse captures the interplay between participants' sense making of history, their interaction within the moment of data collection and their projections regarding the future. Whilst the time of data collection was necessarily restricted to those schools that had successfully opened (and were, therefore, strategically developing), the data itself is the unification and reshaping of its

own histories and the histories that have since arisen. Likewise, the cessation of data collection does not reflect a cessation of process, but the accomplishment of the research's own purposes.

As is discussed in the sections below which set out different stages of data collection theoretical sampling has also been influenced by the processes guiding participant selection (Charmaz, 2014). Following the initial 'scoping' exercise (see *Section 3.5.1*) in which all open schools were initially approached, using a survey, theoretical sensitivity emerging both from the literature and from the analytic process of the data collected initiated the narrowing and focusing of participant selection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This refining of participant selection allowed the research to generate further depth by exploring experiences within only three school 'social settings'. The process was also informed by the requirement to maintain comparability across the data. Sensitivity to the findings of James et al (2014) that the 'context' of governance and strategy differs between primary and secondary school levels informed the need to focus school and participant selection to comparable social settings, namely the primary school context. This narrowing took place between Stage 1 (*Section 3.5.1*) and Stage 2 (*Section 3.5.2*) of the data collection and analysis. This is addressed in *Section 3.7* regarding the limitations of the study.

The selection and recruitment of additional participants in Stage 2, and extended in Stage 3 (*Section 3.5.3*), reflected the sensitivity to the breadth of possible experiences within each school. This was initially done purposively to reflect sensitivity to the differing founding and governing roles that might shape differing experiences (Morse, 2004). However, in moving towards theoretical sampling one of the core findings was that the diversity of experiences evident in the findings was not solely linked to the conduct of specific roles. The move from Stage 2 (*Section 3.5.2*) to Stage 3 (*Section 3.5.3*) therefore reflected the process of theoretical sampling in which the questions used in data collection were altered in line with the emerging theorization. This is addressed in further detail in the corresponding sections below, and is illustrated in *Appendices 9.6 & 9.7*. In parallel to these iterative stages of collection and analysis the recruitment of additional participants in the final stage (*Section 3.5.3*) maintained the pattern of ensuring the greatest breadth of governor roles was incorporated. The

rationale for doing so was to ensure consistency in the constant comparisons across schools, as well as supporting the analysis of diverse perspectives within each.

3.5 Iterative Data Collection and Analysis

In line with the approach to theoretical sampling outlined above this section is structured according to the iterations of data collection and analysis. This is intended to convey how each stage informed each subsequent stage, and therefore how the research was able to move from engaging with a broad range of governors to an analysis of governors' experience within three school contexts in such a way that would support the development of theory. This will be shown in terms of how the analysis occurring in parallel to each stage of data collection informed the development of the subsequent methods e.g. the development of lines of enquiry and interview themes. It is in respect of these stages that the research is able to demonstrate its accomplishment of each of the first three objectives, by revealing how the satisfaction of each objective provides the grounding for the subsequent ones. In line with this the structure of the Findings (*Chapter 4*), Analysis (*Chapter 5*) and Discussion (*Chapter 6*) can then be seen to present the integration of the stages of analysis that emerged from this process. This is done by moving from the analysis of themes emerging from governor experiences embedded within the shared social contexts of each school (*Chapter 4*) onto an account of how the theoretical categories emerged from this analysis (*Chapter 5*). *Chapter 6* then provides the theoretical account that satisfies the third objective; whilst *Chapter 7* draws the implications of this out in line with the final objective.

As discussed in detail in the section below interviews were employed to generate the qualitative data that formed the focus of analysis in the study. Semi-structured interviews are well suited to meet the research requirement to transfer governor narratives to explicit forms of data, especially when conducted in an iterative and reflexive style (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Stover, 2004). Interviews are also an effective method for enabling the generation of narratives and discourse through which experiences can be analysed (Potter, 1996). The open-ended nature of the questioning in semi-

structured interviews supports the gaining of access to the perspective of the person being interviewed (Qu & Dumay, 2011) and allows the interviewer to pursue points of particular interest or importance. The themes that guided these questions are seen in *Appendices 9.6 & 7*. While these themes informed the area and nature of questioning the questions themselves were adjusted in interview to reflect the suitability to the interview context, with sensitivity to the answers already given. This included providing participants the opportunity to expand upon their answers as necessary. As is also discussed below secondary data and surveys formed important instruments in the process of theoretical sampling. Theoretical sensitivity to the data sources outlined in the lower sections of *Appendix 9.4* informed the selection of specific schools and participants in line with *Section 3.4.1*. Compared to other naturalistic approaches, semi-structured interviews are a particularly useful method when the research seeks to explore themes that can be compared and contrasted across participants (*ibid.*). As has been discussed in both *Chapter 1* and above the research purpose concerns an account of governors' experiences across settings that reveals novel theoretical and practical insights regarding the strategic development of Free Schools. The conclusions sought in this particular research therefore depend on the comparability of those experiences such as to be able to draw conclusions about the facets of experiences that are both specific to unique social contexts and emerge across them. It is for this reason that ethnographic research was considered less suited. This is discussed further in the limitations. Similarly, it was not felt to be possible to capture the richness of experience by adopting quantitative techniques.

3.5.1 Stage 1

3.5.1.1 Data Collection – Generating Databases and a Scoping Survey

The Databases

The research started by generating two databases based on publicly available secondary data of the whole population sample of Governors of the first 24 and eventually 79 Free Schools opened in 2011 and 2012 (DfE, 2013). The forms of secondary data that informed this first stage of research can be

seen illustrated in *Appendix 9.4*. The first database included information such as school ethos, location, size (proposed capacity), governor profiles, affiliations and contact information. The second database also captured information on the schools' contexts including relative deprivation, local demography, urban density and local educational statistics. Generating this information enriched the understanding of the broad context and range of Free Schools that were opening and supported subsequent stages of sampling. It also meant that the analysis of the participant interviews, discussed in *Sections 3.5.2 & 3* was approached with a high level of theoretical sensitivity to the broader social context that might influence experiences of strategic development. However, in the interests of maintaining participant anonymity *Chapters 4 & 5* focus on presenting participants' experiences without such identifying data. Although generalisation of the data was not the intention (see *Section 3.3.2*) this information would affirm that the analysis was not influenced by any outwardly anomalous features. The databases were also of value to generating a list of contacts important for the primary research.

A Qualitative Survey

The first process of primary data collection entailed an e-mail survey of five broadly qualitative questions (see below). The e-mail survey was distributed to every publicly accessible contact for all 79 Free Schools open in the 2011 and 2012 cohorts. These were typically the school's principal, administrator or Chair of governors. Where responses were not received, this was followed up by a maximum of two rounds of phone calls and a resubmission of the survey. This survey process yielded 18 responses from 13 different schools (16.5% of Free Schools existing in England as of June 2013). Of these 16 participants from 12 schools stated a willingness in principle to participate in the next stages of research. This represents the initial stage of 'convenience sampling' that underpinned the subsequent 'purposeful sampling' stage, a process which reflects established approaches to Grounded Theory participant selection (Morse, 2004).

The responses from a broad range of schools and individuals provided a meaningful way to sensitise the researcher to the kinds of governor experiences and attitudes that formed the focus of the study. This would ensure that subsequent iterations of data collection emerged from a comprehensive base.

This is seen as significant for subsequent processes of comparison, rather than for the pursuit of some quantification relevant to generalizable sampling. The survey method was selected as it was neither invasive nor time-consuming, thus increasing the likelihood of responses. This was of particular importance for the generation of candidates for more detailed data collection without pre-existing contacts. The questions were chosen to provide some insight into how and why the individuals had become involved and offer an initial insight into how individuals were making sense of their role and their own expectations about what they were doing and experiencing. The questions contained in the survey were:

1. Did you have a role in setting up the Free School?
2. What were the reasons for you becoming a governor of the school?
3. How often do you engage in activities related to the school's governance?

E.g. Daily/Weekly/Monthly/Less often

4. In your role as governor, can you give some examples (whether positive or negative) of unexpected events, challenges or occurrences you have experienced?
5. Would you be willing to be involved further in the research?

Yes/No/Maybe

These questions were assessed for understanding by piloting them with a panel of lay people as well as experts. The panel included three Academics with expertise in Strategic Management, and five participants with no specific expertise in education or management fields. This ensured both the impartiality of the questions and the accessibility to a wide spectrum of potential civil society actors.

3.5.1.2 Data Analysis – Survey Coding and Theoretical Sampling for Interview

Survey Coding

The data collected from the survey was analysed using Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), namely NVIVO. Such programs have been seen as highly supportive of the iterative processes reflected in grounded theory that allow the research to move towards theoretical

sampling, which in turn supports theory generation (Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Initially the responses were coded by question, grouping together similarities in responses. These were in turn compared across questions, to establish whether any consistencies or patterns emerged in the overall messages being delivered by participants. The coding and very early stages of thematic development is illustrated in *Appendix 9.5*. Although this data has only a limited role in the subsequent development of data collection instruments it is considered here for its role in the ongoing process of theoretical sampling. This supported the achievement of the first objective by ensuring the development of subsequent data collection was informed by insight from the participants themselves.

Initial Findings and Implications for Interview Development

The purpose of this stage of data collection and analysis was to support and inform the research's trajectory by exploring the degree of difference and similarity amongst the responses. In line with the Grounded Theory approach presented in *Section 3.4* eventual theorization would need to have sufficient explanatory capacity to account for a breadth of reported experiences. Therefore, the surveys were of importance to theoretical sampling towards the next stage by demonstrating some of the potential breadth of experiences.

Although the findings from the survey were limited in scope the responses from across a wide range of schools revealed some consistent trends. Notably, accounts from across the schools were characterized in terms of a high frequency of involvement and time commitment. This showed that involvement in the enduring development process was given more emphasis than involvement in specific founding or governance roles. The quotation below illustrates this.

“All of my governors are committed daily and I don't believe a governor at any Free School isn't.” (Survey Participant 1)

-See *Appendix 9.6* – E.g. Interview themes 2, 4

This initially informed the development of interview questions relating to the tasks and activities they were specifically engaged in. The analysis also informed questions regarding how and why individuals became involved in the project and how this might shape their relations within and outside of their

schools. The following quotations illustrate the kind of responses study participants provided to the survey.

“I’m generally very active in the Jewish community, and saw this as another way to be involved and do my bit.” (Survey Participant 2)

-See *Appendix 9.6* – E.g. Interview themes 1, 4, 5, 6

Responses could be seen to focus on support for specific ‘actors’ as well as support for specific ‘objectives’. This recurring finding that participants involvement was in support of specific *people* would underpin one of the core themes emerging through the research. This informed the need to consider both the associations amongst actors and the strategic expectations for the school.

“[I’d] been involved for 2 years and had established relationship with our education provider...I felt I understood [the] issues and could support...” (Survey Participant 3)

-See *Appendix 9.6* – E.g. Interview themes 1, 5, 6

The findings further revealed a diverse range of issues that had arisen in relation to e.g. buildings, stakeholder relations, issues with both students and staff (or staffing), as well as general uncertainty. Reference to past experience, or a lack of, was of significance to how these accounts were framed.

“I’m not from a formal education background, and I’m not involved in education in my day job, so it’s been a whole new experience. One that I’ve had to learn about as I go along... To some extent everything that happens is a challenge as it’s new and different to what I’ve experienced before” (Survey Participant 2)

-See *Appendix 9.6* – E.g. Interview themes 3, 4, 7, 8

In seeking to understand how participants made sense of their own experiences more generally the final two interview themes (see *Appendix 9.6* – Interview themes 9 & 10 – *how close is the school to how you imagined* and *is there anything else you’d like to add*) were developed to allow for broader reflection on the part of the participants.

3.5.2 Stage 2

3.5.2.1 Data Collection –Narrowing Participant Selection and First Round of Interviews

Narrowing Participant Selection to those in Three Schools

As mentioned, the survey served a significant purpose in the sampling process generating contacts for additional data collection. Although the research would seek to focus on governors within three schools, the chairs of governors from all six of the schools that could potentially be included in the sample were initially interviewed. These six represent all the schools that would facilitate an interview in practice. From these six three were then selected. This reflected a process of purposeful sampling that narrowed participant selection in line with the theoretical sampling process (See *Section 3.4.1*) that emerged (Morse, 2004). This selection was intended to capture the most diverse range of individuals identifiable at this stage of the research and practicable for the purposes of data collection. The time of selection pre-dated the typologies of founding groups that has subsequently become established (see Higham, 2014). However, it must also be noted that the research's emphasis did not initially seek the forms of aggregation relevant to such typologies. Rather, this selection process was sensitive to a broader range of differences in school contexts resulting from the analysis in the databases (see *Section 3.5.1.1*). Selection was therefore informed by the data sources on community factors including local demography, deprivation levels and local government (See *Appendix 9.4*). It was also informed by known school information including size, structure, physical characteristics of the buildings, religious admissions and data on the participants already in contact (See *Appendix 9.4 & Table 3.5.2.1.4*). This is in line with the approach to theoretical sampling previously outlined, where the aim is to pursue exhaustion of the possible variations achievable in the data such that the resulting theory's explanatory capacity is also forced to capture this breadth (Draucker et al, 2007). It is further consistent with the constructivist account presented above in which the aim is to generate multiple interrelated perspectives such that examination of the process of construction becomes possible (c.f. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bevir, et al., 2003). The selection therefore took into account a broad view

of the local social context in which strategic development was taking place, as well as the known characteristics of the 'Founding Group'. Although two groups led by experienced educationalists would be selected, the composition of the rest of the governing boards was of significant difference, as well as the schools' broader contexts (see *Appendix 9.8.1 & 3*).

Developing the First Round of Interviews

The first interviews were important for sensitising the researcher to the kinds of issues and attitudes that governors would seek to represent – which would therefore be important in the development of theoretical sampling. Alongside the initial interviews of the Chairs would also come an interview with an additional governor from 'School 1', two additional governors from 'School 2' and three additional governors from 'School 3' (see *Tables 3.5.2.1.1 & 2*). This would ensure that sufficient data had been collected to support the development and refinement of emerging themes and categories. As discussed in *Section 3.4.1* this would also inform the development of second round interview questions (see *Appendix 9.7*). Data from both rounds of interview are represented in the following chapters. School 1 remained below the legal minimum of two parent governors during data collection (with the only one inaccessible to interview). Contrasted against this School 3 was composed of a majority of parent governors at the time of selection.

The breadth of additional roles incorporated included responsible officer (see *Glossary*), finance expert and staff governor (see *Tables 3.5.2.1.1 & 2 & Appendices 9.8.1, 2 & 3*). As discussed in *Section 3.4.1* this variety of roles was intended to facilitate comparisons between perspectives within a school with some consideration as to how, and whether, this related to the reported experience. This would also further facilitate a comparison between schools, by allowing the research to determine whether the formal roles would emerge in participant accounts as significant to defining experience. From the total population of governors at each school during the initial and subsequent selection process four out of eight (50%) were sampled from School 1, six out of eleven (54.5%) were sampled from School 2 and four out of nine (44.4%) were sampled from School 3. The distribution of roles and a near 50% sample from each school was seen as providing the most effective strategy within the feasibility of the

study and without being of detriment to the depth of insight sought. Mean interview time was 56 minutes 8 seconds, with deviation of approximately 15 minutes from this point. In the subsequent chapters, participants are referred to according to their abbreviations outlined in *Table 3.5.2.1.3*.

The interview themes also went through a rigorous piloting process at each stage. At this point piloting with two non-experts with no association to either the education sector or the particular academic area enabled an assessment of how the questions could be interpreted. This helped to ensure the questions were appropriately open-ended and the language was accessible to non-experts. The questions were then piloted with an experienced ex-governor of a maintained, but not Free, school. This process allowed for an analysis of the appropriateness of the questions to a school governance research context. Finally, the questions were piloted in a mock-formal interview with a current Free School Member. As the Member did not also fall into the 'Governor' selection this made for an ideal candidate to ensure the questions were revealing and appropriate to the Free School context, whilst further assessing the open-endedness and suitability.

3.5.2.1.1 – Table of Interviews Conducted

School	Stage 2 – First Round Interviews					Stage 3 – Second Round Interviews					Total
	Chair	Community Governor	Principal/CEO	Parent Governor	Other	Chair	Community Governor	Principal/CEO	Parent Governor	Other	
School 1	1	1				1	1	1		1	6
School 2	1	1			1		1	1	1	2	8
School 3	1		1	2		1		1	1		7
School 4	1										
School 5	1										
School 6	1										
Totals	3 (+3)	2	1	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	21 (+3)

3.5.2.1.2 – Table of Total Interviewee composition against population by role (at time of data collection)

	School 1	School 2	School 3
Principal/CEO	1/1	1/1	1/1
Chair	1/1	1/1	1/1
Community Governor	1/1	¼	0/0
Parent Governor	0/1	½	2/5
Staff Governor	0/1	½	0/0
Other governor	1/3	1/1	0/2
Total	4/8	6/11	4/9

Number of Interviewees/Total in population at the school

3.5.2.1.3 – Participant Abbreviations

Participant Abbreviation	School	Self-defined role at time of writing
School 1 CEO	1	Chief Executive Officer (Including responsibilities as principal)
School 1 RO	1	Responsible Officer
School 1 Chair	1	Chair of the Governing Board
School 1 Comm	1	Community Governor
School 2 Chair	2	Chair of the Governing Board
School 2 Comm	2	Community Governor
School 2 Parent	2	Parent Governor
School 2 Principal	2	Principal
School 2 Finance	2	Finance Governor
School 2 Teaching	2	Teaching Staff Governor
School 3 CEO	3	Chief Executive Officer (Including responsibilities as principal)
School 3 Chair	3	Chair of the Governing Board
School 3 Parent1	3	Parent Governor
School 3 Parent2	3	Parent Governor

3.5.2.1.4 – Comparative School Features

Identified feature	School 1	School 2	School 3
-Governance numbers (at time of research)	6 (including 3 Members)	13 governors (including 3 Members), additional 3 Members, 2 clerks	9 governors (including 4 of the founding Members)
-Lead proposer's subsequent role	Education director and full governor; and subsequently Executive Head	Chair of the Board of governors, and project director of a sister Free School trust	Principal, governor and Member; and subsequent arching head/CEO
- Explicit and tacit visions	Preparedness for life – grounding in Maths & English, and also citizenship. A key focus on Creative Arts, including compulsory learning of at least one instrument. A broad Christian ethos.	To raise the aspirations of the students, and their parents of them. To be of and for the community, and engaged in various community projects. Science and technology specialism.	Celebrating a love of learning. Inclusivity within a Christian environment. To bring education commonly associated with the independent sector to the state sector. To encourage residents attracted to the area by professional opportunity to remain there whilst raising families.
-School size at full capacity	600> primary places (including expansion onto a new site)	300-600 primary places (not including sister schools)	<300 primary places (not including places within additional planned primary and secondary provision)
-Religious affiliation	Broadly Christian ethos, but with no religious admissions.	No religious affiliations	Christian ethos and 50% religious admissions

3.5.2.2 Data Analysis – Analysis of the First Round of Interviews and Theoretical Sampling

Analysis of the First Round of Interviews

This first round of interviews was conducted over a six-week period between 25/03/13 – 30/04/13. All interviews were recorded. These were then transcribed by the researcher within 48 hours of the interview taken place, and then subjected to the same processes of open/initial coding as the survey. The researcher continued to reflect on the survey answers and maintained a continuous parallel examination of a range of secondary sources to determine how the codes might be understood in relation to a broader context (see *Appendix 9.4*). The processes of returning back to the data, and generating memos informed by both the primary data and nontechnical literature analysis would support the immersion required to support the emergence and refinement of fledgling themes and categories (Mills, et al., 2006; Corbin, 1998). Incorporating reflections and memos on the interviews made shortly after each one (illustrated in *Appendix 9.5*) allowed for critical examination of the researcher's own role in the constructed narratives, therefore also ensuring interpretations were purposeful without becoming predetermined.

The content of the coding process was initially anchored in the individual narratives on strategic development within the context of their school. This would initially allow for comparison and contrast between the participants' accounts, including their expressed attitudes, coded in recognition of both the shared and differing events, experiences and explanations being offered. This would then enable further in-depth comparative analysis of narratives between schools. This iterative multi-stage comparative analysis would represent a process of theoretical sampling, with a concern for maintaining comparability whilst also seeking to exploit the maximum diversity amongst interviews (Gephart, 2004).

In developing the process of theoretical sampling it can also be noted that the first round of interviews supported some of the initial themes that had emerged from the survey analysis. It also informed the development of additional themes of significance. Particular concepts that emerged from the first round

of interviews then went on to inform the development of additional interview questions (Charmaz, 2000). At this stage the codes were grouped under the headings of Engagement & Factors Affecting Engagement, Stakeholders, Governance, Process and Outcomes and Responses (See *Table 3.5.2.2.1*). In *Section 4.1* the introduction to findings develops an explanation of how the iterative analysis and integration of interview data from *Stage 3* (3.5.3) assisted in refining these descriptive themes based upon the emergence of a theoretical account with sufficient explanatory capacity.

3.5.2.2.1 –Table of Themes and Initial Codes Emerging within the Iterative Analysis of First Round Interviews and Surveys

Engagement & Factors Affecting Engagement	Involvement in Founding the Free School
	Employment History
	Personal Motivations
	Past Experiences
	Affiliations
	Frequency of Engagement
	Other Influences on Engagement
Stakeholders	Influential Individuals
	Interactions
	Leaders
Governance (hierarchies, networks, influence)	Arrangements
	Roles and functions
	Actions
Process	Responsibilities
	Perceived Causes and Effects
Outcomes and Responses	Outcome (positive)
	Outcome (neutral)
	Outcome (negative)
	Actions and Reactions to Perceived Causes

In *Chapters 4 & 5* it will be seen how the codes and themes that informed the emerging theoretical categories were restructured as a consequence of the process of ‘selective coding’ (Glaser, 1998). This was important to guiding the development of second round interview themes. Following the abductive process outlined in *Section 3.4* the development of tentative hypotheses grounded on the initial codes and themes would guide subsequent areas of questioning (Suddaby, 2006). For instance, where the fluidity of the experiences of strategic development initially emerged in the responses to the surveys this informed the development of an early theme related to ‘Process’ and the transitions in perceived causes

and effects. This informed second round interview themes that specifically sought to explore continuity and discontinuity (See *Appendix 9.7*). Another theme that was established or increasingly supported at this stage related to the interactions governors were reporting between themselves and a variety of stakeholders including Senior Leaders, community groups, central and local government. As such questions were informed by a need to understand *relationships* within broad networks of actors. In parallel issues of influence within the development process were seen to emerge. This informed questions about the nature and degree of involvement e.g. in decisions and around perceptions of hierarchy and the definition of roles (See *Appendix 9.7*). To this extent the themes highlighted above were developed and refined to allow for a clearer explanation of the commonalities and differences between schools. This is reflected in the Stage below, with the results of this process presented in the *Findings Chapter*.

3.5.3 Stage 3

3.5.3.1 Data Collection – Second Round Interviews and Additional Participant Selection

The questions generated for the second round of interviews can be seen in *Appendix 9.7*. These questions were informed by the emerging theory and analysis discussed above. Firstly, this would allow for clearer comparison between participants, especially where the sample had been expanded. Those participants recruited only at the second round stage addressed the areas of theoretical interest emerging closely from the analysis of the first round questions. This was assisted through appropriate introductions that allowed for an understanding of new participants' personal backgrounds (including to their involvement in the school). As discussed the grounded development of the second interview schedule was linked closely to the analysis above, meaning that the emerging interview themes served as iterative extensions to the areas of theoretical interest. For example, the interview theme on networks (Theme 5 in *Appendix 9.7*) could be seen to extend the enquiry into how participants saw themselves in relation to other stakeholders (Theme 5 in *Appendix 9.6*). This process of extension and focus would also support saturation

by adhering closely to the iterative approach to theoretical sampling around themes of emerging significance. At the beginning of second round interviews those participants already interviewed were asked questions specific to them. This would also support iterative depth within the exploratory process without undermining the comparability emerging from the remaining questions.

The second round of interviews was conducted between 19/08/13-29/10/13. Whilst it was hoped that all participants from the first round would carry on to second round interviews this was not always possible. The Chair of School 2 was no longer able to participate in the study due to an 'Act of God'. Likewise, the parent governor from School 3 was unavailable during the second stage of data collection due to professional pressures. The iterations between first and second round interviews described above would ensure that the contributions from these two participants maintained its relevance and value within the context of subsequent analysis. The recruitment of additional participants was done so on the basis described *Section 3.4.1*. The specific participants selected are highlighted in *Tables 3.5.2.1.1 & 2* and *Appendices 9.8.1, 2 & 3*.

3.5.3.2 Saturation of Theory and Data

Theoretical, or category, saturation occurs when new data ceases to yield new evidence that has not been incorporated into the theory being developed (Morse, 2004). The process outlined in the iterations of analysis above reflect how emerging theory was continuously reviewed against the accumulation of data (Suddaby, 2006). During the second round of interviews, with the process of transcribing and coding running in parallel, it became apparent that saturation was being reached. Gradual recognition of saturation emerged as a consequence of several factors. Firstly, having had multiple interviews and surveys the iterations of lines of questioning returned a significantly diminishing amount of information. For instance, rather than reflecting new insights regarding how governors experienced the fluidity of their roles the final interviews rather simply added to the illustration of this fluidity. This was compounded by

the repetition of specific codes and themes within each schools e.g. how participants stood in relation to one another in School 3 (see the CEO and Parent dynamic in *Section 4.4.3*). To this extent further interviews yielded little in return that was not already accounted for by the emerging conceptualization. Saturation was also acknowledged in terms of the diminishing returns from incorporating new participants. The final additional participant was the Parent Governor of School 2. Reflecting several other interviews, the participant's account resonated closely with the conclusions emerging regarding the social configurations in the school already discerned. Furthermore, the analysis of this interview, amongst others, supported conclusions arising from the analysis across schools. The analysis is discussed in detail in *Chapter 5* but reflected the conceptualization of tacit hierarchies within the schools informed by factors such as knowledge and perceived legitimacy. Based upon the diminishing returns from new interviews at this point it was concluded that saturation had been achieved.

3.5.3.3 Data Analysis – The Refining of Themes and Categories

Consistent with previous iterations the interviews were coded with a sensitivity to the previous stages of data collection. An understanding of the narratives being presented was therefore enriched by all of the sources of data evident in *Appendix 9.4*. In line with the discussion in *Section 3.5.2.2* the number of themes was refined and condensed, as the most significant groups of codes were reconciled. This process is illustrated in *Section 4.1*; and informs the structure of the *Findings Chapter* by grouping together the codes within schools according to the themes identified across schools. These themes therefore reveal the similarities and differences between experiences within and between schools. The result is a multi-level comparative analysis, adhering closely to the systematic approach required by the Grounded Theory methods outlined in *Section 3.4*. This underpins the development of the theoretical categories in *Chapter 5* that provide the basis for a theoretical account of the phenomena identified. Specifically, the following chapter (*Chapter 4*) will be seen to introduce and develop the themes of '*Purpose and Vision*'.

'Relationships', 'Organisation and Reorganisation' and 'Positionality' that emerged from the refinement of the codes and themes outlined in *Section 3.5.2.2.1*.

Participant sense making within the interview context has been argued to reflect the 'present' interaction and the history that both consciously and subconsciously shapes individual positionality. The constant comparative analysis has therefore been a powerful analytical tool in understanding how experiences in one school stand in relation to another, how governors experience themselves relative to others and how governors' constructed narratives offer experiences that stand relative to other experiences. The Findings in *Chapter 4* and extended in the Analysis in *Chapter 5* are therefore sensitive to both the continuities and changes in this positionality in relation to different iterations of discussion around particular symbolic content (c.f. Blumer, 1936). This is seen to reveal something about how the social processes participants have engaged in between time that have continued to shape both experience and identity.

3.6 Ethics and Responsible Research Practice

The research has maintained the highest ethical considerations and responsible research practices. In order to ensure the safety and comfort of both the researcher and participants all interviews were conducted either by telephone, Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP e.g. Skype) or in person. Where interviews were conducted in person these were conducted only in university spaces, within the schools in question or in public spaces. Permissions were confirmed as relevant. Recording of VOIP and face-to-face interviews was conducted using

3.6.1 Ethical Recruitment

Appendices 9.9 & 9.10 provide details of the information provided to interview participants and the informed consent gained, in line with the ethical consent gained under protocol **BS/R/037 11**. Where interviews were conducted by telephone participants were provided an electronic copy 24 hours in

advance of the interview and provided express consent before the interview proceeded. In the case of face-to-face interviews participants were provided with a copy to retain and signed another, retained by the researcher. Participants were recruited only through publicly available contact details. Additional participants were initially contacted by those existing participants and provided contact details for the researcher. This ensured that participants were willing to engage in the research without feeling under undue pressure from the researcher.

3.6.2 Ethical Consent

The survey participants were sent the Participant Information Sheet and details of the consent that they were giving by opting to return the completed documents. It was clear to all participants at all times that participation was entirely voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and without suffering any disadvantage as a consequence. Participants also explicitly consented to participate in an interview lasting in the region of 1 hour. Their consent did not commit them to further involvement in the study, although it was clarified that further contact may be necessary. This would come to include the subsequent round of interviews, at which point their informed consent was reiterated. Participants were aware and understood that their contribution would be examined as representative of their specific experience within the broader context of other experiences within their school and others. However, participants also confirmed their understanding that their own identity, and that of their school, would be kept anonymous in all presentations of the data. Participants were given the right for specific comments to be kept confidential so as to ensure the protection of sensitive and accidental disclosures. This right was exercised on two occasions. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded for the purposes of supporting the accuracy of the research and removing other distractions from the interview process itself. Consent was required from all participants in advance of any data collection process.

3.6.3 Ethical Compliance

All data generated by the research has been stored using the University of Hertfordshire approved research drive. All other copies or transmissions have been kept only in fully encrypted formats. All names and locations that might risk participant anonymity in the analysis and presentation of the data have been substituted or removed. Where justified, other details that might lead to identifying potential participants have also been generalised to a level that would mitigate the risk. This includes focussing on the empirical data from interview in *Chapters 4 & 5*. This avoids revealing the secondary data that informed sampling and theoretical sensitivity that might otherwise have threatened anonymity. Details concerning the participants' identities have been restricted only to the researcher and supervision team.

3.7 Limitations

In selecting a research methodology it is recognised that all options present limitations. These limitations are conceived of as offering further definition to the parameters of the study, rather than negating the justifications given for the approach chosen. It must be noted that all of the schools selected were primary schools. However, as previously discussed in *Section 3.4.1*, this selection would also support the comparability required for the abductive processes described. To test emerging hypotheses from one school required a degree of understanding and comparability over the contexts in which those hypotheses had emerged. Without increasing the breadth of the analysis, at the cost of depth, any explanation of potential differences between primary and secondary schools would risk the rigour required to achieve theoretical saturation. Approximately 38% of Free Schools are primary (at the time of writing) (NSN, 2014). This is compared with 42% secondary, 14% all-through and 5% 16-19 only (*ibid.*).

The discussion in *Section 3.5* also sought to provide justification for the interview process used. In doing so the research has been defined as examining experience as the process of self-construction, sense-

making and un/intended projections characteristic of the social. It is therefore right to conceive of the study as providing a theoretical foundation for understanding sociological facets of developing a Free School, rather than an abstraction from policy processes defined as something other. Consistent with this view the research has rejected other methods of data collection. Whilst ethnographic research would provide a richer 'first-hand' experience of the development process the shift in emphasis here was seen to shift along the constructivist spectrum away from an interpretation of the experiences narrated by others towards an interpretation of the experience of the researcher of the experiences of others. This would still not mitigate objections to methodological challenges associated with 'other minds', and would potentially restrict the grounded theory approach espoused above in which meaning is generated from the comparisons between multiple constructed narratives. The consequence here was seen in increasing the emphasis on the researcher's own discourse, which was judged as being less consistent with the stated research aim and objectives. The position of the current research was therefore one of awareness of the limitations of each approach under which the decision made was an informed one. Future ethnographic research in this area would be of significant complementary benefit to the development of research within this domain. It may also be possible in the future to explore the generalizability of specific phenomena identified in the current research through the use of quantitative approaches.

3.8 Summary

What has been presented in this chapter represents a moderate constructivist position (consistent with social constructionism) and a grounded theory approach to data collection and comparative thematic analysis. This comparative analysis has been seen to pursue multiple iterations, both in line with the data collection process and in distinguishing the levels at which participants exist within networks of actors within shared social contexts. The adoption of this approach has been shown to be both consistent and

well-founded within academic research. The constant comparative methods seen in grounded theory are well suited to generating rich and novel findings and for determining the rigour of theory that results. The moderate constructivist position outlined is equally capable of supporting an understanding of the multiple perspectives represented in the data without seeking to limit their complexity. *Chapter 4* presents the themes and analysis that arose having reached saturation following the pattern of theoretical sampling discussed in the methods above (as in *Sections 3.4 & 3.5*).

4.0 Findings

4.1 Introduction

Following the grounded approach laid out in *Chapter 3*, this chapter presents the empirical findings generated through the interviews. As discussed in *Section 3.5.3.3* the codes and themes were refined and focused because of the continued data collection and analysis between Schools to the point of saturation. Initially 19 codes were produced across the three schools (See *Table 3.5.2.2.1*). Early in the analysis these were organised under five themes under which the codes were subsumed: Engagement & Factors Affecting Engagements, Stakeholders, Governance, Process, Outcomes and Responses. At this early stage, these themes remained descriptive rather than enabling explanation and, as discussed in *Chapter 3*, the coding process occurred simultaneously to the first, and then the second, round of interviews. The remainder of the introduction summarises the analytical process and provides the reasoning that led to the refinement of the themes developed and illustrated in this *Findings Chapter*.

The refinement in themes between the end of the second and beginning of the third phase of analysis corresponded with the ongoing theoretical sampling that supported theorisation. For example, the original theme 'Governance' lacked explanatory power (i.e. why governance was being observed as 'emergent') and was dropped as a unifying concept. Codes that had sat under that theme could then be split and relabelled to enable a clearer comparison across schools and a richer understanding of the data that had been coded. The fluid and transitioning nature of 'governance' (emerging from early within the analysis as reflected in *Section 3.5.3.1*) was brought together under the theme of 'Organisation and Reorganisation'. The refined theme would therefore also more effectively account for some of the other coding previously under 'Factors affecting engagement'. This theme therefore allows for a clearer

representation of how processes of reorganization have been affected by different values and interests that have shaped how participants see their involvement (see, for instance, *Section 4.4.4*). This led to a reduction of unifying codes (to 16) and themes (to 4). However, no data was dropped in the refinement process, whilst their conceptual reorganisation enabled a more robust understanding of the key themes being discussed across participants in this chapter. The four core themes that remained are ‘purpose and vision’, ‘relationships’, ‘organisation and reorganisation’ and ‘positionality’.

Other codes initially incorporated under ‘factors affecting engagement’ were divided between ‘purpose and vision’ and ‘relationships’. This separation reflects the observation emerging early in the analysis that participants referred back to both specific people and specific objectives in making sense of their involvement and judgements about the strategic development process (see *Section 3.5.3.1*). The new theme ‘Relationships’ was also able to encompass some of the findings initially coded under ‘stakeholders’ and ‘governance’. This reflected participant narratives concerning the mediation of multiple interactions across relationships defined by differing purposes e.g. to hold to account, or to support. Finally, positionality emerged in parallel as an effective lens through which to understand how participants saw themselves in relation to others with differing values or interests. As a consequence of the refinement of themes the data initially coded under the theme ‘outcomes and responses’ was subsumed under the new themes. This occurred as a consequence of the explanatory capacity of the refined themes and analysis to account for the experiences of these events in strategic development.

The themes presented in this chapter are structured according to the codes developed within each school, organized according to the themes that emerged from comparison across the schools as discussed above. To support the interpretation of participant narratives each school is premised by a brief introduction to the research participants within the context of their joining their respective school. The conclusion to the chapter introduces the result of the continued comparative analysis of the themes across schools. In doing

so it reveals how the variations amongst the codes underpinned the development of theoretical categories, which are then developed in *Chapter 5*.

4.2 School 1

4.2.1 Participants in Context

CEO – Supported by their partner, the School’s financial manager, the CEO was the lead proposer of the Free School project. Alongside their partner the CEO continues to operate other companies focused on educational training and solutions. Having owned and sold a string of private Schools and nurseries the CEO wanted to maintain a hands-on approach, yet also hire a separate School head. Finding a balance between being able to stay ‘hands-on’ and also take a strategic view was important, given the experience of overseeing a large chain of Schools.

“I’ve always said when we sold the School and nursery group that it had outgrown us, it was too big for us to run... but the intention was always to get back in it...” (School 1 CEO)

Responsible Officer – The Responsible Officer was amongst the first to be invited to join the team and was therefore amongst the small initial group who would become Members (trustees); as well as being active in founding and governing. With a substantive and respected career in areas of education, although outside of School management and teaching, they had developed their relationship with the founder through the provision of consultancy services. Other participants would observe how the Responsible Officer would draw upon their own unhappiness in education in the conduct of their role. However, they characterised their own motivation in terms of two good reasons and one less good; where the less good motivation was reported merely in terms of curiosity. One of the other reasons was a dissatisfaction with the condition of state education.

“The more principled reason was that I have huge admiration for [the founder] and [their partner]. I’d come hugely to respect what they were doing, so when [the founder] said I’ve got this new idea, I want to do a Free School, will you help me with it, it was a no brainer, if [the founder] was doing it I wanted to be there...” (School 1 RO)

School 1 Chair – The Chair, a retired GP, was invited to join the founding team by the CEO because of a long-standing personal connection. Alongside their professional capabilities a passion for reading would lead to their involvement as librarian four days a week. The chair was also amongst the founding few to become a Member of the School. They were also one of the few in the founding group to live within close proximity to the School.

“When she realised I was retired thought I might be a good candidate to join the governing body as I would have time to donate to it and she approached me and asked me if I would like to take part...My role was mainly supportive and advisory to begin with.” (School 1 Chair)

School 1 Community Governor – Although not one of the original founders the community governor provided some peripheral support and encouragement from early on in the Schools conception. Being semi-retired from an extensive career in education, including continued work for one of the CEO’s other companies, would mean they were positioned to lead the children and learning subcommittee.

“I taught [the CEO], so that says it all really...We’ve been friends ever since. And [they were] the head to my son... [The CEO] wanted me to come on board as a member of staff... I really got involved once it had opened, and, and not reticently, but guardedly I suppose, you know, I just didn’t want to drown.” (School 1 Comm)

4.2.2 Purpose and Vision

Origins of the vision

As reflected above, three of the participants report their initial involvement as a consequence of their 'recruitment' to the School by the School's central proposer: the CEO. When reflecting on the emergence of the School's vision in the earliest stages of development the centrality of the CEO to its origins was clearly echoed in the ways in which these governors, and the CEO themselves, spoke about it. On the one hand, the CEO spoke directly to the heart of the ethos that was being sought in the School.

"I think it's about expectations...we expect good manners, we expect them to work hard, we expect them to be well behaved, we expect them to achieve, we expect them to just love life, and go for things... and because of that, we've got our ethos and our vision statement." (School 1 CEO)

However, in reflecting on what they felt to be important to the formation and representation of a central strategic purpose other participants referenced the CEO's driving role.

"We used the idea that [the CEO] had and had constructed... I had a very clear idea of what it was [the CEO] was trying to achieve, so it's pretty much in line with my expectations" (School 1 Chair)

"You would have to write down [the CEO] and then scratch your head and say what else is important to this School; [their] vision, [their] presence, [their] energy, [their] enthusiasm and [their] ideas are the most important single factor." (School 1 Responsible Officer)

Yet, contrasted against these similar narratives the Community Governor sought to adopt a more critical position. Drawing from their own experience of school development and provision they sought to question the extent to which the School's offering was distinctive or founder-centric.

“They will be gleaned from somewhere; they didn’t come out the top of [the CEO’s] head. They came through looking at what other people have done and research and stuff. [The CEO’s] not that creative, [they] haven’t dreamed them up for [themselves]” (School 1 Comm)

The distinctiveness of the strategic vision for the School was subsequently represented in different participant perspectives that both celebrated, and critically assessed, its diverse manifestations.

“We can create the kind of School which is reflected in visible things like School uniforms and School ties.... You won’t find things like that in every School.” (School 1 Responsible Officer)

“How many other children line up at the end of break through someone donging a bell that’s on the wall? It’s a nice touch, but they’re not the fundamentals of the School. The fundamentals are behaviour management and various other things that are standard features really; just dressed in a different way.” (School 1 Comm)

Individual and Group Vision

Emerging from the different experiences and relationships amongst the participants was a diversity in the perspectives about vision and purpose. These perspectives drew on often-complementary judgements regarding the roles of altruism and social transformation, and on personal values and philosophies. Yet these different principles and perspectives on education could therefore also be seen to manifest in tensions around education within the school.

“So the more I thought about education the more I thought about the fact I was working in a sector that is massively underperforming from what it should be doing...If somebody’s got a new idea it can hardly be worse than what we’ve got already.” (School 1 Responsible Officer)

“I have had a slight ‘discussion’ with [the Responsible Officer]. I believe that children have talents, they have natural leanings towards things; [they] believes that with enough input anybody can be good at anything, so we have a fundamental ethical difference there.” (School 1 Comm)

However, perspectives across the interviews reveal that neither individual attitudes, nor their interplay with the development of the School’s strategic vision, are static in nature. Participants had become involved in the School as a consequence of established relations and historical convergences in attitudes through which sufficient consistency had emerged to ensure a loose strategic trajectory. Despite areas of conflicting opinion, the enduring social interplay through the founding process had led to the development of further areas of consensus. Individual perspectives were experienced as being brought into and adopted by the group, and through this process they became translated into mutually agreed, yet simultaneously ambiguous, value propositions.

“Well [the Responsible Officer] is the prime mover behind our board above the door, our promise that every child should be happy at School, because [they were] not, and I think that [they’re] trying to put it right for the next generation, which is good.” (School 1 Chair)

“The promise originally formulated by me was that we promised that if you come to this School you will learn the things you need for a happy and successful life; and that you will have a happy time at the School. The School of course took the formulation away and kicked it to pieces and rewrote it over time... and it went up in the form it is now.” (School 1 Responsible Officer)

Converging experiences around the notion of happiness can therefore be understood in terms of a shared perspective on the trajectory of the School. Yet even within the context of this agreement individuals could be seen to retain differing views on how this might translate into what the School would do or achieve for its students. As seen below, these differences could be seen to echo the endurance of motivations and attitudes that had shaped governor perspectives extending beyond their participation in

the School. Ambiguity is maintained in governors' emphases on aspects of educational importance; simultaneously demonstrating the potential for inconsistency, conflict or disaggregation of the group along the fault lines that distinguish attitudes.

"Reading is crucial because without being able to read it's difficult to access all the other aspects of education. So it's the one thing they really need to be able to do well...I've always loved books, I read a lot, I own a lot of books ...I love books" (School 1 Chair)

"When you come through here we want you to be happy...they still might only be a level four in reading, they might only be a level three..." (School 1 Comm)

"Those qualities of self-belief and determination.... if you don't put the pre-requisites in place then you're just wasting your time; banging on about learning to read or write or whatever else you want the poor children to do." (School 1 RO)

"Numeracy and literacy are really important, so without being able to read, and write, then the rest of the curriculum is closed to a child." (School 1 CEO)

The codes emerging in relation to the 'Purpose and Vision' theme in School 1 reveal a loosely defined, yet tightly held, set of shared values and principles. The quotes above demonstrate how individuals bring in their own subjective values into the narratives about the school. This led to convergence in the narratives around particular concepts e.g. 'happiness' and ideas e.g. 'traditional dress'. However, the continuation and co-existence of disagreement, ambiguity or directly expressed conflict reveals a degree of dynamism regarding the potential strategic trajectory. Even more so the beginning of this section captures the significant role that the recruitment from existing colleagues and friends has on 'bundling' particular individuals and their specific dispositions into this particular school's strategic development. Strategic

development therefore requires appeal to both some initial conditions and the emerging processes of potential conflict and negotiation.

4.2.3 Relationships

Familiarity

Discussed in the section above were, amongst other factors, the pre-existing relationships that shaped involvement in the School. When considered in relation to the formation of the strategic vision this aspect of the development process depended heavily on the ways in which ideas and foci were generated, adopted and disseminated. Involvement in the strategic development process has been seen to, at least in part, depend upon the established social networks through which the founder recruited support. These previous relationships could be seen in participant narratives reflected in how decision making was enacted. For example, as a factor of influence in the initial recruitment of the headteacher:

“Nepotism rules really. [The ex-head] was the head to my son, many years ago. So in actual fact, because of that I had reservations; and in actual fact at the interview my reservations were allayed, but, but that’s where that came about.” (School 1 Comm)

That such relationships are reflected as influential in the founding process in governor narratives could be seen to portend a challenge also observed by governors over time. Continued conduct in the School was narrated in terms of their enduring individual relationships and the manner in which the origins of their involvement through these relationships continued to define their connection to school activities. This was significant to understanding how governors experienced their own individual role, and in redefining or repositioning themselves in relation to others.

“I think the other governors are not so heavily involved as I am in the School on a day to day basis, and obviously will have a different perspective...I do have too much of an internal point of view

here, and that's another reason for my wanting to back out a little bit, to get a sense of perspective, I think it's too easy to get swamped in what's going on day to day." (School 1 Chair)

"Yeah, I've managed to maintain the distance fortunately. I do think that there is an element of being a governor where you have to look in from the outside, and I have tried more to do that, and I have tried to be diplomatic in my differences. As much as though, you know, [the CEO] and I are very close, I don't always see things the way that [they do]." (School 1 Comm)

"I haven't been close enough, hands on enough, to see [the translation of vision into practice] happening. So I tend to have these inspirational conversations with [the CEO] and we get very excited and say yes that's it, and then [the CEO] and [the Head], when she was our head teacher, go away and develop it..." (School 1 Responsible Officer)

The data reflects different projections about what participants feel their roles 'ought' to be or become. At one end the Chair acknowledged their seemingly excessive involvement in daily life at the school and a desire to back away. At the other end the Responsible Officer finds themselves in a position too distanced from the development process to assist in translating a vague strategic narrative into anything practicable. To this extent the participants have been seen to focus on their affections and conations as emerging *in relation to* the social context of the school. This has implications for understanding roles, such as 'Responsible Officer'. Whilst these might determine specific functions played they only represent one aspect of how the participants see themselves in relation to others and how they see their contribution to or involvement in the strategic development process. Founding and governing activities are closely entwined with the specific relationships governors see themselves a part of.

Inclusion and Exclusion

The relationships in the School have emerged with the CEO central to their narration. The consequence can be seen in the exclusion of ideas that do not adhere to or complement the CEO's own founding vision. Whilst particular characteristics of the School have been experienced as emerging unpredictably from individual perspectives this remains consistent with a strategic process to appear self-reinforcing from a central perspective. Those whose contributions are experienced as conforming to the central vision or philosophy can be accepted, and those who do not face rejection.

“It’s a little bit like, perhaps I started a painting of a Summer English garden. If someone came in and stuck an Indian elephant in the picture it wouldn’t fit, but if someone came in and put a deck chair or a sun umbrella in, you’d say thank you for the contribution, it fits in with the scene.”

(School 1 CEO)

The CEO, as founder of the vision, is defender of the vision. Their narrated role entails maintaining and exercising power over potential threats to their initial purposes. This can be seen to manifest in the ways in which governors experience their own roles in the strategic development process. Their perceived inclusion on the basis of perspectives conforming to an established vision can be seen to have consequences for how governors experience their own roles. It becomes manifest in governor narratives in terms of the translation of trust in a central idea into deference to or empowerment of those key individuals.

“I suppose the three of us had a watching brief more than anything else. We contributed ideas here and there but not a lot to be honest.” (School 1 Chair)

“Although I’m used to being a leader in my outfit that isn’t my role in this School, my role in this School is to support [the CEO], to listen to what [they] say.” (School 1 RO)

Yet within the same narratives counter-positions emerge suggesting that this trust and faith is not absolute, or should not have been absolute. Despite the shared authority of governors and trustees over key strategic founding decisions the inclination to support the CEO, previously described, would lead to perceived failures to act in ways that retrospectively they suggest they knew were right. In the process of making sense of the development experience governors reflect on the feeling of having permitted the CEO to act, even against guidance, where had they asserted themselves the perception was that a better strategic outcome may have emerged.

“The head teacher, I think I would hold my hand out and say the three foundation governors made a mistake, we should have refused to appoint.... This is a good example I suppose of the governors trusting [the CEO] and then two years later saying actually [CEO] you were wrong and we shouldn't have trusted you evidently.” (School 1 RO)

“We had an instance where I said ‘I wouldn't employ that person’, and then about half a term later I said ‘well, maybe I was wrong’....and after a term and a half I said ‘no, I wasn't wrong’.”
(School 1 Comm)

The emergence of relationships as a theme pertinent to School 1 reflected an important theoretical development for accounting for multiple phenomena. Participants' experiences of their own conduct was shaped by their relationships with others, most notably the central figure of the CEO. Extending this the quotes above reflect the way that these relationships informed the role of trust, support and enablement regarding strategic decisions. This in turn was significant to experiences of the strategic development in the sense that inclusion in strategic decisions was self-reinforcing.

4.2.4 Organisation and Reorganisation

Consistent with the tensions revealed above, and the perceived challenges within strategic development, governor narratives reflected perceptions of a continued process of reorganisation. Although it may be possible to examine reorganisation in terms of structural configurations reflecting the development and expansion of the School, the reported experiences capture the sentiments, lessons and processes of sense-making that underpinned this. Structural reconfiguration may therefore be contrasted against, or understood in parallel to, the far more dynamic social processes that governor narratives sought to present.

“We had a big meeting about the whole thing and decided to restructure from what we had originally planned. It just so happened that we found somebody who was in a position where [they] only had to give a month’s notice, and then appointed [them] as head of lower School. Somebody again that was known to us from the distant past, and with whom we were in contact. It’s not the way that we would normally expect to do things, but needs must because time was so short.” (School 1 Chair)

Making sense of organisation

When making sense of the turbulence of the development process reported, governor narratives continue to reflect inconsistencies. Attitudinal propositions in relation to the departure of the head range from surprise to expectation, from unfortunate departure to necessary removal. In seeking to understand these differences the narratives can also be seen to reflect other differences. What emerge are differences in the conative language used to represent ‘motivating forces’ embedded in these perspectives, and differences in the emphasis placed on the social relations that inform the affective responses.

“Although there had been pointers along the way in retrospect, at the time it came as a bit of a shock, and, obviously I developed quite a close relationship with [the ex-head], working together since the School had opened, since before the School had opened. I had the feeling, you know, how on earth are we going to find anybody who is going to be as good as [the ex-head]?” (School 1 Chair)

“The one we did appoint, [the ex-head] of course, turned out not to be able to take the responsibility of the job. By the second year we were actually running a School with a head who was a passenger...I was probably the first to say [the ex-head] will have to go. The question was how are we going to manage it, and we need to make it happen as soon as possible.” (School 1 RO)

In dealing with the resulting crisis the result could be seen as a shift in attitudes or expectations regarding the CEO. Whilst governors had previously permitted the CEO’s decisions regarding School leadership the shift was one towards increased governor resolve to assert the solution. By restricting the CEO’s discretion and working against their original inclinations towards their role in the School the governors compelled the CEO to assume an increasingly proactive role in the School’s operations.

“We then had to say are we going to appoint another [ex-head], or are we going to acknowledge the truth: that the head teacher of this School is called [the CEO] and always has been. We did that. That took a bit of effort because [the CEO] wasn’t absolutely sure that was the right answer but [they] accepted that that’s what the foundation governors wanted.” (School 1 RO)

The analysis here captures how experiences of the process draw upon a broader set of contextual factors, social interactions and individual subjectivities that define participants’ sense-making of the school’s particular path of development. A number of social factors can therefore be seen to limit participants’ perceptions of the available strategic choices. Participant experiences of the development process are

characterized by their relative positions to others; and it is the biased and reactive nature of these perceptions that underpins the narratives about organisation.

“I don’t think [the ex-head has] been particularly honest. I think that [their] relationship with [the CEO] was difficult, which is ironic bearing in mind that they’ve worked together many years before. I think we reverted somewhat back to where we were. [The CEO] is working as arching head now, which seemed to be the way...It’s just a change of balance as much as anything else.”

(School 1 Comm)

Multiple Roles

The turbulence experienced in the School’s development and organisation has equally impacted on defining the nature of individual contributions to the School. Drawing upon their knowledge, experience and interests it has already been seen how the Chair’s role has been shaped by their involvement in the library. Yet the multiplicity of the contributions made by individuals extends to other participants in the same ways. The result is an experience of the development process that serves to blur the boundary between strategy and operation, between peer engagement and governance hierarchy.

“It’s not all governor stuff...because I’m around so much I hoped that people would be able to approach me. Obviously I’m seen as management so I’m probably not going to be included in some of their confidences but I hope that they would be able to come to me if there were problems and we could sort things out.” (School 1 Chair)

In the case of the community governor this phenomenon also appears in stark contrast to their expressed view (above) that they had done more to retain the distance they felt necessary.

“At one stage I stood in for the special needs teacher for half a term because they left, and that’s my expertise, and I found myself becoming too closely tied in with School politics that I need to

walk away from...With my other hat on I have students here who are my students for the diploma.

I'm not then coming in as a governor but of course you still see what's going on." (School 1 Comm)

"I'm supposed to be doing Joseph with year three in October.... heaven.... help.... me. That was a drunken meal where [the CEO] said I can't do it for all of them now we're getting bigger so will you do one, and again that's not as a governor that's just having hands on." (School 1 Comm)

The same participant was also responsible for leading a school play, where it was acknowledged again that this was not as a governor, but rather 'having hands on'. Role is therefore, to some extent, self-defined according to individual understandings of their own skills and interests, and their relationships with others. Perceptions about what is good for the school reflect extensions to how governors perceive their own skills and experiences. The extent to which the community governor's expressed interests are satisfied in the development process impacts upon their attitude towards their own role.

"So from my point of view I find it far more unfulfilling than it was before. Before I had hands on contact and I was giving advice... I'm a doing person. I'm not a committee person at the best of times...and I'm getting very tired of sitting around a table of people justifying their existence and doing nothing." (School 1 Comm)

As introduced above the development of this theme from the codes generated within School 1 reflect a process of organisation in which participants find themselves adopting roles as a consequence of their perceived positions relative to others. The group's emerging identity is at least in part shaped by the constant balance participants narrate through their critique of or contrast with the attitudes of others against themselves. Put together the quoted perspectives strike a simultaneous harmony and discord, reflecting governors' experiences of self-organisation.

“There are rules to this game, and we’d do well to play by the rules if you see what I mean. So, slightly to my own surprise I find myself with the formality whilst believing passionately in informality. But for the sake of the School you’ve gotta [sic] do the formal things right.” (School 1 RO)

4.2.5 Positionality

The experiences of the strategic development process presented demonstrate the complexity of the positions governors see themselves standing in in relation to the School and to others. The result has been seen in closer alignment between some individuals on some issues than on others. Different social groupings have subsequently emerged within the broader set of participants and governors defined by shared and converging attitudes and motivations for the school’s strategic development. The longevity of involvement emerged repeatedly in governor narratives as a justification for the level and nature of their input. However, in understanding why longevity matters governor narratives can also be seen to reflect the importance of trust that emerges within personal relationships and the role of self-preservation.

“At the moment, there’s an element of them and us, for those who’ve been there long term and for those who are coming in from what was [the closed independent School]. There’s a lot of these little power things going on, and it will level out, people will find their role, some will come out on top and some won’t. If we employ somebody we don’t know then actually they might be better than me. And I leave that as an anonymous comment about that.” (School 1 Comm)

The ‘us’ and ‘them’ mentality is also notable in terms of the distinction between the founding governors and those who joined later.

“The three of us still feel that we have a special spot. I think there’s a sense in which the three of us hold the School in trust, even more so than the later governors who came on board. I’m not

sure that that's particularly built into the constitution, or more built into the way we feel about it" (School 1 RO)

"Well, rightly or wrongly, I think we see ourselves as sort of the leading group, the three of us, and the others do a lot less than we do..." (School 1 Chair)

The formation of these relational identities can in turn be seen to impact on how individuals communicate and engage in their roles. The consequence can be seen in differing levels of perceived efficacy amongst governors regarding their impact on the School. This included further differences in how other participants identified with each other.

"We have contributed quite a lot, we do, we think we have a special role, as I've told you we meet from time to time, we meet with [the CEO] ...What about the other governors? Less important. I may be being unfair to them but I haven't see a lot of evidence of big input from the rest of the governing body." (School 1 RO)

The convergence of perspectives within the School has been seen to inform the development of different levels of shared identity. Positionality emerged as an important interrelated theme as a consequence, in this school, of how participants narrated their roles, influence and conduct in relation to others. The narratives accounted for experiences in which the relative positions were highly contingent on complex and highly fluid contextual social relations. These experiences did not only therefore seek to characterize the past, but also make judgements about intentions in the present and future.

"I'm involved as much as I want to be; and it's going to go down, not up. The only governors who turn up for things and do anything candidly are [the Chair] and myself." (School 1 Comm)

4.2.6 Summary

The themes emerging from participant accounts across the School show a diversity of perspectives.

Experiences in the school appear on the surface to maintain inconsistencies and disorder. Yet the development process has simultaneously been seen to build upon converging and ordered relations and motivations. In understanding how the participants came together in the project the data revealed diverse individual motivations that referred to varied past experiences and observations. These included professional skill sets, reputation, desire for a new project, understandings of the local community, childhood experiences and judgements about the broad education sector. To understand how the vision and purpose of the School emerged governors reflected on the adoption of some of these dispositions by the group. Even so, it could be seen how these attitudes became shaped and reshaped by the relative subjectivities of the participants. The consequence was a broad yet ambiguous consensus concerning the strategic focus of the School. Yet it was also seen that participants' explanations for their involvement were also heavily couched in terms of their existing relationships with others involved in the project. Recruitment by the CEO from existing connections was based on a pre-existing degree of consensus on educational matters and professional respect; which simultaneously reinforced the School's progress along its strategic trajectory.

A central set of values and visions (developing the fundamentals within a broadly Christian context) emerged in the School in terms of a broad identity shared across the participants. The familiarity amongst participants was seen to cultivate a high degree of trust and faith in the CEO which would culminate in deference to them over significant strategic decisions. In the case of recruitment this was seen to result in significant challenges for the governors. Also outside of the formal hierarchies in the School it was seen how participants identified with one another, and others, on the basis of factors including the length of their relationships and their roles in the origins of the School. The emergence of 'cliques', formed on the basis of these narrated relationships, had a direct impact on how individuals saw their roles in the School. At the same time conflict and disagreement were seen as central comparisons between different

elements of governors' narratives. Participants reflected on the challenges of maintaining relationships established 'within' the Schools and their commitments to a formal governance role. Likewise, in observation of others each participant regarded their own contribution to be greater than that of others. Furthermore, in making sense of key strategic challenges conflicting judgements were seen to arise in part as a consequence of the differing relations that shape individual experience.

The experiences reported reveal a significant dependence on informal and tacit relational elements in understanding how power was distributed amongst the governors. In seeking to understand influence in the strategic development process it was necessary to appeal to the formation of different cliques, and the centrality of key individuals, to understand which, how and when individuals were included in different decisions and actions. In understanding the shifting relationships that emerged in the governor narratives it was revealed that the staffing crisis discussed reflected a moment at which governors shifted the figurations of power. With the CEO having enjoyed the trust and permission of governors to have the final say over the recruitment of the head, upon finding this to have been a mistake governors report a shift in perspective towards one of increasing criticality. This ultimately resulted in the adoption of a role that the CEO had initially rejected. The consequence is an understanding of power that is not purely embedded in the formal hierarchy, but in processes of self-organisation founded on relationships extending beyond the formal School hierarchies and in the exclusivity of informal groups of decision makers.

4.3 School 2

4.3.1 Participants in Context

Chair – Prior to formally proposing the School the Chair had not long since retired from a career built within the maintained education sector. With past experience as a teacher, head teacher and education advisor they had progressed to a managerial position overseeing education services within the Local Authority. Facing a new policy environment, the Chair saw an opportunity to progress local partnership and community development in a new way. The chair would go on to lead the development of a separate company to found other Schools on behalf of the LA.

“I’ve always worked for local authorities; I’m a local authority person. I believe in the structures and systems and the equality they provide...but I’m also a pragmatist. So here we were in a new world, with a new way of developing Schools and either you fight it or you embrace it” (School 2 Chair)

Community Governor – Working for a local university the community governor had become aware of the project through a colleague already acting in the university’s community interests as a school founder/Member. With volunteer work for the local police services having come to an end the project was seen to offer a new community outlet. On the surface this would help the School to tick the box for community representation; but their involvement would come to involve a much greater paid role in the development of further provision in the Chair’s commissioned-school company.

“They hadn’t got any local parents in the group that were putting the School together, and they needed some. Whilst my son was never going to go to the School because it was never going to be for the right age, they needed local people...So I got more involved than I would have anticipated; that was worth it because I’m now being paid to do the same job.” (School 2 Comm)

Parent Governor – Having initially joined the School as a community governor they officially shifted role to parent governor after their child was old enough to enrol. This would be seen to help the School, having struggled to recruit local parents. As a parent to a young child the Parent Governor had become concerned by the lack of local provision, and this would drive their initial involvement. With private sector finance and management experience, they had also sought to bring a professionalism to the role.

“I had a friend at the time who was working on the Schools for the Future project. She really made me aware of the fact that we had a shortage. At the time my daughter was 2 – 2 1/2 and primary schools were not quite yet on my radar for her. On the back of that the steering group had started to be created and I was asked to become a part of that.” (School 2 Parent)

Principal – Having worked as a headteacher for many years the Free School project was seen as an opportunity to develop the latter stages of their own career. As the post had been advertised some way into the founding process the principal had judged the narrative projected about the School project to be consistent with their own perspectives. The School still offered an opportunity to shape provision according to the principal’s ideas.

“I’d been running a very successful primary academy for eighteen years and was looking in this latter part of my career for something different. I wanted a blank sheet of paper, on which to build in some of the ideas that I had alongside those which the proposers attracted me to the post with; which turned out to be exactly as I thought.” (School 2 Principal)

Finance Governor – Although not a formal role, this governor’s initial involvement would revolve heavily around their finance and resource capabilities emerging from a career in dealing with finance for another council. They maintained roles as a governor and trustee both in this School and in the other company, which, alongside some colleagues would ultimately culminate in distinct work in ‘sister-trusts’. A

pragmatic view to the project meant the benefits could be seen both in planning local provision and in impacting the community.

“I was contacted by someone who was involved. They’d just got to the stage of being interviewed by the DfE, and at that point, one of the gaps, potential gaps in the expertise of the group to take the thing forward to opening was finance. So they asked me if I’d be interested in joining in and so I came along...I had worked with the person fairly recently.” (School 2 Finance)

Teaching Staff Governor – The teaching staff governor started as an NQT at another local School four years before. After only a couple of years there this new School represented an opportunity to be involved in something exciting that emerged at an opportune moment in their own career pursuit. Having started as the only experienced teacher aside the head, there were also clear opportunities available. The School presented good prospects, but in a setting in which the staff governor could otherwise see no real difference. The intentions they had for governing would also complement the objectives they felt they had for teaching.

“I was looking for a new job anyway actually, and saw this on the teaching [council] website...and it just sounded really interesting. If you’re going to go for a new job anyway well you’d be involved from the very beginning. The Free School bit didn’t really bother me in the slightest. I’m on the outcomes committee because I wanted to be involved, I’m involved in the outcomes of the children anyway.” (School 2 Teaching)

4.3.2 Purpose and Vision

Local Authority commissioned

To understand the School’s purpose and vision requires tracing its origins back in the experiences of those responsible for driving the project forwards. A common rationalization of involvement was seen across

the School's formal proposer and other founders. Extending from the lead proposer's own professional history in the Local Authority the School's philosophy embedded an allegiance to the Local Authority in terms of its guiding principles and strategic relationships. Founding participant narratives consistently reflect the role of the Local Authority as the School's commissioner.

"I retired from my role in [the Council] three years ago. Largely influenced by the previous director [of education for the council] they signed up to the notion of supporting the development of [an independent company], that would take a responsibility and a commission from [the council] to actually develop Schools." (School 2 Chair)

Not only does this frame how participants would understand the School's purpose, it also provided the foundation for explaining who became involved in the project. Participants recruited by the lead proposer were drawn from like-minded networks e.g. other local authorities and public services. The outward projection of these principles could be seen reflected in who was attracted to apply or engage with the project based on shared underlying attitudes towards policy and education provision.

"I was partly attracted to being involved on the basis that this looked like a way of maintaining some logical approach to Free School planning and putting places where they're needed. I'm not an advocate of the policy itself." (School 2 Finance)

"Although it was going to be opening as a Free School there's not too many differences [from LA maintained Schools]. So that was quite important for me.... I did make myself aware of the people that were already a part of that group before I made a decision to sort of support them and work with them." (School 2 Parent)

From amongst the participant narratives a converging set of ideals could be seen to underpin their involvement. This could in turn be seen to shape the kinds of policies and strategic decisions that would

be implemented by the school. The multiple yet complementary perspectives on education, driven in part by a Local-Government rationale counter to the one perceived to be driving Free School policy, was consistent with their narratives on the development of a vision and values.

“So we’re not opening Toby Young’s type School: ‘darling let’s teach Latin and wear gowns all day’. That’s not what we’re about. We’re about providing a better start at life for people who need it really.” (School 2 Comm)

“We haven’t, and quite deliberately, gone down the route of using the flexibilities and freedoms to appoint staff that aren’t qualified for example because we feel quite strongly in having qualified teachers.” (School 2 Chair)

The slightly counter-intuitive consequence can be seen in a shared logic to use the freedom not to utilise more freedom. However, with parallels to the analysis of the first school to understand the experiences that would underpin the development process along this trajectory requires analysis of a greater degree of complexity. Just because the freedoms would not be used for one perceived set of purposes their narratives reflected the acknowledgement that their self-governance still entailed self-definition. The initial convergence on a broad Local Authority ethos maintains the scope for disagreement regarding potential future trajectories.

“I have chosen, and the leader of the governing body, to go down the qualified teacher root. We have highly qualified teachers. But it’s not saying that if someone did walk through the door who had particularly strong leadership skills that, you know, we wouldn’t appoint them just because of the very principles really.” (School 1 Head)

This reflects a potential tension between a set of espoused values that draws ultimately from differing underlying assumptions or judgements. This supports the earlier observations that convergence around

particular outwardly espoused ideas is not tantamount to unaffected harmony within the development process. Underpinning the school's strategic trajectory were continued differences in the holistic priorities, dispositions and perspectives of the participants. Illustrative of this was the head's initial attraction to apply to a job role in a Free School, where the freedoms associated with the schools are ultimately a part of the package of assumptions brought in. This was clearly recognised by other participants to be the case in the school. Later in this chapter this also provides an important context to the tensions experienced in the perpetual negotiation and counter narrative of the strategic trajectory.

"I'm guessing that being a sort of new and exciting opportunity there's a good chance that you're gonna [sic] attract people, you know, in built leaders, to it... A head who wants challenges might look for a failing School to go and sort out, whereas other people may have other objectives..."
(School 2 finance governor)

"So really those freedoms just go back to a central thought of what do the learners need, and what are their parents telling us they need as opposed to, you know, what do the teaching unions tell us we should be doing, or what does the Local Authority tell us we should be doing." (School 2 Head)

This is significant in demonstrating the effect that differing attitudes towards and perceptions of the structural context have on defining areas of potential conflict around the strategic development process. The Head's narrative offered an account in which the 'freedom from' LA oversight meant that decision making could be more significantly influenced by other factors, in this case parents. However, the origins of the School were still recognised, even by the head, to be embedded in the Local Authority. Local Authority logics would therefore have an enduring influence on the development process because of the authority and influence expressed by other participants over it. This was effectively exemplified in what was perceived to be a strategic approach to inclusion in the project. Relationships developed through a

professional network emerging from the Local Authority commission would be seen not only to underpin the first School, but also in the broader project that would emerge to found additional Schools under a multi-academy 'sister' trust.

“When we first had the group together, I built the strategic partnerships first, and then the community partnerships.... The local authority in terms of school place planning service... so in clear partnership with the local authority we submitted three applications under [another Trust]...” (School 2 Chair)

“The [LA] are involved as much as they were in this one, and they have strategic roles on both trusts, and they have a director at it as well, not just a Member, and they have some input and they have lots of knowledge in areas that we link up with and use, so nothing’s really changed.” (School 2 community gov)

What is revealed is a degree of path dependence, in part maintained by the allegiances of some participants over others. This is significant in revealing the importance that relative influence had in defining the school’s trajectory where power is not only associated with the proposer but with the support they have built up through recruitment. Importantly is also the revelation that the allegiances to a Local Authority ethos, extended through participants’ rich historical and enduring professional involvement, had led to the development of a Free School that is not in fact ‘free from’ the LA in its practices. The idea that strategy was perceived as bound by enduring expectations and norms further extended to other facets of decision making that would extend from the school’s context.

“There is no point in silly hours in the day and the holidays just to annoy everybody just because we can, that’s not going to be of use to anybody.... from the very beginning, we’re not as free as I thought we could be....” (School 2 Comm)

Perspectives on the School's Purpose

Consistent with the above many of the individual perspectives on the School's purpose closely reflect their perspectives on the community the School would serve. The lead proposer, subsequently the Chair, could be seen as having a central role, firstly in the recruitment of suitably like-minded individuals to the project, and then in the process of initially developing the vision of the community. This could in turn be seen to underpin the development of the School's explicit strategy.

"It's from the original work that was done, mainly by [the Chair], and then everything else has just fallen out of that. I see in [the town], there are so many children that I'd just like to take home, because if I took them home, terribly arrogant, they wouldn't have the life that they're destined to have. I want better for the children in the town, and I can't do anything about it individually, but getting involved in something like this..." (School 2 community gov)

"From my point of view there, the drive was to source School places where they are needed, but particularly in areas where there may be relative disadvantage, and that's still true. As an individual, and this is me really, developing them into decent citizens of the town. That's again part of the reason for being involved really in a way." (School 2 finance governor)

"The main vision that has come across is the 'for a better future' bit. The key thing that we've had is the question what does it mean by 'for a better future'? So we decided that it has to be a better future for the children, but also the parents, and also for the community which is where it all sort of starts to interlink. It's about providing the children [in the town] with experience and the resilience to say well yeah I can do this." (School 2 Teaching)

"[It] is about respect and mutual respect for everyone in the School community and beyond, so actually valuing the community..." (School 2 Chair)

The illustrations above reveal a converging set of values amongst the participants regarding the community. However, of significance is the extent to which the founders and governors, recruited through the channels previously illustrated, maintain a separation between 'us' and 'them' in the resulting discourse. The view of the school's purpose arising from this is one of an organization led by a group tasked with affecting others. As discussed below this could be seen to generate challenges as the school's stated aim to be of the community emerged at odds with the strategic developers' history and approach which entailed being 'for' or 'to' the community. The complexity of this was further increased by the maintenance of distance between 'strategy' and 'practice'; which will be further developed.

"I think it was quite clear from the beginning, because the governing body and Members are very experienced and members of the local authority, they brought to the table a lot of strategic visioning experience. So I knew that I was going to be able to have some degree of separation between the operational management and leadership and the strategic thinking that the governing body were doing." (School 2 Head)

Strategy in practice

Whilst governor narratives reflected agreement in the vision that emerged in their own experiences of the strategic development process this clarity would not be so identifiable. For some, an understanding of the vision did not relate to an understanding of what this would actually look like for the School. This was presented as a consequence of the fact that their past experiences did not afford them meaningful expectations about how strategy might become embodied in a School setting. The links between perceptions of 'strategy' and 'strategy in practice' are therefore extremely difficult to conceive of causally. This is important for conceptualizing the partialness of experiences within the school, further denoting the disproportionate influence of other factors or individuals in the process of implementation.

“I had no expectations being totally honest, I did not know what to expect. For me although there’s lots of elements of what I do in my daily life and work that I can bring in to this environment it’s still a learning environment for me at the same time.” (School 2 Parent)

“At the time it was like this is a really good idea, but actually seeing it in real life, and having seen it through, I mean the learning curve from picking that e-mail off the printer to now was just the steepest one I’ve ever been on... it’s things like they all have hot School dinners, on plates, with cutlery, not plastic trays.” (School 2 Comm)

Experiences of the strategic development of the school are therefore reflected in the ambiguity through which ideas are translated into tangible school features. Extending the discussion above is the illustration of this process in terms of the intended trajectory towards being ‘of the community’. Multiple experiences would demonstrate the challenge of becoming ‘of the community’ when perceptions of that community could already be seen to reflect perceived differences in social status between those founding the School and those it might serve.

“Where its parental engagement...proper education in the community. We haven’t worked it through yet; we don’t know what that looks like yet. But that’s definitely an operational thing for [the head] to be managing. The [commissioning company] just commissioned some research on what community actually means.” (School 2 Comm)

“One of our particular sort of themes going forward is really the question of what do we mean by community i.e. what are we doing to really progress that part of it? What do we mean by it and what else could we do to bring that out?” (School 2 Finance)

“For the first year and this year, well the community part of it was a big point. Well what do you want from the community part? Well the teachers have said this, but you’ve said this, so can we

meet here, and we're going to do this. The governors have been very much OK so you always need to involve the parents but then it's always been completely up to us as to how we actually do that. It's more that we do it and then report back on how it went. I think our governors are very understanding that they might be saying these things but in practice it's not necessarily working.”
(School 2 Teaching)

“Less clear was the community aspect, and that's still really muddy in the eyes of the governing body. Well what do the proposers mean by community and visioning this one? So, that was probably the weakest aspect of the vision. It was that 'the School would be at the centre of its local community'. When I said well what do you mean by that it was like well 'the children will go out and litter pick'; 'anybody can walk into School and engage in the learning process'. You know, what came to me was the alarm bells, of course, in terms of safe guarding you can't have that.”
(School 2 Head)

What emerges is a lack of consensus on what a key aspect of the vision means. Participants can be seen to draw on differing experiences and judgements about what originally emerged as an area of consensus. The multiple competing perspectives reflect differing narratives about what 'community' entails. Of significance is the manner in which the narratives of the teaching governor and head convey a sense of ownership or repatriation of control over this aspect of strategy. Where the governors had seemingly failed to generate clarity regarding strategic implementation the parameters and direction of development were being experienced as an operational issue. To this extent strategy has been perceived through the emergence of the broad community concept within feasible actions. To this extent strategic agency is more clearly identified in the narratives of those responsible for operationalizing it. Power in this development process, as an experiential phenomenon, emerges in explanations of action and those that have influence over it.

“Obviously the proposers and the governors originally started it but then it was [the head] and myself feeding back and saying this is what it now looks like in practice. Because we know what we want but it’s not necessarily...we’ve had to meet with the governors and say well this is what it looks like.” (School 2 Teaching)

The issues raised above reflect the extent to which an understanding of experiences of the strategic development process leads to a focus on how governors experience the processes of negotiation and interaction through which strategy actually emerges. The consequence is a view of strategy in the school in which despite outwards clarity participants maintain openness, flexibility and responsiveness in their understanding of the driving forces behind the development process. This reflects how the range of individual motivations for involvement in the school and the common strategic values they served to influence is played out in a social context in which other interests and contextual complexities have been seen to be involved.

“It’s not set in stone, but in terms of general visits to the School and actually seeing what it does, in terms of slightly broader conversations we can have them.” (School 2 finance)

“I think that it’s building up the case to say look this just isn’t working, and also we’ve tried this, we’ve tried this. And it is really difficult when you’re reporting back to someone who that was their vision, that’s what they said, and we’re saying that’s not quite working. See, I think because we came from literally nothing, I think our governors are a lot closer to our School than other governors I’ve seen.” (Teaching Staff gov)

“The exciting thing about a Free School is its very organic and remains so. So the strategy isn’t set in stone, it’s more of a general idea that, you know, we’re moving towards. The strategy will inevitably change because we’ve got different inputs...” (School 2 Head)

“There were so many things during the year had to be like ‘yep, that looks good’, bang, move onto the next thing, and that’s the sort of thing we’re going to go and look back at properly now we’ve got time.” (School 2 Comm)

Yet in balance with the discussion above is the manner in which participants also seek to maintain claims about the level of influence and agency that they have been able to maintain in the development process. This reflects how individual narratives seek to maintain retrospective claims over strategic outcomes. As such this can be seen as an extension of the power relation with the interviewer as participants seek to assert their own dominance. In this process the constructed narratives are therefore endowed with a sense of causality that is not clearly mirrored in the experiences of others.

“I think it is amazingly close, I never dreamt it would stay so close and that’s both in the physical manifestation of the building, because I was lucky enough to be able to influence the design, and we’ll be able to do that for the [other] Schools as well. So the School lives to the vision.” (School 2 Chair)

What this section reveals is the complexity of the social process through which strategy is experienced. The group identity reflected in participant accounts extends from a shared set of principles contrasted against what is seen to be ‘another way’ that others might run Free Schools counter to their own values. Participants were brought together by an opportunity to create a school from nothing that was loosely defined by its community purpose in connection with a strategic approach to stakeholder participation and involvement, notably around its Local Authority origins. Yet these motivations were also seen not to mirror one another exactly. What has emerged from the narratives are tensions between other attitudes e.g. around the exercise of freedom and how these have become mediated, negotiated or influential in their translation into the development process. As a school driven more by its principles it was equally

seen how visions of the school in practice were experienced as emerging within or after the actions through which they were realized.

4.3.3 Relationships

Emotional Attachments and Deference of Power

The sections above reveal the role of the context of those involved in the subsequent processes of the School's development. In doing so the theme of relationships was seen to be of importance to understanding how responsibility for and ownership of the continued development process would also develop. Having been founded by a broad spectrum of stakeholders the strategic understanding of what was required to be 'of the community' meant recruiting actors able to take responsibility for the School going forwards. This included the recruitment of the Senior Leaders that would allow the school to manage the operations under this strategy. However, it also included recruiting and developing governors that would enable the founders to effectively hand the School back to the community it was intended for.

"At some point [the chair] and I will extract ourselves from it and leave it to the local community if you like. I think the developing relationships are around the other members of the governing body feeling confident about their roles, and being clear that just because we were there at the start a) we don't know everything and we haven't got an agenda other than whatever that community thinks is right for the School." (School 2 finance governor)

"Well my role is quite particular because I was the lead proposer it made sense for me on a transitional basis, to be chair of governors. My intention has always been, that that should then move to someone who is of the community and I'm not. So I'm of the vision, but I'm not of the community, so it's not right for me to stay in that role, long term." (School 2 Chair)

Yet despite the calculated strategic intent behind the School's future leadership, governor experiences reflect the endurance of emotional and affective relations to the School. Governor narratives reflect the challenge for pursuing a dispassionate position towards the Schools in light of the energy invested in such a development process. These affected perspectives in turn impact on how participants narrate their engagement in the School and perceptions of their formal roles. The capacity to relinquish control, or the will to maintain involvement, are therefore influenced at least in part by the endurance of the motivations that led to their commitment to the project in the first place.

"I wasn't expecting to feel the emotional connection. To actually see children be part of the creation that I had been part of blew me away. I would definitely have a different emotional connection if I thought that the School was delivering in any way, shape or form to a standard that I didn't believe in." (School 2 parent governor 1)

"It's *my* School. One of the other governors and I, when they actually did the formal opening for it, I deliberately didn't stand anywhere near her, because we both cried. It was just like, even when I go in my car and I go this is my School, these are my children. Definitely my School. Don't you come and mess it up! It was quite hard actually, when we were going from being the trust to the School opening. Being so heavily involved, and then: 'you don't need us anymore'. (School 2 community)

To seek to distinguish emotional dispositions towards the school from how the participants therefore engage in their roles in relation to others would therefore be to dismiss a significant feature of the experience of actually developing the school. Continued involvement in governing, and the pursuit to maintain control or protect, are influenced by the narrated motivations characterized in terms of emotional attachment.

Relationship Boundaries

Perspectives on the School and its strategic development have been seen to be entwined with established and emerging attitudes. The relationships within the school are therefore also defined by individual affections and conations in relation to the School. This can be seen to impact on how individuals experience the role and nature of relationships with others. As different relationships have been seen to impact upon the school, so too does the continued development of the school impact upon those relationships.

“I mean the only thing that’s really changed from my point of view is the principal and I were very close when we were doing the opening, and ringing me up at 6 o’clock, and going ‘Oh I hate the governing body, oh they really hate me’ type thing. But that’s kind of stepped back a little bit now, because as a governor there’s a line and it’s not, yes it’s supportive, but it’s not quite as supportive and friendly.” (School 2 community governor)

“[The Chair has] been extremely supportive in that sense. So, in the same breath, I’m actually finding quite influential for me, and I’m finding that I’m really enjoying working within this environment.” (School 2 Parent)

In relation to the significance of relationships as a theme of analysis that emerged it can be seen that an understanding of individual conduct and experience within the development process draws from a holistic view of the ways in which individuals relate to one another. Consistent with School 1 the relationship between formal structure and individual conduct is one that is mediated by a dynamic set of social relations. Within the context of the experiences of development outlined in this school a key consequence would emerge between different perspectives on the boundary between strategy and operations. This was reflected in the section above in relation to ambiguity in and influence over implementation of the vision. This may also be understood in terms of participants’ interest in the inflation of their own status.

The participant narratives reflect the process through which individuals seek to define the social hierarchies within the School and how this relates to its development. The consequence can be seen in a tension between respective areas of authority. The narratives construct a view of the relations in which the assumption of power is justified in relation to different issues.

“The head is very signed up to the vision, so what happens in the School and in the classrooms actually realises that vision as well and so it’s as close as I could have ever hoped it would be.”

(School 2 Chair)

“The things that take up the time are when things aren’t working as they should. Yeah, where there’s a need to deal with that boundary between what’s the role of the head and what’s the role of the governor.... The head move back into more of a managerial role. I think that, recognising that that’s got to happen. We’ve all recognised that, it’s just seeing how it fits in practice in the next phase.” (School 2 Finance)

“There is only really one current minor hiccup. We recruited the right head teacher in the first place, who bought into the vision completely. Whilst we might want it our way to get there, she might want to go that way to get there. It will be interesting to see how it plays out because ultimately at some stage there’s a hierarchy. It’s strategic level, it’s the governors.” (School 2 community)

“When I took the post, I had to be absolutely sure that the proposers were not going to interfere in the operational management of the School that I was doing because then I wouldn’t have taken on the post. So, you know, that’s what’s difficult to say at the accepting the post stage, to be able to say to the proposers who’ve created this vision, to say well I need some autonomy.” (School 2 Head)

In understanding experiences of the strategic development process the narratives reflect upon how tensions arise in the claims to the right to make different kinds of decisions. Strategy and operation are not clearly identifiable across the narratives in terms of their distinctions but rather as a spectrum along which discourse seeks to make claims about greater ownership of the activities on that spectrum than is accepted by others. Again this can be seen to echo School 1 in respect of their being simultaneous consensus and disagreement, where the former is ultimately achieved through the mediation of the latter and vice versa.

4.3.4 Organisation and Reorganisation

Growth and Change

Experiences were seen in the section above to draw on the development and evolution of relationships within the school, including their constant renegotiation around particular actions and authority over them. This sense of control and ownership, as evolving in the continued development of both the existing school and a separate sister trust, would also therefore be influential to the experiences of continued organization and reorganisation. This theme was therefore of significance in the analysis of the school in relation to understanding how governors sought to define themselves and their roles within the changing context of formal and social relationships. For instance, the Community governor would find themselves working within the school in relation to the sister trust, yet having to make sense of how to maintain the distance to effectively govern.

“So what about me being in here, is that going to work? You know, because I will know too much, just by default, you stop and say hello type thing. I will know a little bit too much I think might happen. So now, I think it is a different role...you’re removed from it, or you need to be removed from it all.” (School 2 Comm)

The result can be seen in the experience of a dual-existence in roles as the continued path of growth would generate activities perceived to generate potentially conflicting interests and priorities. The focus on maintaining a strategic role in developing new school provision appeared to produce tensions with the need to conduct the governing role with the distances associated with being a critical friend. This may be seen to reinforce or extend the difficulties of understanding the divide between strategy and operation. Participants considered the benefits of experience gained from having opened and run a school and the impact this had on shaping their development of future provision.

“Well obviously it’s informed my work with the new Schools because we’ve been there and done that, so we’ve got the experience behind us, and it’s changed how we might have approached something this time round because of lessons learnt about how that would be,” (School 2 community)

However, participants would also recognize the differing commitments and required skills entailed by the differences between setting up schools and running them. The consequence was seen in governor narratives in terms of constructing distinct roles that they were involved in, whilst in practice the overlapping of individuals and the multiplicity of priorities cannot be clearly distinguished between one role and another.

“On the [existing] one, you’ve essentially got a group of people who are trying to hold the educational vision, and steer that forward, and be the local governing body. There’s slightly different skills involved in it, do you know what I mean?” (School 2 Finance)

Discussed below is the extent to which different levels of involvement can in part be understood by the differing individual motivations of those involved. However, the analysis above has already indicated that motivation cannot be merely understood in terms of the pre-requisites for involvement in the project. Rather motivations have been expressed by participants in terms of the enduring driving forces behind

how they continue to engage in the School. This was seen, for instance, in the role of emotional attachment as motivating particular behaviours, including those in relation to strategy and oversight. The quotations above further reveal that governing, and the relationships shaped by it, have been experienced in terms of their dualisms, and in cases cloudiness, resulting from the complexity of other interests and pursuits running in parallel. This can be further illustrated in relation to the Community Governor's role in both the established school and separate trust with offices located within it. Whilst the Introduction Chapter (*Chapter 1*) demonstrated strategic oversight as a central governing role it appears in tension with the neutrality and distance perceived to be required within governor experiences. The strategic development process does, to that extent lead to experiences of the traditional governing relationships being redefined.

“So in that sense one hat has to disappear, and the other hat has to take a firmer place on the head. Then equally, potentially, if I'm here for the next year, do they really want the vice chair of the governors in the building every day? Obviously I'm going to see...even just now I nipped into the staff room to nick a biscuit, is that appropriate? I think there are some pathways to be established.” (School 2 Comm)

Role development

Parallel to the continued development of the School, the above highlights how individual roles and functions can be seen as also undergoing change. These changes are reflected in governors' perceptions of both the formal punctuations between roles, reflected above and in policy, and also in the needs of the School. The transitions themselves reflect changes in roles and functions that are dynamic in governors' experiences. The movement from founding a Free School to governing one has been narrated as an emergent or evolutionary process within the school.

“If you wanted to talk about the pre-opening stage, when we weren’t yet a governing body or constituted as such, there were a whole series of sessions that we’d hold fairly regularly as a steering group, which, tends to morph into the governing body. So, there’s an evolving group of people” (School 2 Finance)

The consequence of the fluidity between roles is subsequently evident in how participants observe the challenges for how they perceive themselves or others conducting their roles. Experience is vital in determining individual capacity to satisfy a formally defined role. The potential for individuals to contribute to the strategic development is experienced as a distinct set of relations within the school to being able to, for instance, effectively hold others to account.

“Actually being able to hold the School to account, and how you do that? And for some people that’s quite tricky, for some people even asking the challenging questions is tricky...For some people coming from a different sort of background that might be harder” (School 2 chair)

“Well you’ve gone from a new School that involved a whole set of things to being set in place and being able to do more of what feels like a governor type thing, and then in the future you’re going to have to take on another, an expanded governor role in terms of now we have to reassess. Is the vision that we set right? And how are we interpreting that?” (School 2 Comm)

However, consistent with earlier analysis how governors perceive the development of their roles and functions in the school directly relates to the subjective justifications and explanations for their involvement in the project. As such there is a direct relation between how governors articulate their own motivating forces and how they define themselves and their contributions in the conduct of their (sometimes multiple) roles.

“The reason I got involved in this School is because I live here. Whereas the other three I don’t live in. This is like the first one, so it’s like your first born isn’t it. So it’ll feed into that process...”

(School 2 community)

What is revealed in School 2 is that experiences of the process of strategic development are significantly influenced by the complexity of values, priorities and interests that define involvement. Participants can be seen to self-construct their roles in terms of their own motivating forces. At the same time involvement within the continued development and expansion of the school means that governors operate in relation to differing activities. It has been argued that some such activities may be complementary to the extent that the knowledge generated in one context may be of benefit to application in another. However, it has also been seen that the blurring of boundaries between different tasks and functions, and the membership of multiple formal and informal groups and roles, has implications for governor’s self-perceived capacity to conduct their roles as they themselves believe they ought. The complexity of these processes of continued organisation are increased by the extent to which participants have narrated the influence of enduring and developing relationships within these processes.

4.3.5 Positionality

Operating at different levels

The analysis above revealed how the growth of the School and sister trust increased the complexity of factors drawn into experiences of the strategic development process. Participants have been seen to be driven by differing community, professional career development and principled motivations. Where this has led to differing interests in either the first local school and/or the Sister Trust this has led to increased complexity in terms of the differing roles and purposes being narrated. In doing so the analysis reveals that convergence amongst different participants around the differing strategic levels serves to redefine

or reinforce tacit hierarchies within complex organisational and corporate governance relations. Individual experiences do not draw from a static or determined mode of governing but rather from all the ways in which participants in the school experience their involvement.

“I also work for the [commissioning] company now. The work I did in [the existing School], that was all voluntary, but then we’re now looking at opening the next three Schools and I’m being paid to do the work; on that as well and other bits and pieces.” (School 2 Comm)

The focus at a strategic level spanning multiple schools can in turn be seen to shape how individuals see their role in the initial school. This is evident in the quotes below in the need to preserve their own view of the school’s underpinning strategic purpose whilst relinquishing control of the management.

“There is a part of a balance in that if there were people, governors, who wanted to do something completely outside the vision of the School then we’d have an issue, you know what I mean... it’s more a case of testing what we mean in practice by those principles, and letting the community run with it.” (School 2 Finance)

“Guarding the vision for the School, and we see that as one of our key roles, that we are guardians of that vision.” (School 2 Chair)

What emerges in parallel to formal governance structures are the ways in which individuals seek to exercise and maintain power in the preservation of their diverse interests. A contradiction arises for some. Founders wish the School to be of and for the community, defined by that community’s needs and interests. In order to achieve this, it was perceived as necessary to return the School to the leadership of that community. Yet the analysis above revealed this vision as being produced through observation of that community, rather than belonging to it. Simultaneously these individuals demonstrate a desire to retain sovereignty. What results is a sense that the community are *permitted* to act freely, and yet at the

same time that freedom is only permitted within the loosely defined boundaries of those who have staked both formal and social authority through the development process.

“The thing that we’ve had is that most of the governors are so experienced that it’s been that this is your role and this is what you do, it’s been in house training rather than going to a course for someone else to tell you...They’re quite understanding in that way, but then it is also well this is what we wanted for the School so this is what we need you to do.” (School 2 Teaching)

Those who, in terms of organizational governance or strategic relevance, might otherwise be conceived of as equal reveal differing levels of self-perceived agency. Even those maintaining the relation reflect on the experienced difficulties of rebalancing an inequity that they themselves can be seen to perpetuate. The quotes below and above are indicative of how, in the analysis, the duration of involvement and an experience-expectation differential were seen to reflect a degree of perpetuated inequality amongst the participants.

“I know one of our parent governors did express the view then that [they] sometimes feel a little like [they’re] the one who doesn’t know what’s going on. A group of people set this up before we could appoint parent governors, because there weren’t parents there. So I think it’s quite reasonable that those people who joined later on should somehow be worried that there might be a clique of the people who set it up in the first place.” (School 2 finance)

“They’re probably about 6 months behind the rest of us if you like.” (School 2 community)

4.3.6 Summary

To develop an understanding of the reported experiences of participants in the school required drawing on both individual and shared narratives about the origins of the project. The role of the Local Authority in commissioning the Chair to develop a proposal continued to be highly influential to the expectations

of, and rationale for, the school's strategic vision. The lead proposer reported their own recruitment to the project on this basis, and this in turn led to the recruitment of individuals from established professional and social networks in such a way as was judged to be of 'strategic' value to providing a service deemed fit for that community e.g. local university, local schools, other LA professionals. The motivations initially expressed for the School were also therefore articulated in terms of the community it would serve. This was important in demonstrating a shared set of driving values and assumptions that would underpin the development of a loose group identity. Underpinning this however were differing, although sometimes overlapping, rationalisations for involvement. All of the participants in the school offered some rationalization for the school founded on perceptions of local societal problems. This resulted in the articulated motivations to develop a school that, through its emancipation, could belong to that community. Yet, this area of the strategic vision was equally seen to be a central source of conflict and difficulty for the development process. Those engaged in the vision could not escape the origins of the vision itself. The result was seen in narratives in which the school, during its development, was described in terms of its *doing something to* the community, rather than being *of* it. The school's strategic development was echoed in highly subjective narratives about that community that had both brought together individuals through the recruitment process and perpetuated a view about that community. Yet at the same time engagement with that community and operationalization of the vision was equally discussed as a core source of conflict and tension. The result was a sense of control over strategy being seized in the narratives of those responsible for enacting it. Other governors and founders could be seen to permit this to the extent that they perceived limitations to their own conception of what the vision should even involve. This demonstrates the distinction but also significant interrelation between the expressed motivations of individuals and the social processes through which they are mediated in understandings of action.

However, whilst the school's origins could be seen to have influenced the inclination of particularly minded participants to engage with the project the underlying attitudes were, at the same time, never identical. The result was illustrated in the divisions between the head and some of the founders in terms of the continued negotiation of boundaries between strategy and operation. The expressed attitudes across a range of governors, and the inherent differences in their accounts, extended from other diverse interests related to the project. The opportunity to pursue personal benefits, most notably in terms of career, was evident amongst staff, governor and Member narratives alike. Motivations were also split between the individual School, and the broader set of aims associated with the sister trust. The implications were seen in the narratives expressing the difficulties of maintaining divisions between these levels. Governing of the single school was expressed in terms of its being affected by the presence and alternative perspectives of participants emerging with priorities concerning the sister trust. Yet, in terms of organisation and governance these differing priorities remained bundled together within the shared context of social interaction in the school. The complexity of these arrangements was increased by the resulting overlaps between differing formal and informal roles in relation to various personal and strategic priorities, including those related to distinct volunteer and paid positions.

Emerging from the analysis was also an understanding of perspectives of 'us' and 'them' that shaped the dynamic and complex relations within the strategic development. The complexity of the relations described above were seen to have significant ramifications for governance in practice, as tacit, fluid and informal processes of self-organisation. Diverse perspectives resulted from observations about duration of involvement, role in founding and knowledge of education. Issues of perceived 'legitimacy' and 'expertise' could therefore be associated with the processes of self-organisation. Even where participants expressed the intention to 'hand the school back to the community' what was evident was a difficulty in relinquishing power over the core strategic purpose. The result was a tacit structure in which a few core

founders and proposers would ultimately see themselves creating a permissive or enabling environment in which others could exercise their governing freedoms. Yet, because of this configuration, it may be argued that for many of the incoming parent and community governors freedom is defined and constrained by established norms, values and expectations. The strategic trajectory of the school may be understood in terms of the historical social context that shaped individual narratives about their own intentions.

4.4 School 3

4.4.1 Participants in context

CEO – With a successful track record in headship in the independent sector the announcement of Free School policy offered a seemingly attractive proposition. The CEO took this opportunity to mark both a stepping stone in their own career whilst simultaneously seeking to shape local education provision. Departing from a local independent School the CEO sought to provide education associated with the independent sector to the maintained sector. Seeking to both found and run the School the CEO would locate themselves at every level of the governance hierarchy of the School.

“Having seen the need, and being given the opportunity by the government, I grasped it. So this for me now is the next step in my career. The company I was working for were not interested. Having got them an outstanding OFSTED within a year of setting the School up for them I called a meeting and we agreed to part company. What you may not understand is that as principal of this School I am also the founder, and I am also a Member of the trust, so I created the trust, and I am a governor.” (School 3 CEO)

Chair – Having observed a lack of quality School places in the local area, the Chair had been inspired to send their children to the independent School the CEO had operated. Having discovered they had left the School they became engaged in supporting the new project. Although they were not amongst the original founders or trustees they were invited to apply for a parent governor role. The departure of two of the founding trustees shortly after led to their quickly being encouraged to take on the role of Chair.

“We wanted to support it from when we heard about it. It was a load of expectant parents, in the anticipatory use of the term, and she sold her ethos in the School, her vision for the School, and said: ‘We’re going to need help’.” (School 3 Chair)

Parent Governor 1 – Having known the CEO in their role as a headteacher of the independent School the parent governor became involved with the project. Following the support they had offered before opening they were invited to become an official governor upon opening. As a GP they felt that their knowledge and experience would support the safeguarding practices of the School. They would also take an active role in mustering support for the trust’s expansion.

“I had met [the CEO] who’s the headteacher when [they were] the head of another School, and when I heard that [they were] going to set up a free School with some other parents, I was very interested to see what they had to say. Through that, through the support, they invited me to be a governor”

Parent Governor 2 – The second parent governor participant also lived in the area. In the process of looking at local School options they had become aware of the local independent head’s intentions to develop a Free School. Although they enlisted their children to be amongst the first cohort, their involvement did not become formalised until after the School had opened. As well as supporting the vision, they felt the School would save them a substantive amount of money contrasted against the independent School they would otherwise have sent their children to.

“We actually met our principle here, she was running one of the other Schools, so when we heard about it, that she was opening up another School, we thought that was fantastic. Apart from other Schools it was free, and that’s useful.” (School 3 parent 2)

4.4.2 Purpose and Vision

Formation of a Vision

The perspectives offered across the participants reflected the centrality of the proposer (CEO) to the construction of the vision. The perceptions and perspective of the proposer would be central to both the educational vision emerging and also to an emerging narrative about the locale. The origins of the project with a specific individual were therefore seen to be of great significance to the theme emerging around the purpose and vision of the school, including how this would become translated into participant narratives about the strategic trajectory. On the one hand was the immediate sense of centrality of this individual to the school strategy. On the other hand, was the role of their local reputation and affiliations with a private school that would influence who would become involved in the school project. The quotes above, and below, reflect the influence that association with or interest in a specific private education provider would have on exposure to the project during its conception. This is important for understanding the role of particular perspectives on a locality that emerge in an understanding of the school's provision.

“What happened was I'd wanted to start a free School 10 years ago but couldn't find a secure income stream. I had seen in [the town] that there was a great need, here was [a highly deprived] borough, desperately short of School places. Some of the parents from the School which I had just left were a bit upset that I had left, and said tell us what are you doing. I said 'starting a free School' and they said, 'well we'll support you'.” (School 3 CEO)

“[The CEO] said to people at [their independent School], let's take advantage of [policy] and grow the School; and they didn't want to do it. [The CEO] thought it was an ideal opportunity so resigned to do it [themselves], with [their partner], with four other parents from there and then started on this journey which culminated in [the new School].” (School 3 Chair)

What initially emerges is equally therefore a narrative about the School's purpose that is, in part, motivated by differing perceptions of an independent style and quality of education provision. This could be seen to contrast positively against high levels of local deprivation. Whilst the narratives concerning strategic purpose drew heavily on observations about the solution to local demand, they could also be seen to draw on a wider set of shared values and assumptions. The recruitment process was influenced heavily by established networks. As a consequence, this had already influenced why and how the other participants and founders had become involved in the project. Of importance was that the values of those involved would initially appear highly consistent in participant narratives. This is of significance to framing the strategic drivers of the project in terms of whom from the locality the underlying values would likely reflect or appeal to. The school, located in a highly deprived and predominantly Muslim community, could be contrasted against the narratives emerging from across the participants. Whilst the connection to the locality itself was not clearly developed in the narratives, the links to the participant's own values or interests was more clearly evident.

“It's about providing a very good quality of education within a broadly Christian setting and ethos to it. One of the things as a parent is particularly appealing is the, partly because of the class size but it's a bit broader than that, focus they give on each individual child's development.” (School 3 Parent 2)

The CEO's narrative about the construction of the strategy also extended the relevance of the recruitment process. Drawing from existing social capital the CEO was able to recruit a senior Ofsted figure. This would clearly be instrumental to ensuring that the resulting school satisfied all the possible conditions in place for external assessment. This can be interpreted as a significant implication of the strategic opportunities generated by the liberalization of school development. However, linking the current analysis to following chapters it is also of significance to understanding the role of context specific happenstantial relations to

new school provision and the potential implications of this for conceiving of education under such a framework.

“We have a supreme educational governor who was head of the whole of the region inspection group for Ofsted, and I invited [them] to be on the governing board because I wanted a load off my own back. So [they’re] very much at the forefront of Ofsted and the decisions that are being made at Ofsted and [they] pass them through to me with great regularity so that we can actually keep the education at the highest cutting edge that we can.” (School 3 CEO)

Vested interests

The coding of data around the initial formation of the vision led to an interrelated code emerging that was of equal significance to understanding the strategic purposes driving governor experiences of the development process. As a consequence of participant’s own experiences and perspectives, as parents or as the CEO, their views on the purposes of the School were indistinguishable from their own agendas in their constructed narratives about the development process. In turn, this can be seen to shape their initial and continued engagement with the project. The overlap between parenthood and founder can be seen emerging in participant narratives in the way that participants regard their impressions of what the CEO was offering. Comparisons and contrasts against the previous schools could immediately be seen in the dualisms that were being drawn into the individual narratives about their involvement.

“My driving force is that my son, and then later my daughter, go to School or nursery willingly, and come home quite happy.... A lot of them are driven by slightly different motivations, but most of them just want to have a good life now and a good life created for the children in the future. And we see that in [the CEO’s] vision of the School, which is obviously one of the most vital parts of us getting involved. So why did I get involved? To support [the CEO] getting the School up and running.” (School 3 Chair)

“The concept, the idea behind it was very good and we signed up amongst the first batch of parents. So there was a certain leap of faith there because you’re committing to sending them to a School that hasn’t previously existed; but I think they’ve done a great job in generally getting it set up and we were keen to support that development in, you know, anyway that we can.” (School 3 parent 2)

“It would be good to have a School that provides good education, but more importantly a School that provides a place where children are happy and want to go. I don’t have any further image than that, and I think it’s achieved that quite successfully. I guess everyone has different things that drive them to do something. I imagine all of us have something that keep us to [sic] the project” (School 3 Parent Governor 1)

In seeking to understand these perspectives there appeared no inconsistency in the reasoning that an individual might seek to support a school that would affect their children’s education. However, what emerged of importance in relation to experiences of the strategic development process were the implications that would come from the congruence, support and deference to the head’s vision and reputation associated with their recruitment for these purposes. This is discussed further in the themes below where the coding here could be seen as vital to understanding the context in which governing and strategic relations would emerge. This ‘supporting role’ as illustrated above limited the breadth or depth of the other strategic priorities of the parents included in the project, as seen in the areas of emphasis offered during interview. Yet just as the parent governors could be seen to draw together their own motivations with their expectations for the School so too did the CEO from their own perspective. It was repeatedly emphasized by the CEO that the school offered an extension to their career, which would therefore come to define the nature of their involvement in the initial project and subsequent expansion. From an analysis of the narratives it is therefore difficult to distinguish the ‘strategic purposes of the

school' from the 'strategic purposes of the school for me'.

"I've now set up two Schools and now I'm going to oversee the running of a series of Schools at an executive level. So for me that's the next step in my career." (CEO)

A Central Vision

The process of recruitment outlined, the centrality of the CEO to the school's proposed offering and the personal motivations reflected by the participants was seen in the analysis to be important to other aspects of how and why the vision was constructed as it way. The recruitment of parents lacking context-specific educational knowledge, and a CEO for whom the project was a personal and full time investment, would mean that the formal strategy was produced almost entirely by the CEO.

"The business case we submitted, it's a 128-page document with appendices. I wrote the majority of this. So it's the education vision and ethos, all the curriculum and the organisation, the learning, I set out the assessment, the sample timetables, the homework, the extended activity program, all the pupil development and organisation. The governance I got some help with from my [partner] who did some of the legal side of that. [They] and I are the only two that had been part of governing boards before so we were able to do that. I did all the staffing structure, the build-up of the staff, the staff remuneration, the pensions and so on; how that would work. Admissions, that whole section we had to set." (School 3 CEO)

Illustrated by the quotes below the consequence of this centrality can be seen in the contrasting narratives about the development process. There were significant differences in the observations about the degree and nature of perceived involvement, and the understanding of the strategy and development process. This was also seen translated into the sense of possession of the vision by the CEO, extending from how much influence they were able to exercise over it.

“[The visions] are quite clear...I guess it’s quite a difficult question to answer, because you have to go into the intricacies of the management, and then how that translates to the children.”

(School 3 Parent 1)

“Oh I think it is absolutely how I originally envisioned it because I knew very clearly what the vision was that I had for it.... In terms of what we are delivering, we are delivering everything I envisaged.” (School 3 CEO)

Strategy in Context

Reflected in the above the social context inferred from the narratives around the conception, proposal and founding of the school were seen as significant to understanding how participants perceived the strategic purpose and impact of the school. In parallel to the other schools, what the analysis revealed was the distinctions in participant experiences between ‘the school’ and ‘the community’. The quotes below illustrate two important aspects of the narratives that emerged in coding experiences of the strategy itself. Firstly is that, consistent with analysis elsewhere, participants are seen to bring their own subjective values into the development process without specifically seeking to convey some justification for doing so that might relate inclusively to the locality.

“I was very keen, for it to be a School with Christian ethos, and that then weighted the admissions so that we had 50% Christian applications and 50% community application.” (School 3 CEO)

Secondly, and related to the above, is that participants express the relationship between the school’s strategic development and the community in terms of what they perceive to be advantageous for them or for the school. The recruitment of individuals with broadly complementary values is pertinent to understanding a clear strategic trajectory for the school. However, the resulting narratives about the strategic impact reflect a significant conceptual distance between the participants and aspects of the

locality in which it operates. The strategic freedom characterized may to this extent be associated with a form of social segmentation.

“As a consequence of what we’re doing...is to change the socio-economic character of the [area]. Because at the moment people arrive as yuppies, they shack up together, then some of them have families. Then everything changes and you start thinking about not only your child now but when you’ve had a little sleep a year or two ahead and then you think Schools. So people then leave either early enough so that the child starts primary School elsewhere, or they plan to leave when the child is young enough to go to another secondary School.... What we’ve seen already with the [school] is people committing to the area.” (School 3 Chair)

“I think we’re quite lucky in this area in that actually we don’t have enough primary Schools so it’s not a case of ‘you’re coming to steal our children’.” (School 3 Parent 1)

“I cannot conceive that we can let them go into the current secondary School in the area because the level of attainment of that secondary will not attract the parents who’ve taken their risk, who’ve won on their risk, and got their children really well educated up to the age of 11. So we have to provide them a quality secondary School.” (CEO)

Social transformation of the area is not narrated purely in terms of the raised aspirations on and expectations of all facets of the local population. Rather, narratives reflect the transformative effect that the School could have in blocking the reversal of the diaspora of affluence within the area arising because of perceptions of local education. In this respect, the School’s impact is experienced through its potential to support gentrification.

4.4.3 Relationships

A Parent dynamic

Consistent with the other schools, despite a broad consensus around loosely and tacitly defined visions or purposes there remained significant areas of ambiguity and tension. This could be seen to reflect the diversity of values of those involved arising from their respective interests in the project. Contrasted against the other schools was the sense in which the project emerged initially from a 'teacher-parent' dynamic. To understand governor experiences of strategy above the restrictions on individual capacity to contribute were discussed in terms of their emerging from the differing opportunities and capacity for engagement with the project. In relation to this coding of the data informed the theme of relationships in this school in terms of how participants balanced their personal and professional lives with their volunteer input. The parent accounts reflected on their involvement as inherently more restricted by their knowledge and outstanding commitments. This was of great importance to an emerging conception of experiences of strategic agency arising in the relationships defined by such differentials in contribution.

"I have contributed more on the local level. That's where I'm sort of based and that's where I'm more involved." (School 3 Parent 1)

"Within probably my third governor's meeting, the aforementioned couple of trustees resigned and we had a very robust discussion as to who would take the chair. I was put forward and I did suggest that I might find it difficult balancing it with work." (School 3 Chair)

"I don't find myself spending much time every week but there'll certainly be something every month; I guess more realistically, every couple of weeks. I travel a bit on business so I tend to find there'll be weeks when I'm not in the country and it's very hard for me to liaise on stuff. I still

probably need to spend more time going through things like the School governor's handbook, and stuff like that." (School 3 Parent 2)

Consistent with elsewhere the theme emerging within the school was one in which relationships both shaped and were shaped by governing and strategy. This was therefore significantly enriched by an understanding of a broader set of concerns and interests that affected upon participants' experiences of the strategic development process. An important outcome from the findings presented so far relates to the consequences of differences in priority and involvement in defining assumed responsibility and agency over aspects of strategy. Within the context presented, the strategic development process has been presented in terms of experiences that place one individual at the centre. Contrasted against the other schools this could be seen to result from the distinct social context involved in its founding.

Mediating Power

During the process of coding within the school the relationships discussed were not as static as the analysis so far might otherwise indicate. The imbalances in the relationships emerging from the above context were acknowledged in the narratives of the other participants. This imbalance was seen in the division between the limited parental knowledge and opportunity to contribute and the substantive daily involvement for those for whom the School is also a professional focus. This point is also developed in the theme on power. However, the connection was clear in the development of the current theme in terms of how individuals present their experiences as defined *in relation to others*. The result is illustrated in a lack of clarity over the precise nature of the role and contribution individuals should have.

"When I thought should I go for this I wasn't aware of the increased focus on responsibility of governors...Getting the right balance of involvement in projects because some of it is best left to business partners, the management team, [the CEO] and their team, to run and get on with.

Awareness at least if not involvement in, getting the right balance in how much, or how little you're supposed to do..." (School 3 parent 2)

The perceived ambiguity in the formation and development of roles could be seen to then emerge in conflicting perspectives on the overlapping remits of participants. Parallels could be seen in the previous school in terms of the ambiguous divide between strategy and operation. Comparisons between the context, and between participant accounts, would be important to developing a conception of this issue as an extension of the ways in which participants sought to narrate their authority and control over specific areas of decision making. The contrast between accounts therefore emerged as differing and conflicting views on the location of power over strategic development. This in turn could be seen to have implications for how significant elements of governance are perceived. A view of governing emerges concerning the mediation of power and influence, based upon the pursuit of sometimes conflicting values, perspectives or the pursuit of self-interest.

"I think what's very difficult to manage is that transition from the governance where they are all very involved in setting up the School to the School is now open, take a step back, and let the principal lead and, you know, take the strategic view. But then I was able to be very clear as to what my expectations were once we opened. That might sound harsh, but that's the way. Otherwise not only are you having to manage staff, manage children, manage parents, you're also trying to manage your governors." (School 3 CEO)

"It's just [the CEO] is the *head teacher*....it's not always sort of easy. I mean with someone who is an incredibly driven [person], particularly if there are things on the strategic side, with risk and things, and there are concessions, but I think we've come a long way in that process.... One of the things I wanted to be more involved in was with the senior staff and that the governors as a whole

are more aware of the decisions and the choices that are being made and I think we are really starting to do that, so I think that's the main thing" (School 3 Parent 2)

In the context of the continued growth and development of the existing School and subsequently expansion to a multi-academy trust, the development of governors' continued narratives could be seen to increasingly reflect the concerns about how social hierarchy was forming. Not only did those narratives seek to present a historical account of these relationships but they also used these judgements to project their perspectives on where those relationships would need to head. Again this could be seen to reflect the dynamic and evolving nature of the governance relationships that, in part, mirrored the increasing complexity arising from decisions made about the ongoing strategic development. The perceptions about the changing shape of relationships in the School directly reflected the perceptions of others holistically as people. The illustrations reflect the processes through which participants have sought to renegotiate power in the strategic development process.

"We knew that stuff was coming but I think it was sometime around the start of this year when we actively sat down and first of all said well it can't be a small group of 3 or 4 people doing all this stuff, you know. Let's all put it down on the table and think about how we are going to actually use the resources of the governors much more on those opportunities, so that's what we're trying to do..." (School 3 Parent 2)

"[The CEO] is, uh, a very strong personality and wears [their] heart on her sleeve in many ways. Yeah I think I'll be honest now and say that as times gone on [the CEO] has perhaps become slightly more distant. I kind of expected it when I thought it through because as it has gone on and I've come to terms more with what the role involves I've become more confident and more willing to, it's not challenge, just ask questions. It affects all relationships and we both get beyond what the previous issue may have been and we know that we're both working together even if we are

prodding, annoying or getting under the skin of the other for the School. And so being brutally honest yes, it probably has affected our relationship a bit.” (School 3 Chair)

These relationships are not purely narrated in terms of formal roles, even when understood as emergent. The Chair extended their narrative above in observation of the role of gender difference in the manner in which these interactions take place. The discussion here, in line with what has been seen elsewhere, reveals that the description of the relationships in the school are not static. Rather the reported experiences capture the ongoing processes of relating that define them. In terms of understanding the perceived impact of these complex processes governors further reflect on the way in which even areas of broad strategic consensus are negotiated in interaction. Consistent with the other schools, diverse allegiances, past experiences and values draw conflicting perspectives on how to translate a loosely defined vision into practice into open debate. Concerning the current theme, the illustration below reflects the Chair’s narrative that developed over the interviews regarding the complex relationships between ‘us’ and ‘them’ through which a shared strategic vision was to be mediated into policies and practices.

“We had robust discussions because of the faith body; representatives of the local churches and the independents who knew [the CEO] and live out in [another county] and have nothing to do with the area. Because we’re conscious that that local aspect of the School can work against us and we wanted that independent body as well.” (School 3 Chair)

4.4.4 Organisation and Reorganisation

Spanning the Hierarchy

As has previously been mentioned, the CEO’s central role in both founding and leading the School would translate into their centrality to every level of the School’s governance and hierarchy. The CEO is

simultaneously a senior leader, a governor and a Member, before adopting an overarching position as CEO across multiple Schools. As reflected in relation to the themes above this centrality could also be seen to underpin the processes of organisation that would in turn be instrumental in understanding the development of the school itself. Parallel to their role in the origins of the project in understanding the development of the vision and trajectory the coding here in relation to organisation and reorganization reflected the impact these origins had on both formal and tacitly held structures. This was of clear importance to an emerging understanding of the perceptions of influence over the strategic development process. It was therefore of importance in framing the discussions emerging above and below concerning experiences of governing within the context. With the CEO spanning the governance hierarchy the experiences of organisation therefore emerged as a reflection of this. Of particular note was the extent to which other participants reflected on their involvement in compartmentalized functions. Whilst the CEO sits on each of the nine subcommittees, other governors would sit on far fewer. This could be seen as an extension to their respective skills and availability, discussed above, that would shape the areas in which parent governors felt they could contribute. However, the coding around this theme could in turn be seen to be of great importance to understanding how the emergence of structure could reinforce the CEO's influence over the school.

“So role number 1 is actually running the day to day functioning of the [School]. So all that has had to be put up and running within five terms now and so that's my role as principal of the [the School]. In the role of CEO, we then also had all the setting up of the trust, all the setting up of the governing board, all the systems to do with the governing board... And where we're going strategically. So, the whole aspect of that, is also under my, as lead proposer, is under my vision as it were.” (School 3 CEO)

“We talked through the risk one; that was one they were looking to get some more infrastructure around. So [the CEO] asked if I’d look at that one, which I was happy to do. You know, if you look at the other committees, there are other governors who have quite specific experience of those things, built around HR, or education or sport, so, so it seemed a perfectly sensible one to fit in”
(School 3 Parent 2)

The emergence of formal structure could therefore be seen to reflect, or reinforce, the orchestrating role of the CEO. This coincides with the substantive and rigid structure reported by the participants. Yet consistent with discussion above, and in other schools, even within this formal structure participant experiences captured the continuous and dynamic changes to organisation that were experienced. Of particular importance to the emerging theorization was the recognition that changes in formal and informal structures were rationalized in participant accounts in terms of the social interactions and diverse discourses about aspects of strategic development. The narratives extend participants’ perspectives about how they feel that power and influence ought to be distributed and/or their expectations about future trajectories.

“Some of them got combined, because it was similar people on most of them. [The CEO] is on all of them, but otherwise it’s usually at least two of the other non-executive governors if you like. We don’t want to just completely say well we’ll leave the leadership team to do it. I think the biggest one is finance group and meetings between what are very strong personalities leading it, such as [the CEO] ...but it will be interesting to see how that evolves and also how people are getting on.” (School 3 Parent 2)

Emerging from the coding process has been a pattern of argument about change, or the need for change, that shapes the experiences of a continued process of organisation. This has also developed in line with the continued growth of the school into a multi-academy trust. This linked clearly to the coding on the

changing nature of relationships within the school. The narratives illustrate a perceived need to repatriate power from the CEO within what is perceived to be a centralized organisation. In this respect, the parent participants have had a role in permitting or enabling the CEO's role to continue as it has. Analysis above revealed the importance of the origins of those involved in terms of the support for the project and CEO, the vested interests, the limitations to knowledge and involvement and the formality of structures built up by the CEO themselves. However, as the parent participants continued to make sense of their experiences within the interviews what emerged were changes in these narratives. The coding illustrated reflects the developing recognition and acknowledgement of the tensions between a CEO seeking to retain the status quo and other participants seeking to reassert themselves in a position within the governance relationship that would allow them to hold to account and influence the development process. Where the previous passivity or deference by parent participants was acknowledged the narratives moved on in a way that would entail a reduction of the scope of freedoms the CEO had enjoyed.

“[The CEO and their partner] and leadership group are working immensely hard, particularly in the start-up...but it's a part of that institutionalising process that we spoke about over the past six months or so, and we need to take some of the risk on. As we are going towards multiple free Schools, or even just a bigger existing School, that can't be managed just inside the principal's head which it effectively can at the moment, so there has to be more formal, more structures in place.” (School 3 parent 2)

“I've always had the strategic oversight because I was the founder; it's my vision. And, so therefore that makes it different. It's been quite difficult to delegate because I haven't had the people to delegate to, and that's the other difficulty about setting up a School. It's a very multifarious hat, but that's why I've enjoyed it very much and when you get to this stage in my career I don't want another School which is easy.” (School 3 CEO)

The evolution of roles

In parallel to what has been narrated as a dynamic development process, governors also reflected on the role of their individual input in a similar way. In line with the discussion above, participants' reported experiences in the School reflect the changing roles in terms of shifting perspectives and priorities, and the consequence for how power has not only been taken, but also bestowed.

"I think we're starting to see that [the CEO is] letting go. There's just been this this idea to set up all of the strategic choices; and actually I was pretty shocked, careful what you wish for. Because I sort of asked [the CEO] and suddenly bang. It's a huge amount of development of staff, and just the applications to do, and needing to change the roles, how the board works for the Free Schools...So we just want to make sure that [the CEO] is taking the right role, and [they] can still focus on the education." (School 3 Parent 2)

"I think what is changing is my role, instead of just being a head who gets the Outstanding, is becoming an executive head, to then now start to advise the next generation of heads." (School 3 CEO)

In the process of sense-making across the interviews what the above illustrate was the extent to which participants acknowledged the changing nature of the relationships and the impact that this has on the ongoing processes of organisation. Important to accurately theorizing from these findings is the need to acknowledge that whilst the narratives have often sought to convey the need to 'battle' for control over particular areas of strategy this is not the only mechanism through which power is continuously redistributed and produced. Participants can be seen to enable each other with little more than their blessings and the provision of information. Contrasted against other dimensions of the reported experiences is the sense in which hierarchy, tacit or formal, is almost impossible to judge as a fixed or linear arrangement. To the extent that the quotes above and below illustrate participants as prioritizing

and pursuing different activities power can only really be understood in respect of their positions in relation to those activities. As illustrated below, where participants reveal conflicting priorities in relation to the school (e.g. strategic or personal), this is of significance to understanding the complexities of how participants understand the conduct of their role. In light of the context of involvement previously discussed the perceived roles in developing and governing a School may be understood as drawing on differing motivations. Such motivations may not always result in compatible decisions.

“I guess it’s very difficult, because I have two hats...I think actually, it’s quite important to distinguish that, so what I may feel as a parent I cannot necessarily do as a governor. So, to uphold that ethos, it’s got to be much more objective than how I feel personally for my children ‘cos what I need to be doing is what’s right for the School as a whole, and that might not be right for my child. And that’s very difficult, you know, you may think, ‘oh yes you know, my child needs this’ but is that alright for the School...and it might not be.” (School 3 Parent 1)

4.4.5 Positionality

Relative Values

In informing the theme of positionality the coding of this school revealed the significance of the relative disparity in backgrounds, networks and perspectives that has been influential in generating areas of tension. This was mirrored in the schools above. It was also introduced in the section on purpose and vision. However, in relation to the current discussion it illustrates the continuation of differing positions on strategic issues in relation to the different experiences. The result, consistent with previous analysis, are the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in relation to particular aspects of development. These differing positions can be seen to emerge from areas of areas of loosely defined consensus. As illustrated below the shared Christian underpinning is also sufficiently broad as to allow for conflict and tension to

arise. With participants drawing on differing attitudes, experiences and networks in relation to religion, the role of Christianity arose as an area of tension. The capacity to maintain broad strategic agreement alongside conflicting views of implementation is an important feature of the analysis developed further in 5.2.1.

“There has been robust discussions about changing the faith side of it, the school is pushing for more faith places...” (School 3 Chair)

As reflected in the analysis above the differing positions of participants in relation to one another reflects differing sets of values that underpin their subjective views on the strategic directions in which they feel the schools should be headed. A key aspect of positionality emerging from the analysis here and above is therefore also revealed in the fact that the narratives about one another and about self are neither singular nor simplistic in nature. Positionality can be seen to define how governors understand the multiple relations that they stand in with those in the School. Not only is this an extension of the interpretation of the above but is reflected in the narratives participants extend about themselves and their relations. The multifaceted nature of the perceived role can be understood as an extension of the multi-faceted ways in which participants see their relations with one another. The illustrations below reflect how these differing perspectives emerge from, for example, their parental involvement. In founding the School, the context of their involvement can be seen to have an enduring impact on how governors make sense of their own position.

“Fraternal on the governing board, paternal amongst the staff and the teachers; and of course, and way off being a parent for a lot of them notwithstanding, my son being there, a figurehead for the children. Someone that they have an affection for. Because you will have seen around you’re there at the start of the year, you’re there at the end of the year, you’re there on various events.” (School 3 Chair)

Having demonstrated such a heavy personal investment in developing a School the challenge can therefore be seen in governor narratives for distinguishing between emotional and parental input versus the formal conduct of their role. Whilst the multifaceted nature of their roles and experiences is therefore an important aspect of the narratives, at the same time the narratives offered fail to maintain clarity in the boundaries between these different aspects of involvement. This is of significance to subsequent theorization in terms of informing the blurring of the multiple relations that governors hold with one another, and others, in the conduct of governing. To seek to remove participants' affections, conations and biases from the analysis would be to remove a fundamental component of the ways in which they report experiences of the development process.

"As far as what goes on in the School I'm in a privileged position, I have come in a lot more than other parents, who are desperate to know what's going on... I was giving the prize day. I suddenly realised that I hadn't given [my son] a certificate and he was one of the two remaining; and he won the class prize. As a parent I nearly completely lost it, it was very difficult to keep it together when they read out a citation." (School 3 Chair)

"Well from that perspective you do have a bit of an inside perspective and an opportunity to see how the thing is running and some of the inside discussion, but also you have a bit of an outside perspective as a parent, as a customer, or however you want to put it, where you essentially see that." (School 3 parent 2)

Reflected in previous areas of analysis, the consequence can be seen in governors' own sense making as reflecting the different perspectives that are adopted in relation to their conduct within the School, and the complexity of factors and experiences that define them. What the findings demonstrate is that within the participant's narratives there is an active intent to try and distinguish their perceptions of what governing ought to entail from the subjectivities and vested interests they also acknowledge. What is

further demonstrated however is that maintaining such distinctions is experienced as a particularly challenging thing to do, and is contingent on having some self-awareness of those subjectivities. The conduct of governing is, to this extent, extremely difficult to distinguish from the pursuit of subjective values that underpin involvement.

“As far as any other relationships go, necessarily its expanding and getting more complicated with all the members of the staff who run the School. There are times when I feel I have to slip back and be Michael Gove’s critical friend, and of course think about personalities and how to deal with people; think of course about my own mood or spiriting day at work and how that might affect how I go flying in to a meeting and at the end of the day talking about my child’s education as well as everyone else and what is best for them.” (School 3 Chair)

4.4.6 Summary

To understand significant aspects of the narratives presented requires appealing to the narratives regarding the school’s origins that had led to participants becoming involved. The CEO and lead proposer, having observed the opportunity that Free School policy afforded, regarded the development of the School as a clear path on which to develop their own career. However, this personal motivation was accompanied by subjective judgements about the locality and subjective religious and educational values. The other participants, alongside the CEO, shared in aspects of their perspectives about the locality, the broadly Christian underpinnings and the quality of education. In seeking to understand the origins of the school’s vision and purpose these commonalities were an important aspect of the analysis. The convergence of these interests was perpetuated in the narratives by the desire of many of those involved to support the development of a particular form of education provision deemed to be valuable to their own children. The result of these complementary motivations was seen in what appeared to be on the surface a high degree of strategic consensus. However, the analysis has also revealed numerous

consequences the specific configuration of respective experiences and motivations drawn in through the recruitment from a network of parents.

The parent-teacher dynamic echoed in governor narratives translated into the relationships that emerged in the School. With such a high level of support for the CEO's proposal participants reflected heavily on the resulting power the CEO claimed over areas of strategy and governance alike. Having designed the structures of the school the CEO could be seen to seek to reinforce their own position within the school. This was also self-evident in the resulting contradictions and tensions in participant accounts as the CEO sought to define the sphere of their influence over areas that other participants would subsequently seek to express the desire to reclaim control over. The result is an analysis reflecting shifting power structures as governors and the CEO continuously defined and redefined themselves in relation to one another. Yet, to understand the relative positions of individuals within the School participant narratives drew on a much broader range of personal factors. Career paths, social networks, parenthood and local residence were all fundamental features to understanding both why and how individuals saw themselves engaged in the School. As a result, the conceptions of hierarchy that emerged from the organisation around numerous subcommittees formed only one small aspect of how governors reported their experiences of organisation and the distribution of power. On this front what was evident were more significant and ongoing processes of renegotiation over areas of tension. Yet, it was also argued that even to conceive of power in terms of a zero-sum game over strategic decision making did not reflect effectively how participants narrated their relations. Participants were equally seen to enable and facilitate one another in relation to particular strategic areas. This aspect of how governors report their experiences is therefore of importance to theorization concerning experiences of the development process in the next chapters.

In understanding the strategic trajectory of the school the values and motivating forces were seen to originate in principles that had been comparable to operating an independent Christian School. In

observing the impact this provision might have on transforming the local area this in turn translated into governor narratives in terms of the motivation to impact on the local community in a very particular way. In understanding the impact of the significant parental involvement the motivation to afford their own children a perceived level and type of education was vital. Motivation, in this respect, was seen not only in terms of the preconditions of involvement but in terms of its continued and defining role in terms of how governors experienced their own roles and contributions to the School. The multiple roles, including that of being 'a parent', were communicated in terms of the differing hats to be worn and priorities to be balanced. Yet, it was also seen that maintaining these distinctions was extremely difficult, if not impossible. What is revealed is an experience of the role of governing that clearly draws on a set of contextual conditions e.g. professional role or contribution to a specific vision. However, to fully account for the reported experiences also requires drawing on a complex and evolving set of values and judgements as governors seek to make sense of their own conduct in relation to others.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has presented the findings that emerged from the iterations of constant comparative analysis laid out in *Section 3.5.3* and *4.1*. Participants' narratives were grouped according to the schools from which they came. This supported the comparison and contrast of attitudes, perspectives and positions of participants in relation to others within their respective shared social contexts. In addition to the grouping of participants according to their school, the *Findings Chapter* has also been structured according to the themes that emerged from the constant comparative analysis of the experiences of governors *across schools*. The 'selected' codes (see *Section 3.5.2.2*) presented within schools are subsumed under themes that also emerged from the identification of common areas of content in the analysis of data across schools (C.f. Glaser, 1998).

Emerging from the inductive process of analysis above the findings demonstrated the processes through which the vision and purpose of each school emerged in participant experiences. Of significance were the diversity of processes through which each proposal was seen to be generated and others were recruited to support each school's strategic development. Findings from across the schools revealed how ambiguity and diverging interests, values or perspectives also played an important part in how the development process was experienced. The diversity of motivations was expressed not only as attitudes or dispositions towards social and personal interests but also in terms of the desire to support others, notably the proposer of each project. Relationships were also therefore of great significance to the processes through which strategy was negotiated. This also had further implications for the emergence of differing governing relations in each school. Of note was the finding that these relationships were also subject to change and evolution through the accounts offered by participants. This dynamic feature was further developed in the theme on organization and reorganization. As participants sought to make sense of their experiences the changing context of their interactions and relations shaped the diversity of attitudes they reflected in their narratives. In School 1 this was reflected in the participant's experiences of the difficulty of defining the boundary between their (often multiple) roles in the School. In School 2 this was further reflected in the difficulties emerging from defining multiple levels of governance and strategic priority between the School and the broader commissioning project. In School 3 this was reflected in the tensions between a CEO spanning the entire governance hierarchy and the changing context associated with continued growth. How individuals saw themselves relative to others also underpinned the theme on positionality. In line with the development processes the perceived need to renegotiate or redefine particular relationships, including through the reclamation of authority in governing, emerged across the schools in different ways. Defined by a wide range of motivations and relations participant narratives sought to make sense of how power within the strategic development process had become distributed and exercised.

Participants' experiences further reflected this in how they saw themselves relative to others, both inside and outside the schools.

The findings summarized above emerged within the process of theoretical sampling laid out in *Section 3.4.1*. The constant comparative approach, discussed in *Section 3.4 & 3.5.3.1*, revealed similarities and differences in participant accounts within and between the schools. In seeking to account for these similarities and differences the following *Analysis Chapter* introduces the theoretical categories that were informed by the research findings and offer a robust explanation of them. Drawn from the comparative analysis of the themes within and between schools the introduction to the *Chapter 5* develops an explanation of how and why 'Motivations', 'Relations' and 'Power' were informed by the findings laid out in this chapter. These categories are developed and refined by synthesizing the existing literature and empirical evidence required to justify their value and significance to the phenomena grounded in the participants' narratives. This closely reflects the abductive process discussed in *Section 3.4* (Peirce, 1903; Suddaby, 2006).

5.0 Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The findings presented in *Chapter 4* reveal the importance of social context to understanding the content and disposition in participants' accounts. The narratives reflect the expression of 'I' within the social milieu through which the relative 'Me' is codetermined (Mead, 1936). The development of theoretical categories closely follows the critical exploration of the themes that emerged from those socially extended experiences across schools. The focus of analysis remains individual experience, whilst acknowledging that those experiences are inseparable from the broader social context that both directs them and towards which they are directed.

Despite the substantial diversity of perspectives and experiences seen in *Chapter 4*, the analysis has revealed significant commonalities across the accounts. In School 1 and 3 the individual(s) responsible for conceiving of the school went on to develop the proposal. They would then go on to have a central role in defining the vision. Participants recruited to these two projects referred to their joining on the basis not only of 'buy in' to the ideas being presented but 'buy in' to the proposers themselves. In both schools those proposers set up the schools with the direct intentions of leading them, arguably both at a strategic and operational level. School 2 on the other hand was proposed by a retiree prompted by the Local Authority; also inclined by the opportunities the project posed. The proposer here would go on to assume the role of Chair with the view that eventually they would be able to step out of the school and continue to pursue their interests at a higher strategic level opening additional schools. In this case the other participants had been recruited on the basis of having a school *of a particular type* i.e. one that was informed by a 'Local Authority rationale'. Even amongst these differing and similar origins across the

schools, participants revealed the multiplicity of the values and dispositions that influenced their initial and continued involvement in the projects. The plurality and diversity of the motivations expressed was therefore developed as an important part of a critical comparative analysis of the experiences across the schools. This has been further evidenced by the analysis across schools of the role of complementary and conflicting interests, priorities and values in defining the interactions through which strategic development has been experienced. Whilst this point emerged from an understanding of the visions and purposes, the complexity of these issues only became fully apparent as a result of the comparison across the differing relationships and positionalities that also emerged as central themes. The complementary and conflicting interests therefore arose as an important area of theoretical discussion regarding the governing and governance experienced. For these reasons, the theoretical category of motivation is developed and assessed against the empirical data in greater detail in *Section 5.2*.

In bridging the analysis of motivations identified in the empirical data with established theoretical debates it is of significance to an understanding of experiences of Free School development that the language of motivation used by participants has been revealed as being performative in nature (Edwards & Potter, 1992; Shotter, 1993; Wittgenstein, 1958). Attitudinal language has been used to convey propositions about colleagues, the community and about the individuals themselves that represents the process of self-construction within the interviews (c.f. Turner & Stets, 2006). The analysis does not present historic motivations 'as they were', but rather the narratives through which the language has served its own purposes. What has been revealed are rationalisations that have extended participant narratives backwards in time whilst also projecting this sense-making in interview into inclinations towards the future.

Although the initial coding revealed the significance of the numerous relationships across schools this alone was insufficient to account for the diversity of the data collected. Relationships identified across the

three schools ranged from friendship, familial, professional, convenient and serendipitous. The role of networks was of great importance to understanding the initial recruitment processes experienced by participants. This in turn was seen to be vital for understanding significant variations in the subsequent development processes. Yet, in moving the analysis towards more meaningful theorization about the reported experiences the central features of the experiences of these relationships related to their continued change and evolution. *Section 4.5* reflected on this as a common feature across the Schools. However, in extending this analysis *Section 5.3* reveals how these features of relating were significant to the ways in which roles, governance conduct and strategic decision making emerged across the schools. This commonality moves the analysis beyond the static identification of the relationships involved. Rather an understanding of the experiences of the processes of relating and interacting that defined the fluidity captured in these differing perspectives is required. *Section 5.3* therefore develops and assesses the theoretical category of relating for its capacity to explain the findings from the empirical data in *Chapter 4*.

Across the schools, tension and disagreement emerged in parallel to consensus and harmony. Whilst this was seen to reflect the negotiation of roles between levels of governance hierarchy, again this would have been insufficient to explain the formation of differing groups and perspectives that would transcend specific roles. Of particular significance to the conceptual development of this chapter is a need to account for the capacity for participants to simultaneously agree and support and disagree and constrain. The strategic development process has been seen to be experienced across the schools in terms of differing understandings of 'us' and 'them'; whilst at the same time who 'they' or 'we' are has been seen to relate to multiple groups of overlapping membership. This informed the development of the theme on positionality in *Chapter 4*. This element of relating is important to the formation of the identities that have

shaped the strategic development process in the reported experiences, and is therefore addressed in detail in *Section 5.3.3*.

In the analysis of diverse perspectives narrated within schools there has been difficulty in determining definitive boundaries around the roles, functions and experiences as narrated by different participants. Participants have been seen to seek to downplay or overcome the influence of others within the development process within their narratives e.g. the CEO of School 3 (see *Section 4.4.4*). At the same time participants have sought to express their own significance, or their desire to increase their significance, in influencing the strategic development of their school(s) e.g. the parents of School 3 (see *Section 4.4.4*). Experiences of particular actions and behaviours have been seen to reflect the difficulties faced in relinquishing such control. In School 2 the narratives reflected an environment in which the founding few simultaneously sought to hand the school back to the local community, whilst never quite being able to relinquish the power required for those remaining to exercise their full discretion. What is revealed across the themes is the extent to which features of the relationships that emerge in these schools serve to distribute power in particular ways. Yet, as the development process continues the renegotiation of power is central to numerous narratives. However, as will be developed in *Section 5.4.2 & 3* to conceptualise power only in terms of constraint would lack explanatory capacity with regards to many insights emerging from the empirical evidence. For example, governors recruited to all three schools have demonstrated their intention and capacity to support and enable the proposers in pursuing aspects of the school projects. The freedom and capacity to act is developed in this chapter as an important aspect of the relations through which the development process has been experienced. For these reasons Power is further developed as a conceptual category and reassessed against the empirical data in *Section 5.4*.

In further developing and refining the analysis in this chapter the areas of theory discussed in *Chapter 2* are treated like a source of data to be critically compared against the categories presented. The relevance

and significance of existing literature is therefore determined by its critical comparison against the analysis of the empirical data revealing the similarities and differences across schools and themes in participant experiences. By continuously returning to the empirical evidence the development and assessment of categories in *Chapter 5* ensures that theory development in *Chapter 6* also remains grounded.

5.2 Motivations

5.2.1 Balancing Multiple Priorities

In making sense of the multiple participant perspectives on strategic vision and purpose the findings revealed the manner in which personal interests were entwined with broad strategic judgments. Personal interests and affiliations, alongside broad subjective value judgements, were embodied in a diverse range of narratives concerning the justification for individual involvement in the schools. This section of discussion seeks to develop an explanation of a facet of participants' experiences in which multiple values and interests serve as an explanation for involvement and conduct in the strategic development process. For instance, subjective judgements about the relative local deprivation were central to explaining what School 2's 'purpose' was meant to be. Simultaneously such judgements served to account for why those individuals were involved i.e. to 'transform' that community (See 4.3.2 - Perspectives on the School's Purpose). Across the schools these subjective judgements related to: their proposed school's locale, failings of the education system, specific interests and hobbies, religion, social mobility, community transformation, support for their own children, educational ethos, the need to develop specific skill sets, their own education, politics, broad political agendas, school and town planning, lead proposers and others broadly involved in the project. These findings replicate and extend upon those found by Higham (2013) and Miller et al (2014) in linking the significance of motivation to provision. However, where this research distinguishes its focus from other studies is in the examination of the conflict, contrast and

ambiguity that also exists between participants in the process of communicating and enacting the schools' strategic aims. In this respect subjective judgements were not only offered to account for personal involvement, but as extensions to how the participants perceived the schools themselves. In this respect the interview narratives reflect, simultaneously, the social construction of self and school as extensions of one another. To the extent that this entanglement can subsequently be seen to materialise in governor narratives about the conduct of their role is of great significance to the characterisation of the values and expectations that underpin the meta-governance of such Free Schools as under study (c.f. Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009).

In the case of *School 1* the Chair's own narrative sought to encompass both their view on the foundational importance of reading in the school and their affection towards the activity. This does not suppose the connection to be one of a cause and effect relationship (Clarke & Hennig, 2013; Mills, 1962). Rather these are more clearly understood as extensions of the same articulated disposition. The emphasis on these particular values is offered as a rationalisation of both their home life, the attitude towards education, their perceived role in governing and their actions in developing and maintaining the school's libraries (c.f. Burke, 1992; Mead, 1934). In this case, the Chair's narrative captured how their excessive involvement in the library involved a significant amount of physical presence at the school. This, in turn, influenced how they experienced the conduct of their role, including making decisions alone, and in feeling too closely exposed to the school's daily operations. It is in this respect that the breadth of personal values and actions expressed as motivations for involvement affects experiences of the conduct of governance and strategy.

"But I thought my goodness, what am I doing!? I feel in many ways I'm taking decisions on my own, that maybe I would have consulted more on had others been more readily available."

(School 1 Chair)

The previous chapter (see *Section 4.2.3*) reflected on the Chair's desire to 'back out a little bit, to get a sense of perspective'. In this respect the motivation to pursue and support reading in the school had become manifest in actions they perceived to be in tension with what they perceived to be required to govern the school effectively. This reflects the tensions that emerge in the mutual constitution and reconstitution of structure and agency (c.f. Alsted, 2001; Stacey, 2011). It reflects the co-occupation of agent in multiple social structures (the habits and norms of liberal personal conduct and engagement in institutions of governance). The experience discussed presently reflects the convergence of such values within a specific context of liberalised processes of education development. Such tensions may be present in other education governance contexts; yet at the same time current discussion offers something of significance to understanding experiences in a context in which the vagaries of liberalised provision compete with the rigidities of a neo-conservative system of governance. In this illustrative case the diverse motivations experienced in setting up and running a free school were understood in terms of their manifestation in a precarious balance between actions to pursue potentially conflicting interests.

"Because I'm here so much I'm heavily on the inside looking out...I have to be careful and hold myself in reserve, because if I'm involved in a process too early then I'm in a sense contaminated and can't take part in the later processes." (School 1 Chair)

The numerous values, purposes and intentions that participants offer as the rationalisations for their involvement can therefore generate conflict. This is of significance in generating an account of governing in the context that is driven by subjective processes of prioritization. This was further demonstrated in 4.2.2, 4.3.2 and 4.4.2 where factors including vested interests and allegiances shaped these subjective foci. The illustration above shows this in relation to conflicting priorities facing a particular individual. Further below this is considered in relation to the differing priorities across participants within each school.

5.2.2 The Role of Compatible Motivations

The sections on purpose and vision noted above demonstrate that participants were initially drawn to or included in the different projects because of converging perspectives and interests. This point is developed further in this section as an account of the experiences of consensus around the unique strategic trajectory of each school. The processes of recruitment to the founding teams pursued a common pattern of drawing on established social networks. In *School 2* this entailed recruitment through contacts from what were initially regarded as being the key ‘strategic partners’, albeit that they also shared a clear set of interests in an educational rationale stemming from the Local Authority (see Sections 4.3.2 & 4.3.5). In *Schools 1* and *3* recruitment was developed through similarly established personal and/or professional connections – yet from largely outside of established local public service provision (see Sections 4.2.1 & 4.4.1). This issue is developed in subsequent sections, but has current significance to understanding the significance of shared motivations across the accounts.

In *School 3*, parent governor motivations to pursue their own children’s education and to impact the local community underpinned their involvement in the school (see Section 4.4.2). The former was also seen to be of significance in understanding the initial deference to the CEO as a reputable provider of local high quality education. The CEO was, in this respect, empowered by the motivations of those who joined to support the project, where this materialised in terms of support of, and deference to, the CEO’s actions. This will be explored for its significance in relation to power, discussed below. The role of recruitment in generating support for a vision created by an individual can be seen in terms of the balance of power shifting towards the CEO (Elias, 2008). However, to judge it only in this way would be to dismiss all other forms of action and conduct by the parents to enable, realise and extend the CEO’s intentions. In such circumstances power is equally recognisable in all the affiliated actions and the reasons offered for them.

What this indicates is the complexity and plurality of the motivating forces that shape individual action around a shared vision. It is this constructive aspect that ties together the complexity of individual motivations driving strategic vision with the complexity of actions undertaken by the many involved. The quote below illustrates how, within a context of complementary motivations about the school and its success, the participant experiences their drawing on social capital in support of the school.

“One of the things I’ve offered and I’m trying to help with is on the sponsorship side of things. My background, in particular with [an investment group], and [commercial property group], locally, is something I wanted to use, and actually we were looking at how just downstairs” (School 3 Parent 2)

The convergence of some motivations, the complementarity of others, or merely the lack of conflict amongst them, form the foundation of shared attitudes regarding the strategic development process. This was illustrated in *School 1* in the previous chapter in the consensus surrounding the centrality of ‘happiness’ to the school’s strategic vision (see *Section 4.2.2*). It is in this respect that social convergence in the narratives on motivation may be seen as the construction of a group identity experienced through its mutual enactment. Specific value propositions are intersubjectively translated through the habituated responses presented in the quotations seen (c.f. Elias, 1978; Stacey, 2011).

5.2.3 Motivational Ambiguity and Tension

The discussion on motivation so far has sought to present the aspects of the reported experiences that demonstrate the importance of shared values, motivations and perspectives to the formation of the groups and directions of development. This section seeks to counterbalance this point by acknowledging the extent to which participant experiences were not purely harmonious. Within the example of School 3 discussed above, motivations, as offered by the participants as explanation of their reported actions, were

seen to be diverse. To discuss the school's religious vision and trajectory as the mere extension of a single or unambiguous shared 'Christian' motivation would be to dismiss the diversity of attitudes that were present, and their translation into communicated motivations and actions. The quote below can therefore be contrasted against the CEO's perspective illustrated in 4.4.2.

"The governors are committed that it's Christian ethos, but it's not a Christian School. We welcome all faiths, and it's more about returning to what the Daily Mail would call traditional values" (School 3 Chair)

Whilst on the surface there may appear no lack of clarity around a key dimension of the Christian vision this vision is a reflection of contrasting perspectives that participants. To this extent participant accounts reflect this tension as it is taken up in historic and enduring tensions in their relationships. This might be conceived of in terms of the expression of different conative and affective content in relation to shared symbols of interaction (Blumer, 1936). However, of greater significance to the research aim is the manner in which experiences demonstrate the capacity to mediate an enduring tension concerning one strategic issue whilst maintaining clear areas of consensus over others. Experiences of the development process are captured in the multi-faceted complexity of defining the school, and each other, within interview. The quote below illustrates the awareness of these multifarious relationship dynamics as emerging from attitudes to differing areas of strategic concern.

"You have to pull against each other, and of course work as a team and show a united front to the outside but you really have to challenge each other. We know that we're both working together even if we are prodding, annoying or getting under the skin of the other. We can have, what I think we term as, robust discussions and arguments and so on, and [the CEO] can give as good as [they] get, but we stand together when it comes to external facing personal appearances." (School3 CEO)

5.2.4 Motivation and Positionality

Extending the analysis of experienced tensions distinctions between strategic priorities were also seen to emerge from the diversity of motivating interests expressed by participants. This section therefore seeks to extend the discussion on motivation by developing further depth around the role of *subjectivities relative to others* in the experiences accounted by participants. This was illustrated in the shared community-based motivations in *School 2* contrasted against the differing ‘scope’ of intended action (see Section 4.3.5). On the one hand participants such as *School 2*’s parent governor and the teaching staff governor conveyed their motivations in terms of the connection to that school’s specific provision (a place for their child and living in the immediate vicinity, or the opportunity to progress a specific teaching role). On the other hand was a proposer and a financial governor whose motivations included allegiance to a solution to Local Authority planning of school places, and the opportunity to take school commissions from them. It may be possible to discern or explain the formation and account of these motivations in terms of differing positions emerging from the divergence or diversity of habitus and capital (c.f. Bourdieu, 1984). The differing levels of strategic emphasis relate to how individuals see their actions in relation to differing sets of interests – drawing as a result from different ‘fields’ of involvement. The extent to which these overlap echo the extent to which shared motivations and allegiances can be identified. What this further demonstrates is the mediating role of motivation in processes of self-organisation played out in local interaction (c.f. Mowles, 2014; Stacey, 2011). Motivation is seen to have a mediating role to the extent that the analysis reveals these rationalisations in the formation of tacit hierarchies and loose structures that reflect the complexity of local interaction. This was illustrated in *School 1* in relation to the clearly presented motivations of the Responsible Officer and Chair to ‘support the CEO’ (See Section 4.2.2). The result was the perceived self-organisation of a clique contrasted against the community governor who recounted their increasing dissatisfaction with the CEO’s decisions (see Section 4.2.4). This

is of clear significance to understanding processes of self-organisation in governance, where the conduct of formal role and function is entangled with the broader consensus amongst those motivated similarly towards particular objectives. What emerges here is an important connection between motivation and relation as similar or complementary perspectives influence the formation of particular groups. However, participants' experiences capture the challenges for maintaining effective governance that this could produce. For instance, the motivation amongst members of the founding 'clique' to support the CEO in School 1 led, retrospectively, to the acknowledgement that this clouded judgement in governing.

"We should have made much more of a nuisance of ourselves. So easy to do in hindsight. I shall be tougher next time" (School 1 Responsible Officer)

5.2.5 Motivations in Social Complexity

The first section of analysis on motivation discussed the multi-faceted nature of motivation. Subsequent and current discussion reveals motivation as being dynamic, and changeable. This section therefore seeks to bring together the illustrated complexity of motivation that underpins the process of theorisation from experiences of strategic development in the *Chapter 6*. In *School 2* the motivations offered to account for initially joining the school project evolved *over the course of governor narratives* to reflect circumstances and opportunities in the 'present' and expectations about the future. This was illustrated in the case of the community governor, who, driven initially by their pursuit of a new volunteer role, would then find their continued involvement defined by the opportunity to develop a new career (see Section 4.3.5). In the case of both the Chair and Financial Governor the motivation to develop provision that is 'of and for the community' ran in parallel to the motivation to hand over the school and redirect their focus onto new projects. In *School 3* parent governors narrated their initial motivations in terms of the opportunity associated with their children's access to the proposed school (see Section 4.4.1). Having achieved this the narratives captured the shift to overseeing their children's experiences within the school (see Section

4.4.2). However, emerging in parallel to this was the emerging emphasis on the desire to increase involvement in the strategic decision making (see Section 4.4.4). Participants have, in this respect, expressed a diverse range of affections and conations in relation to the various subjects that emerged over the course of the interviews. This includes the manner in which the changing nature of relationships seen within the schools also influences the extent to which individuals continue to serve as a source of motivation. In *School 1*, as illustrated below, the community governor would reflect on areas of continued disagreement and tension with the CEO.

“The nursery nurses which are doing it don’t know what they’re doing and the kids just sit there and mimic what they see on the tele, and I feel like screaming, so, no, we have a difference of opinion there.” (School 1 Comm)

This, compounded by tensions in other relations such as illustrated in Section 4.2.4, could be seen to emerge in the narrative across interviews the participant. This could be seen to substitute the motivation initially to support the CEO in developing the Free School project. Having initially expressed their motivation in relation to their friendship with the CEO (see Section 4.2.1) by the end of the interview the participant’s emphasis had shifted to an attitude no longer in support of involvement in the project itself (Brissett, 1971).

“You’ve gotta let people do what they wanna do [*sic*]...I think my time doing what I’m doing is more finite than it was perhaps when I started. I suspect that I will probably walk away sooner rather than later.” (School 1 Comm)

The participant’s response to strategic misalignment is the desire to walk away. The sense of felt unity on which group identity intersubjectively emerges fails to materialize in relation to the school (Stacey, 2011). Discussion in the moment of the interview draws upon interpretations of the past and present, and gives form to an expected future (Desmonde, 2006; Flaherty & Fine, 2001; Mead, 1934). The governing

relationship between the CEO and this governor is not one in which accountability or formal hierarchy are easily discerned as central to decision making.

The consequences of the discussion above may be seen in founding and governing groups that are self-reinforcing in their recruitment, composition and distribution of power. Initial involvement in the group has been seen to be heavily shaped by shared motivations with the proposer, or the motivation to support the proposer directly. Parallels may be drawn in established schools where the chair, as a central figure, has been seen to play a direct role in motivating others (James et al, 2012; Yukl, 2009). From early on recruitment to the Free School founding groups has been significantly shaped by the combinations of compatible or shared social capital and the commonalities in the content of habitus (professional connections, religious affiliations etc.) (c.f. Bourdieu, 1977; Field, 2003, James et al, 2011; Navarro, 2006). As experiences in the schools have demonstrated, the propensity or capacity to participate or continue participating may be at least in part contingent on the convergence of one's own dispositions and attitudes with the established group identity, or the possession of such a character as to defer to established consensus. This extends the arguments put forward by James et al (2011). Within the current context of study governance agency may be further mediated by its varying concentration in different power relations. What has also been indicated, and is discussed in further detail in sections below, is the potential for group identity to be more heavily influenced by some than others. What is also revealed is the potential for this to have a significant influence on the experienced emergence of a strategic trajectory. In doing so it demonstrates that the processes through which the schools come to deliver particular strategic visions is heavily bound up in subjective value judgements and their mediation through local social relations.

“As people get to know about that more so they will make a choice either to either send their children here or not depending on whether they agree with the vision. You know, we don’t think that we can be all things to all people” (School 1 CEO)

5.2.6 Summary

The discussion above has developed the theoretical category of motivation that emerged from the findings. In doing so it has demonstrated how motivations, articulated in the data, provide a basis for accounting for the dispositions drawn on by participants to account of their actions. In understanding motivation within the social context of the schools it has been seen how the subjective values involved are significant to the relations and configuration of power discussed in the following conceptual categories. In understanding experiences of the strategic development of the Free Schools under study the multiplicity and variability of motivation has been revealed as an important aspect of the social mechanics that define experiences of process. Motivations are therefore understood as possessing the character of process (Elias, 1991); and therefore serve as the *drivers* of the logic that threads together the individual narratives about their actions. The expression of motivation shapes the subjective history of the present, and values embedded within it. In doing so it offers insight into individual intentions for and projections regarding the future.

What has been discerned from the participant narratives is the multiplicity of rationalisations offered in relation to their involvement. Participants have offered motivations equally and simultaneously rooted in the extremes of ethical and charitable principles as greed and self-promotion. The multiplicity of values drawn in through the patterns of recruitment and involvement of civil society actors in founding and governing are of significance to understanding the subsequent experiences within the setting. This is also of significance to understanding how education management and strategy are defined by a socio-historical context and trajectory. What has been revealed in governor narratives is a significant emphasis

on the emergent nature of first-order governance in defining, and often struggling to give coherence to, significant elements of second-order governance (e.g. the development and enactment of rules and norms within the value contexts outlined) (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). These aspects of motivation are further drawn upon in relation to both the latter analysis and discussion in the next chapter. What it suggests however is that meta-governance becomes defined by the breadth of values that are drawn in in the process of motivating civil society actors to develop schools.

The diversity of values presented serves to blur governance boundaries and elude simple categorization (c.f. Ball, 2007). Strategic disagreements were discussed in terms of the internal social processes rather than the appeal to some external value proposition. Simultaneously the ability to pursue one's own values and motivations was reinforced by the processes of organisation that would locate individuals at particular points in the organizational hierarchy (e.g. the CEO of School 3). What emerges are the tensions between emancipation within an enduring system of centralised second-order prescriptions and the realisation of systemic inequities manifest in decreasingly democratic local interaction (c.f. Portelli & Konecny, 2013; Rawls, 1971; Stacey, 2003). A significant question therefore concerns the impact on the 'governability' of school level actors (Olssen, 2005) and the extent to which 'responsibilising' governors is sufficient to ensure local compliance to any still remaining centralized educational values in a neo-liberal self-governing school system (c.f. Foucault, 2010). The analysis above suggests that this sort of dehumanisation of governor action may not capture the richness and complexity of motivation that emerges in the social processes through which these schools develop.

5.3 Relating

5.3.1 Self and Others

The previous section focused on governor reports of the motivations and diverse rationales that have driven involvement and conduct in the schools. In doing so it revealed the significant and enduring

influence that established and emerging relationships had on experiences of involvement, inclusion and the formation of a strategic trajectory. The current section develops a conception of relating that defined how participants saw themselves *in relation to others*. This forms an important underpinning to subsequent sections that demonstrate the implications of this view of relating for the formation of group identities that shape experiences of the development process. This section therefore relates to how participants have seen 'I' or 'us' in relation to 'them'. This was considered in relation to the commonalities and complementarities in social capital and habitus. Across the schools there was consistent evidence of how proposers and founders drew on existing social and professional networks to recruit others. The homophily associated with social capital, manifest in the recruitment from existing networks, may be seen as reinforcing or exaggerating the role of social class and other forms of social and religious value exclusivity in the development of new Free School provision (c.f. Higham, 2014; James et al, 2011; Lin, 2000). As developed in further detail below this aspect of recruitment was perpetuated across all three schools.

Research in international school contexts supports the concern that inequality is an outcome of the additional beneficial resources such capital wields, where such social-capital is already associated with schools located in a higher socio-economic context (Horvat et al, 2003; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). In parallel, the current analysis reveals how this is manifest in participants' experiences. The schools revealed variations in habitus and the strength of relevant capital within them, as reflected in differing participant accounts. To understand experiences of how social-capital manifests amongst the different school groups requires appeal to the differing specific relations that emerge in experience. In the case of *School 2* it was revealed how the development of the founding and governing group followed what was described by the Chair and proposer as a strategic recruitment process. In tracing the origins of the school back the first relationship to be identified was in fact one shared by the proposer and the Local Authority.

This informed the Chair's purpose for the school in terms of its desire to be a community based school. Yet because the Chair was not themselves 'of the community' the recruitment drew from a social and professional network that spanned other schools, another Local Authority and a local university. Early on in the development process the group therefore had very few, often tenuous, direct connections with the population it would serve. What emerged were a series of challenges concerning how, as a school, the participants felt that this central strategic relationship with the community should emerge in action.

"The links we make with the community... but what do you mean by this? Well the teachers have said this; but you've said this; so can we meet here; and we're going to do this... It's more that we do it and then report back on how it went" (School2 teaching staff governor)

"My sense in terms of the [community vision] is that it's getting there in terms of achieving what we wanted to achieve, but it's very early days." (School2 Finance Governor)

What is illustrated is that social capital informs an important aspect of the context that shapes path dependence (Koch et al, 2009). The capacity to relate to the community the school sought to serve depended, early on, on the strength of the existing networks of those through which the relationships with the community would actually be enacted. This is important in casting light on governor's reported experiences in the school of how the community vision began to emerge from the 'bottom up' in practice. Opportunities to develop the community networks were heavily dependent on the specific interactions different participants were exposed to. What emerges is an understanding of why the definition of the community vision in practice was perceived to be determined by teaching staff and the principal (see below, for instance). The reported experiences suggest that social interaction was central to this strategy, and that strategy is only given clarity in how it becomes manifest through local practice.

"So that was probably the tensest bit of the ethos and the vision between myself as principal and also a governor, and also the rest of the governing body, but it is unfolding... I also believe that

we will only be successful in developing the relationships with our parents and our community if I'm there, and out and about, so I'm never ever going to be one of these people who hides [themselves] away with loads of people around, because I think that's not going to be reflecting the effective vision of what we want from the school." (School2 Principal)

The findings that inform this analysis were equally evident in School 3. The previous chapter, and previous section, revealed the role of complementary and consistent dispositions in bringing together the participants. This was reflected in the multiple accounts of the CEO drawing on social capital they had developed in virtue of their role at another local school. This was initially seen in the recruitment of parents from the existing school who wished to support the project. The CEO then sought to develop this capital further by leveraging their reputation in the locale to engage other prospective parents. Supported by their partner as well, the previous chapter demonstrated the importance of perceived like-mindedness and the reciprocal satisfaction of mutual benefits. Subsequent recruitment from established relationships with Ofsted representatives and lawyers may be seen to echo the link between socio-economic status and the intangible resources that can be drawn into governing (Balarin et al., 2008; James et al, 2011).

"If I had not had an extremely capable governor who oversaw the legal side that would have been another area that I would have fallen flat on my face on. [They were] ...able to give three days a week to the school pro bono. I think that needs to be very clearly spelled out because otherwise the government thinks that it's all fun. 'If I can do it anybody else can'; but actually I've had to do it through a) good will and b) diseconomies of scale money" (School3 CEO)

Again, what emerges is a view of the school heavily dependent on existing or developed social capital. Just as with the example above the challenges experienced in the school extend from the formation of strategy as a reflection of the shared or complementing values that underpin the congruity required of a social network. The result was seen in the emergence of a school in participant accounts where there was

broad agreement towards, for example, its Christian leanings. It is in this respect that an understanding of the development process experienced in these Free Schools is largely dependent on the processes through which the perception of shared values defines the networks from which those involved in the projects emerge. Where the Neo-liberal corporate governance structures of Free Schools remain focused on the capabilities brought into development then self-governance appears to be defined by how organisational shared values can be projected onto the community the school serves. In *School 2* this was seen in terms of the attitudes of participants that this was a community that required its low aspirations to be transformed (see Section 4.3.2). The importance of interaction in defining the impacts of social capital can also be seen in examples including the Parent Governor (2)'s drawing on professional contacts for school sponsorship. In *School 3* it can be seen in the projection of Christian values onto a majority Muslim community and the perceived gentrification of the area associated with the resonance of the school's values with the local professional classes (See Section 4.4.2). This echoes a narrowed conception of Neo-liberalism focused on organisational, rather than societal, self-governance; where systemic inequity and a decline of democratic pluralism in service provision are a potential consequence of the school failing to reflect the local population holistically (Portelli & Konecny, 2013).

However, of equal interest was the fact that participants at the school also suspected that members of the locale were raising objections to the school for political or social reasons.

“We’ve had 3 or 4 challenges to our admissions policy online. We have a sneaking suspicion that actually that’s some kind of internal council check to the process.... or else someone else with a political agenda. And of course we have to be careful about how we tread but we want to build bridges with the community schools who have had their noses put out of joint...” (School3 Chair)

In relation to the perceptions of those ‘outside’ of the participants’ and school’s network then objections were to be understood as a way that others sought to influence the school or express their conflicting

values. Although this provides no insight into the motivations as might be expressed by the objectors themselves it casts light on how participants at the school see themselves in relation to others. This echoes paradoxical tensions arising in processes of organisation (c.f. Ashforth et al, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Stacey, 2011). In this case, the sense of unity 'inside' the school can be seen as partially dependent on shared judgements about groups 'outside'. Important for both the current discussion and subsequent chapters (*Chapters 6 & 7*) is the fact that such perceptions do not rely on there being any other actual actors aware or engaged in this political and social dichotomy. The Local Authority, in this context, reflects what Mead (1962) would characterise as the generalised other. This echoes the expectations that participants have about the attitudes and actions of others within the local social context. It is in this sense that the group's own discourse regarding their identity offers only the construction and communication of self-conception and the recognition of how this might stand in conflicting relation with other value propositions (c.f. Bourdieu, 1977).

Governor experiences reflect the processes of self-reinforcement of an 'in-group' identity associated with internal gossip and rumour. The mere prospect that a disconnect between 'self' and 'others' might generate challenges for the strategic trajectory of the school would therefore result in participants' narratives reflecting the ways in which to extend their social capital so as to mitigate the perceived problem. This is directly comparable to what has already been seen in the other schools. In light of the ways in which individuals at the Local Authority were perceived to be imposing themselves on the school the solution was seen by participants to be to extend their own network in such a way that the problems might be mitigated at the source.

"It's [the admissions governor] is now a pretty senior admissions [person], so [they're] now the chair[person], or vice, or something in terms of the area. So we've gone from being kind of

outside, to actually being, you know, sort of, a pretty accepted part of that group” (School 3 Parent 2)

This reflects the manner in which the strategic freedoms experienced by the participants can only be understood as defined through the social relations between them and others; in this case the Local Authority (Stacey, 2003). The ‘freedom to’ define the school according to their own value propositions has to this extent been experienced through the multiple ways that individuals perceive each other and other stakeholders’ ability to continue to restrict and influence (c.f. Olssen, 2005; Reich, 2002).

5.3.2 Processes of Relating

The analysis above revealed how the ways in which individuals relate, and perceive their relations, with one another informs their narratives about the strategic development context. The reported influence of social context means that governing relations are not reducible to the formal roles adopted in the founding and governing groups. It is for these reasons that the current section seeks to develop an account of how participants experience the interactions and relations through which the development of identity, role and conduct can be interpreted. The theme on organisation and reorganization presented across the schools revealed formal structure to both be shaped by, and reinforce, the mediation of power that emerged in the development processes. To explore the links between social capital and agency in participant experiences requires portraying the multi-dimensionality of the networks and relationships narrated (c.f. James et al, 2011). This includes acknowledging the imbalances in how and when individuals draw upon their own social capital, and that of others. It is also of significance in to understanding the apparent multiplicity of shared and competing motivations, and the formation and dissolution of trust (c.f. Field, 2003). This reflects the arguments presented in section 4.5 that informed the current theoretical category in relation to the theme of relationships, but also to processes of organisation and relative position.

Governor narratives reflected on relationships as having developed, emerged or altered discontinuously over the course of their interviews (e.g. Section 4.3.4). The complexity of relating was compounded by how governance structures were negotiated and internalized, and by the timing and duration of involvement (e.g. Section 4.3.5). Similarly, trust is not only seen in the findings as a characterization of particular relationships but as the rationalization of decisions and subjective judgements governors presented (e.g. Section 4.2.3). In *School 2*, for instance, changes in the experiences of relating were evident in the narrative of the community governor. The previous chapter illustrated how, as the school had transitioned from its early development to its operation, the governor had reflected on the distance that had grown between themselves and the principal (see Section 4.3.3 - Relationship Boundaries). This might be explained as a consequence of the role changes inherent in a move from founding to governing. However, specifically within *School 2* the challenges were experienced in the differing priorities between the existing school and sister school trust. The consequence is seen in a governor experience that directly reflects those conflicts and tensions. Within the same interview the community governor seeks to make sense of their friendship, their link to the school as a volunteer, their professional allegiances and the duties of a multifaceted role in the school that spans both governing and management of other associated school projects (e.g. Section 4.3.3). The perceived pressures to separate these relations is characteristic of the competing values and memberships illustrated by Smith & Lewis (2011). Reported experiences reflect on the tensions associated with this multiplicity. The experience is narrated as one in which conflicting relations and motivations are reflected on as in need of separating.

“Do you try and step back? Do you try and put a line down the middle? It is tricky!” (School 2 Comm)

This is important in acknowledging the affected dimension of the agent-structure relation, where the clarity of social structures (e.g. of governance), and their instantiation in actions, are confounded by the

complexity of the ways in which individuals simultaneously relate on a personal level within a single context (c.f. Dépelteau, 2008; Elias, 1978; Shilling, 2003). This builds upon the link acknowledged by Connolly and James (2011) in offering some explanation of the mediating effect of complex self-identifications that underpin the conduct of governing roles (in this setting). This was also not an isolated example. It was seen across schools as individuals found themselves standing in relation to others in multiple ways (see, for example, Section 4.2.5 – Multiple Roles). Adopting multiple roles within the school, drawing on multiple motivations for involvement and having or forming both personal and professional relationships within the founding and governing groups meant that individual experiences of self were drawn from the complexity of ways in which they related to others. The conduct of participants was, to this extent, shaped by how they saw themselves contributing to the strategic development process in relation to others. The analysis reveals an experience of participation not confined to the enrolment in a pre-defined governance role. Governor experience reveal perceptions of that role to be only one of the facets of the experience of strategic development to be juggled and balanced.

“I did at one point consider resigning as a governor because I felt that it was getting muddled and perhaps I’m better placed to be doing other things that needed to be done than being a governor, and there were lots of people who could sit on a committee...” (School 1 Comm)

The experience above illustrates that even the structural relations that can be identified result from a continuous and dynamic interplay between differing values and interests. An explanation may be offered in terms of the enabling-constraints of government in both presenting the opportunities and freedoms to develop the school but within otherwise specific governing roles and functions that the participants are meant to play (c.f. Macintosh et al, 2006). To this extent the quotation reflects the experience of a paradox emerging from being *compelled* to act *autonomously*- the governance system that compels is difficult to reconcile with how this autonomous governor sees their ideal contribution. Parallels may be drawn with

Glatter's (2012) observations that in a context of increasing autonomy experiences reflect one of increasing constraint. Where the current analysis extends this is in recognising the role of actor's experiences stemming from a broader social and civil context. Constraint, within the autonomous settings under study, can be defined in terms of the conflicting allegiances, felt duties and social networks that influence self-organisation. The paradox reflects participant experiences of an education and policy context that both produces this liberal involvement, and works to mitigate the resulting tensions through a prescriptive framework for governing (c.f. NSN, 2015; Ofsted, 1999). How these tensions play out in experience can be illustrated by the established relationships between a trustee and the CEO in *School 1* (see Section 4.2.1). A much broader set of personal and professional relations founded on mutual esteem and an established pattern of working were central to the experiences of self-governing. The conduct of governing, within self-governing schools, is self-defined because of the freedoms to do so. The quote below reflects the emergence of governing practice that only fully makes by appealing to the social history of its development. To this extent governance itself is context specific, and dependent on the increasing influence of the unique local social context extending from liberalisation.

“[The CEO] came over to [School1 RO's home town] only about a week ago and we had lunch together; and that's an informal consultation I suppose. And I would say that the informal outweighs the formal by a portion of about 75% to 25%. In other words, the contribution I'm making to the school is far more through the informal conversations.” (School 1 RO)

5.3.3 Identity in Action

Such illustrations as above reflect a snapshot of participant narratives through which they construct an understanding of interactions that have shaped their impressions of the strategic development process. The accumulation of experiences of these interactions is of importance to how participants account for the complexity of their relationships. It is therefore this area of analysis that underpins the current section.

Doing so will therefore provide a theoretical basis for accounting for the processes of relating that are drawn upon in the construction of experiences within each interview's 'living present' (Holman, 2015; Griffin & Stacey, 2006). The experience in the above example, communicated within the interview, relates the audience to a part of the process through which particular allegiances are experienced as having been forming and becoming reinforced. Narratives are thereby informed by participants' own understandings of established social history, overlapping motivating forces (including those directed towards supporting each other) and their own (early) involvement in the school. The narratives from the CEO, Chair and Responsible Officer of *School 1* captured a relationship of reciprocal enablement (see Section 4.2.3). The result was a construction of identity, reported through its manifestation in particular actions, dispositions and routines associated with being 'special governors' (see Section 4.2.5). These patterns would then be seen to define the exercise of power within the school (see Section 5.4). Despite their role as 'critical friends' to the head, the participants of *School 1* would follow, permit and enable the CEO in pursuing particular strategic ideas. This could be seen in the shifts in narratives about recruitment decisions from having initially supported the CEO to having had doubts and realising the need to be more challenging (see Section 5.2.4). Even if this may be construed as the attempt to reduce individual culpability, in the process it reveals the shifting or multifarious nature of allegiances characterised in attitudes towards different events. Simultaneity is captured in the experience of the multiple relations participants hold with another individual and draw from *within the interview*. Within this context governors' experiences of their own governing conduct could be seen to be influenced by how they made sense of the complexity of these complex relations. Illustrated below, the inherent tensions and contradictions that emerge from the rich social history of *School 1* underpinning involvement may be understood to be at odds with their own pursuit of impartiality. In seeking to avoid a conflict of interest the governor cannot actually escape it. The

bias that emerges from the formation of identity within the school stands at odds with any assumed impartiality of governance.

“We were also asked about the [CEO’s company] providing a computer system for logging in after school clubs... Then the opinion of the governors was sought, because obviously that could be a conflict of interest... so why not use what’s on the doorstep? But we were asked our opinion and our advice and whether we would OK that happening. Having said that, the company subsidises the school to a large extent both from manpower and from resources so....and you know, sponsorships ok so there ya go...[sic]” (School1 Community Governor)

The formation of social groups and cliques, defined by context specific social dynamics, is equally evident in the other schools. In *School 2*, orientations towards the single school or the multi-academy trust, discussed above, also reflected differences in the participants’ intended duration and purpose of involvement. It also became reflected in the formation of tacit hierarchy between those who saw themselves as ‘background defenders’ of the vision and the increasing role of community actors as the school’s ‘community representatives’. The former described how they would seek to exercise power over the latter to defend the original vision (see Section 4.3.5). Yet, paradoxically, the former groups’ strategic vision had extended from the motivation to provide a school that reflected the sentiments of the latter.

School 3 saw the same formation of groups emerge from experiences and judgements about the CEO’s professional and religious connections. This was contrasted against the shared attitudes of the local parent governors whose narratives reflected the perceived need to recoup some of the control over the school’s continued development to a multi-academy. Aspects of this are discussed in greater detail in the section on power. However, the findings do not suggest that self-organisation is reflected in the emergent shift from one pattern of organisation to another (c.f. Aritua et al, 2009). Rather, experiences capture the sense in which self-organisation is a characteristic of self-definition; where self-definition arises in context

dependent interaction. The formation and adoption of opposing views yields differing identifications amongst the participants in relation to that particular issue within their narratives. Yet, to say that the CEO and the parents were therefore adversarial in the school would be to ignore the multiple fronts on which they closely identify. The seemingly contradictory relations help in the experiences of strategic development are addressed in the following chapter.

5.3.4 Summary

The discussion above has captured the role of relating in explaining experiences presented in *Chapter 4*. The possession and exercise of social capital, the ways in which individuals relate with others, the convergence of attitudes and the intersubjective construction of narratives about 'themselves' and 'the school' are of great importance to understanding the themes emerging in the research. Strategic vision and purpose has been analysed here in terms of the processes of negotiation, convergence and exclusion that bring complementary values into the development process drawn from pre-existing networks. In doing so the analysis has the capacity to explain the emergence and predominance of some values over others. This supports and extends the findings of Higham (2014), as, after a selection process that already tends to favour particular forms of social capital the analysis in this chapter demonstrates how values become reinforced in a way that isolates or excludes external or contrasting propositions. The varying distances between strategic values and how they become enacted has also been understood in terms of the distinctions between the processes through which subjectivities are constructed and the processes through which they are imposed on, or restricted within, wider social contexts.

The above points reflect the heightened role or strength that subjective position has in understanding how those in such autonomous schools relate to their stakeholders. The (continued) involvement of participants across schools has been seen to be grounded on the shared identities that develop through the construction of intersubjective 'school level' narratives and histories. Participants define their

identities within the schools against the generalised others outside; whether that be the community, local authority, religion or other contrasting or complementary 'value sources'. Yet it is within the context of how the dominant discourse is constructed that the analysis has revealed the conflicts, tensions and negotiations that influence this. This has been discussed in terms of the processes of self-organisation illustrated. Self-organisation, in this respect, has been considered in terms of experiences of specific interactions. Conceptualisation therefore struggles to reconcile notions of linearity, or the reduction of causality, even when offered by the participants such as to 'thread together' a history of the school. This underpins the need to address the final theoretical category of power, which enables the research to explain the mechanism underpinning identity formation, disparities in participant narratives and ultimately the relative distributions of freedom and control captured in the experiences discussed. Where the current section ends is in casting new light on the processes of mediation "between the individual and the collective, as individuals" in experiences of Free School development (Smith & Lewis, 2011: 383). Conceptualising the simultaneity of consensus and disagreement, informed by how participants rationalise their own disparate motivations, offers a novel way of understanding the experiences of founding and governing in Free Schools that regards individuals holistically. Emerging from the current research context is also a novel approach of potential value to exploring comparable processes in other settings. In doing so it reconciles established theoretical discussion on the role of capital and agency in school governance (e.g. James et al, 2011) with theoretical discussion on the tensions within identity manifest in roles, memberships and values (e.g. Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Kreiner et al, 2006; Pratt & Foreman, 2000).

5.4 Power

5.4.1 Mediating Relations

Section 5.3 & 4, regarding motivations and relating, demonstrated how governors' experiences capture the development and exercise of social capital in the development process. For instance, the experiences illustrated above captured how opportunities conducive to the achievement or realisation of abstract strategic goals were seized upon e.g. the drawing from sponsorship opportunities in *School 3* (see *Section 5.2.2*). Similarly, experiences from *School 3* revealed how perceived potential threats from the council were in part mitigated by the recruitment of one of the governors into a senior role on the admissions committee. However, this alone does not help to cast light on all circumstances in which social capital is drawn upon, or those in which it is not. This section therefore seeks to develop an understanding of the experiences of power as an important category for explaining the vast differences in experiences regarding input and control within the development process. James et al (2011: 430) contend that to maximise on, or amplify the effects of, capital requires governance agency, understood in terms of the "exertions, efforts and endeavours of those involved in governing". Reflected in the quote below in the case of *School 2* the parent governor's experienced lack of knowledge was exacerbated by a lack of confidence and a lack of perceived capacity to contribute more. Disproportionate levels of perceived agency define the level of impact or influence of different governors. This echoes findings by Earley (2000) and Brehony & Deem (1995) with regards to the link between expertise and efficacy. In analysing the self-perceptions of individual experience the current research demonstrates the role this has in determining how power is distributed at board level. This aspect of agency is significant to understanding some of the influences on the manifestation and concentration of power in the schools, and the differing perceptions of levels of influence over the development process.

“I’m not so familiar with the school environment still and every day I’m learning more and more which is obviously going to be of benefit...there’s a lack of confidence you know; I would have been able to work with discussions and decisions that are being made, but I wasn’t really adding.”

(School 2 Parent)

A perception of one’s own peripherality has been cultivated or maintained within the reported experiences of particular interactions, or the exclusion of individuals from them. Peripherality has been seen to result from a lack of overall confidence, a lack of context relevant experience, limited role in founding or proposing or limited duration of involvement. In School 1 the self-perceived ‘clique’ expressed the implications of this reciprocated relation in terms of exclusivity over aspects of decision making (see Section 4.2.5). The community governor extended this experience by reflecting on the exclusion of new recruits and the attempts to renegotiate power within processes or reorganization. In School 3 Parent Governors expressed the felt need to be included in more of the ongoing strategic discussions (see Section 4.4.3). This might be seen to reflect, and extend, dimensions of governance capital and agency (James et al, 2011). It draws upon the processes of relating that define how capital is taken up, and how agency can be restricted and enabled by organisational social conditions and group identity.

Based upon the findings it might equally be possible to offer a conceptualisation of experience and self-perception as a form of ‘social instrument’ that either mediates the translation of images (values, knowledge, convictions etc.) into actions (strategy implementation, the mobilisation of others etc.), or doesn’t (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). However, it is of equal, if not greater importance, to analyse this phenomenon as it occurs *in relation to others*. This can be seen in contrasting the example above against others. In the case of *School 1* the community governor’s attitude towards pedagogy, their extended experience in education and lack of dependence on employment (having passed retirement), their previous roles hierarchically above the CEO (as teacher) and in collaboration with them (in professional

areas), their personality and demeanour and their reflection on having been asked to join the project rather than asking to become involved are all important to understanding their position in relation to others within the school. Again, these can be conceived of in terms of the forms of knowledge and relationships that underpin conceptions of individual agency and capital. However, in doing so this may not enable a complete understanding of how this is characterised in the diverse experiences of the actions and interactions seen within the strategic development process in research. Recognising such dispositions as a part of the context that endures in the living present assists in understanding the multiple experiences and narratives about the relations in the strategic development process (Elias, 1978). This is to say that how individuals spanning multiple roles, layers of formal hierarchy and functions actually relate to one another is defined significantly by the unique memories that define how individuals see themselves and others in interaction. A full breadth of 'historic' factors and conditions, as held imperfectly in individual subjectivity, are of significance to understanding how power manifests in every subsequent interaction.

In relation to this area of development of the category the analysis has sought to account for the agency that is experienced by the possession of capital perceived to be valuable by another. Reflected in Section 4.4.4, despite the centrality of the CEO to the strategic development process conveyed in the findings of *School 3* they still sought to capitalize on governors' participation in areas of strategic activity based upon their access to specialist knowledge or professional networks of perceived value. To this extent the experience captures one of instrumentality. The analysis of *School 3* reflected on the perceptions of the sources and maintenance of the CEO's power within the development process. From this position the CEO has permitted and enabled others to act 'autonomously' within the confines of tacitly approved jurisdiction.

"One of them has helped with all the legal documents... two others of the governors have supported the hunt for a site, and kept the pressure on the education funding agency... so not all,

but most of the governors, have taken a small part, well not small, a part, in this process... I have to delegate" (School3 CEO)

In parallel to the role of social conduct in enhancing different measures of school governance this provides insight into how social capital is mediated through local conduct in experience (c.f. James et al, 2011; Ranson et al, 2005). Upon acknowledging this within the data, it becomes possible to understand why participants' constructed narratives reflect differing degrees of agency over different aspects of strategic development. This mediation could also be seen in School 2 between participants in relation to realizing the community vision (see Section 4.3.2).

An alternative and complementary perspective on the above can also be offered that further demonstrates the significance of power as perceived in the different relations and interactions within the school. The following section more specifically focusses on the experience of identity formation, and the richness and diversity of such relations that shape how configurations of power and agency are experienced in strategic development. However, a significant finding in the current section is the sense in which knowledge is revealed as a vehicle of power at the board level through the active advantages it gives within different social interactions (c.f. Foucault, 1991). Perhaps even more significant is a conceptualisation of the knowledge-power relationship in terms of how the perception of a relative lack of knowledge perpetuates passivity. Power also extends to how *self-reflection* redefines or reinforces social position *in parallel to* the actions and intentions of others. This is not to say that power is 'of the person', but rather that power is simultaneously defined by gestures and responses to both oneself and others. Where one perceives themselves as lacking the knowledge or ability to question or challenge in the same action, or lack of, one is permitting or enabling another to act with a degree of freedom. The processes of organisation underpinning governing and strategic activities are shaped by the consequences of inviting people with a diverse set of skills and backgrounds of mixed relevance to the broader set of

tasks involved in each school. Capacity to govern within the experiences is not drawn purely from a functional knowledge e.g. of HR or law, but from a self-evaluation of all the context-specific knowledge that participants felt themselves to have or not.

5.4.2 Identity, Enablement and Constraint

The discussion on relations revealed the importance of the formation of social groups to the experiences of participants (see *Section 5.3*). In doing so it captured how this process reflected the ongoing mediation of differing values and interests. The current section draws together aspects of relating and the mediation of power to develop an account of the experiences about how individuals serve to affect each other's influence on strategy. Motivations were discussed in *Section 5.2* as a driving force behind initial and continued involvement in each of the school projects. Other priorities (e.g. professional) and 'Acts of God' (e.g. personal crises) were amongst the factors that determined the perceived necessity for founders and governors to discontinue their involvement. This closely echoes established findings regarding involvement in governing roles (e.g. James & Goodall, 2014). However, what the previous chapter also reveals is the manner in which the convergence and divergence reported amongst differing, or potentially differing, interests and relationships precipitates the inclusion or exclusion of self or others from the strategic development process. Governors actively expressed their attitude to deposing those who might not be seen as 'fitting' with their own conceptions. This was seen in the case of *School 1* with regards to the CEO's analogy with the flash dancing and also with the English Summer garden painting. It was equally seen in *School 2* in relation to the original founder's views of their roles as defenders of the vision. It is in this sense that participant narratives capture their pursuit of dominance over the strategic development process; and how the construction and preservation of a central organisational discourse reflects an important aspect of the organisational identity work (Griffin & Stacey, 2004).

In each school it has been seen how participant narratives refer back to central figures. This falls against a backdrop of established theory that recognises the role of centrality in understanding governance agency and capability in terms of the Senior Leader-Governor relationship (c.f. Cornforth, 2003; Heystek, 2004; James et al, 2011; Mace, 1971; Van Wyk, 2004). The current findings build upon this conception in also recognising that it is not necessarily the role itself that extends these relationships, but rather factors such as the degree of knowledge and the level of operational involvement. Furthermore, in the specific context of the experiences within this study, the claim to the figurative, or literal, title of 'lead proposer' was of greater significance to understanding participant centrality to the strategic development process both in their own narratives and those of others. Whilst in *School 1* and *3* this individual would also have a 'Senior Leadership' role, in *School 2* the same authority was engendered by the Chair. This may be understood as a form of 'referent power'; arising from other participants' identification, or desire to be associated with, the influential actor in each school most clearly identified as the school's originator (c.f. Alshahrani et al, 2013; Raven, 1993). It may also be understood as a socially accepted legitimizer of authority that stems from the broadly accepted convention of 'possession' that has now been brought into the governance in Free Schools (c.f. Beetham, 2013; Weber, 1978). In line with previous analysis the experiences underpinning the formation of each school through existing networks, founded on mutual or complementary motivations, is perpetuated in the ways in which the participants include themselves within the desirable 'in-group' embodied in the emerging vision (Ashforth et al, 2008). This was evidenced across all three schools within the theme of 'purpose and vision' (see Sections 4.3.2, 4.4.2 & 4.5.2). In doing so power is instilled in the group through their self-reinforcing behaviours and interactions; whilst being distilled amongst those perceived to be most central to that vision and its enactment. Power, in this respect, was seen in how governors reflected on the differing interactions through which individual roles and the broader strategic trajectory continued its realization through constant negotiation and

interaction. The resulting importance of central figures to each school's strategic identity was seen in the resulting dependencies that emerged from these configurations and the reliance on particular individuals with regards to a school's stability in the development process.

“The hard question that I've put more than once to the governors and three foundation trustees is look what is our succession plan if we lose [the CEO] ...and I put it to [the CEO] and until now we haven't had a good answer really.” (School1 RO)

The emerging conceptualization of power within experiences of the strategic development process is one that emerges from the complexity of the social relations that have been identified in the current chapter and the last. Illustrated above was the role of dependence that resulted from participants' experiences of having gathered together around a vision started and reinforced by an individual. This has further been seen in the allegiances, trust, amicability and respect that was characteristic of the way relationships were accounted for. For instance, both the Chair's and Responsible Officers accounts in *School 1* captured the level of faith these individuals had in the CEO (see Section 4.2.2). This was central to the motivations and explanations offered by both participants for their involvement in the project. It was also significant to explaining how they conducted their role in relation to this individual (e.g. as reflected in Section 5.3.2). This was captured in the sense in which both expressed their roles in terms of having 'come along for the ride'. What this doesn't clearly reflect is the kind of relation in which power can be understood as manifest in interaction in terms of dominance, control or constraint. The defining aspect of these experienced interactions, and the manner in which these participants make sense of their relations, is rather one of deference. It is in this respect that what might be understood as passivity amongst these participants, founded on their entailed trust, respect and amicability, ceases to adhere to the conditions of the definition of 'passive'. Deference is more clearly understood here as also possessing an inherently active property. The agency exercised by the CEO in making a number of central strategic decisions in the school

(e.g. over recruitment, policy, curriculum) are a reflection of the social context that enables them to act. The support of founding trustees and governors serves to reinforce the legitimacy and entitlement of their decision making whilst removing the obstacles that might inhibit or restrict. It is in this respect that organisation and the definition and conduct of role are in part defined in terms of the permissive relation between 'governor' and 'CEO'.

"We don't see our role putting a major input to the school because the leadership is there, it's a very well led school by an extremely capable [person]. You then don't have to try and do the job yourself." (School1 RO)

"It's not just finding *a* solution; it's finding *the* solution; the right solution for us. The one that fits best for us; and I suppose that's where I come in... I think I sit in the middle of [the governors and head teachers], don't I. Certainly our governors are a great source of inspiration, and wisdom, but because they believe in it and they believe in the vision, there's not huge conflict." (School1 CEO)

This was seen to manifest in different arrangements across the governor narratives between schools. In *School 3* the previous chapter revealed how governors, driven by, amongst other things, their vested interests, enabled and permitted the CEO to dominate large portions of the strategic decision making early on in the school's development (see Section 4.4.2 – Vested Interests). In *School 2* 'permissiveness' was evidenced across multiple accounts in relation to the development of important aspects of strategy through its emergence within staff activity. In such circumstances it makes little sense to describe e.g. the Finance Governor as being 'less powerful' than the staff participants. This was not what was captured in the holistic understanding of the respective experiences of different participants of one another, and their respective positions within formal hierarchy. Rather, for the lack of preference, decision or counter-action the accounts reflected the manner in which governors permitted staff to act (e.g. to 'define' community). In the context staff were afforded the 'freedom to' act (positive liberty), rather than the 'freedom from'

the enduring constraints of their being bound up in ongoing interaction (c.f. Olssen, 2005; Reich, 2002). It is in this respect that an important aspect of governor experiences reflects on how particular relations serve to *empower* others. To the extent that power is to capture the complexity of the relations it must be seen both in how power is instantiated in action (e.g. over strategy) and simultaneously in how it acts on the actions of others (through empowerment) (Foucault, 1982). It is in this respect that power cannot be understood as a zero-sum game and cannot be understood outside of the context in which it is enacted. Power, as understood here, extends its reach to the constructive and enabling relations. This avoids the reduction of agency to domination. The Finance Governor (amongst others), in this instance, experiences strategic development in terms of their enabling novelty to emerge.

5.4.3 Power as Paradox

Whilst it may have been possible to provide an account of the typologies of relations, motivations and power seen in the findings this would have been to dismiss the very tensions and complexities that have been characteristic of the participant experiences under study. The current section offers an extension of this by accounting for these tensions and contradictions as an inherent aspect of participant experience. The discussion above reflects both how social capital serves as an enabling force, and how power becomes distributed, potentially unevenly, to those who have social capital deemed to be of value by another. Likewise, it has demonstrated power in terms of the permissive and enabling relations seen to be of significance within the context of the Schools' recruitment and development. This remains consistent with Stacey's (2003) concerns that an individual's 'power to act' cannot be distinguished from the conditions in which others have played a part in empowering them. Furthermore, this is directly reflective of the finding that autonomy and agency have not been seen to be synonymous with acting through emancipation (Olssen, 2005). Participants, in the process of making sense of their own experiences, capture a dynamic process of constantly defining and redefining self in relation to others e.g. '*I will be*

tougher next time; 'it can't all be *managed in their head*'. This is understood in terms of how the interview process engages governors in discussing their relationships in terms of multiple relations, each of which is determined by a differing context. The context of the discussion in which the Chair and Parent governor of *School 3* were both seen to agree with the CEO about the vision was radically different from the context within the discussion on the role of religion.

Whilst governor narratives reflect the attempts to impart a chronological or causal sequence to their narratives it is also evident that these contexts do not sit in any necessarily linear relation. This was reflected in the simultaneity of harmony and discord in the relations reported by participants and generated from the analysis (e.g. see Sections 4.4.5 & 5.2.3). Participant experiences are themselves paradoxical in nature as they seek to maintain their support and enablement of one another whilst also narrating their quest to retain or regain control. It is important to recognise the role of the interview in providing the platform through which governors, perhaps for the first time, construct their understandings about the development of the school and their relations to one another. In the 'present' interviews with *School 3* participants, the sense making has been evident in the moments of realisation through which governors construct their expected trajectories for the school. Such moments in the interview contexts with two participants reflected a perceived gap between their projections about who was controlling the school's expansion and their desired level of input (see Section 4.4.3 – mediating power). This reflects Brissett's (1971) arguments concerning the role of intervention, seen here in the context of interaction within the interviews, that leads to participant's sense-making of their experiences shifting their emphases or concerns in the narratives. This conative element to their narratives was influenced both by an awareness of the formal role they were responsible for in the school's development and their interest in redistributing the work and associated risk. What this captures is the multiplicity of perspectives simultaneously held that enable governors to rationalise both their support and pursuit of

control. This multiplicity, and complexity, has already been captured in the differing positions that emerge from their roles and motivations as parents, professionals and formal governors.

“I know [the CEO] set up the school before but [they weren’t] also running the school... one of the things I’m worried about, I feel quite strongly about, is that the group leadership team at the school, they can’t do all the new school expansion strategy stuff by themselves, the governing body needs to be much more involved in that process and the work” (School3 Parent 2)

Such tensions were equally captured in *School 2*, reflected in the experiences of shifting relationships between governors and the Principal as a consequence of the diverging interests within governance and the pursuit of multi-academy status (see Section 4.4.3 – Relationship Boundaries). Likewise, in *School 1*, the trust that had been afforded to the CEO over recruitment was translated in a shifting attitude towards the need to be tougher in scrutinizing their decisions. In this respect participants can be seen to construct and reconstruct their own subjective position relative to others in relation to a variety of issues. These positions have been seen to be of significance to determining how interactions are mediated based upon an understanding of power in which individuals may either seek to enable or constrain the actions of others. Yet at any given moment the participants have demonstrated the capacity to express multitudinous positions in relation to different issues as a reflection of the complexity of their affections towards them. Experiences of power therefore reflect it as held within a ‘present’ moment of understanding of a relation with another defined by the holistic range of conflicting and complementary motivations and attitudes. It is all the ways in which an individual shapes and is shaped by those they interact with.

5.4.4 Summary

The current section has explored the link between how participants perceive of themselves within the context of their relations and their agency within the strategic development process. This builds on the conception of the role of governance capital and agency by acknowledging the mediating effect that different social configurations have. The consequences have been seen in terms of how capital is drawn into the strategic development process in relation to its perceived relevance or importance to others involved. The possession of such capital is therefore one of the mediating factors in determining relative power. Even more significant however is the role that such capital has in the inclusion of others in areas of strategic influence. Whilst this has been seen to be the case the possession of social capital that extends beyond the school (most notably in terms of access to networks of perceived value) is not sufficient to determine the sources of power that determine experiences of influence over strategy. Perceptions of differing levels and types of knowledge have also been of significance to understanding influence. However, it is notable that the influence of knowledge has been seen as largely determined by the mediating effects that confidence and extent of involvement play. This further extends to how legitimacy is expressed through claims to a sense of 'ownership' or original involvement.

The formation of identities that stem from an allegiance to an individual or vested interest in the realisation of their proposition has also been of significance to understanding how power becomes reinforced. However, the tendency towards over-dependence that stems both from social capital and interpersonal relationships has been seen to be significant to understanding the tacit forms of organisation that ultimately shape experiences of strategic conduct. Deference presents itself as a natural outcome of the processes of organisation that follow the recruitment across schools. Transcending formal governance roles governors' experiences reflect the consequences of this in terms of the empowerment of particular individuals. Yet, it has also been seen that such empowerment, understood in terms of

enablement and the 'permission to act', underpins relations across different relations and activities. However, governor experiences also reflect the shift between co-existing contexts pertaining to the different relationships and activities individuals are engaged in. This underpins the explanation of the research finding that individuals experience themselves in multiple, often contradictory, power relations with one another. Reports of how this is negotiated, and the recognition within interview of these inherent tensions, forms the basis on which participants have expressed their will to redefine power within the ongoing development. The result has been seen in a conception of power that is dynamic, complex and mediated by the subjective positions and motivations that are defined and rationalised in participant experiences.

5.5 Summary

The task of this chapter has been to develop and explicate the three conceptual categories developed in conjunction to the constant comparative analysis across themes in the previous chapter. These conceptual areas were discussed in the literature review for their potential relevance to the context, affirmed above. This is seen to reinforce the authenticity of the current research by drawing connections to areas of theory affirmed for their relevance in comparable contexts. Whilst these conceptual areas have been developed in relation to their capacity to account for experiences of strategic development the current chapter has also contrasted the findings against established theory. In this respect the *Analysis Chapter* remains grounded in the empirical evidence, whilst bridging the novel interpretation of the data with relevant theory towards which the researcher has become sensitized. Over the course of presenting the analysis and assessing its explanatory capacity the interlinkages between the three categories have been demonstrated. This is not to say that motivation stands in some relation to relating and power. Rather, in order to understand motivation, it has been necessary to understand the role of relations expressed in

governor's narratives as defining and redefining their involvement and the value propositions that served to rationalize the accounts provided. In the same way, different relations, shaped by the context in which governor experiences locate them, serve to define how the participants experience and represent their own agency. In doing so the three categories must therefore be understood as a part of the same single social process that shapes how governors experience the strategic development process. In acknowledging the roots of individual subjectivity and individuality as an extension of the social it has been possible to both generate and reassess explanations of the similarities and differences in experience. The reintroduction of established theory and new sources of data has enabled the chapter to exercise and confirm some important aspects of experience within the context. However, analysis of each of the three categories demonstrates that a rigid or fixed account of experiences of the strategic development process fails to address one of the most central aspects of participants' accounts. The dynamics of experience reported in the *Findings Chapter* and developed in the *Analysis* demonstrates how experience fails to embody the qualities of linearity, sequence and causal determination that individual discourse might otherwise seek to attribute. It is in this respect that governor experiences of the strategic development process have been experienced in terms of the capacity to maintain and operate within enduring tensions and paradox. The singularity of experience is defined by the simultaneity and multiplicity of its content and dispositions. Relative subjective positions have been seen to maintain both their complementarity and conflict. Conceptions of strategy and governance within the context of Free School development are therefore characterised by dynamic social processes. *Chapter 6* therefore seeks to draw together the current analysis by offering an account that contributes to knowledge.

6.0 Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The employment of comparative methods has sought insights into the contrasts and similarities in narratives, and the researcher has sought to understand these within the broader context offered by those others to which it relates. Contrasting the perspectives, nested amongst other participants within each school, against those within other schools has provided the grounding for an explication of the social mechanics shaping the differing experiences in each setting. The development of the theoretical categories in *Chapter 5* was based upon the iterative process of reincorporating theory with the conclusions already emerging from comparative analysis of the empirical data across participants and schools. Consistent with the grounded theory approach continued reference back to the empirical content that has informed the relevance of the themes and categories also provides the justification for appealing to the theoretical constructs first laid out in the literature review. The result is an analysis grounded in the empirical content whilst acknowledging the role of the researcher in reconciling these findings with specific theoretical debates.

The role of motivation, relations, and power as central theoretical categories reflects both the novelty inherent in the data and its coinciding with theoretical constructs emerging within parallel domains. It is contended that this result reinforces both the current interpretation and the established trajectory of the literature; in turn enhancing the authenticity of theorisation in the previous and current chapter. Of note, the previous chapter revealed each of these categories in terms of their dynamic character. An understanding of the experiences of the strategic development processes reflected in the narratives is not founded on the chronology or linearity of the events and attitudes expressed. Rather, the analysis has

revealed the manner in which individual narratives captured, often seeking to diffuse, the inherent contradictions, simultaneities and multiplicities that characterised experience. This was reflected as much in participants' own narratives as the interpretation of them by the researcher. For example, governors across schools referred to the multiple 'hats' they had to wear in their schools, often seeking to substitute one for another (see Sections 4.2.4, 4.3.4 & 4.4.4). What is captured is a view of experiences of the strategic development process in which self and other are constantly defined and redefined by the minutiae of a process that is itself emerging. The dynamic configurations of power, the complexity of the processes of relating and the role of motivation as a driving force behind conduct engender a conception of experience that acknowledges its biases and limitations. This chapter seeks to develop and articulate the theoretical account of governor experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools entailed by, and emerging from, the research.

6.2 Governor Experiences of the Strategic Development Process

6.2.1 Experiences of Mediating Motivations and Values

The account of participant motivation extended across both the literature review (see, in particular, *Section 2.2*) and the analysis in *Section 5.2* captures an inherent tension in the manner of its study. Motivation has been addressed in terms of its being an extension of the self-actualisation of the actor (Stacey, 2007). To this extent participants' accounts for *why* they have acted in particular ways can only be understood as an act of self-formation within the interview. Yet, in doing so these accounts construct a historical narrative with content representing those individual subjectivities, affections and conations (c.f. Blumer, 1936; MacKinnon, 1994). In doing so the research has revealed a broad range of value propositions that governors reflect in their rationalisation of involvement. Of particular significance was the multiplicity of these value propositions. At the farthest abstraction, participants were seen to

represent the desire to contribute in a volunteer role towards the enhancement of local public service provision (e.g. Parent Governor in School 2 – Section 4.3.1; Responsible Officer in School 1 – Section 4.2.1). Whilst this might be a general truism across the data, to restrict theorisation about experiences of involvement here would be to dismiss the diversity of views regarding what this entailed from differing perspectives. Individual projections of the strategic development process, and governance roles, appear inherently more complex, biased and value laden than established theorisation, particularly from other school formats, appears to reflect. The context across and between each school defined a level of diversity in the characterisations of meta-governance entailed (Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). What is meant by this is that within the broader context of what has been loosely portrayed as Neo-liberal reforms meta-governance has been most notably demonstrated in the research in terms of the local definitions of values, norms and principles through which governance is governed at the individual and organisational level. It is outside of the scope and espoused philosophy of the research to offer an exhaustive typology of values that impact upon governance. However, the findings have shown allegiance (e.g. *Section 4.2.3*), re-engineering of local demographics (e.g. *Section 4.4.2*), pursuit of a school place for their children (e.g. *Section 4.4.2*) and maintenance of a Local Authority approach (e.g. *Section 4.3.2*) to be amongst the novel motivations that extend the discussions by Higham (2014) and Miller et al (2014). It has also been argued that the complex manner in which these values are mediated within the social interactions reported impacts upon the conduct of governing, and governance structures (see *Section 5.2*).

The current contribution stands in relation to the analysis of meta-governance as an institutional phenomenon. At this level meta-governance is often discussed in terms of its emergence within much broader network formations that maintain the supremacy of the co-ordinating role of ‘government’ (Jessop, 2004; Klijn & Edelenbos, 2007; Sørensen & Torfing, 2007). To simplify this further, participant experiences within the current research more closely reflect how governance involves values brought into

and evaluated through local social negotiation. The impositions of 'state', even in terms of the generalised other, have been conveyed through the same kinds of discourse on 'us' and 'them' as any other set of relationships on which governors have reflected (e.g. Section 5.3.1). The point of interest here is that governor experiences reflect both the immediate interactions involved in shaping the school and the interactions with other stakeholders as possessing the same qualities of flux and emergence associated with complex social processes. For example, this was illustrated in relation to the negotiations with Local Authorities in School 3 (see Section 5.3.1). The consequence is that agency has not been seen as experienced through the plurality of differing levels of structural interaction; but rather through the plurality of a broader range of subjectivities, of which some have and have not included the desire to conform strictly and consistently to instruments and images of governance defined elsewhere. Governor experiences, reflected in the analysis, do not support a view that the technologies of power employed to maintain governmentality are absolute in their efficacy (c.f. Foucault, 2000; Rose, 1996). It is important to note that the current discussion does not, and cannot, seek to directly assess such policy processes as might impact on individual schools in various ways. However, what is important in relation to the current research aim is that Neo-liberalism, as the shift to a form of market-based meta-governance, is reflected in the Analysis in *Chapter 5* in path-dependent, contextually specific interactions (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). For these reasons the 'governance of governance' is not founded on perfect market forces (ibid.) but on the imperfections of inequitable networks that advantage particular forms of social capital (C.f. *Sections 5.2.2 & 5.3.1*).

6.2.2 Experiences of Relations in Governance

Governance relations, as reflected in participants' experiences, reflect on broader personal and professional relationships, judgements about local conditions and the forces that shape the balance between freedom and restriction. However, despite the influence of these characteristics of experience

the resulting narratives are not readily defined in terms of 'representation' or 'network partnerships' (c.f. Andresani and Ferlie, 2006; Ball & Junemann, 2012; Osborne, 2010b; Ryan & Walsh, 2004). Rather, governance relations have, as introduced above, been seen to emerge initially from motivating conditions including 'vested interests', 'allegiances' and 'subjective value judgements about locality' (c.f. Ball et al, 2012; Higham, 2014; Thrupp & Lupton, 2011). What is missing in the empirical data are the forms of holism and pluralism that might otherwise support such forms of network governance. This discussion generates a conception of governor experiences that have arisen within the context of Neo-liberal shifts as described. Free Schools entail civil society actors setting up increasingly autonomous schools independent of local government (as defined in policy). Emerging within this context the experiences reflect how governors make sense of the sources of value brought into strategic development, and the processes through which those values are negotiated and enacted at a local level. In this respect governance relations can be understood as the consequence of the mediation of social capital (i.e. allegiances within the schools and values drawn from wider networks) through governance agency (i.e. the individual capacity to influence and act drawn from their competence, confidence and claim to legitimacy) (James et al, 2011). This was illustrated effectively in *School 2* in relation to the Parent Governor's involvement on the grounds of the 'Local Authority' ethos, mediated by their lack of experience and confidence both in the context of education generally and their late involvement in the school project. Furthermore, in refining an understanding of 'governance capital' within the research context the individual motivations described can be seen to reflect both the social justification for involvement and the personal ones as extensions of the same reasoning e.g. to secure good school places generally, including for their particular child; to give something back to the community, but as an extension to their career.

The discussion also serves to contribute to established theoretical debate concerning the implications of the self-governing school agenda, as considered in the literature review (c.f. Whitty, 2008; Glatter, 2012;

Higham & Earley, 2013). Not only does the interpretation above and in previous chapters provide direct illustration of the 'balancing act' in school leadership, it reveals that this balance is not purely mediated between local and central 'levels' (see Section 5.2.1). Governor experiences further reflect the mediation of diverse values, dispositions and attitudes at a local level. All of the participants, contributing to their respective strategic development processes, have been seen to balance differing interests and biases; where these have in part been expressed through the rationalisation of diverse motivations. These values have been argued to embody the diversity of experiences that the participants draw from. Such experiences draw from individuals' conceptions of their own personal histories, from the skills and knowledge sets developed through diverse personal and professional backgrounds (often outside of education) and from the networks they relate to both inside and outside of their school. The characteristics of experience outlined here emerged clearly from the analysis in Section 5.2, reflecting on both participant narratives on the sources of their perspectives and the social processes through which they emerged. Furthermore, the balancing of values witnessed in the analysis increases in complexity when considering the processes of relating through which values are mediated and enacted. Whilst broad institutional change initiated by government (legislation, new corporate governance structures etc.) might set the initial and contextual conditions, an understanding of the continued transformation of those institutions is at least as much reliant on the presently analysed local social processes through which schools emerge. Only through acknowledging the centrality of these social processes in governor experiences has it been possible to make sense of the differing trajectories of each school captured in the narratives within the findings. Of particular importance to the resulting governance relations is the manner in which formal governance structures seen within the school emerge in a reciprocal, and reinforcing, relation to established and developing social configurations. This is discussed in *Section 6.2.3* below.

6.2.3 Experiences of Agency and Structure

One of the key tensions emerging in the discussion above, and reflected in the challenges for theorisation around power and relating that emerge from the analysis, is in conceptualising the role of structure in experience. This is of significance to the research to the extent that much of the established theory contends that shifting power and roles in the governance of society, and subsequently organisations, reflects the restructuration of networks (C.f. Foucault, 2000; Ranson, 2008; Rose, 1996). Ranson (2008: 208) contends that theorisation of educational governance founded on “self-organizing inter-organizational networks...regulated by ‘the rules of the game’, and significantly autonomous from state” fails to complete the task. Such theory fails to identify the modes of causality through which the state acts to induce change. Rather, it is contended, we must look at the social mediation between regulative principles that define citizenship and the semiotic order that shapes individual awareness of positionality and social classification within this relation (Bourdieu, 1990; Halliday, 1978; Ranson, 2008). Parallels can be found Foucault’s (1991) task to develop Neo-liberal reform as the transformation of governance through the social instruments of responsabilisation and governmentality. In line with Ranson’s (2008) observations this study contributes to challenging the assumption that structure precedes, or endures in parallel to, agency in such ways. The findings do not reflect positionality in experience in the ways that might be rationally predicted based upon such macroscopic social positioning. Positionality, reflected in participant experiences of Free School development, has been seen to entail the continued mediation of structure in one and the same social processes through which agency is also mediated.

It may be possible to contend that the experiences explored in this study are really rather the illusory consequence of ‘government’s’ intention to individualize in such a way that local action is perceived to be the extension of autonomous choice and freedom (c.f. Baez & Talbert, 2008). There may be some merit to such a claim. However, taken as the only defining feature of governor experiences in this research

would seem to credit processes of government with nothing short of omnipotence. At worst this perpetuates a form of sociological discourse that actually dismisses its own core interests by reducing the behaviours and experiences of the many to those of the few. To maintain the capacity of remote agents of change in 'defining' experiences of the strategic development of Free Schools would be to, paradoxically, dismiss the very agency of these individuals afforded by the autonomizing changes implemented.

The purpose of discussion in the paragraphs above and below is to support an understanding of how different values are drawn into Free School development through individual agency, and how this sits in relation to an understanding of the 'governance structures' that are also reflected in the reported experiences. To move the debate forward, and in line with the policy shifts that have informed the Free School context, requires acknowledging that the interplay between experiences at the local 'autonomous' level and any other such stakeholders involved is just that: *interplay*. Kooiman and Jentoft's (2009) interactive framework arguably goes some way to addressing this issue, by reflecting the multi-directional influences not only between images, instruments and actions but also first and second order governance. The analysis has revealed the framework to have greater 'explanatory' significance than more pronounced (post-)structuralist accounts of causation. This is achieved by virtue of its facilitating a conception of process that rejects a reductionist pursuit of causation. Extending this line of interpretation enables the research to regard the self holistically in relation to the complexity of experiences that influence agency. The analysis of experiences rejects the principle that causation, reflected in the interplay between structure and agency, is a task of isolating strict antecedent and descendent relations. This is in part evidenced in terms of the differing perspectives that emerge from common origins in participant narratives (e.g. *Section 5.2.3*) and the implications of these differing perspectives for the diversity of participant dispositions that influence subsequent strategic decisions. To clarify this further, to reduce

experiences of governing and strategy to causes emerging only within the context of governing would be to dismiss all of those factors identified in the research that have been seen to directly influence the processes of interpretation.

The subjective images and predisposed instruments that have been conveyed in relation to actions in participants' narratives cannot be readily distinguished from the holistic representation of their historic experiences that have shaped the values represented (c.f. Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). First and second order governance emerge in reciprocity as self-governing emerges in ongoing self-definition. This was clearly seen across the schools in the processes of 'organisation and reorganisation' in which the experiences of roles, functions and structures (formal and informal) transitioned in parallel to the experiences of the interactions that mediated change. The discussion therefore returns to the meta-governance, discussed above, whereby in the Free Schools under study conflicting and complementary values and norms are first mediated internally by participants (see *Section 5.2.1*) and then within the relations with others. The retrospective attribution of 'cause and effect' is an oversimplification of the complexity of the processes through which the self and the social enable such formations of governance to emerge in the first place in self-governing schools.

Governors' narratives reflected current and future intent (e.g. to reclaim power, to draw further from social capital, to leave) (See *Section 5.2.5*). Subjective inclinations towards the future reflect the individual capacity to construct a narrative based on a diverse range of experiences and dispositions drawn upon within interview. Participants' experiences conveyed their attitudes towards and intentions to change their positions relative to others (e.g. *Section 5.4.3*). This reflects the co-dependence and reciprocal reinforcement of structure and agency (c.f. Connolly & James, 2011). Rather than an experience that captures 'levels', the analysis reveals the processes underpinning the formation of 'I' within 'us' (c.f. Mead, 1934), and 'us' against them. This further reflects the inseparability of local and global, as an extension of

the symbiosis and co-construction of experience and its content (Elias, 1978; Mowles, 2014). This is therefore not a rejection of the roles of laws, rules and norms in shaping important aspects of experience, but rather the situating of these as necessary but *insufficient* conditions to account for the research findings. Agency and local structure have emerged together through largely tacit social processes (See *Section 5.3.2*). Consistent with the issues raised in the introduction chapter, the comprehensive evaluation of governance structures at a national level has been shown to require acknowledging the ground up processes through which governance practice is realised. The variations analysed between the schools in *Chapter 5* reveal how this self-determination has resulted in diverse governance practices reflective of the complexity discussed above. Understanding governance more broadly must therefore reflect the understanding of all the relevant local experiences involved in its performance. *Chapter 7* develops this as an important direction for future research.

6.2.4 Experiences of Developing Governance and Strategy

The analysis reveals the importance of understanding the role of motivations in governor experiences in terms of the conflicting and complementary forces that drive activity in strategic and governance processes (see *Section 5.2*). Such experiences reflect the affections and conations of individuals in relation to respective symbols of interaction, as drawn up from the richness of human experience (c.f. Blumer, 1936). It further reveals the importance of the relations through which those motivations are mediated; as characterised by the emergence of identities that define and redefine processes of organisation and development (see *Section 5.3*). How power is experienced in those relations through its intentional pursuit and unintentional allowance; its permissive and restrictive exercise; its enabling and constraining, is of direct consequence to understanding agency and freedom as inherently relational (see *Section 5.4*). This provides a novel account of experience with strong explanatory capacity within the research context. It also provides a basis for future examination of the emergence of governance in practice whilst avoiding

the limitations posed by Ranson (2008) (as discussed above). By treating governance as an inherently social phenomenon in *this* particular way avoids any temptation to conceptualise governance as the consequence of prescriptive processes that recognise the will of only the few (e.g. authors of policy).

Rather, it draws back onto a conception of the complexity of the social processes that encompass the experiences through which governance practice is constructed – acknowledging that its construction does not begin or end with any specific group in isolation. It is in this respect that the findings and analysis contribute to the conception of governance as praxis. The result is an understanding of the conditions in which specific practices diverge at the local level, embedded within the context in which they are experienced. This supports the argument that agency must be considered in parallel to structure in governance arrangements (Connolly & James, 2011). It has further implications for demonstrating that centrally prescribed governance structures are insufficient to align local conduct with central or democratic interests within the context of Free Schools. This is of particular consequence within the shift towards a self-governing school agenda highlighted in the introduction. The capacity to reallocate value judgements at a local level is reflected in local governance arrangements and practices that mirror those values. The following chapter draws out the implications of this for conceptions of governance in the context of the self-governing school agenda.

Much of the conceptualisation of experiences discussed relates back to the role of the theoretical categories in underpinning the formation of identity within the findings. Identity formation was seen not to require appeal to some objective or reciprocated understanding of particular relations e.g. between participants, participants and community, participants and broader governance actors. Rather, identity formation was seen to be founded on perceptions of those relations. It is only within the frame of reference of individual subjectivity that the reported contradictions can be explained; and similarly that it is through the process of intersubjective agreement emerging that explains identity formation. Those

perceptions were demonstrated within the analysis to be a consequence of a set of extended experiences and memories that shape how individuals relate. Furthermore, the experiences that potentially shape relations within this context reveal a level of internal complexity beyond predictability. The knowledge, values and relationships that governors draw from in their accounts is, by its very nature, only ever partially understood by their peers or the researcher. However, whilst the numerous possible permutations of how individuals have related in the research is beyond exhaustion, the analysis has revealed significant commonalities that assist in explaining both the similarities and differences between governor experiences. For instance, in the case of parent governors the significance of balancing, or distinguishing, the interests of the child(ren) against those of the school was a recurring theme. A similar finding can be seen in relation to the pursuit of career development by those with paid roles in relation to the schools or broader projects. Underpinning each of the parents' involvement in the projects was a set of common attitudes that their specific school satisfied some value proposition in respect of their child. Parent governors expressed their identification with their respective school as being in part defined by a common purpose with others involved in the project but drawing from a differing, yet complementary, position.

The *perception* of complementarity, or lack of conflict, between expressed motivations forms a point on which attitudes amongst those with differing formal roles in the school converged. This was seen to be of significance to reinforcing broad agreement regarding strategic direction and to generate a sense of trust and alliance under a shared school identity. This was in turn seen to perpetuate a shared discourse regarding their respective communities, local authorities and central government as a generalised other (Mead, 1962). This contributes an additional social dimension to the interrelationships between governing and socio-economic context (c.f. Balarin et al., 2008; James et al, 2011). As well as the influence of how individuals draw from social capital linked to this context (as well as beyond), founder-governors define

the provision within the context of how their attitudes reflect or contrast local socio-economic conditions as they perceive them. The governors in the research can be seen to serve a community as they perceive or choose to define them; even where doing so might be understood from another perspective as failing to observe that demographic accurately or holistically. This demonstrates the significance of perception and its translation through school level narratives and discourse. The production of a shared identity in each school has therefore been seen to be founded on the process in which ongoing relations and complementary motivations can be realised. These define the initial and continued involvement of particular individuals, and the reinforcement of personal motivations as strategic drivers through the shared construction of particular representations of others.

6.2.5 Implications of Experience for Practice

The above reveals how aspects of strategy and governance have been experienced in three Free Schools. It has also been of significance to the continued social process through which governance becomes manifest in experiences of practice. Firstly, the research has demonstrated a lack of clarity around the boundaries between governance and management in the ongoing development process, and that these boundaries have been negotiated within local social interaction. This is consistent with findings from other context (see Heystek, 2004; Van Wyk, 2004). Distinctions between strategy and operations have been mediated by factors including level of personal investment, the strength and nature of relationships with others, the configuration and reconfiguration of power. Even then, the enduring tensions in the process of distinguishing strategy and operations, and the consensual renegotiation of such boundaries, emerge in subjective accounts reflecting shared and differing attitudes, and understandings of context. Where the current analysis moves this on is in the finding that governors often recognise and acknowledge the problems linked to the level of their involvement. This has been seen to emerge from the conflicting priorities associated with pursuing shared strategic attitudes and values underpinned by converging

motivations; and a set of perspectives about what constitutes the governing role. This might be understood as extending the tensions seen between balancing local and central pressures (Glatter, 2012; Higham & Earley, 2013; Simkins, 1997). Within governor perceptions more notably it demonstrates an enduring misalignment between what many participants see as being important to their satisfying the strategic needs of the school and how they understand the governing role as it is prescribed.

As considered earlier, the result has been seen in terms of the multiple narratives across schools drawing on different 'hats' that participants wear. These hats have been seen as indicative of the different underlying values that have driven the multiple facets of involvement (e.g. allegiance to a central figure, desire to progress education of a particular character, being a parent). The implications can be seen in how the 'Critical Friend' role is represented in the perceived practice of governing in the setting (C.f. NSN, 2015; Ofsted, 1999). This formalisation of the role of participants post-opening already reflects a logical contrast between actions typically embodied in being 'critical' and those embodied in being 'a friend'. The inherently dynamic nature of governing captured in the literature review is not at odds with a conceptualisation of the 'Critical Friend' in terms of the movement back and forth through its manifestation in different activities. However, what the findings and analysis reveal is the manner in which motivations, relations and power characterise the shifts between these roles as sometimes failing to correspond to the activities one might otherwise expect.

The 'friendliness' entailed by supporting the school's continued strategic development has been seen to emerge in the context of strategic decisions in which governance might have otherwise assumed a need for probity and accountability. This was self-evident in School 1 in relation to decisions around the adoption of IT infrastructure and recruitment. In School 2 it could be seen in the blurring of boundaries between the community governor's roles as a paid member of a separate trust, a local volunteer governor and a friend to the small teaching and staff team. In School 3 it was embodied in the parents' support of

an opportunity for local perceived high quality education and the necessary relation this had to offering initially unwavering support of the decisions of the school's proposer, and principal. In contrast, participants were also seen to exercise critical judgement within the context of diverging strategic agendas. These agendas often resulted from the complexity and ambiguity of the differing values and motivations driving involvement and the diversity of perspectives of those involved. In this sense the 'Critical Friend' role, as well as the role of Member, could be seen wielded across the school as just one 'instrument' of power employed to advance individual values into strategy implementation (c.f. Kooiman & Jentoft, 2009). To this end the roles entailed by formal organisational governance were seen as one component feeding into the social complexity through which strategy was experienced as negotiated. This could be seen in School 1 in relation to the Community Governor's pursuit to reject or undermine particular educational practices. In School 2 a minority group involved in the broader set of trusts sought to ensure the preservation of their conception of the schools' community strategy (despite also expressing a desire for it to be run by this community). In School 3 governors, the CEO and their experiences of other actors reflected a process of vying to define religious involvement.

6.3 Theorising from Experience

6.3.1 Conceptualising Motivation, Relation and Power in Narrative

Ultimately, what the above synthesis points towards is the extent to which the hierarchies defined through formal roles do not mirror the dynamic nature of how strategic development is experienced. Experience captures the manifestation of power in diverse relations mediated through the differences and similarities in motivating forces. The consequence is a theoretical conception of experiences of governing founded on the social complexity involved in Free School development. This casts light on how such relations define positionality, where this positionality is of significance to understanding the

distribution of power. How individuals draw from their own capital, and how individual status emerges from claims to knowledge and legitimacy, defines experiences of the formation of social configurations influential to governance and strategy. Of particular note was the finding that participants' narratives reflected the changes and developments in how they related to others as an extension of their attitudes towards the retention, repatriation or deference of power. To this extent their discussion of those relations served as referential 'symbols' within the interview context. The analysis of this subsequently reveals how their affections and conations shifted in relation to those symbols according to the frame in which the relevant relationships were being referred to (C.f. Blumer, 1936). This was argued not to entail a definitive evolution of those relations through time, but a change resulting from the instances of self-awareness within the interview itself (c.f. Brissett, 1971). In some instances these shifts captured the complementarity of differing facets of how participants accounted for their relations e.g. as 'friend' and 'strategic partner'. In others, however, this resulted in the acknowledgement of tensions between the conflicting interests embedded in those relations e.g. the desire to support versus the concern to maintain or seize control. It is to this extent that experiences of power are reflected in every reported instance of relating through which individuals co-construct themselves in relation to others (c.f. Elias, 1978; Mead, 1934; Stacey, 2011).

Adding further to this complexity, the findings do not merely reflect figurations of power in terms of relative position within a given instance. This would be to ignore the extent to which those individual narratives simultaneously endowed their expressed position with affections and conations about those figurations of power. It is in this sense that narratives do not only look to account for the present, but to convey propositions about the future. The previous chapter argued that passivity in the expressed conduct of a participant's role did not necessarily equate to a lack of power in this context. The sense of autonomy experienced by particular participants is one that is learnt from perceptions of the liberalised policy

context working in unison with the freedoms permitted by those whose responsibility it is to hold to account (c.f. Olssen, 2005). The perception that '*I am free to act*' is true to the extent that others do not seek to inhibit. To the same extent that Foucault (1982) contends that power acts on the actions of others, an active choice towards deference to another is a manifestation of power in itself within the context of the relations under study. Even those instances of deference arising from passivity serve to empower another. Enabling another with the 'freedom to' act cannot be equated to that other individual having acted with 'freedom from' (c.f. Olssen, 2005; Reich, 2002). To equate these would be to dismiss the potentiality of agency of governors operating within a shared social setting. The previous chapter revealed the extent to which relations characterised by trust, a desire to support, a lack of confidence, admiration and a perception of knowledge or experience were associated with participants' experiences of deferring to one another. To ignore this aspect of the reported experiences about the social context in which strategic development arises would further entail ignoring the affections and conations to *change* these deferential relations captured in the same governors' narratives. An important aspect of governor experiences of the strategic development process is therefore revealed in how their own power is consistently judged in its emerging in relation to the freedoms they perceive to be available to others.

Participants' expressed desires (e.g. to gain further knowledge or to reclaim control of the strategic direction) reflect their intentions to act in the future such that this would impact both on the reconfiguration of power in subsequent interactions and potentially influence on future strategic decisions. The extent to which such intentions were only raised, or developed, within the interview context is highly consistent with the extent of the contradictions between governors' narratives within the same context. To the extent that governors can be seen to choose not, or feel unable, to restrict or constrain the actions of others they are permitting them to act. This extends the conception of how governors actively enable one another, and staff, by acknowledging every opportunity a governor has to

act such as to alter the actions of another. This might be of conceived relevance to much broader conceptions of power and governance. However, this permissive relational element of founding and governing within these specific strategic development processes is more directly related to how the participants reflect on their experiences of their particular social contexts. The analysis has revealed these contexts to be informed by extended relationships, the formation of identities that tend to exclude dissent and reinforce central co-constructed narratives and formal governance hierarchies that perpetuate the centrality of key visionaries. Within such a context governing has been seen often to result in the perpetuation of biases, where the externality or impartiality of judgement is clouded by the conflicting alliances, shared motivations and converging identities seen to underpin experiences across the three schools. This could be seen in School 1, where judgements to use the CEO's commercially developed IT systems were made by individuals with commercial relations to that company and personal relations with its owner (e.g. Section 5.3.3). In School 2 the tensions between sister trust versus local school, voluntary versus paid roles and emotional, as well as physical, proximity versus distance required for governing became defining features of the Community governor's concerns about their own conduct (e.g. Sections 4.3.4 & 5.3.2). In School 3 consensus about the locality was coupled with a shared set of interests in providing education that was both of an independent school ethos and a Christian religion. The result was a focus in participant narratives on the pursuit of differing brands of Christian influence (e.g. 4.4.5 & 5.3.1). This emphasis emerges within experiences of the social context of the school, rather than from a broader appeal to the achievement of social mobility in light of a holistic view of the local populace (c.f. Miller et al, 2014). This may be understood as a ramification of the shift towards a model of governing founded on the inclusion of particular skills, over and above that of a broader sense of pluralism and local inclusion in governance (c.f. Higham, 2013; James, 2014; Ranson, 2012; Sharma, 2013).

Chapter 5 also demonstrated how experiences reflect the changes of context in which relations are continuously defined. Regardless of origins, and the endurance of particular attitudes and dispositions, these relations reflect the desire to renegotiate or exercise power in participant accounts. To this extent the experiential nature of power has been captured in all of the ways in which the discretion of one is experienced as acting upon the agency of the other. A gesture, including its own lack of, not only precipitates a response, it in part defines it (c.f. Stacey, 2011). Power and freedom to act, free will, within the strategic development process are not defined by 'I', but by all the conditions through which 'I' becomes 'Me' (c.f. Mead, 1934). Power may be understood as a concept through which it becomes possible to understand how the relations, such as those in the experiences in this research, define such processes as have been reported. This includes a full spectrum of experiences captured. Participants have been seen to permit and enable others to act, where the convergence of identities around shared motivations has been reported in relation to the intention to share social capital and to authorise or encourage the pursuit of particular outcomes. At the other extreme the tensions self-evident in the accounts emerged from participants' realisation of diverging or conflicting motivations and intentions. Subsequent interactions were reported or predicted to require the formation, or reformation, of novel relations in the ongoing process of self-organisation (c.f. Stacey, 2011).

This highlights an important point about the enduring ambiguities involved in how individuals perceive the convergence of their shared values and perspectives (Abdallah & Langley, 2014). For instance, in School 2, the shared values expressed by both the principal and founders were reflected in the school's reserved approach to utilizing strategic freedoms. Yet, in the subsequent comparison of narratives there were enduring contradictions regarding whether recruitment could, in the future, include non-qualified teachers (see Section 4.3.2). This was also evident in School 1 in the differing interpretation of the vision to prepare the students for life (see Section 4.2.2). For some this meant that reading was imperative,

whilst for others reading was not a priority in comparison to welfare or analytical development. In School 3 this ambiguity could be seen in relation to religion; but it was also evident in the lack of specificity or clarity in parent governor's view of what the vision actually entailed (see Section 4.4.2). This has further implications for how one conceives of the experiences of governing within the context. To be of a higher hierarchical role within formal governance structure does not reflect the fixing of a relation of power continuously enacted through those roles. It is to this extent that formal governance, as experienced within the setting, does not alone distribute power. Rather it arms individuals with a responsibility, and in doing so provides a legitimising claim that defines only one aspect of the relations through which power is continuously configured. The result is a view in which relations of power draw on one's self perceptions, and perceptions of others, with regards to a much broader view of *status*. Status, in this respect, draws not only upon formal roles but on claims to legitimacy, knowledge or other forms of capital seen within the previous chapter. Claims to the title of proposer, and to a lesser extent founder, have been seen to have been amongst the most notable legitimizers of power amongst the perspectives of those involved (c.f. Beetham, 2013; Weber, 1978). Even then, the disparity between the narratives that emerged in School 2 against the other schools demonstrate that the perceived possession of such claims to power, by those without, inherently constrain such individuals in how they see their capacity to contribute. This was echoed in both the parent and staff governor's accounts in relation to the central 'clique'. This provides an explanatory lens for the challenges that face recruitment of new governors further along in the strategic development of new school provision. The propensity for new governors to fulfil their role is dependent on the perceptions of those individuals as much as it is on the intention of existing members to perpetuate those perceptions. Hierarchy is created not only through active exclusion and inclusion but also through the ways in which individuals form their understandings of tacit social structures founded largely on their own extended experiences.

6.3.2 The Multiplicity Paradox

The discussion in this chapter so far has drawn together a theoretical account that captures closely the complexity of the experiences presented in the empirical data. What has been required of such an account is the acknowledgement of both conflict and complementarity; enablement and constraint; divergence and convergence; plurality and singularity. In drawing together the contributions the discussion has sought to develop, this section presents a central contribution to the conceptualisation of experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools. A key feature of the motivations, relations and power configurations identified within and between participant narratives has been characterised in terms of their manifold nature. They have drawn from motivations that not only capture their attitudes towards their locality but their relations to others and their vested interests as an employee or parent. The multiplicity of their experienced relations not only reflects the many different individuals with which they are engaged but the many different ways in which they are engaged with any specific individual. The capacity to experience oneself as both a key proponent and adversary of another has been represented within the sense making process. The multiplicity of these expressed relations serve as vehicles through which differing values, motivations and perspectives are conveyed relative to the context of the interactions in which they are being pursued. It is through this that power has been reflected in governor accounts as expressed through all the ways in which individuals perceive themselves as enabling and constraining others. These relations of power extend discourse to encompass numerous historic interactions within the interview's present, and become expressed through governors' future intentions in relation to those constructs. The natural theoretical conclusion in response to the research aim may therefore be embodied in the inclination to present governor experiences as inherently fractured, discordant and therefore well aligned to the propensity to produce theoretical categorizations of differing governor experiences.

Governors' experiences do not themselves embody such categories or categorizations. The fluidity, dynamism and complexity of socially embedded experiences is embodied in an enduring process of construction that can already be seen reflected in research evidence demonstrating the relation between perception/experience and the governing role (c.f. James et al, 2011; Mncube and Mafora, 2013; Scanlon et al, 1999). Governors' experiences must therefore be understood as not merely the passive receptacles of memory but as the active constructors of organisational narratives and discourses that extend individual subjectivities through time. The interviews through which governors have constructed these narratives within the current research context do not present themselves as possessing an impossible tension. The multiplicity paradox therefore arises in reconciling this important aspect of governor experiences as a holistic phenomenon with what emerges from the analysis of their content. Section 6.2.3 developed the argument that governor narratives do not accurately portray, or seek to portray, some independently verifiable chronology. To this extent experience does not operate in the domain to which conceptions of linearity apply. What has been suggested is that governors' narratives reflect the intentional and unintentional construction of a series of contexts through which interpretation tends to seek causes and effects. Where such narratives have been seen to contradict across participants it has been argued that this has often captured participants' intentions to construct a history of the school that might appear to favour themselves. That reported experiences in relation to differing contexts appear at odds with one another is an extension of the tendency to interpret a division where the logic of cause and effect does not appear self-evident. Contradiction and tension arise from the failed attempt to apply an internal sequential logic where none exists.

In understanding how governor experiences reflect the extension of sense making captured above the current conceptualisation offers a rejection of dualism (c.f. Küpers, 2005; Shotter, 1993; Stacey & Griffin, 2005, Stacey 2011). Experiences, and by virtue their content, do not present a distinction between their

subject and object or between their 'being experienced' and that which is experienced. Experience in this respect further reflects the quality of process in which it resides (c.f. Elias, 1978). The sense in which experiences have been seen to reflect 'simultaneous perspectives' can only be understood from the view that experience itself embodies the entanglement of that to which it refers. Festinger (1957) and Bem (1967) contend that this is an extension of the capacity to maintain internally conflicting points of view, beliefs, value and ideas. Smith and Lewis (2011) argue that paradox emerges from the tensions between the individual and the collective. This can be extended to recognise that individuals, as seen in the current research, have their personal identity founded in the multiple relationships that they hold with, and between, others with identities converging for different reasons. The aspect of self that extends to one's parental relationship is as ever-present in one's expressed identity as one sees themselves within the context of governing. This, and the sometimes resulting tensions this creates, was clearly echoed in the findings and analysis (See Section 5.2.1). This reflects the argument, developed in the literature review, that to engender governance in one's actions requires exercise of the *choice* to adhere to such principles as have been defined elsewhere. It is in this respect that liberalisation entails the further individualisation of governors through which discretion over governing conduct is defined by increasingly complex value propositions (c.f. Baez & Talbert, 2008).

The assumption that governmentality is the only or strongest lens through which governors experience these choices, or influences over them, has been rejected in the context of these findings. Governors, recruited through complex networks of social capital within civil society, draw from multiple values in such a way that would make any attempt to predict the causes of their actions disingenuous. In understanding governor experiences it has been seen that motivations reflect how governors make sense of their actions holistically. Identity is not therefore dualistic in nature, but rather quantum, maintaining itself both 'here' and 'there' and without entailing its divisibility. This might be understood in terms of the distinctions

between the differing social codes, or fields (although without the assumption of natural hierarchy) associated with the differing allegiances and values mediated at once through the actions of the individual (c.f. Burke, 1992; Bourdieu, 1977). What governor experiences reflect is the process through which choice is constructed in terms of the exercise of will; characterised in terms of the differing dispositions, affections and conations that mediate differing values. This echoes the view that participant experiences can be understood in terms of how their 'being' is also their 'becoming' (Flaherty & Fine, 2001; Mead, 1934). The distinctions between the differing influences on the nature of their involvement (i.e. their motivations, their relations, and the configurations of power) are created in the language through which those experiences are constructed. To this extent these distinctions are co-dependent.

Governors have been seen not only to construct a sense of 'us' but also 'them'. The school, as a social object, stands in relation to its community, its Local Authority, central government etc. One set of governors stands in relation to another. That a governor might enable *and* constrain the actions of another is a reflection of how language enables the construction of experience by giving it those characteristics (Wittgenstein, 1958; Shotter, 1993). There is therefore no conflict in the experience or in the language used to construct it. Such features are rather a necessary aspect of the choice that personal autonomy entails. That Free School governors' experiences reflect such a heightened account of such conflict and complementarity is an extension of the autonomy that pervades the entire strategic development process they reflect. Individual diversity of motivations, engagement in multifaceted relations and the dynamism of power are co-dependent with the social context that inform governors' experiences in with the strategic development of English Free Schools. This offers an important contribution to the discussions outlined in the Introduction Chapter (*Chapter 1*). It demonstrates that local divergence in school provision is a consequence of the processes of liberalization. However, in doing so it reveals that local experiences reflect the incorporation of highly subjective values and interests into the development of schools. It also

reveals that current approaches to the formation of founding groups may not align with broader democratic and social interests (see Section 6.2.4). The processes through which diverse values have been brought into the development of school strategy reflect biases, subjectivities and self-advantages. This stands in contrast to a view of Free Schools as supporting social mobility and justice and a narrowed focus on academic attainment that has otherwise emerged as justification for the specific structural reforms (c.f. DfE, 2016a; Gov.uk, 2016c; SM&CPC, 2015). It also demonstrates how governance practice emerges from within those local social contexts. Whilst mapping back onto centrally defined 'structures' those structures are not shown in the analysis of experience as sufficient to ensure the balance of effective strategic provision and impartial oversight embodied in the 'critical friend' role. Implications of these findings are explored in the following chapter.

7.0 Conclusions and Implications

7.1 Conclusions

7.1.1 Introduction

The aim of the research has been to analyse governor experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools. In order to achieve this aim a grounded methodology has been employed. This reflected the interest in substantiating a novel conceptualization of experience within the research context through appeal to participants' own accounts rather than a predetermined theoretical lens. This interest was in turn informed by the gaps in understanding highlighted in the Introduction Chapter (*Chapter 1*). In particular was the acknowledgement that within a context of enduring and substantive change reflected in both policy and practice the perspective of those involved in practice has remained underdeveloped. Yet within the context of the 'Neo-liberal' structural reforms that provide the research context, local practice and conduct are central to understanding the trajectory of education in terms of its performance against numerous social and educational objectives e.g. improved performance or social mobility. Taken further, in setting the terms for debate on structural reforms at the level of a macroscopic analysis of policy outcomes would be to fail to acknowledge all other unintended or unpredictable consequences of what occurs in such schools. The approach adopted within, and contribution of, the research therefore sit closely aside one another.

7.1.2 Experiences within Schools

In order to satisfy the research aim four objectives were developed. *Chapter 4* presented the findings from the research in adherence to the first objective to investigate governors' reported experiences within their

schools. The satisfaction of the first research objective was achieved through this analysis. This was an important stage within the iterative processes of coding and analysing as it enabled the research to develop an understanding of individual experiences *within the shared social contexts* involved in founding and governing each school. The process of comparative analysis led to the development of codes within schools that enabled both an analysis of the similarities and differences in participant narratives and an initial exploration of why those similarities and differences arose. In School 1 the converging foci on the CEO were central to explaining the formation of governance and the strategic trajectory. Yet contrasting perspectives were also evident in the tensions in the relationship between CEO and Community governor; and in the differing emphases on what the vision meant for the school's rationale e.g. towards reading. The relations were seen to subsequently evolve across narratives as a consequence of how strategic events had led to the re-evaluation of participants' actions in governing. This included the intentions to leave, or to reassert oneself in decision making (see Section 4.2.6).

In School 2 the emergence of a central group of founder/governors surrounded the shared intentions to develop further schools and to preserve a defined version of a 'Local Authority' and 'community-based' ethos. Yet standing in tension were the perspectives of staff governors in the implementation (and arguably creation) of the community strategy. Divisions further extended to the parent governor's perceptions of feeling less able to influence or engage. The evolution of relations in the school were reported through the experiences of having to balance incompatible interests, and the challenges for relinquishing control (see Section 4.3.6).

In School 3 the parent-CEO dynamic was instrumental in the formation of the trajectory of the school and its oversight by placing the CEO squarely in the centre. Yet changes in the experiences reflected the multiple fronts on which tensions were experienced between competing claims to control and on the definition of loosely shared values (e.g. religious) (see Section 4.4.6).

Having initially coded the data within schools it became possible to generate themes, namely purpose and vision, relationships, organisation and reorganization, and positionality, under which those codes could be reconciled across schools (see Section 4.1). Purpose and vision emerged as an important theme. This was not only because it enabled the research to capture the strategies of the schools as understood by the participants. Rather, the codes collected under this theme offered an account of the social formation of these visions and the processes through which they became reinforced across the schools by the recruited participants. The theme reflected on the importance of origins, the negotiation of values and the processes of implementation through which vision is or isn't manifest in development. Emerging in parallel across the schools was the significance of pre-existing relationships and networks in defining the formation of the founding groups. The interplay between emotional or personal connections and formal roles was seen to be of great significance in defining individual conduct. The dynamism, evolution and discontinuity in experiences of these relationships mirrored the complex processes through which organisation and reorganisation emerged as a socially informed phenomenon across schools. The extent to which differing perspectives within the schools converged and diverged in relation to different strategic issues and the implementation of differing values or attitudes to external influences was accounted for in terms of the intersubjective positions participants held or contrasted against.

7.1.3 Experiences across Schools

As discussed above the themes generated by the research provided an organisational framework for the data that had emerged from open or initial coding (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In doing so it provided the foundations for the abductive and iterative process of analysis of the findings across schools. Utilising memoing, and constant comparative techniques, conceptual categories were generated that could explain the social mechanics within and between schools as evidenced across the themes. *Chapter Five* therefore satisfied the second objective of the research in generating categories from governor

narratives across schools. The categories of motivations, relations and power were developed from and assessed against the empirical data extending from the Findings Chapter (*Chapter 4*). What emerged was the importance of tracing back the diverse experiences behind the origins of participants' involvement in the projects and the rationalisations for their continued participation and intentions. From this the category of motivation emerged as an effective device to account for the diverse but consistently present role that social capital and relative disposition had played in participants' own accounts and perspectives. Yet, as summarised in Section 5.2.6 the identification of motivations did not follow a pattern of simple cause and effect in understanding and explaining individual experiences in relation to circumstances within the development process. Rather, what was evident was the complexity and profusion of competing and complementary values both within governors' own understandings of self and in their relations with others. This was further reflected in the blurring of these different rationales in the narratives about their own conduct, and the challenges for managing this. This both revealed and explained an important aspect of how the governing role and personal conduct emerged as an extension of the diverse subjective values drawn in through the recruitment of civil society actors to the self-definition of each school.

The analysis captures the dynamism and fluidity of the experiences conveyed through participant narratives. In the initial coding this was seen as an important characterization of the codes that were drawn together under the relationship theme. In extending this theme it was therefore necessary to offer relations as a way to account for the underlying qualities of the expressed experiences. Participants reports captured the impact of the multiple relationships they stood in with others. Yet of even more significance was the complexity and multiplicity of the ways that participants related to just another person (see Section 5.3.4). It was seen that the governing relationship could be shaped simultaneously by an enduring allegiance to an individual, reflected in outward facing consensus, and also multiple and

enduring conflicts and disagreements in which participants sought to preserve or enact their own interests. What emerged from this conception was an understanding of the formation of differing informal group identities that would both reinforce particular perspectives and actions and exclude others. This was significant to defining experiences of the strategic trajectories, and to understanding how governors saw themselves in relation to various stakeholders. To this extent, relations were vital to understanding strategic purpose and vision. Furthermore, the changes in the social context, reflected in the transitions through different stages of each school's unique development process, yielded further changes in the interactions and relations between those individuals. The result was a shift in narratives from relations at the time of founding or joining to greater distance or greater convergence emerging because of shared and differing values that were, in turn, subject to change and flux in the ways discussed above.

The final category explicated is an extension of those above. It was in virtue of the differing values and interests expressed in participants' motivations, and the processes through which they were mediated in social interaction, that power was seen in the data as a fundamental component of an explanatory account of experience. Knowledge and perceptions of legitimacy, including a sense of 'ownership' over the schools, influenced the distribution of power amongst governors in such a way as to increase the complexity of tacit hierarchies influential to strategic decision making. It was to this extent that structure and agency have been understood as extensions of the same social processes. Incremental changes in formal structures embodied the much more dynamic interactions through which such changes were mediated. The formation of group identities, coupled with shifting positions and attitudes within them, was of direct significance to understanding governors' experiences of agency within the development process. On the one hand was a conception of power seen in the schools that was seized and reinforced over others (including through the intentional formation of structures). Yet on the other hand was a conception of power that emerged through the deference and permissiveness of individuals towards

others. Governors provided an enabling environment to the same extent that they provided a constraining environment. This was of significance for conceiving of power not as the freedom from others, but the freedom to act that emerged within the context of those social relations. Those social relations, described above, offer a governing context fraught with the same complex values as embedded in the society from which they emerge. Within this context power emerges as the pursuit and maintenance of locally defined value propositions, embodied in the variety of ways in which individuals affect the actions of others, or do not.

7.1.4 Theorising from Governor Experience

In achieving the third objective of the research the previous chapter drew together the theoretical categories, as summarised in *Section 7.1.3*. In doing so the discussion facilitated a novel conceptualization of governor experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools. In line with the espoused methodology the resulting theory has its foundations firmly grounded in the data, and as a consequence of this grounding maintains the explanatory capacity to account for the breadth, depth and complexity of the empirical data. In doing so a central feature of governors' experiences has been the apparent multiplicity of their motivations, expressed through their values. The current research extends theorization around the importance of motivations within the context of structural reform by acknowledging that the subjectivities brought into these schools must be assessed at the level of individual subjectivity to fully understand the implications for development (c.f. Ball, 2012; Higham, 2014; Miller et al, 2014). More significantly however these motivations play a significant role in the subsequent patterns of development seen in Free Schools. The founder-governor recruitment processes implemented in the development of autonomous school provision are founded on the networks reflecting the proposers' social capital (c.f. James et al, 2011). Not only does this result in a self-reinforcing strategic

trajectory around shared but ambiguous value propositions, it reinforces the claims to legitimacy and power by those involved early in the schools' conception.

Emerging from such approaches to involvement is a process of disconnect between the strategic development of such schools and a holistic or pluralistic view of the localities in which they operate. The research findings would reject any assertion that a proposer's social capital is a necessary reflection of a school's locality. This is important to debate on governing within the context of structural reform in generating questions about the feasibility of the 'Critical Friend' role. The resulting convergence in attitudes, interests, allegiances and intentions serves to undermine the ability to question decision making in an impartial and inward-looking way. This has been seen reflected in the permissive relational element of the governing relations that emerge from the synergies and complementarities of the above. Simultaneously these same experiences of Free School development produce a challenge for embedding those schools effectively within their context. Where the proposer's own social capital does not mirror that local community then the results can be seen in terms of the potential exclusion of certain groups.

It has also been seen that Free Schools within such circumstances have the potential to perceive their impact in terms of transforming the local social context. Yet this may not be in such a way as can be deemed consistent with social mobility. This is of notability given that enduring measures used to track social deprivation are fixed on geographies rather than the actual families (c.f. UK Data Service, 2016). This may also offer further light on why there are such significant variations between the intake and performance of particular Academies and Academy Chains in relation to disadvantaged students (c.f. HCEC, 2014). The processes of self-definition seen within the Free Schools, contrasted against the local demography and their involvement in such projects, may in some instances demonstrate the processes through which social selection is realised (c.f. Green et al., 2014). This is not to say that Free Schools are inherently detrimental to such social goals, but rather that the current mechanisms through which values

become mediated in such schools are insufficient to guarantee alignment with an existing locality. This is likely to be of particular significance to Free Schools in light of the extension of their capacity to self-define over other academies (c.f. Gov.uk, 2014). This has potentially significant implications for governance, as discussed below.

In parallel to the discussion above the research has addressed the multiplicity of governors' relations, expressed in terms of the multitudinous interactions expressed in the interviews. The consequence has been an experience characterized by the constant negotiation and renegotiation of power over different facets of the strategic development process. Higham and Earley (2013) suggest the autonomy and freedoms associated with academy status tend to be reflected particularly in areas of management. Within the current research it has been seen that it is often through these processes of management that strategy itself actually emerges in practice. The outwardly extended visions and purposes seen in the three schools offer only limited insight into strategy, and its development, in contrast to the processes through which implementation is experienced.

It is the processes of mediation and facilitation emerging within a context of both shared and conflicting interests that defines experiences of the strategic development processes (See, for example, *Sections 5.4.1*). To this extent experiences of strategy and action emerge in reciprocity as a consequence of the micropolitics of school governance. Within the current research 'operational' practices (as conceived by the participants) have included community relationship management, the use of pedagogic approaches and particular approaches to recruitment. Yet, it has also been seen that such practices have significant implications for how strategy itself is conceived of. This reflects more broadly the conception of experience offered in *Chapter 6* as having a seemingly paradoxical quality. The seemingly paradoxical qualities of governors' experiences are further reflected in the interdependence of strategy and action, in structure and agency, enablement and constraint, conflict and complementarity, and being inside looking

out and outside looking in. Herein lies an important foundation to the contribution made by the research to conceiving of experiences of process. It is in the character of the language used to construct experience that the multiplicity of governor experiences has been located.

In the identification and communication of multiple value propositions is the tendency to denote and discern the qualities of compatibility and incompatibility. What this reflects is the problem associated with trying to separate self from a holistic conception of the social (c.f. Elias, 1978). Governor experiences reflect how they draw from experience holistically in the development of autonomous, self-defined and self-governed free schools. Presented experiences of governing have been defined by the exercise of power through which alternative motivating value propositions are incorporated into the interactions through which strategic decisions emerge. Those value propositions draw from the breadth of social relations through which the 'I' has emerged from the 'Me' (Mead, 1934). The 'Me', as characterised within the research context, draws not only from the gestures embodied in policy but also from the breadth of personal and professional relationships that inform involvement in the project. Free Schools emerge in the context of Neo-liberal reforms that, on the surface, appear to emancipate founders and governors from the 'shackles' of the structurally reinforced power of democratic local and central governance. For example, the power for e.g. a Local Authority agent to influence development is formally restricted by the removal of the perceived, and structurally bound, legitimacy and knowledge, as would be required to exercise authority or force. What is revealed however is not an experience of emancipation in general, but rather an experience focused on the exercise of influence emerging through other social interactions and technologies. To this extent the autonomy and liberation of governors within the Free Schools is seen as tantamount to the reallocation of influences on the strategic development to a much greater breadth of social actors and interests. The conclusion reached from the empirical evidence within the current study is that governing is a process of mediating value. This reflects the argument, developed in the literature

review, that the conduct of governance reflects the exercise of the *choice* to adhere to such principles as have been defined elsewhere. It is in this respect that liberalisation entails the further individualisation of governors through which discretion over governing conduct is defined by increasingly complex value propositions (C.f. Baez & Talbert, 2008). Experiences of complexity and multiplicity reflect these choices, and the ways in which others define, enable or restrict them.

The discussion in this section draws together a conceptualisation of governor experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools founded on the interrelations between the theoretical categories. In doing so this section, extending *Chapter 6*, has satisfied the research's third objective, whilst also formally addressing the central intentions of the aim of the research. What is also revealed is a response to the discussion presented in the *Introduction Chapter* (see *Section 1.3*). The above offers a narrative that stands in parallel to broader debates about structural reform and education policy that takes these conditions to be dominant or pre-eminent in the evaluation of school implementation and outcomes. The findings support the assertion that understanding 'what else' occurs in parallel to the policy context (see *Section 1.3*) matters to the ongoing debates about the trajectory of English education. In doing so it reveals some of the key reasons why claims about the links between policy and outcome erroneously narrow the 'causes' and 'effects' that are likely to define what occurs in such schools.

7.2 Implications for theory and practice

In addressing the final objective of the research the current section draws out the key implications of the research. In line with the espoused methodology, and due to the nature of the topic, theory and practice must emerge in close relation to one another for the former to have any significance to the practical debate about English education. As reflected in the discussion above there are significant implications for understandings of governance, governing and strategy. The research has presented an account of

experiences of those values that have become incorporated, or have been sought to become incorporated, as a consequence of the social processes through which development has arisen. The question in need of addressing in much broader debate on theory and practice, and therefore outside of the current discussion, concerns which values *should* be brought into governing, and how these relate to broader conceptions about the purposes of education provision. What the findings demonstrate is that in recruiting supporters with pertinent skills through one's existing social capital then the relationships that define that social capital are also brought forwards into the conduct of governance. As discussed in Section 6.3.1 the consequence is seen in the restricted role of pluralism and democratic inclusion and accountability with regards to the school's locality.

The further 'thinning' of external governance (i.e. the removal of LA control) associated with the 'self-governing school' means that there are few formal mechanisms to support such processes of oversight. The choice, discussed in the introduction (see *Section 1.2*), that is associated with the diversity of provision cannot be seen in the current research data as the foundation of the kinds of market forces that might otherwise have formed a kind of 'governance-by-demand'. This is because the 'industry structures' are defined by a) the compulsory nature of education, b) the practicalities that inform 'choice' for the typical family and c) that unless supply outstrips demand choice does not manifest in reduced numbers for the less-chosen schools. It is not within the current scope or intention to address whether oversupply or the implementation of true market forces would be desirable for state funded education. However, *prima facie* this would not seem to provide advantages for the desired limitations of cost or stability of provision in education. Rather the implication that is being developed here relates to the research outcome regarding the enduring insufficiency of mechanisms within self-governance to ensure the diverse values pursued or pursuable in such schools are consistent with the democratic oversight of public interests.

It is unclear whether there is any assumption that a school should serve its existing demographic through reflecting that demographic in its governing body, such as to increase the likelihood of engagement and social inclusion. It should be noted that proposals in existing White Paper include scrapping the requirement for parent governors on Academy Trusts (Gov.uk, 2016c). The affirmation or rejection of the broader principle in holding the schools in this research to account would have had significant ramifications for reshaping the social influences on experiences of their respective processes of strategic development. Furthermore, a serious question remains as to whether values conducive to the public good that are brought in through the social processes characterised in the research can be adequately separated out from the implementation of values that are incompatible. The applications process and continued corporate governance of the wider education system resulting from the self-governing agenda have not been seen in the study to inhibit the pursuit of personal interests that may be regarded as inconsistent with the public good. This further extends the implications of both Higham (2014) and James et al's (2011) respective findings in that the social capital likely to anticipate a successful application is not inherently in contradiction with potentially undesirable values or actions. It may be that the view to schools as required to reflect and represent local communities holistically is rejected on the grounds that the consequences of diversity and autonomy are considered justified where they run in parallel to improved school outcomes. Firstly, such school outcomes have yet to be demonstrated. Secondly, the current study demonstrates that the oversight of such schools is potentially unable to account for public spending as being consistently in the broader public interest, and lacking in mechanisms to detect where this is the case. Alternatively, the system that emerges from the social processes outlined by this research is one that permits school strategy and management to advantage individuals and agendas in such ways as to exist outside of democratic process.

Where experiences of strategic development reflect the emergence of, convergence on and reinforcement of particular social realities this also has significant implications for the extent to which one understands any relevant school as capable of serving its community impartially. Where governor composition may be so significantly influenced by a social identity informed early on by key figures there are also potentially significant concerns for how one judges the internal governance arrangements in self-governing schools. Underpinning the role of motivation as the rationalisation of actions within governor narratives, the analysis drew on an understanding of the multiple and diverse value propositions that underpin agency, and how these are mediated within the social contexts of Free School development. The evaluation of governance structures at a national level can only therefore be addressed where the ground up processes of realizing governance practice are also acknowledged. The variations analysed between the schools in *Chapter 5* reveal how this self-determination has resulted in diverse, and often only tacitly held, governance practices reflective of the complexity discussed above.

Understanding governing more broadly must therefore reflect the understanding of all the relevant local experiences involved in its performance. Of note are the challenges for the conduct of the 'Critical Friend' role emerging from the analysis. Putting to one side the concerns for which values are being mediated through this role, as discussed above, the complexity of the relations themselves leads to a number of challenges. Firstly, is that the pre-existing and enduring relationships have been seen to provide the basis for a potentially enabling or permissive environment in which diminished criticality over decision making may result in injudicious choices (e.g. one's support of IT procurement benefiting a company from which that individual benefits). Secondly, is that the recruitment processes through established networks of social capital have the propensity to reinforce trajectories determined by a minority group of influential founders. This can also be seen as having the effect of including and excluding particular stakeholders from the strategic development process. Thirdly, internal governing roles and conduct have been seen to

become increasingly muddled by the lack of divisions between the interests in an individual school and wider trusts. To improve the likelihood of recruited governors satisfying the 'Critical Friend' role effectively may require reconsidering how they are recruited such as to avoid the over-dependence on personal and professional allies in generating oversight. There may also need to be clearer divisions and principles in place for ensuring Members and Trustees of Academy trusts are distinguished more effectively from the strategic oversight and accountability of schools. This would include the need to remove the capacity for those with a paid school role to also reside at the membership level.

Externally presented governance roles, and their conduct within such schools in contrast, both emerge largely from a process of mapping established social configurations back onto the kinds of hierarchies and terminologies mandated by policy and guidance. As seen in the research the concern is that the resulting governance of, and governing within, the schools has the unchecked potential to be disingenuous. Should a judgement subsequent to this research be reached that such implications are negative or detrimental then these concerns could, to some extent, be mitigated through limiting the time permitted by founders and proposers to remain involved in governance. To begin to overcome some of the exclusionary consequences seen above it would further be possible to open up recruitment processes more effectively through independent networks.

The above identifies some of the key implications for theory and practice that result from the role of the social processes identified across the schools in defining formal governance structures, strategic purposes and governing arrangements. Underpinning the concerns raised are the implications of increased autonomy coupled with the complete freedoms to self-define associated with Free Schools. The issues are compounded by the complexities associated with the involvement of a breadth of diverse civil society actors in the development and implementation of strategy. To this extent there are parallel concerns that may be raised in relation to other types of school in England (notably Academies) and schools in other

contexts (including American Charter Schools). Current discussion has satisfied the final objective of the research in drawing out the implications of governors' experiences of the strategic development process of English Free Schools.

7.3 Future Research

In seeking an appropriate approach to satisfying the aim of this research a grounded methodology has been employed. Previous chapters (see, in particular, *Chapter 3*) have discussed in detail its efficacy in doing so. However, as a consequence of the choices made the research has revealed a number of areas of theoretical, practical and methodological interest that remain in need of addressing. This final section therefore seeks to address the future research requirements that have emerged as a result of the current study.

One key outcome for the development of theory from the use of a grounded theory approach was the emergence of power as a central category. Power has been revealed as vital to understanding the manifestations of governing in practice. The analysis has revealed power in how governors' narratives have constructed particular accounts of history endowed with such qualities as possession, position and permission. Further research is required to develop the implications of a conception of permissiveness for the conduct of governing and leadership within schools. This is of note in light of the fact that permissiveness may be seen as the basis for both beneficial and detrimental governance and leadership processes and outcomes. It provides a potentially alternative or complementary account of school leadership to those exploring distribution or democracy; as well as casting new light on the context of transformation.

Governor narratives have also expressed power in relation to future intent. The findings reiterated here would not have emerged had an approach to theoretical development been grounded in a pre-

determined theoretical framework rather than in the empirical data. The significance of power only emerged because of its revelation in the participant narratives. The consequence has been seen in a novel view of power within the setting that draws parallels with both Foucauldian and Complex Social Process of Relating perspectives. As a consequence there is further analytical work that could be done to develop understanding of the manifestations of power in governing. This includes further pursuing the reconciliation of the above perspectives on power through more traditional presentations and structures of discourse analysis and practitioner reflexivity. Drawing on the conception of power in the current research, future research may benefit from a more intricate deconstruction of the mediation of power within its context. The development of a sociologically informed view of governing and governance within the context of Neo-liberal structural reform may therefore also benefit from the adoption of ethnographic or action-based methods of data collection. Reflecting the discussion in *Section 3.7* whilst this embodies a parameter to the current study it is also argued not to have limited the authenticity or significance of the research outcome.

It must be noted that the research maintained emphasis specifically on experiences within the strategic development process. It has thereby focused its contribution in terms of understanding how governance practices are experienced as forming in parallel to strategy within the particular context of the Free Schools under study. Future research may develop this further by considering the role of these dynamics in relation to established schools, and schools operating within different policy contexts. What has been demonstrated is the potential significance of such dynamics to issues related to governor recruitment and retention; as well as implications for the broader assumptions about the implementation of prescribed frameworks for governing. The findings may therefore be of significance to developing research in the broader set of Academy schools and schools with comparable features within an international setting. Comparative analyses across international settings may further offer a more nuanced understanding of

the interplay between policy conditions and the social processes through which new schools become manifest. What should also be noted is that in the process of school selection highlighted in the methodology justification was given for the focus on comparable primary schools. Future research is required to assess how and whether the social processes identified here emerge in different ways as a consequence of underlying differences in contexts between such schools. As at least one of the schools under examination was undergoing the process of developing secondary provision the current research further reveals the complexity of researching such experiences within the context of multi-academy and multi-level provision.

Finally, the current findings reveal the need to direct future research attention to the changing nature of the governing role. Whether the critical friend role is 'fit for purpose' within the changing policy context is in need of re-evaluating in light of the influences on practice identified. This links more broadly to research and debate regarding the governing in and governance of autonomous schools. The discussion above has highlighted the implications of the governor experiences within current arrangements. Future research and theoretical debate may build in this area to determine what principles should underpin state funded education in a changing context and the best policies and practices for ensuring adherence.

8.0 References

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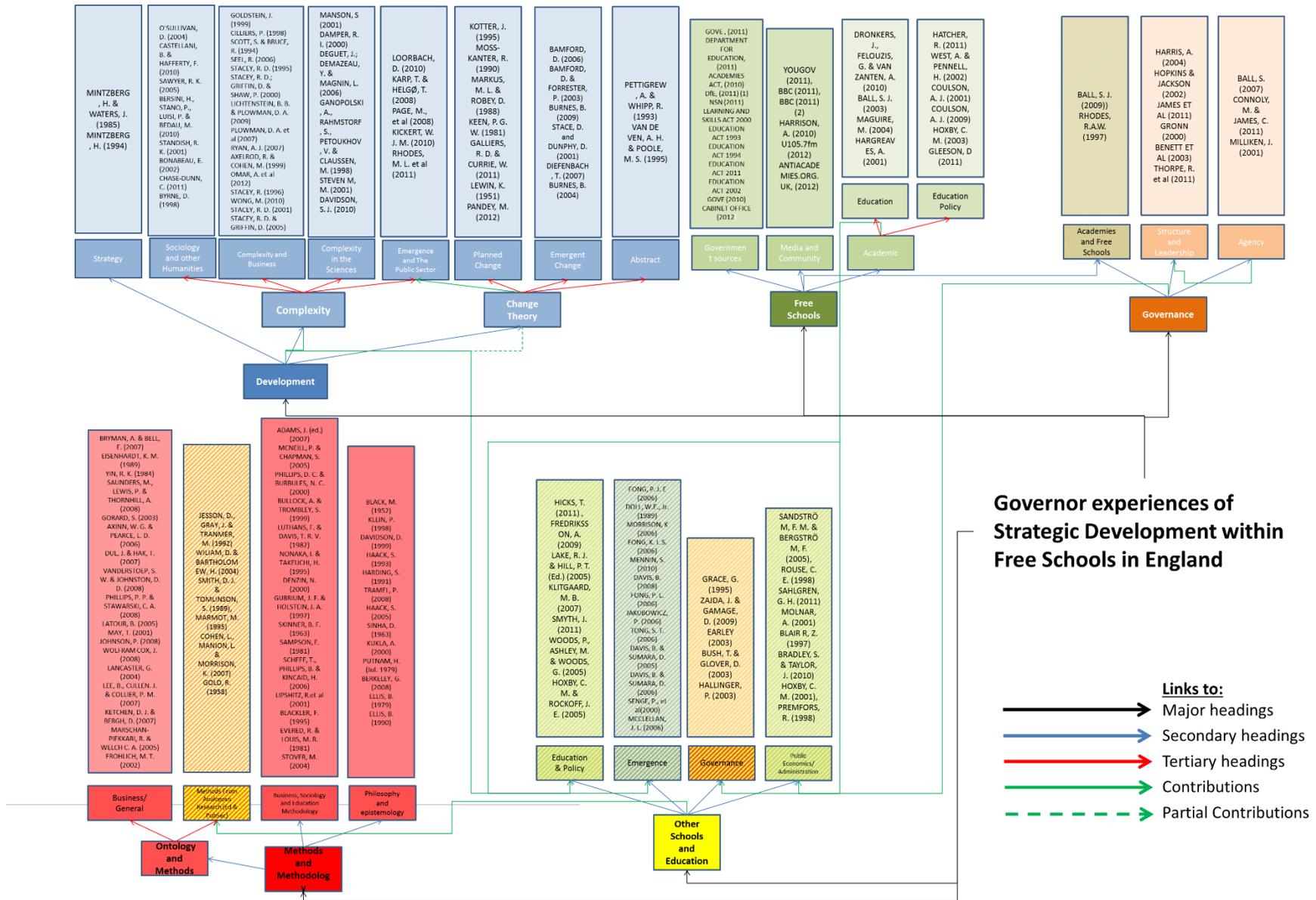
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9.0 Appendices

Appendix 9.1 – Illustration of Researcher Sensitivity Informing Early Survey/Interview Question Themes



Appendix 9.2 – Illustration of Interview Memo and Excerpt of an Interview Transcript

Interview– Memo and Transcript

- Transcribed by Phillip Mason
- Interview took place on 20/11/12 at 10:00am
- The interview took place in the participant’s office. We sat either side of his desk and as such I was very much the visitor to his space, and despite myself being the interviewer there was still a sense that he commanded enough authority in his room and under these circumstances to say that he remained the more powerful between us.
- The participant was very comfortable, relaxed and appeared happy. Due to the previous rapport we had built whilst trying to arrange the interview there was a certain sense of joviality throughout the interview process. However, there is a sense that the participant takes very seriously what they are saying both with regards to their role in the school and their attitude towards Free Schools as a whole. The participant’s demeanour, descriptions and approach to those things that they discussed appeared more mature, perhaps more ‘executive’, than the participant’s years might have suggested.

OK, so I’d just like to begin with some very basic background questions that will just help with the anonymised analysis. Firstly, we can breeze over this, is whether there is any particular method of contact you’d prefer if I needed to follow up on a particular point.

Um, I think the e-mail address is best...

That’s, that’s fine. With regards to age would you consider yourself under 35, 35-50 or 50 plus

Under 35

What is your defined governor role?

Yeah, uh, it’s not as defined as you’d find in the state schools for instance, you have your community governors, it’s not so clearly defined, or certainly not in the free school I’m involved in. What we will find is that particular individuals have strengths and I think that’s where it will come through...uh...people with educational backgrounds, will be Ofsted inspectors and that plays to their strength of looking at that role. I think my role is really about progression of social mobility and ummm finance, unfortunately...

Appendix 9.3 – Visualisation of the Iterative and Abductive Processes of Thematic Analysis Using Constant Comparative Methods

Illustrative Codes

Themes

Categories

Theorising

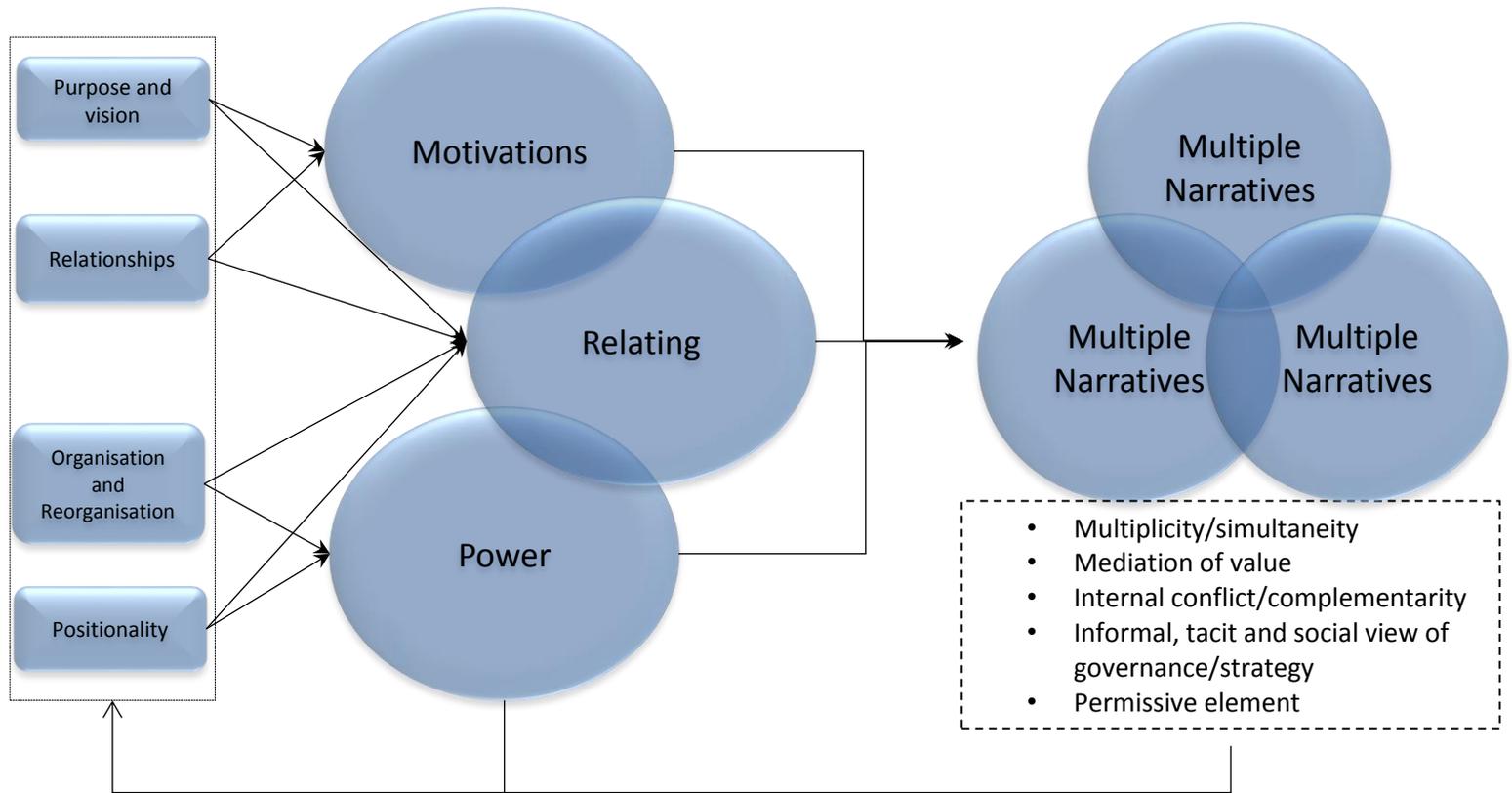
- Origins e.g. private, LA
- Individual vs. Group
- Vested Interests
- Passions
- Ambiguity

- Pre-founding and developed
- Emotional connections
- Boundaries and mediation
- New additions
- Trust and Inclusion

- Crises and conflict
- Change and evolution
- Responsibility and authority
- Roles and conduct
- Different Hats

- Cliques
- Community
- LAs & Government
- Religion
- Levels

Representing conceptual link (rather than causal)



- Multiplicity/simultaneity
- Mediation of value
- Internal conflict/complementarity
- Informal, tacit and social view of governance/strategy
- Permissive element

Experiences of the Social

Complexity of Social Processes

Appendix 9.4 – Data Sources Shaping Theoretical Sensitivity



Governor Experiences of the Strategic Development Process of English Free Schools

Appendix 9.5 – Illustration of Survey Coding and Analysis

The screenshot provides a view of NVIVO containing the survey data. The excerpt illustrates the earliest stage of coding and how this relates to the development of initial codes and themes.

N.B. Table 3.5.2.2.1 – Themes and Initial Codes Emerging within the Iterative Analysis of First Round Interviews and Surveys

Engagement & Factors Affecting Engagement	Involvement in Founding the Free School
	Employment History
	Personal Motivations
	Past Experiences
	Affiliations
	Frequency of Engagement
	Other Influences on Engagement
Stakeholders	Influential Individuals
	Interactions
	Leaders
Governance (hierarchies, networks, influence)	Arrangements
	Roles and functions
	Actions
Process	Responsibilities
	Perceived Causes and Effects
Outcomes and Responses	Outcome (positive)
	Outcome (neutral)
	Outcome (negative)
	Actions and Reactions to Perceived Causes

ID	Parti...	Gender	School	Ch.	E-mail contents	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Que.
1	G001	M	6	Chair	Attached are my answers to your questions. I hope this is helpful and bet of luck with you research.	Yes, as an ***** employee and the Director of Development, I submitted the proposal and project directed the school from approval by the DE to opening	Mainly consistency, but also as we established a new trust to run this school. ***** I am also there to ensure the Trust delivers its original purpose. We are also moving to be a multiple promoter with another Free School opening in ***** this summer. I am also passionate about introducing innovations into education along with making the very best use of the freedoms academies enjoy. (Free Schools are statutorily academies)	Weekly to fortnightly. We have a light touch governance arrangement, with the smallest possible governing body (8 members) we can get to.	I am delighted that following opening the school in such a short period of time, the school has established itself into the local community and is very oversubscribed from September (an excellent indicator). A negative is that we have had a higher turn-over in staff that I would have liked in the first year. Two were not up to standard and the business manager decided a school setting is not for him. With a small initial staffing structure and one fixed term contract, too much effort has been placed on recruitment this year and not on raising standards in the classroom. This is now resolved for September.	Yes
2	G002	M	9	Chair	Please find attached the responses from our Chair of Governors ***** to your questionnaire sent by yourself on the 12th July 2012. I trust this is acceptable however please contact me if this is unreadable. Kind regards	Yes	I am a solicitor and a former pupil of the school and wanted to give something back	weekly	Deciding to apply to become an Academy/Free School. Various serious staffing problems	Mayb
3	G003	M	10	Chair	Please find attached the survey you requested that I fill out. I have asked that it be circulated to the other governors as well. Kind Regards	I am not one of the original trustees but I did during the process and was involved in the consultation; we attended the first meeting for interested prospective parents	I was asked by the Head to consider applying (there was an election for two parent governors) it made sense to show my commitment to my children's local education, a new project, a dynamic Head and to use my professional skills if necessary. I discussed the option with three governors I know with a variety of experience at other schools. I really appreciate my own education and realise the financial sacrifices my parents made for my brothers and I to attend public school.	In person at the school for formal meetings around monthly but by email, on the phone and through unplanned meetings at either end of the school day it would be more than weekly.	After Prize day yesterday, the penultimate day of term, I am thrilled by the positive feeling of parents towards the school, what it has already achieved and the future plans for expansion. Unexpected resignations of three governors has meant my taking on the role as Chair. But I relish the challenge.	Mayb

After Prize day yesterday, the penultimate day of term, I am thrilled by the positive feeling of parents towards the school, what it has already achieved and the future plans for expansion. Unexpected resignations of three governors has meant my taking on the role as Chair. But I relish the challenge.

- Positive outcomes
- (Governance) Actions
- Perceived causes and effects; roles
- Actions and reactions

Appendix 9.6 – Interview Schedule 1

Background Questions

- (Note Gender)
- Is there a particular method for contacting you that would be preferred if I need to follow up on a particular point?
- Are you under 35, 35-50, 50 plus
- What is your defined governor role?
- Do you have any particular functions related to your role?
- Are you a parent?
- Do you have any other employment, or what was your last employment?
- Do you have prior experience in an educational setting?

Main Questions

1. Why, and how, did you become involved in the school project?
 - a. What founding role did you play? (if they allure to having had one)
 - b. Any other examples?
2. Can you describe the ways in which you and your fellow governors work together and communicate on school related matters?
 - a. How have responsibilities been distributed between the governors and trustees following from the initial set up period pre-governors?
 - b. How frequently do you find yourself engaged in the school?
 - i. Do you think this is linked to your position at the school?
 - ii. Has anything caused an increase/decrease in your involvement?
 - c. Any other examples?
3. In what ways do you find that your role at the school links to your past experience? Can you give examples?
 - a. Have you ever had any experience as a governor before? Where? How does it compare
 - b. Any other experience in education? Primary, Secondary? Compare?
 - c. Any other examples?
4. Which if any particular areas of the school's development are you especially engaged in? Is this an area you feel particularly passionate about? Can you explain how this responsibility came about?
 - a. How would you describe the school's vision, values, purpose?
 - b. Any other examples?
5. What are the main groups of people you perceive to take an interest in the workings of your school, and what is the nature of their interests? Are there any particular champions of these interests at the school?
 - a. Stakeholders
 - b. What is your relationship like with the LA? Central Government?
 - c. Any other examples?

6. What are the main ways in which you and your fellow governors communicate with these other interested parties? Can you give examples of any interactions which you feel have been especially important?
 - a. Any other examples?
7. If you had to pick one, what do you think has been the biggest challenge or problem the school has had to overcome so far and how is it/was it dealt with?
 - a. How did this affect you or your involvement at the school? E.g. frequency of engagement
 - b. What did you think about this? Reasons? Solutions? Underlying problems?
 - c. Any other examples?
8. What lessons would you share from your personal experience of dealing with this challenge, to help fellow governors of other schools in the future?
 - a. Any other examples?
9. Thinking back to how you first imagined the school would be, how close do you think you are to that image and what is different?
 - a. Physical? Abstract? Notion?
 - b. Any other examples?
10. Is there anything else you feel important about your experience of being involved in governing a Free School?
 - a. Any other examples?

Appendix 9.7 – Interview Schedule 2

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me again. I'd be especially glad to take up some of the points you made last time:

- *Personalised to specific points raised in the first interview*
- *OR background questions and introduction to new participants (N.B. themes 1,3 & 4 from Interview Schedule 1)*

Then, selected from the list below, questions that will:

- *support an increase of depth of understanding*
 - *ensure saturation is reached with individual participants*
1. How have things changed (or stayed the same) for you or the school since we last spoke?
 - a. Why and how?
 2. How do you engage with management staff at the school in the strategic development process?
 - a. What role do you all play in this?
 - b. How did you decide who would consider what?
 3. Are there particular relationships that you feel are increasingly influencing the development of your own role/function or the development of the school itself?
 - a. Who with and why?
 - b. What is the impact?
 4. Are there particular aspects of the school you would like to be more or less involved in?
 - a. Why?
 - b. What do you think your contribution to this area is or could be?
 5. Do you feel like you and your school are a part of a larger network, and if so which?
 - a. Who else would you like to build connections with?
 - b. Would you like local or central government to play more, or less, of a role in the school, and why?
 - c. How does central government listen and respond to feedback you have based on your experiences of running a Free School?
 6. How do you think the role that you play has changed between the period before opening and now?
 - a. Was this a result of a deliberate change/handover or if not, can you describe how it came about?
 - b. What hasn't changed between pre-opening and now for you
 7. Are there any particular powers or responsibilities that you wish you or the school did or didn't have?
 - a. What do you think the impact of this would be?

8. How would you describe the hierarchy or structure at the school?
 - a. -formally?
 - b. -informally?
 - c. Is power or responsibility quite centralised or spread out?

9. How do you think your role as a governor differs from the principal's, senior managements' and members' roles?
 - a. What do you think are the main similarities and difference between founding a Free School and governing one?
 - b. What kind of balance are you experiencing between inside the school looking out and outside the school looking in?

10. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel important or that has not been addressed by the questions?

Appendix 9.8.1 – School 1 Governor Composition

Governor	In post for data collection	Interviewed	Proposer/ Founder/ Pre-open/ Post-open	Other Current Official Role(s)	Employment field	Affiliations
School 1 CEO	✓	✓ (1)	Proposer	Education Director; executive head	Education and Education training	CEO and owner of an education training company
School 1 RO2	✓	✓ (1)	Founder	Member; Chair of Resources Sub-comm.	Kindergarten and HE consultancy	Ex-adviser-consultant for the education training company. Various educational and charitable organisations.
School 1 Chair	✓	✓ (2)	Founder	Member; School Librarian	Retired GP	X
School 1 Comm.	✓	✓ (2)	Pre-open	Chair of Children and Learning Sub-comm.	Education & Education training (semi-retired)	Employed by various education training groups, including the CEOs
School 1 Rel.	✓	X	Founder	Member	Religious	
School 1 VC	✓	X	Pre-open	School Solicitor	Law	
School 1 Parent2	✓	X	Post-open	VC of Children and Learning Sub-comm.	Unknown	
School 1 Non-teaching staff1	✓	X	Post-open	Staff	Primary Education	
School 1 Principal	X	N/A	Pre-open			
School 1 RO1	X	N/A	Founding			
School 1 Parent1	X	N/A	Post-open			
School 1 Teaching staff1	X	N/A	Post-open			
School 1 Non-teaching staff2	X	N/A	Post-open			
School 1 Teaching staff2	X	N/A	Post-open			
School 1 Parent3	X	N/A	Post-open			
School 1 Teaching staff3	X	N/A	Post-open			

Appendix 9.8.2 – School 2 Governor Composition

Governor	In post for data collection	Interviewed	Proposer/ Founder/ Pre-open/ Post-open	Other Current Official Role(s)	Employment field	Affiliations
School 2 Chair	✓	✓ (1)	Proposer	Member; Director of sister schools	Retired Council Worker – Children’s Services	Connections with the Local Authority; Sister Schools
School 2 Comm.1	✓	✓ (2)	Founder	Member; Vice Chair; Governor development co-ordinator	Sister schools; HR expertise	Local University; Sister Schools
School 2 Parent1	✓	✓ (1)	Founder	Community; Responsible Officer	Skincare Industry	X
School 2 Principal	✓	✓ (1)	Pre-open	NQT mentor;	Primary Education	Teaching schools’ alliance; local school’s trust; Independent Academies Board
School 2 Finance	✓	✓ (2)	Pre-open	Chair of Resource Committee; School Finance; Member of sister schools	Council Finance	A different Local Authority; Sister Schools
School 2 Teaching Staff	✓	✓ (1)	Pre-open	Staff	Primary Education	Teaching schools’ alliance
School 2 Comm.2	✓	X	Post-open	Children’s Safeguarding	Police	
School 2 Non-teaching staff	✓	X	Post-open	Staff; Health & Safety risk management	Education	
School 2 Parent2	✓	X	Post-open	N/A	Education	
School 2 Uni. Rep	✓	X	Post-open	N/A	Higher Education	
School 2 Comm.3	✓	X	Post-open	Learning and teaching focus	Education	
School 2 Parent3	X	N/A	Founder			
School 2 Parent4	X	N/A	Post-open			
School 2 Parent5	X	N/A	Post-open			
School 2 Council Rep	X	N/A	Founder			

Appendix 9.8.3 – School 3 Governor Composition

Governor	In post for data collection	Interviewed	Proposer/ Founder/ Pre-open/ Post-open	Other Current Official Role(s)	Employment field	Affiliations
School 3 CEO	✓	✓ (2)	Proposer	Member; Principal moving to executive head	Education	The National College for Teaching and Leadership; Independent Schools Association; New Schools Network
School 3 Chair	✓	✓ (2)	Post-open	Parent governor; chair of health & safety sub comm.	Community relations for Public Service Projects	X
School 3 Parent1	✓	✓ (1)	Post-open	Chair of safeguarding sub-comm.	GP	X
School 3 Parent2	✓	✓ (2)	Post-open	X	Banking & Finance	Local group of property development, investment and management Co.
School 3 Gov1	✓	X	Founder	Chair of Admissions sub-comm.; project management; Chair of facilities development & IT sub-comm.	IT Consultancy	Local Authority Schools Admissions Board (VC)
School 3 Parent3	✓	X	Founder	Chair of HR, marketing & comms sub-comm.	HR & Academia	
School 3 Parent4	✓	X	Founder	Chair of Finance and Audit sub-comm.	Business Development & IT	
School 3 Gov2	✓	X	Post-open	Chair of Education sub-comm.	Ofsted	
School 3 Gov3	✓	X	Post-open	X	Business Development within the education sector	
School 3 Chair2	X	N/A	Founder			
School 3 Parent5	X	N/A	Founder			
School 3 Parent6	X	N/A	Post-open			

Appendix 9.9 – Participant Information Form

The Researcher and the Research

I am a PhD researcher with the Business School at the University of Hertfordshire. My current research focuses on the governors of Free Schools in England. I am interested in exploring the motivations behind governors' involvement and their experiences related to the development of these schools. The research seeks to understand how governors contribute to each school's efforts to live up to its distinctive vision, values and purpose.

My personal interest in the research stems from being a parent to two young children. As such I have an inherent interest in the English education system. As education in England continues to be transformed under the Education Act 2010 and beyond I was curious to develop an understanding of the role that governors play in these processes. As my focus had always been strategic management I wondered how this process is played out amongst the governing committees of these new Free Schools in light of the fact that the founders and governors potentially come from such a vast range of backgrounds, coupled by the fact that there does not exist a clear Free School archetype for newly opening schools to learn from. Although governors play such a vital role in the development of these schools, especially considering the new freedoms and responsibilities these new schools are subject to, they are not well represented in the research and literature on public sector and school governance. That is why this research seeks to understand a little bit about you and your experience of your involvement in your school.

This research has been approved by the University of Hertfordshire ethics committee; protocol number **BS/R/037 11**. I will be recording the interview so as not to disrupt the flow of conversation with note taking. All information will be stored securely and your anonymity is ensured in all uses of the data arising from the interview. You retain the right to cease or opt out of the interview at any stage. If you require further information at any point before, during or after the interview I am happy to oblige.

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in my research.

Phil Mason

PhD Researcher and Visiting Lecturer
M322 – Business School – Management, Leadership and Organisation
University of Hertfordshire
AL10 9AB

07920 515356
p.mason3@herts.ac.uk

Appendix 9.10 – Participant Consent Form

This academic research, which is being conducted as part of a doctoral programme of study at University of Hertfordshire Business School, aims to explore the motivations and experiences of Free School governors in the context of their schools. The research will develop an understanding of how governors contribute to each school’s efforts to live up to its distinctive vision, values and purpose. In order to achieve this, you are asked to take part in an interview exploring your motivations and reasons for becoming a governor along with your experiences in the role. As such:

1. You have been asked to participate as you are a governor of a Free School in England.
2. The interview should take in the region of 45 minutes to 1 hour.
3. Participating in the interview does not commit you to any further involvement, although there may be reasons to follow up on particular points with you via phone or e-mail.
4. Your interview will form part of an anonymous case study of your school’s development from a governor perspective.
5. The interview will be recorded, but this along with any other information arising from the research will be held securely and will remain anonymous in all future uses.
6. I, the Researcher, undertake to honour any request you make for specific comment(s) from your interview to be kept confidential.

Please answer the following (select all that apply):

- I agree to take part in the above study
- I understand that the interview may be voice-recorded for the purpose of this research
- I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, and without me being affected in any way
- I understand that my, and my school’s, identity in this research will be kept anonymous.

Name (optional):

Signature:

Date: