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PRINCIPAL SELECTION BY BOARDS OF TRUSTEES
PERCEPTION AND PROCESS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Educational Administration

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Abstract

This research study examines three regional primary school Boards of Trustees in New Zealand leading up to the appointment of their new teaching principal. It focusses on trustee perceptions of educational leadership and on each Board's principal selection procedures. The conceptual and research framework identifies three areas for investigation: trustees' new employer role as a result of devolved educational control and their future training needs; the principal's dichotomous role as leader and manager of the school; and the efficacy of the principal selection process taking into account trustees' knowledge of the job, core principal qualities necessary for the position, identification of selection criteria, subjective factors and gender considerations.

A qualitative case study approach was used to illuminate the selection process which involved a total of 17 trustees. The research design was based around four information sources: documentary analysis, questionnaire, observational recording of meeting discussions, and a focussed interview with each trustee. Results of the study showed that trustees' predominant perceptions of principal qualities lay in the area of personal relationships and practical teaching experiences, with a preference for leadership rather than managerial skills. Trustees were not yet comfortable in their employer role, and selection processes displayed weaknesses in assessment methodologies and their consistent application. Results also revealed the impact on trustees' decision-making of subjective factors such as selector impressionism, and of the concept of 'best fit' involving dual processes of job and person perceptions.

As a consequence, the study recommends that future trustee selection training should be directed towards an understanding of employment legislation and of school leadership and management issues, and a greater proficiency in the use of valid assessment methods. These research findings have implications not only for trustee personnel training but for the expectations of a principal's role in today's schools, and for a broader definition of the principle of merit selection.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgements	ii
List of Tables and Figures	v
Introduction	1
Chapter One	
GOVERNANCE AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ISSUES: CONTEXTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL LITERATURE	5
The role of governing bodies in principal selection	
Management versus leadership: the great debate	
Chapter Two	
RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF PRINCIPALS: A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE	19
Chapter Three	
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	34
Chapter Four	
CASE STUDY: HIGHFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL	53
Chapter Five	
CASE STUDY: CENTRAL PRIMARY SCHOOL	89
Chapter Six	
CASE STUDY: MIDDLETON PRIMARY SCHOOL	126
Chapter Seven	
FROM PERCEPTION TO PROCESS: AN ANALYSIS	161
Trustee perceptions of educational leadership	
The selection process	

Chapter Eight	
PRINCIPAL SELECTION: TRUSTEE IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	186
Trustees' employer role in the 1990's	
Recommendations for training and future practice	
Conclusion	195
Appendices	201
Board of Trustees questionnaire	
Observational recording format	
Trustee interview schedule	
Letter requesting participation	
Letter of support	
Agreement of understanding	
Interview transcript	
Trustee meeting summary sheet	
Data sources for research questions	
References	213

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 1	Data collection time chart	50
Table		
4.1	Trustee perceptions of principal qualities by grouped ranking: Highfield Primary School	54
4.2	Leadership qualities identified at candidate interview: Highfield Primary School	56
4.3	Priority order of essential leadership qualities: Highfield Primary School	57
4.4	Critical factors during shortlisting and post-interview discussion: Highfield Primary School	59
4.5	Concepts of leadership and management: Highfield Primary School	60
4.6	Documentary analysis: Highfield Primary School	71
4.7	Major criteria identified across a range of sources: Highfield Primary School	76
5.1	Trustee perceptions of principal qualities by grouped ranking: Central Primary School	90
5.2	Leadership qualities identified at candidate interview: Central Primary School	92
5.3	Priority order of essential leadership qualities: Central Primary School	93
5.4	Critical factors during shortlisting and post-interview discussion: Central Primary School	95
5.5	Concepts of leadership and management: Central Primary School	96
5.6	Documentary analysis: Central Primary School	108
5.7	Major criteria identified across a range of sources: Central Primary School	112

6.1	Trustee perceptions of principal qualities by grouped ranking: Middleton Primary School	128
6.2	Leadership qualities identified at candidate interview: Middleton Primary School	130
6.3	Priority order of essential leadership qualities: Middleton Primary School	131
6.4	Critical factors during shortlisting and post-interview discussion: Middleton Primary School	132
6.5	Concepts of leadership and management: Middleton Primary School	133
6.6	Documentary analysis: Middleton Primary School	145
6.7	Major criteria identified across a range of sources: Middleton Primary School	150
7.1	Essential principal qualities in ranked order: Highfield, Central and Middleton Primary Schools	163
7.2	Criteria identification across documentary sources: Highfield, Central and Middleton Primary Schools	174

Introduction

Below we have listed the principal qualities we came up with What we would like you to do is to give the qualities a rating between 1 and 5 We emphasise that it is not an exhaustive list - the task has been compared with trying to design God so there is plenty of scope.

Board of Trustees newsletter to parents 1994

The magnitude of the task of leadership selection and particularly that of a school principal, is well illustrated in the extract above. The selection of an appropriate leader includes not only the question of who should be appointed but also how leadership potential shall be evaluated. When the latter question is answered incorrectly, the universal ramifications can be devastating: "teams lose, armies are defeated, economies dwindle and nations fail" (Hogan et al 1994 p 493).

In the case of educational leadership, school principals have an important role in modern society. They have the potential to improve the lives and life opportunities of countless pupils and teachers, to affect student achievement and the quality of teacher performance. After investigating various schemes to improve schools in the USA in the late 1970's, the American Senate concluded that, if schools were to be vibrant child-centred places where there was excellence in teaching and where students performed to the best of their ability, then the key to success lay in the leadership of the principal.

It could be argued that this growing recognition of the relationship between school leadership and school effectiveness corresponds with the increased attention during the 1980's given to educational selection and appointment processes. As a consequence selection procedures for school principals have come to be regarded as of key importance in the provision of successful learning and teaching outcomes in schools world-wide.

The necessity to appoint the 'right' person to be a school principal has been compounded by the demands of a changing environment. School administrators are asked to restructure school organisation, management, and curriculum in order to prepare pupils to live and participate in a post-industrial society. This, in turn, necessitates a different type of leadership than that seen in schools previously. This has been summarised by some educational theorists as a shift in paradigm from a "power over approach ... to a power to approach" (Sergiovanni 1991 p 57).

The purpose of this research is to undertake a case study of three Boards of Trustees and their perceptions of the qualities of a 'good' principal, and to record and analyse each Board's process of principal selection. It is intended that results will identify responses to a number of research questions arising from an examination of the conceptual literature and research in the field of principal recruitment and selection. A further objective of this study is that it will lead to more informed decision-making about the qualities to look for in a principal, about the valid use of selection procedures, and identification of future trustee training needs for selecting school principals.

The research study is set against a background of considerable administrative change in New Zealand education. In August 1988, the New Zealand government produced a policy document on educational administration, *Tomorrow's Schools*, which would decentralize a number of educational responsibilities, including the employment of staff, from central government departments and regional education boards to individual schools. The devolution was realised in October 1989 when Boards of Trustees were elected to take over the management of their local schools, and were exposed to the realities of their new employer role.

Like their counterparts in other employing groups around the world, the New Zealand trustees have had to confront significant staff and principal selection problems: differing perceptions of the job, variable use of selection criteria and the use of undeclared criteria (Baltzell and Dentler 1983; Morgan Hall and Mackay 1983), together with inadequate selection procedures which employ selection tools lacking the reliability or validity necessary to provide sound data about applicants (Jensen 1987). In addition the choice of a school principal is centred on a prediction of the future based on varying information made available to the selection panel. The panelists then predict that the

person they choose for the job will be an effective principal according to a pre-determined set of criteria - a high risk business indeed!

This research study begins by identifying relevant underlying issues in the field of school principal selection. Chapter 1 examines the contextual literature of school governance and conceptual literature of current school leadership issues. It firstly places the devolution of educational administration in New Zealand in an international context and outlines the new employer responsibilities of Boards of Trustees since 1989. Then the dichotomous roles of the principal as both leader and manager are outlined and it is argued strongly that the present thrust towards managerial efficiency in New Zealand runs counter to the professional leadership role to which most principals still aspire.

Chapter 2 reviews international research on the recruitment and selection of school principals to derive a number of common problematic factors which influence the selection process. By comparison, research on the topic in New Zealand is negligible, with the exception of a focus on barriers to women's promotional opportunities in senior educational administrative positions. Both the opening literature review chapters problematise features in the principal selection process which form the basis for a series of research questions, and for subsequent data discussion and analysis.

The research methodology for this study is detailed in Chapter 3. The study's research design, instrumentation, sampling methods and ethical foundation are described, along with strategies employed for data collection and analysis. The results of an earlier pilot case study are discussed briefly, as are the ensuing changes to improve later data gathering techniques in the thesis proper.

The research results are presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Each chapter describes the three case study primary schools, using data gathered from documentary analysis, questionnaire, trustee interviews and on-site observation methods. Each case study records the school setting, trustee perceptions of educational leadership and selection processes employed, all of which are viewed within their unique educational context. These results reveal how the expectations of trustees and their selection strategies impact upon their choice of school principal.

Chapter 7 offers an analysis of the research findings from the three case studies. This analysis is closely linked to the areas defined by the research questions and covers trustee perceptions of leadership, components of the selection process, and gender considerations. Chapter 8 outlines implications for trustees of their employment responsibilities and provides recommendations for future directions in trustee training, from both trustee and researcher perspectives. Trustees' reactions to their new-found employer role are discussed, together with suggestions for future trustee training in the area of principal selection which have arisen from the research results, and from interviews with the trustees. These suggestions are offered in response to a current lack of in-depth preparation for the selection task, be it for overseas governing bodies or for New Zealand Boards of Trustees.

The study concludes with an overall summary of underlying concepts, research methodology, and results of the case study investigations under the major headings of perceptions of educational leadership, selection process and directions for future trustee training. Contributions of the thesis findings to the field of principal selection are discussed, together with suggestions for further research. The conclusion of the research study reiterates the problematic nature of personnel selection processes in general and the critical care required for the appointment of a school principal in particular.

Chapter One

GOVERNANCE AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ISSUES: CONTEXTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL LITERATURE

The educational climate in which Boards of Trustees now select their new principal has changed considerably in recent years, both universally and within New Zealand. This chapter provides an overview of educational change and thinking in the areas of school governance and school leadership and a link to governance and leadership issues which later emerge from the case studies. It examines contextual literature to determine the major issue of decentralisation of educational responsibilities and its implications for Boards of Trustees. It also examines critically the changing role of the school principal from the conceptual literature and research in terms of leadership and management functions.

1. The Role of Governing Bodies in Principal Selection

Principal selection and the decentralisation movement of the 1980's

There has been a universal decentralisation of school administration during the 1980's as western governments moved to devolve administrative responsibilities from educational bureaucracies to local school communities. International developments in school-based management have taken place in the United States (Dunlop 1985), Canada (Sackney and Dibski 1989), Sweden (Lundgren 1986), and in Britain (Whitehead and Aggleton 1986). Not only must contemporary school board members now have a sound understanding of the complexities of governance but they must also perform their responsibilities in a highly changed environment. They are expected to confront the community's social and economic problems as they are reflected in the classroom, rise above political and financial pressures, and govern in a highly ethical and professional manner (Campbell and Greene 1994). As a consequence of this devolutionary process, school governing bodies undertake far greater responsibilities for overseeing each school's operation, including the mantle of employer, and in particular, the selection of the school principal.

The impact of such a devolution on senior teacher selection has been seen in a number of overseas countries. American education has for many years promoted the role of the local governing board in the selection and evaluation of its superintendent, and in the process highlighted the importance of the Board's understanding of how to select the right superintendent for the district. In addition the governance of schools was being altered to allow for on-site management by parents, teachers and students. It is interesting to note in contrast that, while other nations have reacted to reduce excessive centralisation of their state school systems, American reform efforts of the 1970's and 1980's have increased centralisation as a by-product of measures designed to correct deficiencies associated with the decentralised character of American schooling (Boyd 1984).

In Australian education, the state of Victoria has seen the most dramatic departure from traditional patterns of principal selection (Moyle and Taylor 1991). During 1984 in Victoria, policy was implemented allowing for School Council participation in the selection of principals and deputy principals:

This policy, initially implemented only in post primary schools, marked the Victorian government's attempt to resolve the considerable tension between the centralised concern for consistency, equity, economy and efficiency which had characterised traditional selection practices in Australian government schools and respect for localized individual autonomy in the pluralist society of Australia in the late twentieth century (Chapman 1985b p 4).

When confronted with a principal vacancy, each School Council was to constitute a selection committee, whose responsibility it would be to short-list applicants, contact referees, interview short-listed candidates and make recommendations for appointments to the Council, with final ratification made by the State Education Department's Appointment Board. Similarly Slattery (1988) found changes in Australian Catholic education where, as the authority increased of lay administrators in administering the school system, new Catholic school authorities established new procedures for the selection of school principals.

In her study of the experiences of eight Australian School Councils involved for the first time in the selection of a principal, Chapman (1985a) reported an effective devolution

of education decision-making from the Education Department to the school. In particular, schools saw the new procedures as contributing to:

- the development of a mutual appreciation of the contribution to be made by both professional educators and members of the school community,
- a greater understanding of the complexity of the roles, duties and tasks of the administrators,
- an improvement in the image of the Department as a body supportive of, and responsive to, school interests (p 73).

In addition it was often reported that members of the school felt more committed to their incoming administrators.

In Britain the need for decentralisation of school administration and its implications for staff selection were taken up by the Taylor Report published in 1977 which called for more governor involvement in all staff appointments. Previously, governors contributed little to the appointment procedure, apart from some progressive Local Education Authorities (Mahoney 1988). The recommendations of the Report were encapsulated by the 1986 Education Act which set out the governors' role in the appointment and dismissal of staff. In the case of headteacher selection, at least three Local Education Authority (LEA) representatives and at least three governors constitute the selection panel; an LEA cannot impose a headteacher but can appoint, in consultation with the governing body, an acting headteacher. The LEA may decline to appoint the recommended candidate, after which the panel may interview other applicants or re-advertise the position.

One of the common themes to emerge from the overseas literature on decentralisation of responsibilities is the heavy burden now placed on school-based authorities to exercise their function effectively on a multitude of crucial educational issues: systemic educational reform, school effectiveness, assessment, school operations and school-based management which includes legislative, judicial and executive roles such as the appointment of staff. Such expansive responsibilities invite the following key question in relation to this study: can school boards composed primarily of part-time lay people perform all of these functions well?

Devolution in New Zealand

During the 1970's, it was perceived by many that the highly centralised form of public education administration had become clearly undemocratic, resulting in a severe crisis of legitimation:

One of the main manifestations of a deepening legitimation crisis is that state institutions are unable to satisfy public expectations and they become obvious targets for 'blame' and derision. From the mid 1970's on, there was an increasing expression about deficiencies within the education system, combined with calls for greater community participation and parental involvement in education. (Codd et al 1990 p 15)

In 1987, the Taskforce to Review Educational Administration was established to investigate the efficiencies and devolution of such administrative responsibilities. It reported to the Minister of Education as well as to the Ministers of Finance and State Services. Its Picot Report¹ was published in 1988 and contained radical restructuring proposals based around three core principles: reorganisation of the central state, including a shift from operations to policy as a central focus, devolution of operational activities to school level and new systems of accountability (Gordon 1995).

The then Minister of Education produced a white paper, **Tomorrow's Schools** (Lange 1988), endorsing the proposals and setting the implementation date for 1 October 1989. A major aspect of the administrative reforms was the governance of schools by a small Board of Trustees, elected by parents, which in turn took its direction from a school charter; in particular the Board gained control over operational expenditure, and employment of personnel, namely to select the Principal and approve the appointment of all staff.

¹Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education Report of the Taskforce to Review Educational Administration.

Employer role for trustees

The Picot Report had strongly advanced the decentralised decision-making process for principal selection: "The Board of Trustees will appoint the Principal, on a contract within a salary range established nationally. The terms of the contract should be negotiated between the Board of Trustees and the Principal" (p 47). Now Trustees have a legal obligation to be a good employer, as detailed in the State Sector Amendment Act 1989 and in the school charter.

Under the generic heading of **Staffing Goals and Objectives**, each charter contains a goal of sound personnel policies with the objectives to comply with appointment, appraisal, discipline and dismissal procedures established in the relevant awards and regulations for all teaching and non-teaching staff. The schools' policy statement on principal and staff appointments defines the process by which such appointments are made and approved and delineates who will be responsible for the various stages of the appointment process. Each Board of Trustees has also been given the power to delegate its authority to trustee sub-committees of the Board and to staff.

While the Board is ultimately responsible for the employment of all personnel, the Principal is the only staff member for whom the Board has direct responsibility. The Board is responsible for the recruitment, contracting, induction, supervision, performance appraisal and dismissal of the Principal. "Typically, whilst most boards carry out the recruitment and contracting tasks quite well, few fulfill the other responsibilities with the same confidence" (Kilmister 1989 p 82). To assist Boards with their new governance role as personnel managers, several Ministry of Education publications were produced including **A Practical Handbook for School Trustees** (1989) and **A Guide to Personnel Management** (1990). These outlined, in general terms, aspects such as relevant legislation and awards, and, at times, cursory descriptions of appointment requirements.

This new role for trustees in the field of staff employment represents a distinct change from pre-1989 management of school operations, where a regional Educational Board was charged with the responsibility of staff selection and employment. What has been

the impact of this devolution of employment responsibility from a centralised bureaucracy to local control?

Impact of administrative reforms

The major issue arising from decentralisation of educational responsibility in New Zealand has not been local control per se but rather how to ensure an effective policy and decision-making body for public education at the local level. Initial frustrations were expressed by Boards that operational funding did not match in real terms the funding needed to run their schools. However the dominant problem was more fundamental: just how much devolution was the Government prepared to allow when local bodies were fully funded from taxation (Boston et al 1991)? In the event, the State withdrew from its operational involvement in school affairs, yet maintained its level of control by legislating through school charters on-line accountability links from Boards directly to the Minister of Education.

The end result has been that Boards of Trustees presently find themselves in an accountability predicament: although they have been elected by parents and therefore responsible to their school community, their primary responsibility is still to a central body. This tension for Boards between local and central demands is further exemplified by Gordon (1995): "The focus on compliance to rules and regulations set centrally does not sit well with the diverse and voluntary nature of school management" (p 70).

The consequences of an enhanced employer role for trustees have been varied either for principals or for general teaching staff. In a study of 15 schools in the Waikato and Wellington regions, Barrington (1992) found that primary trustees made positive mention of their ability to make appointments and be freed from administrative oversight by the former Education Boards. However, there is also evidence to the contrary, as first indicated by the Lough Report (1990) on the progress of the administrative reforms. It found, among other difficulties, that many boards were not yet comfortable with being the employer and it registered concern about the ability of schools to take full responsibility for personnel issues. Codd et al (1990), in a different view, pointed to expressed fears that "traditionally minded school boards may act on their suspected preferences for male principals at the expense of women" (p 18) while

Gordon (1994) believes there has been a negative shift in ethos surrounding Board of Trustees since the reforms of 1989: from an emphasis on community representation to a political encouragement for boards to see themselves as directors of successful businesses (p 115).

Research problem

The review of the literature on school governance has highlighted the inherent dangers of decentralisation of educational responsibility from a central authority to a local group, without the concomitant transfer of knowledge and skills which would enable the local trustees to perform satisfactorily their new duties. This problem will be addressed later by a research question which, from the results of this study, will focus on the area of future training needs for Boards and which will provide suggestions to promote trustee confidence in and effective use of selection procedures, especially in relation to their choice of a new educational leader. This is reinforced by an Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development report as a key challenge following any process of decentralisation leading to school-based management:

Shifts of responsibility to the school level raise the possibility that some functions, formerly carried out at the centre, will not be effectively performed. Central authorities need to ensure, through guidance and support for pre-service, in-service and community-based programmes, that those assuming new roles have developed the capacity to meet their new responsibilities (OECD 1989 p 2).

2. Management versus Leadership: The Great Debate

The role performed by the principal has always had two competing dimensions: instructional leader and school manager. A number of educational and business writers have suggested that there can be an important distinction in meaning between the term 'leader' and 'manager'. Smyth (1989) asserts that leadership and management are not interchangeable concepts. Zaleznik (1977), an American management expert, describes the contrast in this way:

Managers are responsible for establishing order and predictability, systems and routines; leaders are responsible for stirring people up, provoking, questioning and inspiring. Managers are concerned with structures and their focus is on operations. Leaders on the other hand, base their activity on people rather than structures - they typically work on people's values, beliefs and ideas to effect change by raising standards and defining future goals. The essential difference is that leadership involves risk, management does not (pp 67 - 68).

This section of the chapter serves to review the literature on the leadership/management dichotomy with the aim of providing a universal conceptual and research background against which Board of Trustees' principal selection processes can be examined. It will also draw research questions from predominant educational issues arising from the leadership/management debate.

Role of an educational leader

In the educational environment, Edwards (1989) and Blairs (1992) see the professional educational leader demonstrating skills by defining the school's mission and focusing on a more distant future, leading developments in curriculum and instruction, promoting a positive school climate by working with and motivating staff and students, and by managing the daily operation of the institution.

Specifically, Snyder (1983) identifies three phases of an instructional leadership model which builds school success over the year. This centres on the planning phase (school-wide goal setting, team action and individual planning), the development phase (teacher supervision, staff and curriculum development, performance appraisal and resource management) and the evaluation phase (assessment of current plans, school

effectiveness, performance of staff and students, and teaching and learning outcomes). This model provides a framework of the principal's tasks but Snyder also acknowledges that success is dependent on a vision of what is possible, on collective reflection and action, and finally on people's ability to work collaboratively.

While a number of researchers point to the predominance of administrative and managerial functions that inhibit the practice of innovative leadership (Sarros 1984) and to the need for an emphasis on transformational rather than transactional leadership (Beare et al 1989, Silins 1994), many of these managerial activities can be linked with instructional leadership, particularly to resource management and the effective implementation of school programmes (Blairs 1992). In addition, by efficiently managing their staff, budget, school buildings, student services, and the school's relationship with the community, school principals can provide the necessary base for a strong school culture (**Principal Selection Guide 1987**).

The managerial problem

There is, however, a considerable argument against an increasing managerial thrust from central authorities in terms of the principal's role in a school. Its basic tenet centres on the educative nature of the school as a learning institution where managerial tasks are viewed as a secondary means to the larger end of producing sound educational outcomes for students. This professional perspective stands in direct contrast to the ramifications of decentralised decision-making and school-based management which, in the English education system, Grace (1995) views as the "hegemony of managerial culture over professional culture" (p 120).

In Britain and now New Zealand, school principals face contradictory demands as a result of this increasing managerial pressure. For example, they are expected to work in a collegial way with their staff and simultaneously be responsible for matters such as staff appraisal and the development and measurement of staff performance objectives, clearly a move towards a management model more familiar to industry than to educationists. Such a model based on a management ideology has prompted New Zealand critics to view the agenda of administrative reform as an exercise in

cutting government expenditure which had nothing to do with the good of schools or pupils (Nuthall 1994, Gordon 1995).

Not only is the relationship between managerial activities and long-term educational outcomes yet to be proven, but also the competing demands on school principals in a market-driven world may render their position one of unenviable choice:

Those headteachers who are drawn by the image of managing director, or skilful player of the education market place, will experience the excitement of new roles to be practised - on what is sure to be called 'a new playing field'. Those for whom the professional aspects of headship were especially important, particularly in the cultural, pedagogic and pupil relations sectors, have to face the challenge of adjustment or flight from the field (Grace 1995 p 23).

Perceptions of the dichotomy

When the effective schools literature is examined, a clear pattern emerges. Apart from instructional factors such as time spent on instruction, quality of curriculum programmes, assessment, and positive reinforcement, it is significant that the major influence among the extra-instructional factors lies in leadership by the principal rather than his/her management capabilities. For example, in an early small-scale study of eight Michigan schools (six where pupil achievement was "improving" and two where pupil achievement was "declining"), Brookover and Lezotte (1979) found a clear difference in the principal's role in the two types of schools: "In the improving schools the principal is more likely to be an instructional leader, more likely to be assertive of his instructional leadership role ..." (p 67). In contrast, they found that declining schools were more likely to have principals who emphasised administrative and public relations functions.

Interestingly, when teachers and principals are questioned about their perceptions of the characteristics of an effective school principal, they express a universal preference for leadership rather than management qualities. In the United States, Rallis and Highsmith (1986), and Howey's (1980) case study of open-ended teacher interviews, indicate a consensus that leadership was the most pervasive characteristic of a successful school and that leadership was embedded in instructional improvement rather than

administration. Similar conclusions were drawn by Weindling and Early (1987) in a British study on the first years of secondary leadership and by Baskett and Miklos (1992) in a survey of principal and associate superintendents in Canada.

In the New Zealand educational environment leading up to the administrative reforms of October 1989, the literature also extolled the virtues of the influence of the principal's instructional leadership and leadership style in tomorrow's schools (Ballard and Duncan 1989) and in the Picot Report, the influence of the principal on collaborative staff relationships:

The research evidence is clear and unequivocal. A successful principal is a professional and instructional leader who has a coherent vision of the purposes of the institution, who is able to articulate that vision to the staff, and who is able to gain their commitment to it. The research tells us that the most successful principals are those who have developed team management strategies. Whatever system is developed, the collaborative relationship between principal and staff must be protected and enhanced (**Administering for Excellence** 1988 pp 51-52).

What, then, is the current situation in the leadership/management dichotomy as school principals attempt to meet the expectations and demands of today's schools? Regrettably recent experiences of principals and researchers alike reflect one of Neagley and Evan's (1975) fears of 20 years ago, that principals "may be relegated to a role of clerical minutiae" (p 100). The dilemma of the dichotomy still exists: the persistent tensions between the principal's desire to be an instructional leader and the practical necessity of administering the school (Marshall and Duignan 1987). Not only does it continue but also the dilemma has been exacerbated in New Zealand since the implementation of school-based management as part of the administrative reforms of 1989; it is a dilemma "rooted in the disjuncture between the managerial efficiency model being officially propounded and the professional service model to which many educators subscribe" (Alcorn 1993).

Leadership in today's schools

There is no doubt that the goal of instructional leadership for principals in today's schools is under threat, primarily from the increasing managerial aspect of principals' workload. Bowe et al (1992) carried out a series of school and Local Education Authority case studies in England and Wales to ascertain the effects of the Education Reform Act (1988) by focusing on the local management of schools. They found a strong pressure upon Heads and senior managers to 'manage', and a belief in 'management' as a panacea for solving the dilemmas and relieving the tensions: "if only they could get the systems and structures right, then everything else will fall into place" (p 157).

Similarly, the advent of school-based management in 1989 has created identical pressures for New Zealand principals. Reforms in education administration, the New Zealand school curriculum, the new qualifications framework, the role of the Education Review Office (ERO), the seamless education system - set against a background of government free market policies - have recently compounded the principals' workload (Donn 1993, Bennett 1994). These reforms have added extra responsibilities to the tasks carried out by Boards of Trustees and have contributed greatly to the pressures of the managerial function of the principal as the Board's Chief Executive. It is not insignificant that, in tracing developments from the Picot Report to the Lough Report, the rationale for collaborative leadership had given way to the efficiencies of managerialism, with the demarcation lines drawn that Boards should govern, principals should manage and teachers should operate (Codd 1990 p 22).

As a consequence, the principal's instructional leadership role is being eroded, as quality time and attention is now being diverted to "managerial aspects having an aura of immediacy and accountability which draws the principal's attention" (Blairs 1992 p 32). This, in turn, has led to a change in the principals' role, "a move from being the principal educator to being the principal administrator" (Marshall 1993 p 8). This view is supported by Robertson (1991) in a study of a group of eleven New Zealand school principals (primary, intermediate and secondary) over the course of the first year (1990) of the implementation of *Tomorrow's Schools* (Lange 1988). All of the principals surveyed were aware that they had been diverted from the role of instructional leader

and were looking at ways to reclaim that part of school leadership that they enjoyed most (p 154). The problem has been especially acute for teaching principals where a considerable amount of their release time has been used for administration and management purposes, with minimal time spent on professional leadership, community liaison and their own professional development (Fitchett 1995).²

Alternative models of leadership are, in fact, being propounded by both practitioners and researchers, as schools seek to respond not only to the demands of national bureaucracies but also to the needs of their teachers and learning communities. Some point to the moral dimension of educational leadership (Sergiovanni 1992), while others (Barth 1988, Fullan and Hargreaves 1992) advocate a move to collaborative arrangements within a "community of leaders" rather than top-down hierarchical relationships. The latter model is enhanced by the growing research on women's educational leadership styles both overseas (Shakeshaft 1987, Helgesen 1990) and in New Zealand (Neville 1988, Court 1989, Strachan 1991) which point to differences in the ways women and men may perform their leadership role, namely an emphasis on building relationships, empowering others by means of inclusion, collaboration and negotiation. Helgesen (1990) offers the following conclusion both as an advocacy of an inclusive leadership style and as a compromise to the management/leadership dichotomy:

What is needed, then, are leaders who can work against the feelings of alienation that affect our institutions, by bridging the gap between the demands of efficiency and the need to nurture the human spirit (p 234).

Research problems

It is important that a study of how school Boards of Trustees select their new principal be seen against this backdrop of national and international literature and research on the tasks and demands of an education leaders. Major problematic issues raised by the literature and research suggest key research questions to be asked of the selection process, particularly in the area pertaining to trustees' understanding and appreciation of the competing demands made of their new appointee, and their priority thinking as

²The teaching principal's workload of sixty plus hours per week has been well documented in the literature (Deloitte Ross Tohmatsu 1991, Wylie 1991, Livingstone 1994).

to a preference for their new principal to be an educational leader or an educational manager.

In Chapter 2 the focus of the literature review shifts from a contextual and conceptual base to survey past selection research studies from America, Britain and Australia. Previous research, linked to the current New Zealand education environment and to human resource management, will formulate a further set of research problems on the recruitment and selection of school principals.

Chapter Two

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION OF PRINCIPALS: A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH LITERATURE

The recruitment and selection of school principals has been given little attention by the early literature of the 1960's and 1970's, with the result that in the initial stages of research "remarkably little is known about just how these critical educational leaders are chosen" (Baltzell and Dentler 1983 p 1). In 1967 the American Association of School Administrators published a pamphlet entitled **The Right Principal for the Right School**. Reed (1989) suggests that this publication is the first to focus primarily on the selection of principals.

At a similar time in Britain, Allen (1968) set out a description of how head teachers were chosen, with an overly generalised account of appointment committee practices and qualities deemed important in a Head. These included examples of interview questions such as: Will you cane the girls? Can you lick this school into shape? What did you do in the war? (Answer: I was at school!) and identification of a Headteacher stereotype, as inter alia, "a **man**, on the right side of 40-45, an ordinary, well-dressed, ambitious member of the teaching profession, a **man** able to converse freely and easily if not deeply on a wide variety of topics, a **man** who is self confident with a tendency to pomposity" (p 165).¹

While this study of Boards of Trustees in the 1990's will suggest improvements in a number of areas of selection practice and perceptions, evaluation of early research presents a gloomy picture. This is emphasised by Murphy (1992) in his assertion that tentative evidence suggests that selection procedures were cloudy and quixotic (Boyer 1983), random (Achilles 1984), byzantine (Barth 1988), chance-ridden (Baltzell and Dentler 1983), and only distally connected to the ability to perform (Campbell et al 1960). This chapter will provide further background to these preliminary findings by reviewing subsequent research on principal selection from America, Britain and Australia and comparing the results of three major studies on the topic which were all carried out during the 1980's. The situation in New Zealand since

¹The emphasis is my own.

1989 will then be examined, together with research on the promotion of women in educational administration and an associated concept of merit selection. The review will conclude with an examination of parallel personnel selection themes from the literature of human resource management.

American Research

In 1982, Baltzell and Dentler conducted a comprehensive examination of the principal selection process in American schools. The researchers carried out a two-phase field investigation which sampled ten school districts to identify common practices and which examined five case studies where schools had implemented one of the following more systematic methods of selection: assessment centres, internships and "exemplary" common practices. Interviews were held with school boards and administrators; written policy statements, demographic and personnel data were analysed as the authors sought to define the dynamics and effects of the selection process:

For the past two and a half years, we have been trying to understand the ways, and the social as well as educational reasons for the ways, in which people in public school systems select school principals. We began our enquiry with the impression that those selection processes would illuminate the otherwise murky corridors of school leadership (1983 p 4).

Baltzell and Dentler's major research findings included the following:

- 1 Although the top leadership firmly controlled the process, there were constraints of local norms, customs, notions of what a principal is "supposed to be" and traditions of "how we select principals here".

- 2 Educational leadership merits became only one - and not always the most important - element to consider.

- 3 Given that "educational leadership" is difficult to define and measure, 'fit' or 'image' often came to dominate the selection criteria; "fit" in terms of pervasive local values and customary ways of behaving, often expressed through physical presence and social manner.

- 4 Numbers of women and minorities were increasing among the ranks of principals.
- 5 The principal selection process could **not** be generally categorised as merit-based and equity-centred: special **local** goals, aims and conditions very frequently determined the selection process.

This theme of bias is also taken up by Godin and Mithoefer (1988) in their study of the selection perceptions of 29 secondary and elementary principals in Maine. They found that bias of school boards still existed in relation to the gender of the candidate, the preference for quantity of experience as opposed to quality, and to their lack of awareness of (or refusal to acknowledge) current theories and research on principal characteristics, "despite our enlightenment about what constitutes effective school leadership" (p 1).

In a wide-ranging review of American selection literature, Reed (1989) concludes that the selection process is still heavily influenced by personal characteristics of the candidates and cites the example of Batchelor et al (1987) who investigated which characteristics resulted in high ratings by having four hypothetical resumes of potential principals evaluated by a national sample of superintendents. They found that outside interests and skills were most related to the evaluator's overall assessment of the candidate, followed, in order, by professional involvement, appearance, professional experience, academic background, references, and personal background. Reed notes that while evaluators may be unwilling to admit that they base their selections on factors generally considered unacceptable, they appear to allow personal characteristics to sway their assessment.

This research has been supported by a revival of interest in the field, notably from American doctoral students in the early 1990's. Holliday's (1989) study of six rural and suburban school districts in Ohio revealed the key role played in the selection process by superintendents, the personal interview, the personal appearance of candidates, and their 'fit' with local expectations of what principals should be. Huddleston (1993) compared principal selection practices in 67 Florida school districts over a ten year period between 1983 and 1993. His positive findings reported that 53% more districts

were currently using valid and reliable techniques for assessing the competencies of principal applicants, current selection procedures exhibited greater complexity and more stringent selection criteria, and 44% more districts used recognised measurement techniques for matching applicant qualities with school leadership needs. However, these optimistic findings were simultaneously counteracted by Winn (1993) whose research investigated critical factors in principalship preparation. Her 193 responses from senior administrators in principal preparation programmes in Florida identified barriers to career progress including perceived preferential hiring and promotion practices, and discrimination in the formal processes of application, screening and selection. Such contrasting research may be the result of the difference between observation and perception. Nevertheless, such a contrast reflects the complex nature of selection dynamics and may point to an intriguing paradox: that while the strategies and techniques of selection have improved in the past decade, the perceptions of principals and personal biases of appointment panels may have changed little.

British Research

The major British study on principal selection was carried out in England and Wales between 1980 and 1983 by Morgan et al (1983) and was known as the POST (Project on the Selection of Secondary Head Teachers) project. At the time it was the only study on selection in any occupational sphere in Britain which was based on observation, together with question and interview techniques and document analysis. Head teacher appointments were observed at the final interview stage and respondents for the project were drawn from officers responsible for local education authority (LEA) head teacher selection and, for the purposes of contrast, from "like" organisations involved in senior selection. The researchers evaluated their data on a job analysis to procedures match; that is, did the selectors have a clear view of the job for which they were appointing and did the procedures in use appear to measure those competencies which a job analysis of the secondary head's duties would indicate as necessary?

The following represent four of the major findings:

- 1 Selectors had a meagre knowledge of the job and used undeclared criteria; in fact only one among the 59 LEA's visited was found to have a written analysis

of the head's duties and nowhere among the 26 LEA's where appointment stages were observed did selectors have a formal job description from which to work.

- 2 The roles of the different groups of selectors were ambiguous viz LEA members, school governors and advisory officers, and contention at times arose over issues such as the notion of technical assessment in the job-related areas of educational leadership and management skills, as distinct from the more social concerns of the lay members.
- 3 The selectors used a restricted selection technology, whereby candidates' applications and references were discussed at one formal meeting, followed by an interview, usually on a very ill-planned and unstructured basis.
- 4 Non-job related factors dominated the selection decision! The researchers conclude that it seems, in the absence of controls dictated by explicit job criteria, the human selector has a marked penchant for the personal traits he believes are job-related and works from his or her own notions of the image and values appropriate for the job. (Morgan 1986 pp 153-157)

These findings are later supported by other British researchers as they identify selectors' reliance on personal judgement (Eustace 1988) and selectorial concern with the personality/character traits of candidates (Williams 1988). Williams' survey of a number of elected members and officers in one LEA and a random sample of head teachers suggested changes in selection practice including careful job analysis of the position as it was currently performed, together with an informed set of relevant criteria. This theme was taken up by Adey (1988) in his research which monitored the selection process for 26 vacant posts in ten secondary comprehensive schools during 1985-1988. This monitoring included observation of the formal interviews and decision-making discussions for 94 candidates. The results confirmed previous research that selector perceptions of candidate personality at the interview dominate selection decisions and that observed selection criteria have little relevance to the identified skills and tasks.

Although Evetts' (1991) study of 20 Midland secondary head teachers' career histories showed positive changes over time in the relevance and specificity of final interview

questions and procedures, it also confirmed the continuity of negative aspects of selection such as gender differences in promotion and the indeterminate nature of selection ie why candidates were selected for interview for some posts and not for others. As with their American counterparts, the call from British researchers has been for a strengthening of selection procedures to increase the reliability and validity of the process (Everard and Morris 1990, Moyle and Taylor 1991), in particular by defining the position to be filled, and identifying more closely core competencies which the successful applicant will need to possess, and the criteria for effectiveness.

Australian Research

Australian research has produced few studies on the topic. The major investigation was conducted by Chapman (1985a) on the involvement of school councils in the selection of school administrators. Chapman's study documented in a case study format the experiences of six schools involved in principal selection and two schools in the selection of deputy principals. Interviews were conducted with all selection committee members, representatives of each School Council, and with the applicants. Results identified the following:

- 1 As weaknesses and omissions in the development of relevant criteria became apparent, a greater reliance on intuition and subjective judgement began to emerge. The most successful selection committees were those associated with schools which had a clear philosophy and, as a result, were able to derive readily accepted criteria, which in time provide a basis for the systematic judgement of applicants at the time of shortlisting and interviewing.
- 2 Common criteria among the schools placed experience and expertise in seven functional areas of responsibility: curriculum development, staff relationships, parent/community relationships, student relationships, relationships with the Education Department, relationships with School Councils and the management of resources (financial, facilities).
- 3 Within these areas of responsibility, applicants were most frequently expected to possess the knowledge and skills necessary to: provide leadership, administer

efficiently, communicate effectively, facilitate and share decision-making, create the conditions for harmonious interaction among all members of the school community, reconcile different points of view, motivate others and maintain morale.

- 4 Applicants were expected to possess certain personal attributes, in particular: breadth of vision, insight, in-depth understanding, mature judgement, sympathy, compassion, commitment, motivation, adaptability, initiative and a positive outlook.
- 5 Committees which rushed into shortlisting without definite prior agreement on specific criteria and procedures reported frustration and conflict.
- 6 Candidate performance at interview was a critical factor in selection. On a number of occasions candidates who had been ranked highest on their written applications were unanimously rejected after interview.
- 7 Given that many candidates had similar qualifications and experience, in the final analysis there was considerable focus upon the extent to which the candidate had the personal attributes deemed desirable for a senior position.

(Chapman 1985a pp 74-78)

Other Australian studies have supported Chapman's research. Slattery (1988) established that selection procedures used to select Catholic school principals need to be evaluated, and that school authorities should set clearer selection criteria and pay stricter attention to undeclared criteria and the hidden agenda of selectors. Watkins (1991), in a single case study, found both positive and negative aspects of selection practices in Victoria. These appeared to be a more positive matching of the new principal to the philosophy and educational requirements of the school, and a clear enunciation of the local community's expectations using the decentralised selection process. However, he also found that women and existing principals were disadvantaged, a lack of interviewing skills on the part of selection panels, and a concern that some school communities' past experiences may have produced a limited vision of their expectations of a school principal.

Universal Considerations

A comparison of the three major research studies performed by Baltzell and Dentler (1983), Morgan Hall and Mackay (1983) and Chapman (1985a) points to a number of similar factors which influence the selection process, derived from examples of both inferior and exemplary practice. Problem areas identified across different countries have been found in the lack of a planned basis for selection, especially clarity of the principal's role, job description, valid use of the interview method which often lacked technical skill and cohesion; the use of undeclared criteria including biases and subjective judgements, and in the dominant influence of non-job related criteria such as the personality of candidates, and local criteria which seek to find the best fit to local conditions. The requirements for future universal improvements in both defining job characteristics and achieving a more systematic personnel selection process can be best summarised by Morgans et al's (1984) four fundamental questions:

- What is the job?
- What knowledge and skills are needed to perform the job?
- How will these skills be assessed?
- How will the final decision be reached? (p 18)

One universal response to inject more rigour into the assessment of technical competence in the job-related skills of principalship has seen the development of principal assessment centres. While assessment centres have been in use since the 1950's as a personnel selection method in industry, it was not until 1975 that they were applied to education through the work of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in Virginia, USA. The assessment approach targets specific skills required of principals, and assesses twelve skill dimensions using a battery of analogous tests and structured interviews (McLeary and Ogawa 1989). The NASSP assessment centre approach has been validated as having content validity ie skill dimensions and tasks set were relevant to principalship, and the capacity to predict performance in the job (Schmitt et al 1984).²

² Evidence to the contrary is produced in a study by Ham (1992) which found negative correlations between NASSP Centre ratings and teacher perceptions of principal effectiveness.

A similar model was introduced to Britain in 1990 with the establishment of the National Education Assessment Centre at Oxford Brookes University. The centre approach is "customized" for particular posts and focuses on six competencies which are difficult to assess in an interview situation. The formal interview, the centre claims, is a notoriously unreliable selection method, having up to a 30% validity in predicting high level performance compared with an assessment centre validity of between 40% and 60%.

However, the review of overseas literature on principal selection, and particularly the three major research studies, revealed a surprising omission in the field of study: the lack of any theoretical basis which could be used to inform the selection process or to illuminate particular selection problem areas. Baltzell and Dentler (1983) come closest in their attempt to understand the social as well as the educational reasons behind school principal selection; yet their major attention was concentrated on social and educational criteria without any theoretical foundation to support their findings. Similarly Morgan et al's (1983) study in Britain was "based on the literature and practice of the art of selection, and our application of this to the local government context of [secondary] headteacher selection" (p 7). Their major concern was how the successful candidate was actually chosen. Chapman's (1985a) study was aimed at documenting principal and deputy principal selection, identification of effective practices and development of resource materials. Thus the major research studies have been directed towards the efficacy of systematic procedures and selection instruments, focusing attention on **how** to improve current selection practices. What is lacking are comprehensive analyses and a theoretical underpinning of reasons **why** some candidates are appointed to be school principals while others are not.

Research in New Zealand

Research in New Zealand on the principal appointment process is non-existent, either prior to or following the educational reforms of 1989. Few articles in the literature focus specifically on the topic. The 1990 July issue of the **New Zealand Principal** featured three short articles: Jamieson (1990) lists problems in selection interviewing, together with suggestions for interview improvements and post-interview decision-making; Gauld (1990) formulates trustee guidelines for principal appointment, including

principal characteristics; and Winefield (1990) offers advice on the selection process to principal aspirants. The Principals Implementation Task Force (1990) set out a skeletal guideline for Trustees on personnel selection in schools while the New Zealand School Trustees Association (1990) produced a guide to developing an appointments policy, and in 1993 its **Trustee Handbook** containing a short section on school appointments which concentrates on procedure and practice. The most productive guidance for Boards has been the State Services Commission (1989) publication giving a step by step analysis of the process, together with sample application and criteria evaluation forms.

However, there has been more research attention in New Zealand in the area of women's leadership paths in educational administration, beginning with the Teacher Career and Promotion Study (TEACAPS 1982) which used 48 case study interviews to identify reasons why more women did not achieve senior positions in the teaching service. Neville (1988), in her examination of successful New Zealand women in educational management, identified personal, interpersonal and organisational barriers to the promotion of women. Similarly Court (1989) discovered discriminatory practices in the selection of women for educational administration posts in her study of 30 women teachers in Taranaki while Strachan's (1991) research was directed towards ways of empowering women for educational leadership.

Promotion of Women in Education

Such a focus of interest in New Zealand is a reflection of world-wide attention on the role of and promotional opportunities for women in senior educational positions. Their promotional paths have been variable. In 1928, 55% of elementary school principals in the USA were women, but by the 1987-1988 school year, women held only 20% of elementary school principalships.³ In recent years, progress has been slow in redressing the balance of numbers of men and women in leadership positions (Sayer 1993). This has been the case in New Zealand where in 1992, 3% of women teachers were principals in primary schools while 32% of men in the primary service held principalships (Slyfield 1993).

A major theory explaining the lack of women in leadership positions in educational administration has centred on socialisation and sex role stereotyping, as identified by Adkinson (1981), in which gender differences are exacerbated by expected gender role behaviours. When applied to career advancement in education, gender stereotyping places women in a deficit position by reinforcing a dominant masculinist model of leadership:

It implies the need and pre-condition for women to take on masculine attributes of leadership (rationality, aggression, the ability to control and dominate) in order to succeed; it accepts the hierarchical relationships in school and state educational bureaucracies as necessary and given; and it defines success/relevant experience in male terms (occupation, hierarchy, expertise). Ultimately particular sets of observable behaviours are valued more than others (Blackmore 1989 pp 102-103).

Concerns have also been raised by overseas research that many selection practices discriminate against women (Shakeshaft 1987). For example, in Edson's (1981) study of 116 female aspirants for principalship in Oregon, 69% identified aspects of discrimination in the hiring process while 55% believed they failed to achieve promotion because of a lack of experience: "inexperienced men were hired on their potential whereas women were already required to have demonstrated their competence" (p 171).

³ Statistical source is from the Educational Research Service quoted in **Strengthening Support and Recruitment of Women and Minorities to Positions in Educational Administration** 1992 p 13.

Chapman (1986) points to other aspects of the selection process which contribute to the problem, such as the under-representation of women on selection panels, and that there are simply too few people on panels who have had a working experience with women in top administrative positions.

Given this, it is essential that the selection process be carefully planned, tightly structured and based on clearly articulated criteria and valid and reliable evidence. Everything must be done to reduce reliance on 'intuition' and 'gut reaction' (p 17).

The other significant research studies (Baltzell and Dentler 1983, Morgan et al 1983) reiterate Chapman's assertion that to achieve equity, selection processes need to be monitored closely to avoid using procedures which are potentially discriminatory. In particular Baltzell and Dentler's findings that appointment decisions often relied on local values and conditions to determine the final choice of candidate invite closer scrutiny of the concept of merit-based selection.

The concept of merit refers to a relationship between a person's competencies and qualities and those required for effective performance in a certain position. The merit principle "assumes that free competition between individuals will ensure that the most able and deserving will move into the top decision-making positions irrespective of attributes such as ethnicity, being able-bodied or gender" (Briar 1994 p 32). The principle is based on candidates' suitability for the position, and is described as including experience, training, demonstrated ability, performance to date and potential for further development (CCH 1993). Of interest in this study will be the operation of the "merit" principle among the three case study Boards during the final decision-making stages.

Human Resource Management

It is relevant that this review of research on school principal selection be situated against developments in a related field. Accordingly the literature of human resource management is examined to investigate parallel and contrasting findings, and selection concepts which may provide a further basis for conceptual or theoretical thinking.

There are consistent similarities of approach between principal selection in education and managerial selection in business and industry. Selection methods follow a sequence of job analysis leading to the formulation of a job description, person specification and associated list of expected results or key result areas (KRA's), the aim being to enhance the organisational culture with an emphasis on better quality service (Cowling and James 1994). Shortlisting and selection decision-making follow in a similar order, with accompanying concerns that the selection criteria meet pre-requisite requirements of reliability and validity in their prediction of individual competence in the job.

The interview process represents the most widely used selection technique and is constrained by limitations also recognised in the education selection process: the influence of first impressions, stereotyping, non-verbal behaviours of candidates, and the 'halo effect' where interviewers' impressions are coloured by one particular good or bad characteristic of an applicant (Beaumont 1993). As a consequence, strategies for overcoming problems with the mechanics of the interview have centred on appropriate training for selection panels in interview techniques and in their understanding and effective use of assessment methodologies.

Where principal and managerial selection processes differ is in the extent to which diagnostic testing is employed. The incidence of candidate testing is rare in primary school selection, although a number of New Zealand secondary schools and tertiary educational institutions are now hiring consultants to administer a battery of tests as part of their executive recruitment. In comparison, British developments in human resource selection practice indicate a significant increase in testing designed explicitly to assess behavioural and attitudinal characteristics (Storey 1992). Examples of testing methods include intelligence tests based often on numerical and verbal ability and criticised for their irrelevance to the position; personality tests and aptitude testing in which the required job skills are replicated in job simulation exercises. In addition there is an increasing use of 'biodata', whereby biographical information can be used to predict future job success on the basis that past behaviour exhibited in life histories can help predict future behaviour, and can be matched to an optimal profile of a particular sort of person required; and the use of off-site assessment centres, often for managerial training or graduate recruitment.

Like the literature on school principal selection, the literature on human resource management is concentrated on the efficiency of the process and how improvements may be made to actual selection methods, with little attention devoted to conceptual or theoretical considerations. However a study of two selection models outlined by Iles and Salaman (1995) provides a useful conceptual basis against which to consider the process of principal selection. Firstly they put forward a psychometric or objective model where the major focus is the 'job' with an associated set of discrete tasks. In this model performance criteria are selected and individual attributes (knowledge, skills, abilities) are chosen as predictors of job performance. The attributes selected are then measured through a variety of procedures (tests, interviews, biodata etc). The model assumes that people do not change and that objective assessment of individual attributes is possible; its key assumption is that the purpose of assessment is prediction of future job performance. This represents what might be called a 'standard' selection approach in New Zealand schools and in educational institutions in general.

Their second proposal is a social process model which moves away from the systematic procedures of measurement and prediction to focus on relationships, attitudes, interaction and self-perception. It builds on concepts proposed by Herriot (1989), and one gaining increasing recognition, that selection assessment processes are social processes. This is best exemplified in the continued use of the selection interview, despite criticism of its reliability and validity.

The emphasis on negotiation, interaction and mutual influence is perhaps one reason why European organisations continue to rely on the interview as the main selection method, as it opens up opportunities for a bilateral exchange of views, mutual decision-making, and mutual negotiation (Herriot 1989 p 223).

The rationale for a social process model is supported by Townley (1989) who argues against the inappropriateness of the objective psychometric model since it represents "a veneer of scientificity - the rational application of measuring systems or techniques to a socially organised work environment" (p 107).

This provides another conceptual viewpoint to be explored in this study when related to the principal selection process: to determine any deviation within the actual selection process of each case study from the standard psychometric or objective model to include

social process features such as the notions of 'best person for the job', and 'best fit' as identified in the previous discussion of the principle of merit selection.

Research Problems

In summary, it is evident that considerable attention was devoted during the 1980's to research in the field of school principal selection. This research was directed towards the area of selection practices with no theoretical framework to support the range of findings. Apart from some interest by doctoral students, the 1990's have been conspicuous by the paucity of further research and theoretical thinking on the topic.

However the earlier research activity has identified problematic areas for investigation in this study of the principal selection process in New Zealand primary schools. In particular, the three major research studies of the 1980's have highlighted certain selection issues and helped to conceptualise research problems for this study in terms of trustees' knowledge of the job they are appointing for, the essential qualities they are seeking in their new principal, selection procedures they employ, identification and subsequent use of agreed selection criteria, the influence of subjective elements such as impressionism and 'best fit', and the role played by the candidates' gender in influencing the Boards' selection decisions during the appointment process.

The next chapter provides an explanation of the research methodology employed in this study, preceded by a series of research questions. These have been derived from the conceptual and research framework established during the respective literature reviews.

Chapter Three

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Conceptual and Research Framework

The role of the literature and research review has been to develop a conceptual and research framework upon which to base this study and to generate questions for investigation. It has helped define more accurately three fundamental topic or thematic areas in the principal selection process which require further scrutiny. Firstly the contextual literature on school-based management has identified the concept of local school governance as an important consequence of a universal decentralisation of educational responsibilities which began in the 1980's, especially in the implementation of employment obligations by governing bodies composed primarily of part-time lay people. Secondly the concept of effective educational leadership has been raised by the conceptual literature as an influential factor in school effectiveness, together with a problematic situation currently facing school principals as they attempt to reconcile competing demands to be both educational leader and manager. Thirdly the review of overseas research has revealed critical aspects of the principal selection process which invite comparison with selection processes in a New Zealand school governance setting, particularly in the areas of knowledge of the job, principal qualities and skills required, criteria identification, subjective factors and gender considerations.

Accordingly, this study takes as its focus the selection process employed by three primary school Boards of Trustees in the Otago region during their appointment of a new teaching principal. In line with the direction established by the conceptual and research framework, the study examines trustee perceptions of educational leadership, each Board's selection process, and on future trustee training needs to assist their governance role as selectors and employers of the school principal. In this way, the themes for investigation are derived "downwards" from educational concepts and previous research rather than "upwards" from the field data itself.

There are nine research questions which have been generated from common problems arising from the conceptual and research literature. These research questions will be analysed under the following three areas:

1 Educational leadership

- Research Question 1: Knowledge of Principal Responsibilities
Are all trustees fully aware of the tasks currently demanded of a school principal?
- Research Question 2: Essential Characteristics of an Effective Principal
 - (a) What are the essential characteristics which trustees seek in an effective principal?
 - (b) Are there changes in trustee perceptions of principal characteristics over the time of the appointment process?
- Research Question 3: Leadership and Management Functions
Are trustees aware of leadership and management activities currently performed by the principal?
- Research Question 4: Leader/Manager Preference
Do trustees have a preference for a leader or a manager as the new principal of their school?

2 Selection Process

- Research Question 5: Selection Procedures
What general procedures are followed by Boards in their selection process?
- Research Question 6: Criteria Identification
 - (a) To what extent do trustees identify specific criteria that will be used to select their new principal?
 - (b) Are such criteria consistently applied throughout the process?

- Research Question 7: Subjective Influences
To what degree is the process characterised by subjectivity, impressionism, personal bias, and external influences?
- Research Question 8: Gender Equity
Does the gender of candidates influence the Board's selection decisions during the shortlisting and appointment phases?

3 Directions for trustee training

- Research Question 9: Future Board of Trustees Training
What principal selection training needs for Boards of Trustees are suggested by the research results?

Research Design

Following Baltzell and Dentler (1983) and Chapman's (1985a) successful on-site investigations of principal selection processes, the research design for this study is similarly based. It is essentially exploratory in nature using a variety of data gathering strategies including documentary sources, questionnaire, observation and interview methods; hence the specific design for this study employs a qualitative research methodology.

Such a research method offers the best opportunity to examine each Board of Trustees during their principal selection, not only in the observation and recording of the process but also in the assessment of individual trustees' perceptions of principal characteristics. This is well summarised by Hakim (1987) in her description of qualitative research methods:

Qualitative research is concerned with individuals' own accounts of their attitudes, motivations and behaviour. It offers richly descriptive reports of individuals' perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings, the meanings and interpretations given to events and things, as well as their behaviour; displays how these are put together, more or less coherently and consciously, into frameworks which make sense of their experiences; and illuminates the motivations which connect attitudes and behaviour, the discontinuities, or even

contradictions, between attitudes and behaviour, or how conflicting attitudes and motivations are resolved in particular choices made (p 26).

From within this qualitative aspect, the case study research method is the particular method of approach which has been chosen to provide illumination of the research questions previously formulated.¹

The case study has had a range of meanings conferred on it, from being the opposite of statistical method to becoming synonymous with fieldwork and participant observation (Burgess 1993). Yin (1989) developed a technical definition of case study research as an empirical study which

- (a) investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when
- (b) the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which
- (c) multiple sources of evidence are used (p 23).

In general terms the case study methodology involves a sequential procedure which begins with planning the overall research exercise and understanding the necessary methods to be used. The researcher identifies a variety of appropriate data sources for the particular case study such as letters, memoranda, documentation kept on file, interviews, visits to the actual site, direct observation. Diary records are kept along with detailed notes. The overall methodology for this study follows the process of illuminative evaluation used by Parlett and Hamilton (1972), an approach which concentrates more on description and interpretation than on measurement and prediction. The three step process involves observation and recording of the Board of Trustees' selection environment, focussed interviewing of the trustee participants, and eventual placement of individual Board findings within a broader context of a conceptual and research framework.

The next stage of the case study approach involves instrument design. The form which instruments take can vary from questionnaire and interview schedules to observational

¹ Baltzell and Dentler (1983) used five case studies in the USA to illuminate school principal selection processes, and Chapman (1985a) investigated eight case studies of school councils in Australia on the same topic.

formats. This is followed by the data collection exercise using whatever instruments have been selected.

The final phase prior to report preparation is that of data analysis. The great weight of data gathered may be analysed in several ways. Anderson (1993) suggests either an analytical approach which takes the literature and conceptual background of the case and utilises it as an organisational framework, or a descriptive approach which uses descriptive themes arising from a content analysis of the data. The former approach is the method employed in this study.

The relative merits of the case study approach have been keenly debated from a range of research perspectives. Positivist researchers have traditionally criticised the method for its lack of statistical testing, its lack of scientific rigour which allows the subjective involvement of the researcher to produce equivocal evidence or biased views. Another common concern about the case study is that it offers little basis for scientific generalisation, given that its sample is often composed of a very small number of cases. A third perceived weakness is the excessive time involved and massive documentation produced, particularly when employing data collection methods such as ethnography or participant-observation. Perhaps the tenor of the scientific perspective towards case study research is best expressed by Kemmis (1980) in a note of warning: "Those who expect to follow the progress of science in brilliant light will be ill at ease following the case study worker stumbling from lamplight to lamplight in the fog" (p 100).

However, for the interpretivist researcher who seeks to interpret events from a humanistic viewpoint, the case study offers numerous advantages. These include case study data being strong in reality; they identify patterns of association between various factors; they recognise the complex nature of social truths with a capacity to illuminate discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by participants (Adelman et al 1976).

From the perspective of the critical theorist, there are also strengths within the case study method. Schon (1983), Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) and Altricher (1993) advance the notion of reflection-in-action. Kemmis and McTaggart comment on case studies' ability as a "step to action", whether they be directly interpreted, or used for

internal feedback or formative evaluation. They also see a strength in case study data being more publicly accessible than other forms of research report in its language and presentation. In addition critical concerns with empowerment are emphasised by Anderson (1989) in reference to the strength of critical ethnography to effect change by "freeing individuals from sources of documentation" (p 254). It is hoped that the findings of this study will assist Boards of Trustees by encouraging a critical and reflective response to principal selection processes, leading to an enhanced understanding of the principalship itself.

The question of case study validity and reliability has also been a matter of concern. Positivist researchers have pointed to the problems of construct validity and reliability whereby case study investigators fail to establish an appropriate operational set of measures to collect data objectively. In order to increase construct validity and reliability, this study will use multiple sources of evidence in the data collection phase to ascertain convergent themes. These sources will include each Board's written documentation, trustee questionnaires, researcher observation of all selection meetings, and interviews conducted with each trustee after the decision-making phase had concluded. In addition, each trustee or key informant will be invited to review the draft case study report on their Board's selection process to check its factual content and interpretation of perceptions and procedures.

This study seeks to improve its external validity with two further features. It will use a multiple rather than a single case study approach: all three primary school Board of Trustees will be followed throughout the duration of their principal selection process, beginning with their initial planning meeting and concluding once the successful candidate has been nominated. It also undertook a pilot case study prior to the commencement of the research proper.

The Pilot Case Study

The aims of this exploratory pilot case study were twofold: to help finalise a definitive collection of the data in respect of a set of valid procedures to be followed, and to identify any dominant issues present within a principal selection process in a

New Zealand educational setting. This took place during 1993 at the time of principal selection in a regional secondary school. The pilot school was selected on the basis of convenience, access, and prior personal contact on the part of the researcher.

An analysis of the data content from documentary, questionnaire, observational record and trustee interview sources revealed a number of recurring themes. The trustees were concerned with effective leadership qualities and each possessed a distinct picture of the skills and aptitudes they would prefer in school principals in general and in their new local principal. The most popularly perceived qualities were good communication, personal integrity, ability to establish positive relationships with staff and trustees, leadership, delegation, and administrative skills. One major problem area was their lack of confidence in their role as an employer, especially as this was a first-time principal selection by the current Board. Their apprehensions lay in the unknown, the enormity of responsibility, the possibility of procedural problems, and the fear of making an erroneous appointment.

In terms of the principal selection process itself, the pilot study revealed two influential factors at work which were worthy of further investigation in the main study. These were the extent to which trustees were influenced by their first impressions of the candidates at interview, and the relationship between their perceptions of the incumbent principal and their expectations of each potential principal sitting in front of them.

The pilot study also allowed the instruments and data collection procedures to be scrutinised more closely. A two dimensional grid framework for the analysis of documentary sources was confirmed but the trustee questionnaire format was amended. A battery of leadership qualities which trustees rated on a 5 point Likert scale was abandoned because it failed to differentiate sufficiently, and a pre test/post test format on trustees' perceptions of educational leadership produced no changes at all in trustees' perception over time. However, a brief profile on each trustee was added at the conclusion of the questionnaire to provide extra contextual and social information on the composition and experience of each Board.

The observational recording method was amended to include the names of each Board member who spoke. This enabled the researcher to build a profile on each trustee's

perceptions as well as provide ease of follow-up with subsequent interview probe questions. The interview schedule was also amended to include a mixture of specific, open-ended and probe questions. Trustee members had difficulty with some of the open-ended questions and required help to identify specific issues. Further probe questioning techniques were required to elicit both in-depth answers and to encourage trustees to express their real feelings; thus the need was established for a focussed interview approach using questions which were clearly formulated and devoid of educational jargon.

The pilot case study proved important in a number of ways. It confirmed some major selection issues and subsequently the focus for ensuing research questions, and the methodological issues of valid instrumentation and data collection. This pilot experience was used in conjunction with the review of relevant literature, so that the final research design was informed both by prevalent educational concepts and research and by a recent series of empirical observations.

Instrument Construction

The instruments for collecting the case study data have been designed according to the four major sources of information: documentary sources, trustee questionnaire, observational record and trustee interview.

1 Documentary analysis

A two-dimensional grid framework was prepared to assess both the range of documentation used by Boards and the qualities sought in the new principal. This grid divided the documentary sample into groups with like characteristics. One dimension contained the variety of documents employed during principal appointment (eg community consultation, job description, person specification, assessment schedules for candidate applications, referees' reports and interviews). The other dimension contained qualities

of educational leadership located in any of the documents. Such a documentary analysis provides a factual record of the sources of selection criteria used.²

2 Trustee questionnaire

The trustee questionnaire was specifically designed as a generalised and non-threatening introductory document (Appendix 1). Its key focus area was centred on Research Question 2 to confirm trustees' prevalent notions about educational leadership. It contained two questions, both of which were open-ended questions on the qualities of a "good" principal, and in particular, on the qualities individual trustees were seeking in their new principal. The questionnaire was designed to highlight the leadership issue in a way which would allow trustees to express openly their opinions, beliefs and attitudes.

3 Observational recording

In order to collect observational data of Board of Trustee discussions, the method of continuous recording was employed. This constituted a narrative record of data in diary-type form with a column specifically set aside for the researcher's critical observations as they occurred. Each Board meeting was observed, from planning phase to shortlisting and post-interview meetings. As well as recording each speaker's views and topics discussed, the observational record also took into account the time and length of meetings to enable a comparison of workloads among the case studies (Appendix 2).

4 Focus interview of trustees

The construction of an appropriate interview schedule was pivotal to the effectiveness of the data collection and offered the greatest challenge. The interview, in this highly sensitive area of principal selection, becomes crucial "as a means of obtaining personal

²Refer to Tables 4.6, 5.6 and 6.6 in the respective case studies.

information, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs" and reducing anxiety "so that potentially threatening topics can be studied" (Sax 1979 p 261).

Previous researchers have also pointed to the necessity for arriving at a suitable interview design which would accurately reflect participants' variable responses within their particular social or educational context. Thus, the focus interview provided the most appropriate format to ascertain individual trustee perceptions of the selection process, but with scope within the standardised framework to adapt to the experiences of the respondent. The one to one format for interviewing each trustee or key informant was preferred to the group interview technique, for ease of management and identification of individual perceptions where issues can be kept confidential.

In this type of interview technique, it is acknowledged that a tension exists between the need for rapport and reciprocity, and inter-interview comparability and objectivity. Wolcott (1980) believes that the idea of key informant interviewing "flies in the face of a prevailing notion in education research that truth resides only in large numbers" (p 195), while Wallen (1989) points to aspects of interview procedural bias in areas such as gender mix, settings for interview and attitudes of the researcher which may influence the direction of respondents' statements. However, the notion of complete objectivity in research recording and in the level of detachment between interview participants has been challenged considerably (Oakley 1981), as has the myth of "hygienic research" (Stanley and Wise 1993). Mishler's (1986) view of interviewing acknowledges the positive aspects of subjectivity in the process as a form of "discourse between speakers ... grounded in and dependent on culturally shared and often tacit assumptions about how to express and understand beliefs, experiences, feelings and intentions" (p 7).

The topics for the trustee interviews were informed by the pilot case study findings, together with those common themes emerging from the conceptual literature and research on principal appointments. Observation of the first Board of Trustees' selection discussions raised further sub-category questions within the area of subjective influences (eg the role of the principal adviser).

The interview schedule was prepared in relation to the research questions set for the study and in relation to the specified variables: perceptions of educational leadership,

selection processes, and identification of future training needs of Boards of Trustees. A question format was devised, taking into account considerations suggested by Cohen and Manion (1980): objectives of the interview, the type of topic areas dealing with fact, opinion or attitudes, the degree of specificity or depth sought in responses, the respondent's level of education and motivation, the interviewer's own insight into the respondent's situation, and the relationship of the interviewer with the respondent. Finally a series of individual questions were formulated, using a variety of open, direct, specific/non specific, and probe questioning techniques (Appendix 3).

Sampling

This investigation involved the study of three primary school Board of Trustees in the Otago region prior to, during, and after the appointment of their new principal. As qualitative researchers such as Hammersley (1992) affirm, one of the most difficult research decisions to take is the choice about how many cases to study and how these should be selected. In this research study, the choice and range of Boards were determined by the number of schools looking to appoint a new principal in 1994 and by those who consented to become part of the study. With 160 primary and 29 secondary and area schools in Otago, it was expected that the sample would be predominantly of primary origin.

In the event, there were comparatively few Otago schools advertising for a new principal during 1994. A total of eight schools in the region were approached to be a part of the research study: two secondary schools, one area school, one intermediate and four primary schools. Three primary schools and the area school Board of Trustees agreed to participate in the study. However the area school could not be included as time constraints made it necessary for the shortlisting meeting and selection interview to take place within a one week period when the researcher was working overseas. The remaining five schools elected not to participate for reasons of preferred anonymity, sensitivity of the appointment or potential conflict of interest on account of the researcher's working relationship with the school, all of which serve to emphasise the highly sensitive nature of the principal selection process.

The 17 primary trustees who agreed to participate covered the range of rural and urban environments and socio-economic backgrounds. There was also a range of experience in terms of length of time serving on Boards of Trustees or on previous School Committees as they were then known. While broadening the study to include the selection of deputy and assistant principals would have provided a greater range of schools within the sample, it is nevertheless the appointment of a principal which concentrates Boards' attention on leadership qualities.

The main difficulty posed by a relatively small sample of respondents is the inability to generalise across a whole class of subjects. While it is recognised that statistical generalisation cannot legitimately be drawn from such a small sample of Boards of Trustees, it is possible to develop analytical generalisation from the three case studies in which generalisation may be made in a retrospective sense rather than in a predictive sense of the scientist. It is also possible to illustrate how general factors may influence a selection process within specific educational settings.

Ethical Considerations

Appropriate standards for research ethics have gradually been developed and become more formalised (Frankel 1987). Essential ethical guidelines are suitably outlined by Anderson (1993) under five general headings:

- 1 That risks to participants are minimised by research procedures that do not necessarily expose subjects to risks
- 2 That the risks to participants are outweighed by the anticipated benefits of the research
- 3 That the rights and welfare of participants are adequately protected
- 4 That the research will be periodically reviewed
- 5 That informed consent has been obtained and appropriately documented (p 20)

This study has attempted to meet these basic ethical requirements. Documented informed consent was obtained from each Board of Trustees at the outset. It was important to stress to the trustees that the researcher had a responsibility to protect them

from potential risk or harm as a result of their participation in this research exercise. Other protective features included an acknowledgement that trustees' welfare superseded the interests of the researcher and that they always reserved the right to decline to participate in or withdraw from the study at any time. In order to enhance both the study's validity and its ethical protection, the preliminary draft of their case study was forwarded to each trustee, thereby providing them individually with the opportunity to have clarified, amended or withdrawn any aspect of their case study with which they felt uncomfortable.

Of vital concern throughout the period of the research were the first two considerations suggested by Anderson. Firstly, the researcher felt strongly that there should be some practical benefit to Boards of Trustees in general, hence the emphasis on suggestions for future trustee training needs in principal selection in Chapter 8. Secondly, the exposure of trustees to subsequent risk by public identification was minimised by conferring on each school an assumed name, and by changing the names of trustees quoted in the study to protect their anonymity and the confidentiality of the selection process. Similarly, during individual trustee interviews with the researcher, it was paramount that confidentiality and trust were upheld, especially when trustees wished to express their personal feelings about people and events. Consequently, it was undertaken that all tape recordings and transcriptions of each interview would be destroyed at the conclusion of the study.

As will be shown in the case studies to follow, the selection of a school principal is an extremely sensitive and exacting issue, demanding complete confidentiality on the part of any observation of the process. Morgan et al's (1983) study of British headteacher selections had earlier exposed the emotionally charged aspects of the process and as a result, found that assured confidentiality was central for gaining access to observe selection procedures. This New Zealand study reaffirms this situation and the need for communicating clearly to potential respondents the protective ethical considerations underpinning the research.

Method of Entry

The method of entry to gaining Board of Trustee consent commenced with an introductory letter to the chairperson from the researcher outlining the project, trustee participation and some of the ethical issues, with the intention of contacting the chairperson for further discussion (Appendix 4). This introduction was accompanied by a letter of support for the research from the Otago regional field officer, School Trustees Association (Appendix 5). The Board chairperson, after clearance from the trustees in principle, then invited the researcher to discuss the project with and answer questions from trustee members before the Board gave its final approval for participation in the research. Initial trustee concerns about confidentiality were allayed after discussions with the researcher and given concrete affirmation in the form of an Agreement of Understanding in which the researcher stated the major ethical research principles of informed consent, confidentiality, minimising of harm to participants, truthfulness and social sensitivity (Appendix 6). Concerns about disclosure of applicants' personal information were met by including a statement of confidentiality in respect of the provisions of disclosure under the Privacy Act (1993).

Data Collection

The retrieval of primary source data was achieved through the four major instruments. At the time the principal's position was advertised, all related documentation and written background sources were obtained from the Board of Trustees and examined using the two-dimensional grid matrix. The questionnaire on the qualities of educational leadership was distributed to individual trustees at their initial selection meeting, together with a stamped addressed envelope for each to return to the researcher. It was to be completed in the trustee's own time to encourage thoughtful comment and returned before the next selection meeting.

Observation of the process took place on site at all Board selection meetings, appointment sub-committee meetings, during all discussions on the day of interviews (with the exception of the actual interview of each candidate) and during all subsequent discussions leading to a decision to appoint. The total time spent in observation of each

Board of Trustees were 25 hours, 20 hours and 10 hours respectively. The researcher's role was that of a non-participant observer for the purpose of maintaining the confidentiality and integrity of the process, attempting a neutral objectivity in recording the selection procedures, and allowing the trustees and the researcher to build an initial relationship of non-interfering trust and confidence in what clearly became, for the Boards concerned, a sensitive and stressful exercise.

At the conclusion of the selection process, each trustee was interviewed at a time and location convenient to them. In addition to a written record of the discussion, each interview was taped and transcribed for subsequent analysis. The interviews, which lasted between 3/4 hour and 2 hours, followed the schedule of questions previously established, and in the concluding stages also involved the researcher in giving feedback and in reciprocity. It was consciously placed at the end of the process to enable a relationship of trust to be established between trustees and the researcher in the preceding weeks.

The following figure presents in diagrammatic form a generic outline of the different phases in the selection process when the respective stages of data collection took place. The length of time varied for each case study.

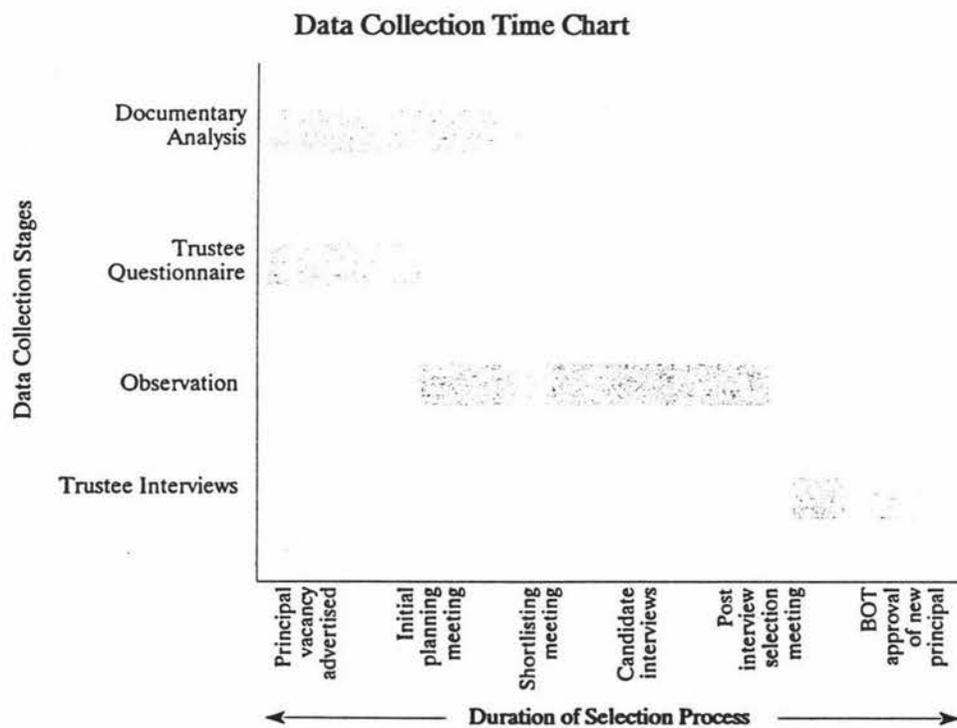


Figure 1

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study took its components from an analytical approach which uses the conceptual literature and research as an organisational framework and locates previously determined categories or themes for further examination and cross referencing as they become apparent. At the same time there was scope within the content analysis of the data for emergent themes to be considered, as in the observation of the first case study Board when the role of the principal adviser and of referees' reports was observed to have some significant impact on the selection process. Thus the following case studies will be described in a manner which offers an outsider a view of proceedings without being present: "The account is sometimes called a thick description, and aims to make the familiar strange and the exotic familiar, via the analytic categories or themes" (Delamont 1992 p 150).

For the analysis of qualities of educational leadership, each characteristic was extracted from the trustee questionnaire which was based on Research Question 2, and from field notes of selection discussions. The significance of principal qualities was established by frequency of occurrence across the two sources and across a number of trustee respondents.

For the analysis of components within the selection process, a method of selective coding was used following a system proposed by Strauss (1987). These codes were based on the remaining eight research questions and were used to analyse documentary, observational and trustee interview data, to code systematically for particular core categories as they related to the respective research questions. In this way a more concentrated analysis is possible whereby significant categories or class of information are "located" rather than necessarily "discovered".

The observation field notes and transcriptions of trustee interviews (Appendix 7) were closely scrutinized by repeated readings. Each data source contained a blank column on every page in which analytic memoranda could be written, together with the researcher's initial and subsequent thoughts. This column also allowed for the following system of multiple codings to be appended as marginal symbols:

RQ1: Knowledge of principal responsibilities

RQ2: Essential principal qualities

RQ3: Leadership and management functions

RQ4: Leader/manager preference

RQ5: Selection procedures

RQ6: Criteria identification

RQ7: Subjective influences

PR - role of incumbent principal

PK - prior knowledge of candidates

PA - role of principal adviser

RR - impact of referees' reports

IMP - impact of impressionism

RQ8: Gender equity

RQ9: Future Board of Trustees training

The categorised data were then analysed in direct relation to the research classifications. In addition the observation notes of each Board meeting had appended a summary sheet containing the researcher's perspective of events shortly after they occurred, under the generic headings of "Meeting topics", "Principal qualities" and "Selection processes" (Appendix 8).

One of the main analytical tasks was to establish patterns in the data and to check against a range of sources in order to ensure that the data were reliable and valid; hence the use of multiple data sources, and the use of triangulation whereby two or more occurrences of a finding are derived from different sources and so help interpret converging evidence. For example, observation of a trustee's particular stance during

selection meetings could be followed up in the subsequent interview for clarification or verified as a correct interpretation.³

Following Mathison's (1988) conception of triangulation, it was anticipated that three outcomes might result from a triangulation strategy. The first was that of **convergence**, whereby data from different sources and methods will provide evidence that will result in identifying a single proposition within the research topic. A second outcome is **inconsistency and ambiguity** among the data which present alternative propositions, while a third outcome is **contradiction** which offers an opposite view of a proposition. The value of triangulation is not seen as a technological solution to a data collection and analysis problem, but rather as a technique "which provides more and better evidence from which researchers can **construct meaningful propositions** about the social world" (Mathison 1988 p 15).

In the following three chapters, it is the unique educational setting of three Boards of Trustees which will be under scrutiny. It is a multiple case study of a selection process yielding convergent and contrasting contextual insights leading up to the appointment of a new school principal. Each case study examines the school setting and nine research questions as they apply to the focus areas of educational leadership, selection processes, and trustees' reactions to the principal selection process and their suggestions for future trustee training.

³Refer to Appendix 9 for cross referencing of research question categories against multiple data sources.

Chapter Four

CASE STUDY: HIGHFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL

SCHOOL SETTING

Highfield School has a pupil enrolment of 90 children. It is located in a semi-rural area close to a large commercial centre in Otago. The parents and community, according to the Board, are very supportive of and involved in school affairs. The school has four full-time teachers including the teaching principal, a teacher employed under the Task Force Green employment scheme, a part time secretary and a caretaker.

The Board of Trustees comprised eight members: the outgoing principal, staff representative and six parent representatives. They covered a range of paid and unpaid employment, from professional positions to a student and a voluntary worker. The Board contained twice as many women as men. Members were European in origin, within the 31-50 age grouping, with an average of 3.7 years of school governance experience.

1 EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research Question 1: Knowledge of principal responsibilities

From the results of their post-selection interview, the four women trustees expressed confidence in their knowledge of the tasks of a principal, on the basis that they were in and around the school frequently enough to observe the principal at work, and on account of some years previous experience on the Board. However, Paul was new to the Board and while familiar with British education, had no experience of the New Zealand education system. Ray claimed a good working knowledge of secondary principals' work but admitted that it was not until the Board formulated the person specification and referees' report form that he fully appreciated the range of tasks associated with a primary principal. Thus, two thirds of the Boards of Trustees were confident in their knowledge of principal responsibilities.

Research Question 2: Essential characteristics of an effective principal

Highfield Trustees were asked in their questionnaire, prior to beginning the selection process, to describe desirable qualities of principals in general and their own principal in particular. Using common coding categories, qualities were elicited and placed in a top four priority grouping where the frequency of trustee response was greater than 50%. Similarly, at the conclusion of the selection process, trustees were asked to respond to the same question during the interview to gauge any change in perception over time. The results are displayed in Table 4.1:

Table 4.1 Trustee perceptions of principal qualities by grouped ranking:
Highfield Primary School

Principal Quality	Pre-selection (questionnaire response)	Post-selection (interview response)	Average ranking
Relationships with children	1	3	2
Communication skills	1	2	1.5
Leadership qualities	2	2	2
Teaching skills	2	1	1.5
Working relationship with BOT	3	-	
Sense of humour	3	-	
Relationship with parents	4	2	3
Vision for school	4	-	
Teamwork	4	-	
Management skills	4	2	3

From the averaged rankings of principal qualities over the time of the selection process, the essential characteristics identified by the trustees were in the following priority groupings:

- 1 Communication skills
 Teaching skills

- 2 Relationships with children
Leadership qualities
- 3 Relationships with parents
Managerial skills

From their overall responses, the Highfield trustees saw the most important principal qualities in the areas of classroom teaching skills and the ability to form positive relationships with children and their parents, together with the necessary leadership skills to provide direction for the staff and school community. These were underpinned by the principal's communicative capacity and personnel skills.

Six of ten trustees' perceptions of principal qualities had essentially remained constant over the time of the selection process. As a triangulation measure, during the post-selection interview, trustees were asked if they themselves had changed their ideas about important principal qualities. All six claimed they had been consistent in their perceptions; two had acquired an added emphasis on teaching skills, Ray had added managerial skills and Paul considered he did not want a matriarch as the next principal!

However there was significant change in the priority order of some trustee perceptions by the end of the selection process. There was less emphasis on 'relationships with children' and a greater emphasis on 'relationships with parents' and 'managerial skills'. From the top three groupings, the Highfield trustees no longer considered their earlier third priorities 'working relationship with the Board of Trustees' and 'sense of humour' worthy of consideration.

To test further their notions of educational leadership, the three trustees on the appointment sub-committee were asked to describe leadership qualities which they identified in the candidates at interview, either in a positive or negative way.

Table 4.2 Leadership qualities identified at candidate interview:
Highfield Primary School

Quality	Ray	Elizabeth	Judith
Ability to make hard decisions	•		
Making sound judgements	•		
Calmness under pressure	•		
Ability to absorb knowledge quickly	•		
Ability to learn from mistakes		•	
Teaching children before administration		•	•
Ability to delegate		•	•
Promotion of teamwork		•	•

Of interest in these results is that Elizabeth and Judith were, independently, in agreement with what principal qualities they identified during their interview; both directed their attention towards leadership and collaborative qualities. In contrast, Ray's perceptions of principal qualities were clearly directed towards managerial skills at this stage of the selection process.

As part of the post-selection interview, trustees were given a 'hung parliament' scenario in which they were forced to choose between similarly rated candidates. They were asked to prioritise at least three essential leadership qualities that would, for them, differentiate the candidates in the event of a tied selection decision. The aim was to further determine trustees' individual priorities about effective leadership qualities. The results are displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Priority order of essential leadership qualities:
Highfield Primary School

Quality	Claire	Ray	Elizabeth	Judith	Lyn	Paul
Manager of school	1					
Team leader	2		3		1	
Crisis resolution	3					
Trustworthiness	4					
Communicative skills		1			3	6
Mana		2				
Sound judgement		3				
Knowledge and expertise		4				4=
Teaching ability			1	1=	2	4=
Relationship with parents			2	3=		
Balance: teaching/administration			4			
Relationship with children				1=		1
Warmth				3=		
Positive personal vibes				5		2=
Dealing with gender issues						2=

The ranking figures in Table 4.3 indicate several features in trustees' perceptions of essential principal leadership qualities. Firstly there is a range of qualities which were individually rated, together with a spread in priority order. From a total of 26 quality rankings, only five coincided in terms of the actual quality with the same rank order, thus emphasising the individual nature of trustee perceptions.

Secondly Table 4.3 reveals three significantly recurring qualities which were supported by three or more trustees: teaching ability, leadership of a team and communicative skills. This is entirely consistent with the findings of Table 4.1 where trustees registered the same priority preference for their new principal to be a sound classroom practitioner as well as possess the necessary leadership skills to motivate the staff, and

communicative ability with people to build positive relationships within the school community, especially with children. The effectiveness of good 'people' skills was particularly emphasised by one trustee:

For principals who have good people skills, colleagues will forgive them enormous administrative blunders, but the great administrators who don't have the people skills will not be forgiven anything.

Observational records taken by the researcher during the shortlisting and post-interview phases were analysed and ranked in groupings according to the frequency of reference by trustees to critical factors affecting the selection discussion. The purpose was to compare the observed factors with essential principal qualities which the trustees had identified in their questionnaire and in their interview with the researcher. This would show the interrelationship between essential qualities the trustees wanted in their principal and the factors in discussion leading to the principal appointment. The results are listed in Table 4.4 (Trustee qualities are denoted either in ranked order, or as being previously identified with an ●).

Table 4.4 Critical factors during shortlisting and post-interview discussion:
Highfield Primary School

Group ranking	Critical factor	Shortlisting	Post-interview	Trustees essential qualities
1	Teaching skills	1	2	1
	Experience of applicants past v potential	1	2	-
	Interview technique	-	1	-
2	Relationships with parents and community	2	2	3
	Personal qualities: general	2	3	-
	Warmth	2	-	-
	Leadership	-	2	2
3	Relationships with children	3	-	2
	Sense of humour	3	-	●
	Extra curricular contribution	3	-	-
	Age of applicants	3	-	-
	Relationship with BOT	-	3	●

From the data, trustee qualities were reflected in three out of nine critical factors discussed during shortlisting and in three out of seven factors at the post-interview phase. Of the top three groupings of critical factors in shortlisting and post-interview discussion, a total of 12 factors, trustees' qualities corresponded with six out of twelve. This would indicate that perceived essential principal qualities only partly contributed to the two decision-making phases of the selection process.

Research Question 3: Concepts of leadership and management

Highfield trustees were asked during their interview about their perceptions of the concepts of leadership and management in an attempt to determine their knowledge base of these two concepts. They were invited to describe what they thought a principal would be doing if she/he demonstrated leadership or management skills. The results would also help establish, in relation to Tables 4.1 and 4.3, their preference for the new principal to be a leader or a manager.

Table 4.5 Concepts of leadership and management:
Highfield Primary School

Concept	Claire	Ray	Elizabeth	Judith	Lyn	Paul
LEADERSHIP						
Working collaboratively/leading a team	•		•	•		
Promoting tone of school	•	•				
Good relationships with BOT	•					
Good teaching ability	•					
Relationship with and respect for children	•	•			•	
Positive learning environment	•					
Vision for school		•				
Leading by example		•	•			•
Getting the best out of people		•	•			
Managing administrative tasks		•				
Up to date with curriculum			•			
Understands professional development			•			
Encourages professional development				•		
Decisive decision-making					•	
Good disciplinarian					•	
MANAGEMENT						
Administration: managing the tasks	•	•	•	•		•
Teacher development		•				
Maintains a distance		•				
Sets the standard		•				
Vision-setter		•				
Sense of purpose and direction		•				
Time management of staff		•				
Deals with the paper war		•				
Efficient school operation			•		•	
Deals with problem children						•

Results from Table 4.5 identify 23 recorded references to a principal's demonstration of leadership compared with 15 separate references to management tasks, a decrease of 35% on knowledge of leadership features. Of the concepts which elicited two or more trustee references, five were leadership tasks while only two were involved with management. Dominant leadership skills from the five tasks included leadership of a staff teaching team, leading by example, and developing positive relationships with and respect for children. In comparison trustees' knowledge of managerial functions was limited mainly to management of the administrative tasks and thus not as expansive as their knowledge and appreciation of school leadership.

Research Question 4: Preference for a leader or a manager

The data from Table 4.5 supported trustees' greater awareness of a principal's leadership rather than a managerial role, and provided a background against which to view the results of Tables 4.1 and 4.3 in relation to the leadership/management debate. Trustee perceptions of essential principal qualities ranked leadership second in pre-selection and post-selection responses (Table 4.1) and second in the 'hung parliament' situation of qualities required in a crucial decision-making scenario (Table 4.3).

In contrast, the managerial function was rated well below that of the leadership role. While management skills received a fourth ranking in trustee questionnaire responses and gained a greater emphasis by rising to the second priority grouping in trustee interviews, it was a specific consideration for only one trustee in Table 4.3 among 25 other essential leadership qualities which were recorded. These results were supported by trustees when asked as part of their interview schedule if they had a leadership or managerial preference for their principal. All six trustees favoured the leadership role, emphasising their declared preferences for teaching and communicative skills, and the importance of building positive relationships with all sections of their school community: children, parents and Board of Trustees.

Therefore the Highfield trustees' preferred qualities in their new teaching principal were based around those of an educational leader rather than an administrative manager.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research Question 1: Knowledge of principal responsibilities

4/6 trustees felt confident in their knowledge of principal responsibilities.

Research Question 2: Essential principal characteristics

(a) Trustee perceptions by grouped rankings

- 1 Communication skills
 Teaching skills
- 2 Relationships with children
 Leadership qualities
- 3 Relationships with parents
 Managerial skills

(b) Trustees' major priorities for essential principal qualities

- Teaching ability
- Leadership of a team
- Communication skills

(c) 6/12 critical factors at shortlisting and post-interview phases corresponded with trustees' essential principal qualities.

Research Question 3: Concepts of leadership and management

Trustees displayed greater familiarity with a principal's leadership tasks than with the managerial function: leadership tasks were more defined than management tasks.

Research Question 4: Leader or manager preference

6/6 trustees favoured their new principal in a leadership rather than a managerial role. This is supported by their perceptions of essential principal qualities.

2 SELECTION PROCESSES

PROCEDURES

The following represents an account of the selection procedures employed by the Highfield trustees. It is based on the researcher's observation field notes and validated by the trustees as an accurate record of proceedings. It traces the sequence of events from initial meetings to plan the process, the workings of a principal appointment sub-committee, shortlisting, to the post-interview discussion, and concludes with a retrospective review of actual decision-making processes leading to appointment.

Initial meetings

The selection process at Highfield began with an initial meeting of the full Board to outline procedures for the new principal appointment. An informal request was sent to parents in a school newsletter asking them to share their thoughts on the qualities important in a principal by communicating with a member of the trustees or passing their information to the school office in writing. At the following Board meeting the trustees formally decided to ask parents for their comments in the form of a returnable written questionnaire.

Two months later, the Board held a crucial two hour planning meeting specifically to put in place arrangements for the appointment process. This covered, in order, the topics of interview format, use of referees, a time frame for the process, approval of an updated policy on principal appointment procedures, election of a three member appointment sub-committee, choice of a principal adviser to the appointment panel, ratification of the principal's job description and teaching responsibilities. It concluded with a brainstorming session which produced 22 qualities sought in their new principal that would form the basis of the parental questionnaire.

It was an impressive organisational meeting. The Board functioned well in a consensus mode. All members had an opportunity to speak and be listened to. Elizabeth, the chairperson, was an able leader, helping to define problems and asking probing

questions. Another trustee had a background in educational management and was able to help define solutions on the basis of previous experience.

Principal appointment sub-committee

The sub-committee comprised Elizabeth as Board chairperson, Judith and Ray. The purpose of their first meeting was to analyse the parents' questionnaire responses and to refine selection procedures before reporting back to the full Board. The 20 parental responses showed a strong emphasis on personal skills including a sense of humour, and this formed the basis for the person specification. Ray noted in passing his disappointment that only 9/20 responses gave an 'essential' rating to current issues and trends in education. Other topics covered at this meeting were the wording of the Gazette advertisement (a longer process than at first anticipated as trustees were keen not to limit the range of people applying), role of principal adviser, rating schedule for application forms, and interview format.

Several practical realities came to light for the three trustees during this meeting. They realised that they had not yet addressed the area of the principal's relationship with the Board of Trustees. They saw a need in the interview to somehow test a candidate's ability to demonstrate skills or an awareness of a focus area (eg by using scenario questions); they experienced confusion in their understanding of the Privacy Act pertaining to contacting referees; they identified the need for interview questions to be based on established criteria; they came to a clear realisation that the application form, referees' reports and the interview do not in themselves provide a sufficient profile about candidate **performance** and cited previous experiences where "if schools had dug around, they would have found interesting things!"

The sub-committee reported to the full Board two weeks later. The chairperson reported back on a meeting held with the principal adviser and his role at the interview. It had been a fruitful meeting as the adviser had produced sample questions for interview and a declaration form of prior knowledge of any candidate for the trustees to sign. However, Paul expressed obvious concern about this 'outsider' and enquired about his background, age and proximity to an old-boys' network. Concerns were again expressed about the ramifications of the Privacy Act in respect of contacting referees and asking

applicants to divulge criminal convictions, and about the legal status of the application form (viz if an applicant provided incorrect information, would that render his/her subsequent acceptance of the position null and void?)

The advertisement for the position of principal at Highfield was placed twice in the Education Gazette and once in the regional newspaper. At the time of the first advertisement, the appointment sub-committee met for the final time before shortlisting, to ratify a rating and weighting scale for application forms and referees' reports, final interview questions, and how to make optimal use of the principal adviser at the interview. Although the sub-committee had previously acknowledged the necessity to assess all applicants' data against their agreed criteria, some gaps in the process now appeared. To their dismay, they discovered that the application form had been compiled in isolation from the pre-determined criteria. They were wanting to use category headings in assessing application forms which were **not** part of the application form itself and therefore were incompatible. While it was now too late to change the application format, they expressed the hope that gaps between the simplistic topics of the application form and what they had **really** wanted to ask would be revealed in the referees' reports.

They almost made a similar error with their set of interview questions which, until now, had been a clone of those supplied by the principal adviser and those used by other schools in the area. However, they became proactive and adjusted the questions to reflect their own principal's job description and person specification. As the pressure to formalise the systems became apparent, it was noticeable that Elizabeth and Ray assumed a more dominant role: it was they who decided on the relevance of interview questions and both interrupted Judith several times as she was about to contribute her views. Ironically, it was Judith who first noticed that the application form headings were unrelated to the agreed criteria.

Shortlisting

The shortlisting meeting lasted 3½ hours and 19 applicants were considered. The sub-committee signed a declaration of interest form at the beginning to register their prior knowledge of any of the applicants.

The shortlisting process was based on the degree to which applicants met the selection criteria in their written application and from referees' reports. Each trustee had privately assessed the applicants beforehand and the evaluation of each was then considered. Those applicants who received unanimous judgements of 'Yes' were automatically included on the shortlist; those who received unanimous judgements of 'No' were excluded. Two applicants were shortlisted very quickly by this process. Discussion then took place when there was divided opinion over the 'Maybes'. The sub-committee narrowed the field down to two for the remaining third interview position, concentrating on their relative experience in curriculum and extra curricular activities, and a consensus decision was finally taken.

The prospect was discussed of shortlisted candidates' referees being contacted by phone. Ray volunteered to ring all referees with specific questions for each candidate (eg teaching ability, coping with older staff members if a younger candidate, sensitivity to girls' needs, and general questions concerning community relationships, expectations of future performance, energy and workload capacity).

The shortlisting meeting concluded with a checklist of mechanical features for the day of the interview: date, place, start time, length of interview, intervals for discussion, lunch break, order of candidates, travel and teacher relief expenses, and relief for the principal adviser. The trustees made a final agreement on the question format regarding introductions, role of principal adviser and rotating questions around the panel. They did acknowledge they had a lot of questions (23) for the one hour available but did not address the inevitable problems of manageability and time overruns. They discussed how to and who would make the job offer and the mechanism for contacting unsuccessful candidates. At the end, the pressure of the responsibility of the imminent task was weighing heavily on trustees' minds, prompting Ray to say in defence of their efforts: *"Our system is still better than the old Education Board who didn't have the community's interest at heart."*

Interviews

The panel of three trustees arrived at 9 am on a weekday at one of their business offices where comfortable chairs were arranged around a small table. All trustees were decidedly nervous about the process and felt it was harder on them than the candidates. They were joined by the principal adviser at 9.20 am and, among other things, discovered that in accordance with principal contract pay scale requirements, they could not award the top scale to the new principal on appointment. Despite thorough preparation, the Board had not anticipated post-decision procedures relating to salary and conditions of service.

The first interview started on time, and thereafter ran behind schedule on account of the number of questions posed. The researcher was not present during the candidate interviews but observed all post-interview and subsequent discussions. The interview format was conducted as previously agreed, with the panel sharing questions and the principal adviser in an observational role. Fifteen minutes were allowed after each interview for discussion on pertinent issues. Of interest in these discussions was the role played by the principal adviser who identified two major criterion-related issues for the panel: the tension between teaching needs and administrative demands, and in the discussion of the final two candidates, the contrast between one's **past experience** and the other's **potential experience**. The panel also observed how nervous all three candidates were and how disappointed they felt that the promise of referees' reports never eventuated for any of the candidates at interview.

After the final interview, general discussion took place on the candidates' comparative merits. One candidate was eliminated at an early stage, leaving a choice to be made between a male and a female candidate. This discussion took the panel well past its designated lunch hour and at 2 pm the principal adviser departed. After a brief coffee break, the panel resumed its deliberations and continued doggedly to a resolution at 3.30 pm. The chairperson then rang the principal adviser to confirm the panel's choice and sought advice from the other trustees on the consequential order of job offer and Board of Trustee ratification. Clearly the panel was feeling the effects of a gruelling interview process; the previous six and half hours had been a particularly stressful and exhausting undertaking.

Selection decision-making

The critical point of decision-making at any part of the process was of considerable interest in this study ie what mechanisms were used to differentiate similarly rated candidates both at the shortlisting and appointment phases. During shortlisting, the Highfield trustees were called on to distinguish between two similar candidates to determine who would be the third interviewee. The critical factors, in order of occurrence, were the concept of 'best fit': *Which one will transfer best from their school and community to ours?* followed by elimination of the candidate who posed the greatest risk to the school if appointed, and subsequent justification of why the remaining candidate rated more highly. This notion of inverse decision-making was an interesting factor to emerge, whereby trustees considered reasons why candidates should not be appointed rather than considering the strengths they offered to meet the needs of the school.

During the interview, in a lengthy discussion about the final two candidates, it was apparent from the outset that Elizabeth and Judith supported the male applicant (A) while Ray was in favour of the female candidate (B). After the standard consideration of relative strengths and weaknesses of the candidates, the panel returned to the interview responses but to no avail. At this first impasse, Ray offered consolatory thoughts:

We won't make a mistake about either of them. Let's not be scared about making a decision: whichever one it is will be a reasonable decision

For Judith the decision rested on two criteria: experience at the Form 1/2 level, and previous experience as a principal: *It comes down to this and, I guess, our gut feelings.* Elizabeth too reiterated her preference for A on the basis of greater experience as a principal.

The panel then returned to the written application in order to find any differences, again unsuccessfully. They also reviewed briefly their summary evaluation forms which was a schedule to record their assessment of each candidate's written application, referee's report and interview performance. The panel was reluctant to use this summative form,

and ignored the weighting system of categories they had discussed previously. Another look at candidates' positive and negative aspects according to the person specification was attempted. A and B scored similarly in a number of categories but no trustee kept an actual running account and the impasse remained.

This impasse worried the panel as they would prefer a consensus decision. Further discussion returned to highlight critical factors that had become apparent for the trustees during the candidates' interview. Those included the value of past experience versus potential experience, the notion of 'best fit' for the local community, and a series of negative personal features of the candidates' interview performance: a lack of enthusiasm for the job, a lack of good interview technique and a lack of presence or impact. This list of critical factors culminated in the consideration of which candidate would pose the greatest risk in the school in the future.

Eventually a decision was taken by the sub-committee. The decision was made possible by Ray conceding his support for candidate B but yet making a stand by abstaining from the panel decision. Hence candidate A was supported by two of the panel members. Again, as in the shortlisting process, the lead-up to appointment was characterised by inverse decision-making, with its differentiation of the candidates built around worst-case scenarios.

Time schedule

The entire selection process for the Highfield principal appointment lasted for 7½ months, beginning with an initial meeting on selection processes and culminating in the full Board ratification of the recommended candidate. The luxury of having an extended time period was made possible by the incumbent principal giving a year's notice of intention to retire.

A total of 12 evening meetings were held which were partly or wholly directed towards the selection process, the total meeting time for trustees on the sub-committee being 25 hours. For those three trustees, no less than 25 hours were spent in private preparation which included reading applications, travel, phone calls of enquiry to schools

and referees. Overall each sub-committee member devoted approximately 50 hours work to the appointment of their new principal.

CRITERIA IDENTIFICATION

In order to identify specific criteria employed in the selection process, an analysis was carried out on the Highfield Board's documentation using a two dimensional framework, extracting criteria from the various written forms to ascertain both essential criteria at work and consistency of criteria application. These criteria were grouped under four classifications: educational and professional leadership, classroom teaching, administration and personal attributes. The results of this documentary analysis are set out in Table 4.6 with the Community column displaying essential qualities in priority order.

Table 4.6 Documentary analysis:
Highfield Primary School

CRITERIA	BOT categories	Community rankings	Job description	Person specification	Gazette advertisement	Application form	Assessment of Application form	Referees' Report	Assessment of referees' report	Interview questions
Education/professional leadership			•		•				•	•
vision for school	•									
provide leadership	•	6=	•							•
ability to delegate	•		•					•		
ability to make serious decisions	•	10								•
knowledge of education issues	•			•						•
awareness of trends in age group	•	15=		•						
provision of learning opportunities	•	11	•	•						
extra curricular activities	•		•	•					•	•
ability to work collaboratively	•	5		•						•
biculturalism				•						•
level of teaching programmes			•							
personnel management			•							•

CRITERIA	BOT categories	Community rankings	Job description	Person specification	Gazette advertisement	Application form	Assessment of Application form	Referees' Report	Assessment of referees' report	Interview questions
professional development of self and staff			•				•			•
appropriate qualifications						•	•			
Classroom: teaching/class experience	•	9	•	•	•	•	•	•		
sound class management	•	13=		•						
experience at senior class level				•						
meeting individual needs								•		
Administration: administration skills	•		•	•	•		•	•	•	
planning ability	•		•	•						
liaison with agencies	•									
financial management			•							
policy development with BOT			•							
reporting to community			•							
relationships with BOT										•
goal setting										•
Personal:					•			•	•	
ability to communicate	•	1		•			•			
skills and attributes						•				

A summary of the major criteria identified in three or more documents is listed under the four main focus areas and includes the following commonly held aspects:

Educational/Professional Leadership:

- provision of leadership for staff and pupils
- provision of learning opportunities
- provision of extra-curricular activities
- ability to work collaboratively
- ability to delegate
- knowledge of educational issues
- professional development of self and staff

Classroom teaching:

- practical teaching experience

Administration:

- administrative skills
- ability to plan

Personal attributes:

- ability to communicate
- ability to establish positive relationships with children
- sensitivity to community needs
- ability to establish positive relationships with parents/community

In terms of internal consistency there were a number of variations identified by Table 4.6 results. While there will always be a degree of mutual exclusivity among the documents, inconsistencies were noted in areas which demanded a consistency of criteria. For example, 'ability to make serious decisions', 'ability to command respect' and 'patience' occurred in both Board and Community categories but not in the person specification. Found in the job description or person specification but not covered specifically in either referees' reports or interview were a total nine criteria including 'sound classroom management', 'planning ability' and 'financial management'.

In addition there were questions asked at interview on relationships with the Board, goal setting and the ability to self-evaluate which had no basis in any previous documents.

Other inconsistencies were noted in the schedule used to evaluate the candidates' application forms and referees' reports. There were seven elements in the assessment of the application form which were not asked for specifically in the application form itself. Similarly four elements were to be assessed which were not requested in the referees' reports. This eventuated because of the general nature of the headings in the application and referees' report forms which left it to a candidate's or referee's discretion as to how specific they wished to be in reply. Conversely the respective assessment schedules were at odds with such generality as they sought particular information which may or may not have been present, and so did not represent a valid evaluation of the information supplied.

An examination of the observation records of shortlisting and interview meetings was carried out to ascertain the level of criteria consistency with that identified in the documentary analysis and by trustee perceptions, and to note any changes in criteria application over time. This is displayed in Table 4.7, where major criteria have been identified according to frequency of written reference and frequency of occurrence in discussions, and grouped together under the four major categories.

Table 4.7 Major criteria identified across a range of sources:
Highfield Primary School

Major Criteria	Trustee perceptions	Documents	Shortlisting	Interviews
EDUCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP	•			•
leadership of staff and pupils		•		
learning opportunities		•		
extra curricular activities		•	•	
ability to work collaboratively	•	•		
previous leadership experience			•	•
vision for school	•			
CLASSROOM TEACHING				
practical teaching experience	•	•	•	•
ADMINISTRATION				
administration/management skills	•	•		
PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES			•	•
ability to communicate	•	•		
positive relationship with children	•	•	•	
sensitivity to community needs		•	•	•
positive relations with parents/community	•	•	•	•
warmth of personality			•	
interview technique				•
positive relations with BOT	•			•
sense of humour	•		•	

Results show a discrepancy in consistency of application between the early stages of the selection process which include trustees' perceptions of principal qualities and documentary criteria, and the later stages where informal criteria of selection discussion contributed substantially to decision-making. The early criteria indicate a spread among leadership, classroom, administrative and personal attributes. However, in the realistic context of the shortlisting and interview situations, the emphasis given to the major

criteria was weighted towards personal characteristics. Interestingly, when trustees were asked if the Board had been consistent in its application of the chosen criteria throughout the process, they all maintained consistent usage of criteria despite the data showing the later inclusion of additional criteria such as previous leadership experience, warmth of personality, interview performance and ability to form a positive relationship with the Board itself. Nevertheless, two trustees supported the evidence of a changed emphasis by acknowledging that teaching and personal attributes were the most important criteria in the end. Another trustee on the appointment panel summarised the situation well:

I think we had some good systems. I think we kept to those, though my view is we got the emphasis wrong at the end. We didn't get distracted by irrelevancies ... we got through a tense, difficult situation at the interview by conducting an argument, having a debate entirely on the criteria. I think we - particularly on the interview day, we got ... we looked too carefully at the practical teaching skills and the personal skills as opposed to probably the administrative and leadership skills.

SUBJECTIVE INFLUENCES

Selective coding of data from individual trustee interviews and from observational recording of the Highfield selection meetings was used to inform on the possible impact of subjective elements such as the role of the incumbent principal, authoritative sources, prior knowledge of candidates, impressionism, and other external influences.

From all meetings of the Highfield Board of Trustees, it was apparent that the influence of the incumbent principal was considerable. During the course of the first planning meeting, six separate references were made about the principal's personal qualities: the ability to consult and delegate, respect for children, staff and parents, and empathy with the community. These were followed at successive meetings by further positive comments about the principal's virtues, including his sense of humour. Similarly, at the interview, candidates were compared with the incumbent in respect of teaching experience, ability to communicate, warmth of personality and relationships with children. When each trustee was asked if the qualities of the incumbent principal could

have had an influence on the criteria for selection of the new principal, five of the six trustees responded affirmatively. When presented with the list of major perceptions of what qualities they wanted in the new principal, all agreed that it could easily have been the incumbent with its emphasis on similar characteristics and teaching aptitudes. Judith's summary comment was appropriate:

In the partnership with the Board (and principal) over the years, there's been nothing that's gone astray ... it's been really good. I think, probably in a way, we've been a bit scared of the change.

The Board, except for some minor variation, was seeking a mirror image of a style of principalship with which it and the school community felt comfortable.

Prior knowledge of the candidate was another area of potential influence on some trustees. Before shortlisting it was observed that all trustees signed a declaration of interest form which formally intimated prior knowledge of any candidates. However, it did not make candidate comparison any easier, as one trustee remarked during discussion of a known applicant:

*X is unpredictable in the eyes of previous staff Having said that, it does seem that those we *don't* know could be at an advantage.*

Instances of prior knowledge included failed programmes with which candidates were associated at their current school, personal acquaintance of self or spouses, indirect experiences, knowledge of associates. The appointment panel were very much aware of this influence. During candidates' and their own interview, they mentioned that they were conscious of their own bias and the expressed views of others, and overcompensated in their assessment of the applications in the interests of fair treatment.

Referees' reports proved to be an interesting point of influence in the process. During shortlisting, the reports were an integral part of selection and were frequently referred to. They were used to highlight agreement with trustees' initial impressions or to act in contrast to claims made in candidates' applications. Trustees were quick to "read between the lines" of some referees' reports, noting that they tended to be encouraging

rather than enthusiastic in support of the applicant. Trustee reactions to reports were also not without some humour:

Ray: *All these referees' reports here are quite ecstatic.*

Elizabeth: *Do they want to get rid of him?*

At the final interviews, the trustees registered their disappointment that the promise of candidates predicted in their referees' reports failed to materialise for any of them. This resulted in a diminishing of the faith trustees could place in the reliability of such reports:

It was really hard ... I mean, a couple of candidates that I know personally who I wouldn't have wanted to appoint, nonetheless had superb referees which was my first sort of ... inkling of how difficult it is to rely on referees' reports. But in fact I think one of the weaknesses of the whole process of appointing principals is just how unreliable as indicators referees' reports are Of 19 referees' reports, only one said anything negative about any of the candidates ... it just doesn't help.

The role of the principal adviser in guiding the selection process through its concluding stages was an influential one. At an early meeting, the Board indicated that it planned to use this person to check that interview questions were based on the given criteria, to act as a verification of the validity of candidates' stated educational vision and of the candidates' general knowledge of educational issues. In addition to performing these functions, the principal adviser also contributed to the post-interview discussions in an instructive way by interpreting some responses and defending all the candidates from inappropriate judgements. He also clarified for the trustees fundamental educational issues of selection (eg determining an applicant's previous and potential experience and level of leadership skills required for the position).

When asked how they regarded the principal adviser's role, all three trustees on the appointment panel acknowledged the usefulness of his facilitation role, and his sharing of past interview questions and referees' formats at the initial meeting. In retrospect two trustees would have involved him earlier at the shortlisting stage as an alternative to

having a staff member present, while another admitted not always sharing the adviser's judgements about candidates' responses.

The role of impressionism has been well documented in the literature and it was expected that a similar influence would be present in the trustees' selection process in this study. During the Highfield shortlisting, trustees assumed definite impressions from applicants' application forms and curriculum vitae. Examples included:

I don't accept the reason why he left his school. I think the Board wanted to get rid of him.

I got some real bad vibes for some reason.

But that warmth, it wins through even in CVs. I mean ... people do give themselves away, I think, in what they write

Similarly after the interviews, trustees were observed to refer to their 'gut feelings', 'intuitive feelings' and that, in the end, "it may come down to how you feel about them as people". Some trustees, in the final analysis, went looking for the ultimate impressionistic quality:

Z has a teaching persona.

They'd be very competent but there's not that X factor.

This notion of an indefinable quality, an aura, sometimes known as the X factor, was again stated by two of the trustees in a later interview. While one trustee claimed the X factor was not an issue for them, others did allude to it:

'Mana' is as close as I'm going to get ... it's something indistinguishable in terms of personality ... and good principals have got it. I guess if you were British public school you'd call it 'character'.

Finally, one unsolicited comment from a trustee reflected a telling assessment of the role of impressionism in the selection process and in the area of interpersonal relationships in general:

Trustee: [Impressions of people] *It comes down to that in the end. In my job, a lot of what I do with people is, I make judgements, for reasons that I can't always ... the feeling sometimes precedes the fact.*

Interviewer: *And is that, by and large, proved correct?*

Trustee: *Yeah, yes it is.*

There were two other external factors in the process which contributed to the trustees' perceptions of candidates. The first related to staff opinion of the shortlisted applicants when informed of their identity by the Board chairperson. Their reaction was affirmative for two candidates but negative towards the third because of that candidate's age and gender. The second was a major factor to emerge from the interview day: the impact of the candidates' interview technique on the trustees. They were impressed by candidates' eye contact with them, confident attitude, panache, projection of image, and sense of professionalism. They were concerned about candidates' defensiveness, controlled performance, individual mannerisms and body language, and their continued nervousness as demonstration of an inability to cope with pressure situations.

GENDER EQUITY

There were no recorded references to matters relating to gender throughout the shortlisting and only two during the post-interview phase in relation to staff preference for a male principal, a tribute to the understanding and appreciation of EEO requirements by the three member appointment panel. Nonetheless, during early Board meetings to plan the selection process, it was evident that for some members of the community, the gender of the future principal was going to be an issue. Public feedback on the principal selection included one parent who bluntly informed the Board that they had to appoint a male! Another wanted a female principal - was it possible for the Board to slant the advertisement in that direction?

One trustee raised the issue of the Board having a notion of the 'right' type of person for the position, taking into account gender and age. The chairperson replied that could not be an issue because of EEO requirements. In response the trustee admitted his sexist bias and expressed his worst fear of the school appointing a 50 year old matriarch. He was, he claimed, just expressing the concern of a lot of people that there was already

an all female staff at the school and a male appointment would improve the gender balance.

When asked if the concept of gender equity had had any influence on selection, 5/6 trustees felt they had no preference for appointing a man or woman, and were looking for the best person for the job. One trustee declared a preference for a male principal on the basis of maintaining a gender balance on the staff while another trustee mentioned the staff preference for a male but regarded that as a problem for them, not the Board. It appeared from informal comments during trustee interviews that the issue of gender balance, while not declared, was an underlying consideration for some trustees and for the staff.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: SELECTION PROCESS

Research Question 5: Selection procedures

Sequence consisted of initial planning meetings, principal appointment sub-committee, shortlisting, candidate interview, selection decision-making.

Points of Interest

Preliminary meetings:	application form not based on selection criteria
Interviews:	battery of 23 questions for one hour interview issue raised of past experience versus potential experience
Selection decision:	use of inverse decision-making critical factors include interview performance, personal qualities and 'best fit' for local community
Time involved:	sub-committee trustees spent approximately 50 hours each on principal selection

Research Question 6: Criteria identification

(a) Identification of specific criteria across documentary sources

Leadership:	provision of leadership for staff and pupils provision of learning opportunities provision of extra-curricular activities ability to work collaboratively ability to delegate knowledge of educational issues professional development of self and staff
Classroom teaching:	practical teaching experience
Administration:	administrative skills ability to plan

Personal attributes: ability to communicate
 ability to establish positive relationships with
 children
 sensitivity to community needs
 ability to establish positive relationships with
 parents/community

(b) Consistency of criteria application

Documents reveal inconsistent application and assessment of criteria.

Criteria at conclusion weighted towards personal characteristics.

Four additional criteria noted: leadership experience, warmth, interview performance, relationship with the Board.

Research Question 7: Subjective influences

Role of incumbent principal: trustees sought a similar style of
 principalship

Prior knowledge of candidates: 5/6 trustees acknowledged influence

Referees' reports: trustees questioned their reliability

Principal adviser: professional advice and guidance appreciated by
 the trustees

Impressionism: influential role, supported by trustees
 first impressions do affect judgements

External factors: staff opinion of shortlisted applicants
 candidates' interview technique

Research Question 8: Gender equity

5/6 trustees had no preference for a male or a female principal.

Observation revealed few references to gender in trustee discussions.

Gender balance was an issue for some trustees and for staff.

3 TRUSTEE REACTIONS TO THE PROCESS

At the conclusion of the trustee interview, each trustee was offered the opportunity to comment on their experience of the principal appointment process, particularly in regard to principal leadership qualities and effective selection procedures, and to offer suggestions which may assist Boards of Trustees in future principal selections. There was a unanimous response that training should be available to assist Boards in determining their own principal criteria and in formulating a selection process with which individual Boards could feel comfortable. In particular several references were made in regard to the need for trustees to develop a sound knowledge of what a principal currently does, and to the usefulness of a set of generic principal qualities and leadership styles from which they could choose the most appropriate for their school situation. Major suggestions for enhancing selection procedures included an early involvement of a principal adviser, familiarity with the selection process using a standard checklist of procedures, and the use of a trained facilitator who would, in this instance, have taken a lot of the administrative and procedural weight off the three member appointment panel. Less supported suggestions included how to deal with deadlocked decision-making, the aftermath of salary fixing and contract settling, community consultation, and establishing a published list of sample interview questions.

Reflections on the overall principal appointment process provided a valuable source of unsolicited data on what trustees really felt about the important exercise they had just completed. Five of the six trustees interviewed said that in retrospect they would have included the whole Board in the interview process rather than a three member sub-committee. This would have alleviated the problems of ratification where there was disparity in access to knowledge and experience of the candidates amongst the Board.

Contrasting opinions emerged in two recurring areas. Claire questioned the capacity of Boards, especially in small rural communities, to cope with the demands of a principal selection process:

We had a very able team to do it. I'm just wondering if small rural schools have the same skills As I said before, I think it's a fairly unfair job to give to a small community. I just can't help thinking that with New Zealand having some

very small rural schools, how can the parents judge? It's pretty hard to decide, you could get some nasty extremes coming in.

That such doubts exist about Boards' capacity to carry out effectively such a demanding process was re-emphasised by Judith's experiences:

Other comments you hear, not the community but from other people my husband spoke to who said things like "What do they know about that sort of thing?" Comments like that I found a bit hard. But it's a general feeling I've picked up from a lot of people: What do parents know about it? They've got no professional training As a friend of mine said "Nothing against you, sort of thing, but these unprofessional people appointing professionals"

In contrast to Claire's reservations, Judith's reaction was to become even more determined to succeed at a task of which others deemed her incapable of bringing to a successful conclusion.

The underlying notion of criticism from within the school community also yielded contrasting responses. Ray played down the impact of criticism of a Board decision:

I don't think Boards do get an enormous amount of flak for getting it wrong because I think, I suspect that the lay person realises how difficult it is.

However, Judith and Elizabeth, the other members of the appointment panel, were adamant that they felt keenly the community pressure and impending criticism if the principal appointment did not prove to be successful:

I know we're not going to please everyone in the community and there's going to be people you'll get repercussions from ... I think that's a huge thing to put on parents too and you're still living in the community.

Therein lay a dilemma for the Highfield trustees. While they acknowledged the inherent difficulties and pressures of their employer role, they all agreed that a return to the selection processes of the past, which saw a centralised bureaucracy appointing

principals based on candidate seniority, would be a retrograde step. Perhaps, as Claire suggested, there was a middle ground whereby the parents and trustees were an integral part of the process and made the final decision but were assisted by a trained professional from outside the community. This facilitator could provide a necessary objective viewpoint while taking into account educational, professional and community criteria.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: DIRECTIONS FOR TRUSTEE TRAINING

Research Question 9: Future trustee training suggestions

Principal qualities:	use of a generic checklist adapted to local school situation
Selection procedures:	early involvement of principal adviser standardised checklist of procedures use of a trained facilitator
Reflections:	full board participation instead of appointment sub-committee perception of lay people appointing a professional community pressure to secure the 'right' appointment.

Looking in retrospect at their lengthy process, only one of the six trustees indicated their willingness to participate in another principal selection. There were three common stressful factors influencing the trustees. The first centred on the exhausting and potentially divisive decision-making process at the end, which stood in stark contrast to the consensual mode of operation within the Board over the previous five years. The second stress factor involved decision-making based on the views and experiences of others unknown to the trustees, (eg referees, principal adviser, follow-up phone calls to other reference points, and the extent to which one believed what others were saying). The third and crucial pressure point was the weight of responsibility which the Board

felt it had to shoulder on behalf of its pupils and parent community in order to make the right choice:

Even if it is not a close decision at the end, it's still a daunting task. I think it's pretty nerve-racking really because you know ... not only is it going to affect your kids if we jump the wrong way, even given we thought we had three really good candidates [to interview] ... your kids are going to be affected and you've got to live in that community and I just think it's a lot to ask of anybody. The stakes are very high.

The pressures to make the right decision are acute, and were particularly so for the Board chairperson in her pivotal role as the coordinator of the selection process. Her thoughts epitomised those of other trustees who were appointing a principal for the first time:

It's not a job that I'd like to do again ... I think it's a very hard thing to ask parents to do really. But then when you compare it with the old Education Board days, you've got to say it's a better system. The likelihood of getting someone who suits your school is far greater, I think. But I still think it's a horrible process to go through - I wouldn't like to go through it again in a million years!

Chapter Five

CASE STUDY: CENTRAL PRIMARY SCHOOL

SCHOOL SETTING

Central School has a roll of approximately 100 pupils. It is located in a major metropolitan area and draws its school population from a range of socio-economic and ethnic groups. The school has a staff of five permanent teachers, one of whom is a teaching principal, together with ancillary and caretaking staff.

The Board of Trustees comprised eight members: the retiring principal, staff representative, five parent representatives, and a co-opted parent who acted as the Board secretary. All but one trustee were in paid employment and occupying professional positions. The Board contained twice as many women as men. Members were all European in origin, within the 31-50 age grouping, with an average of 2.25 years of school governance experience.

1 EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research Question 1: Knowledge of principal responsibilities

When asked in their post-selection interview about their knowledge of what a school principal does, only one of the six trustees, the teacher representative, felt confident that they knew about the tasks currently performed by a principal. Leo, because he had served on the previous Board, declared some familiarity with issues such as funding, staffing, and grounds. Several trustees attributed a lack of confidence to their relatively short time on the Board or to the absence of any teaching background in their experience. Another trustee felt that the Board did not need to know what a principal did, especially in the daily operation of the school.

Research Question 2: Essential characteristics of an effective principal

The Central trustees were invited to describe their perceptions of principal qualities both before and after the selection process had taken place. This would serve as an indication of their major preferences and of any changes in perception over a period of time. The results are shown in Table 5.1, with each major principal quality placed in a top four priority ranking order, according to frequency of response.

Table 5.1 Trustee perceptions of principal qualities by grouped ranking:
Central Primary School

Principal Quality	Pre-selection (questionnaire response)	Post-selection (interview response)	Average ranking
Leadership of staff and pupils	1	2	1.5
Relationship with BOT and staff	1	1	1
Communication skills	2	3	2.5
Management skills	2	-	
Teamwork	3	4	3.5
Relationship with children	3	1	2
Caring attitude	3	-	
Teaching skills/experience	3	2	2.5
Curriculum knowledge	3	-	
Pleasant personality	4	-	
Clear vision of education	4	-	
Honesty	4	4	4
Qualifications	4	1	2.5
Continuing professional development	4	4	4
Ability to motivate	4	-	
Sense of humour	-	4	
Integrity	-	4	
Figurehead of school	-	4	

From the averaged rankings of principal qualities over the time of the selection process, the essential characteristics delineated by the trustees were in the following priority groupings:

- 1 Relationships with BOT and staff
Leadership of staff and pupils
- 2 Relationships with children
Communication skills
Teaching skills/experience
Qualifications
- 3 Teamwork
- 4 Honesty
Continuing professional development

As a group the Central trustees perceived that the most important qualities they sought in their new principal were a communicative ability to establish sound relationships with children, staff and Board, together with appropriate leadership skills to give direction to the school community. Underlying all such qualities was almost a pre-requisite in trustees' minds that the principal should possess good personnel skills and an energetic personality. This aspect came through strongly from the trustee interviews and was best exemplified by Steve in his summary of one candidate's potential: *Good principal material but lacked that vibrance.*

Two thirds of the Central trustees' perceptions of principal qualities had essentially remained constant with some change in priority order over time. In support of this relative lack of change, six of seven trustees believed that they had not changed their perceptions over time. Gillian indicated that qualifications had assumed a much greater importance for her at the end; Eleanor and Leo both observed that personal qualities played a marked role in their perceptions during the interview phase, Leo adding that he had changed in his appreciation of what goes into a teaching principal's job.

However, significant change had occurred in the priority of some trustee perceptions by the end of the selection process. 'Relationships with children' and 'qualifications' gained in prominence while the Central trustees no longer considered their earlier second

and third priorities 'management skills', 'curriculum knowledge' and a 'caring attitude' worthy of mention.

As further clarification of their perceptions of educational leadership, all trustees were asked to describe leadership qualities which they identified in the candidates during the interview, either in a positive or negative fashion.

Table 5.2 Leadership qualities identified at candidate interview:
Central Primary School

Quality	Nan	Gillian	Jane	Leo	Eleanor	Steve
Leadership skills		•			•	
Communication skills		•	•	•		
Energetic		•	•			
Motivator		•				
Shows initiative		•				•
Pleasant personality			•			
Vision for school			•			•
Genuine interest in school			•			
Confident			•	•	•	•
Intellectual ability						•

Of the leadership qualities identified by the trustees, communication skills and candidate confidence were the two most frequently mentioned. This was consistent with their perceptions of essential characteristics emphasising communication and personnel skills. They were keen to observe candidates' interview techniques in a pressure situation, with the majority of trustees commenting on candidates' skill in communicating their ideas to the Board and on their ability to deal confidently with a group of largely unknown adults.

As an intra-case measure of triangulation, the post-selection interview of Board members presented them with a 'hung parliament' scenario whereby trustees were asked to prioritise at least three essential leadership qualities that would differentiate candidates

in the event of a tied selection decision and so further reveal their individual priorities for selection.

Table 5.3 Priority order of essential leadership qualities:
Central Primary School

Quality	Nan	Gillian	Jane	Leo	Eleanor	Steve	Carol
Personal qualities - general	1=	3			2		1
Professionalism	1=					3=	
Teaching skills	1=						
Relationships with children	1=	1		1=			
Curriculum knowledge		2		3=			
Leadership style			1	3=	1	3=	
Sense of humour			2				
Love of education				1=			
Discipline				3=			
Figurehead/image of school				3=		1	
Qualifications						2	
Organisational skills						3=	
Previous teaching experience							2
Special attributes							3

The ranking figures in Table 5.3 indicate several features in trustees' perceptions of essential principal leadership qualities. Firstly there is a considerable range of qualities which were individually rated, together with a wide spread of priority order for such qualities: out of a total of 25 quality rankings, only 9 coincided in terms of the actual quality with the same rank order, reinforcing the range of trustees' individual perceptions.

Secondly, Table 5.3 identifies three significantly recurring leadership qualities which were nominated by three or more trustees: relationships with children, style of leadership and personal qualities. As in Table 5.1, the trustees registered their continued top priority preference for their principal to have the necessary skills to build good relationships, not only with the trustees and staff but also with the children of the school. They also sought a leadership style that would give direction to the school community. During their interviews two male trustees described this direction as coming from a figurehead, someone who would maintain a public profile for the school in the eyes of the community, while Eleanor believed that their final appointment decision "**did** come down to a personal leadership style in the end". It was noted too by the end of the selection process, both from trustee interviews and from the table above, that trustees overtly identified the prominent role played by a candidate's personality in their selection deliberations.

Observational data recorded by the researcher during the shortlisting and post-interview phases were analysed and ranked in groupings according to the frequency of reference by trustees to particular critical factors affecting discussion. The objective was to compare the observed factors with essential principal qualities which the trustees had espoused in their questionnaire and during their interview with the researcher. This would indicate the interrelationship between what essential qualities the trustees wanted in their principal and the factors in discussion which led to the principal appointment. The results are listed in Table 5.4 (Trustee qualities are denoted either in ranked order or as being previously identified ●).

Table 5.4 Critical factors during shortlisting and post-interview discussion:
Central Primary School

Group ranking	Critical factor	Shortlisting	Post-interview	Trustees essential qualities
1	Teaching experience of applicants	1	3	2
	Personal qualities - general	1	3	●
	Interview technique	-	1	-
2	Continuing professional development	2	-	4
	Extra curricular contribution	2	-	-
	Qualifications	2	-	2
	Administrative/managerial skills	-	2	●
	Leadership style	-	2	1
	Discipline	-	2	-
	Communication skills	-	2	2
3	Community involvement	3	-	-
	Curricula knowledge	3	3	●
	Educational philosophy	3	-	-
	Sense of humour	3	-	●
	Energetic	3	3	-
	Multicultural awareness	-	3	-

From these results, trustee qualities were reflected in six out of ten critical factors discussed during shortlisting and in six out of ten factors during the post-interview meeting. Of the top three groupings of critical factors in shortlisting and post-interview discussion, a total of 16 factors, trustee qualities corresponded with nine out of sixteen. This is an indication that perceived essential principal qualities only in part contributed to the two decision-making phases of the selection process.

Research Question 3: Concepts of leadership and management

In order to determine the extent of their knowledge of leadership and management, Central trustees were asked to describe their ideas about what a principal did if he/she demonstrated leadership or management skills. The results would also help establish, when compared with Tables 5.1 and 5.3, trustees' preference for a leader or a manager as their new principal.

Table 5.5 Concepts of leadership and management:
Central Primary School

Concept	Nan	Gillian	Jane	Leo	Eleanor	Steve	Carol
LEADERSHIP							
Demonstrates initiative	•						
Utilisation of staff skills	•						
Mediator skills	•						
Decisive decision-maker	•					•	•
Ability to delegate	•	•			•		
Good 'people' skills	•						
Gives direction for school		•				•	•
Works collaboratively with staff		•	•	•		•	•
Positive relationships with children			•			•	
Good disciplinarian			•				
Liaison with pupils, teachers, parents			•				
Establish community profile			•				
Planning ability				•	•		
Figurehead/role model				•	•		
Motivation of staff					•		
Undertakes own professional development					•		
MANAGEMENT							
Administration	•	•	•		•	•	•
Works with BOT and community	•			•			
Politicking	•						
Publicity for the school							
Ability to meet goals		•					
Ability to reason			•				
Planning and evaluation					•		
Financial activities				•		•	•
Allocation of resources				•			
Staff development				•			
Motivation					•		

Results from Table 5.5 show 29 recorded references to a principal's demonstration of leadership compared with 18 references to management tasks, a decrease of 38% on knowledge of leadership features. Of the concepts which elicited two or more trustee references, seven were leadership tasks while only two were involved with management. Major leadership skills from the seven tasks included decision-making, delegation, and working collaboratively with staff, and were predominantly expressed in general terms. In comparison, trustees' knowledge of managerial functions was limited to administrative and financial requirements and therefore not as extensive as their knowledge of school leadership. This provides further evidence to support trustees' lack of confidence in their knowledge of the principal's job (Research Question 1).

Research Question 4: Preference for a leader or a manager

The results from Table 5.5 supported trustees' greater awareness of a principal's leadership role rather than a managerial function, and provided a background against which to view the results of Tables 5.1 and 5.3 in terms of the leadership/management dichotomy. Trustee perceptions of essential principal qualities ranked leadership first and second respectively in pre-selection and post-selection responses (Table 5.1) and first equal in the 'hung parliament' situation of qualities required in a vital decision-making scenario (Table 5.3).

In contrast, the managerial function rated well below that of the leadership role. While management skills achieved a second ranking in trustee questionnaire responses, they were not ranked in the interviews with trustees in their post-selection responses (Table 5.1), nor were they a specific consideration for trustees in Table 5.3. These results were borne out by the trustees when asked as part of their interview schedule if they had a leadership or a managerial preference for their principal. Six of seven trustees favoured the leadership role, reiterating the importance of working relationships, especially for a teaching principal. The sole trustee who supported a management function did so on the basis of a school business model approach: *they [Principals] are the Managing Directors of the school, aren't they?*

Thus, the Central trustees declared a clear preference for their next principal to be a leader more than a manager of their school.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research Question 1: Knowledge of principal responsibilities

1/6 trustees felt comfortable in their knowledge of principal responsibilities.

Research Question 2: Essential principal characteristics

(a) Trustee perceptions by grouped rankings

- 1 Relationships with Board and staff
Leadership of staff and pupils
- 2 Relationships with children
Communication skills
Teaching skills/experience
Qualifications
- 3 Teamwork
- 4 Honesty
Continuing professional development

(b) Trustees' major priorities for essential principal qualities

- Relationships with children
- Leadership style
- Personal qualities

(c) 9/16 critical factors at shortlisting and post-interview phases corresponded with trustees' essential principal qualities.

Research Question 3: Concepts of leadership and management

Trustees were more familiar with a principal's leadership tasks than with his/her managerial function. The latter was limited to administration and finance; the former, although more extensive, were expressed in general rather than educational terms.

Research Question 4: Leader or manager preference

6/7 trustees favoured their new principal in a leadership rather than a managerial role. This is supported by their perceptions of essential principal qualities

2 SELECTION PROCESSES

PROCEDURES

The following represents an account of the selection procedures employed by the Central trustees. It is based on the researcher's observation field notes and subsequently validated by the trustees as an accurate record of proceedings. It traces the sequence of events from initial events to establish the processes, shortlisting, external guidance, to pre-interview and interview procedures and concludes with a retrospective review of actual selection decision-making processes leading to appointment.

Initial events

Central primary school's search for a new principal commenced with a Board letter to parents seeking their ideas about the future needs of the school and the type of person to be appointed; in particular ideas about the personal qualities, qualifications, curriculum and/or management strengths or other attributes needed by the new principal. Parents were invited to comment in writing or contact a Board member in person, and were asked if they were prepared to come to a short meeting to discuss the appointment. (Such was the low level of response from parents that the planned meeting never eventuated).

Prior to advertising the position, the Board of Trustees itself held a meeting to discuss the principal's performance agreement and to review it in the light of the imminent appointment. In view of a reduced time-scale for appointment, performance agreements from other schools were collected and a prototype of a new format grew from the meeting discussion. It was left to the Board chairperson to draw up the new agreement to be ready in time for the advertisement of the vacancy. The position was advertised once only in the Education Gazette. Prospective applicants were invited to apply for an application form and information package from the Board, with whom applications closed two weeks later.

During this two week period, the Board chairperson sent a letter to parents, staff, and trustees asking them to complete a list of up to six critical factors (eg experience,

qualifications, personal qualities) and rate them according to importance using a weighting scale from 1-20. The purpose of the weighting given to each factor was to measure the percentage of the whole job that each factor represents ie the relative importance of each factor against the others.¹

At its next monthly meeting, the Board considered what mechanisms were necessary to implement the selection process. After initially considering an appointment sub-committee, the chairperson opted for full Board participation throughout the process. The chairperson stressed confidentiality and suggested a method of evaluating the application forms: trustees were to rank each applicant A, B or C, with A indicating a 'Yes' for shortlisting, C a 'No' and B a 'Maybe'. While trustees were to take into account preliminary information and weightings of critical factors received from parents and staff members, it was left to each individual to devise their own means of assessment. Following shortlisting, it was proposed that six applicants be selected for interview which would possibly take place over two afternoons. Two trustees suggested a principal be sought to assist at interviews but the chairperson felt that no expert help was required at that stage. The chairperson concluded the selection discussion by sharing briefly the methodology to grade the applicants but reaffirmed that each trustee's method of assessing the applicants was a matter for individual discretion.

The selection organisation had taken less than one hour to complete and was characterised by the major input of the Board chairperson and staff representative. Both led discussions with the chairperson giving clear signals as to the direction of the selection organisation and the manner in which applications were to be assessed.

¹Detailed data collected were unavailable for use in this study.

Shortlisting

The Central shortlisting meeting lasted three hours and 24 applications were considered. The process commenced with the chairperson writing on a whiteboard the accumulated Board and staff critical factors for reference during the evening, then on to a comparison of each trustee's grading of the applicants which had been done privately during the intervening two weeks. The trustees eliminated 14 applicants who had received unanimous C gradings, prompting one trustee to comment on the severity of this exercise: *I feel like an axeman here! All these people's futures just gone*

Further discussion followed on the remaining 10 applicants to ascertain any movement on trustees' gradings before the chairperson completed an updated tally count of gradings on the board. Two applicants still remained in the unanimous A category and were shortlisted, while four 'Maybe's', after discussion, were eliminated according to the criteria of the Board and staff.

The remaining four applicants were then reviewed in terms of the critical factors from nine parent questionnaires, and rated against those factors with an A, B, or C grading. Three of these four applicants secured grading sets of (1A, 2B, 3C), (3A, 2A, 1B), (3A, 2A, 1C), respectively and were added to the shortlist; the fourth applicant's grading set of (1A, 5B) was deemed insufficient and so was eliminated. For this applicant, other factors must have played a greater part in their demise than the grading system itself, for on the grades alone, (1A, 5B) were clearly superior to the first applicant's grading set of (1A, 2B, 3C).

Following the shortlisting of two women and three men, the Board discussed the timing of the interviews and the need for a whole day to be set aside. Other issues surfaced such as the need for a principal adviser, who would carry out the interview and was the Board equipped to ask the right questions and know the right answers? Nan agreed to contact a lecturer at the College of Education for assistance with interview techniques and, if needed, to be a part of the selection panel. Discussion returned to the timing of the interview day and a Saturday was chosen by agreement.

The chairperson concluded the meeting by drawing up a checklist of selection matters to be addressed before interviews. This included the need for another meeting prior to interview, collection of extra data on the final five candidates, a check on teacher registration, trustees to re-read each curriculum vitae and make notes on an area of interest together with any gaps that appeared to them. In addition trustees were to choose a candidate, follow up with their referees by phone and present a report back and set of interview questions for that candidate to a pre-interview meeting of the Board in ten day's time.

External assistance

Three days after the shortlisting meeting, another meeting was convened between the Board and a College of Education lecturer. Its purpose was to assist the trustees in their knowledge and implementation of effective interview techniques. Topics covered included specific questions for each critical factor area to establish the extent of each candidate's knowledge base, interview format of timing and protocols, arrangement of the interview room, and concluded with a video presentation on interview technique entitled "*More than a gut feeling*". The trustees deemed this to be of sufficient help in their interview preparation and elected not to seek any further external guidance.

Pre-interview meeting

This meeting took place two days before the actual interview date. The aim was for the trustees to finalise specific arrangements for interviewing the five candidates. Jane, the Board Chairperson, co-ordinated the organisation and some of the pressures of appointment began to be felt. Leo advocated that next time, they should employ an executive consultant to co-ordinate the mechanical arrangements and take the load off the trustees to which Jane added: *In the end we're the one's left with it, to get it right if possible.*

The first task was to allot specific questions to particular trustees so that everyone had a chance to listen, and to maintain that sequence of questioning for all five candidates.

Jane provided an interview assessment schedule or grid which listed all the agreed criteria with columns opposite for trustees to record a ✓ or X depending on their assessment, together with a column for comments: *Something to bring back to discussion after interview ... some evidence to fall back on.*

As the trustees moved through the process of wording questions appropriate to each criterion, they soon recognised the inherent difficulties of using traditional measuring instruments to assess what were often practical skills.

Jane: Most of the interview questions are to do with professional and educational leadership ... we can't put a class in front of them! All we have are c.v.'s, referees' reports, and what they say about themselves.

The Board then conducted a brainstorming session in which each trustee contributed their wording of each question area and others responded to it. At its conclusion, they established 19 topic areas of enquiry. The hardest area for which to derive an effective question was the principal's relationship with the community. A number of early suggestions were based around the notion of conflict, which the Board fortunately recognised and moved to provide a more balanced line of questioning. Leo's request to formalise the interview questions was agreed but lost its momentum as discussion veered off into seating plans, lunch, tour of the school and appointment times. Thus, prior to the actual interview, there was no apparent pattern to the wording or sequencing of the interview questions, nor to the identity of each questioner. As the meeting closed, Jane summarised arrangements for the Saturday, together with a reminder to write out their actual interview questions so they could all glance through them in the 30 minutes leading up to the first interview.

Interviews

The interview panel of six trustees arrived at the school staffroom at 8.30 am without Carol who was absent through illness. In the half hour before the opening interview, they were able to arrange the staff seats in a semi-circle and read through the accumulated information on the first candidate to be interviewed. All trustees were tense and apprehensive about the interview process. Again the researcher was not

present during the candidate's interview but observed all post-interview discussions. The interviews were conducted as planned, co-ordinated by the Board chairperson, with the panel sharing designated questions in a set order. A period of 30 minutes was allocated for post-interview discussion and for reading preparation prior to the next candidate's arrival.

Post-interview discussions were characterised by relating each candidate's performance to the criteria on the interview assessment grid, both in positive and negative ways. The panel monitored its own performance after the first interview and discovered that its failure to get a number of specific answers from candidates was due to the non-specific nature of the questions they were asking, and so they adjusted the questions accordingly. After the final interview, the Board took a short time to review the fifth candidates' performance before embarking on a wide-ranging discussion on the comparative merits of the five candidates. The discussion came at the end of 8 hours of the interview process and was to last a further 2½ hours. During this time three candidates were eliminated early, leaving a choice between a female and a male candidate. As debate continued, the trustees found it necessary to make two phone contacts with respective referees in order to gather extra information on specific points of concern.

At 5.00 pm, the Board stopped for a half hour break, its first since lunchtime, before continuing its discussion of the final two candidates. Two further calls to a referee of each candidate assisted with clarification of major issues and a decision was finally made at 7.00 pm. The Central trustees concluded their appointment meeting feeling extremely tired, which was understandable given an intensive interview process which involved five candidates and extensive deliberation spread over a 10½ hour period.

Selection decision-making

The shortlisting and interview meeting data were examined to trace the various critical points in the decision-making process and to ascertain the means by which similarly rated candidates were differentiated. During the shortlisting phase, the Central trustees had chosen two definite candidates for interview and were considering four remaining applicants. The critical factors which determined that three would be interviewed and

one eliminated included curriculum knowledge, continuing professional development, range of teaching experience, apparent warmth of personality and lack of inspiration.

After the final interview had been conducted, it was very evident from the immediate discussion that the trustees had narrowed the field to two particular candidates. The remaining three candidates had almost been summarily dismissed. An analysis of the data for each case confirmed gaps in professional development, overconfidence, and an apparent lack of energy as being the critical factors in their elimination.

The trustees had no definitive plan for distinguishing the final two candidates so elected initially to compare their interview notes and each candidate's performance against the interview criteria. This process produced no clear differentiation between the candidates and prompted the realisation from several trustees that *"it comes down to personality and what sort of principal we want"*. Various personal opinions were proffered together with Leo's caution: *We need to look at who we represent, and the type of person they would like.*

Nan and Leo were looking for strong disciplined leadership and a firm future direction from someone who could drive initiatives already in place. On the other hand, Jane's preference was for someone with an open view of education rather than being a strict disciplinarian, who would work collaboratively with staff and parents.

An informal poll indicated that four trustees favoured the female candidate (C) and two trustees preferred the male candidate (D). Further discussion narrowed the perceived difference between the two candidates to the area of leadership style: directive dynamism versus reflective collaboration. However the discussion progressed no further. The Board looked for a way forward as they found they were discussing what they already knew. They returned to the principal performance agreement categories and key tasks, only to find that the respective candidates' strengths and weaknesses balanced out. Again the only distinguishing criterion was that of leadership style. The Central trustees would much prefer a consensus decision but an observed 4:2 split still remained as did the impasse between the supporters of the two candidates:

Jane: If you thought C could handle discipline and project an image, would you be happier?

Nan: Put it the other way, if D could overcome a dominating presence and project an image, would you be happier?

While no formal vote was taken, the supporters of candidate D remained outnumbered by 4 to 2 and conceded that they would support the majority decision for candidate C. The major turning point had occurred after the phone calls to referees produced confirmation of one candidate's leadership deficiencies and personal traits and affirmation that the other candidates' perceived leadership deficiencies were in fact incorrect. Then the final decision rested on the type of leadership style the Board preferred for its school, allied with the type of personality it desired in the new principal, a view supported subsequently by one of the trustees:

It really came down to personalities in the end which I think is something that we weren't really allowed to do or shouldn't really concentrate on. But I think what we were really looking for was someone who could fit into the existing framework of the school.

Time Schedule

The selection process for the Central school principal appointment lasted three months from the time of the first letter to parents to the formal ratification of the recommended candidate. A total of six evening meetings were held which were wholly or partly directed towards the selection process, with a total meeting time of 20 hours. For the trustees, no less than 15 hours were spent in private preparation including reading applications and curricula vitae, travel and calls of enquiry. Overall each trustee spent approximately 35 hours work leading up to the appointment of their new principal.

CRITERIA IDENTIFICATION

An analysis was carried out of the Central Board's documentary sources to identify what specific criteria were used in the selection process. Each document was searched and selection criteria extracted and grouped under four classifications: educational and professional leadership, classroom teaching, administration, and personal attributes. The two dimensional grid framework relating documentary sources to selection criteria enabled identification of both essential criteria and the consistency of criteria application. The results are listed in Table 5.6.

A summary of the major criteria identified in three or more documents is listed under the four main focus areas and includes the following recurring themes:

Educational/professional leadership:

- provision of leadership for staff and pupils
- curriculum knowledge and development
- appropriate qualifications
- relationships with and support for staff
- ability to discipline

Classroom teaching:

- teaching skills
- previous teaching experience
- special needs

Administration:

- administrative skills
- financial management

Personal attributes:

- ability to communicate
- critical appreciation

Table 5.6 Documentary analysis:
Central Primary School

CRITERIA	BOT /Staff categories	Community categories	Letter to parents	Principal performance agreement	Gazette advertisement	Application form	Referees' report*	Interview questions	Interview assessment schedule
Educational/ professional leadership	•	•		•	•				•
curriculum knowledge and development	•	•	•	•	•			•	•
provision of positive caring environment				•					
ability to work collaboratively/ team work				•				•	
appropriate qualifications	•	•	•			•			•
staff support	•			•				•	•
ability to discipline	•			•				•	•
educational philosophy	•								
conflict resolution				•				•	
use of principal release time				•				•	

CRITERIA	BOT /Staff categories	Community categories	Letter to parents	Principal performance agreement	Gazette advertisement	Application form	Referees' report*	Interview questions	Interview assessment schedule
staff development				•				•	
assessment and evaluation				•				•	
governance/ management								•	
encourages initiatives				•				•	
Classroom: teaching skills/ experience	••	••	•	•	•	•			•
sympathy with mainstreaming	•								
specific skills (art, sports)	•								•
special needs			•					•	•
multi-cultural								•	•
Administration: management strengths	•	•	•	• •	• •			•	
financial management				•				•	•
relationship with BOT				•				•	

CRITERIA	BOT /Staff categories	Community categories	Letter to parents	Principal performance agreement	Gazette advertisement	Application form	Referees' report*	Interview questions	Interview assessment schedule
Personal: ability to communicate	•	•	•		•				•
sense of humour	•								•
energy	•								•
community participation	•								•
honesty	•								•
stability	•								
cultural appreciation	•							•	•
personal goal setting								•	
relationships with community				•				•	
relationships with children								•	
relationships with staff	•			•				•	•
skills and attributes						•			

* It should be noted that no format or criteria headings were given in the referees' report form. Each referee was free to respond in their own way.

In regard to internal consistency, there were a number of variations revealed by Table 5.6 results. Inconsistencies were noted in areas which should have demonstrated a constancy of criteria. For example, 'ability to communicate' occurred in Board, staff, and community categories but was not covered in the principal's performance agreement which acted as the job description. There was no associated person specification. Found in the performance agreement but not covered specifically in either referees' reports or interview were criteria of 'provision of a positive caring environment', 'ability to work as part of a team' and 'management strengths'. Other inconsistencies were observed in the interview assessment schedule which had elements present that were already known: 'qualifications' and 'teaching experience', or which were to be assessed but not asked during the interview: 'specific skills' and 'community participation'. In addition there were 11 interview questions that were not specifically assessed according to the interview schedule.

Observational records of the shortlisting and interview meetings were also examined to ascertain the level of criteria consistency with that identified in the documentary analysis and by trustee perceptions, and to observe any change in criteria application over time. Again selection criteria were extracted and grouped together under the four major categories.

Table 5.7 Major criteria identified across a range of sources:
Central Primary School

Major Criteria	Trustee perceptions	Documents	Shortlisting	Interviews
EDUCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP				
leadership of staff and pupils	•	•		•
appropriate qualifications	•	•	•	
ability to work in a team	•			
curricula knowledge and development	•	•	•	•
vision for school	•			
continuing professional development	•		•	
figurehead for school	•			
ability to discipline		•		•
extra curricular contribution			•	
educational philosophy			•	
multi-cultural awareness		•		•
special needs		•		
CLASSROOM TEACHING				
teaching skills	•	•		
previous teaching responsibilities/ experience	•	•	•	•
ADMINISTRATION				•
managerial skills	•	•		•
financial management		•		
PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES			•	•
relationships with BOT and staff	•	•		
relationships with children	•			
communication skills	•	•		•
caring attitude	•			
pleasant personality	•			
honesty	•			
ability to motivate	•			
sense of humour	•		•	
integrity	•			
community involvement			•	
energetic			•	•
interview technique				•

The Central application of criteria was quite consistent in its relatively even spread over the areas of leadership, classroom teaching, administration and personal attributes. When the trustees were asked if the Board had been consistent in its application of the chosen criteria throughout the process, four of seven trustees maintained a consistent use of criteria. This was despite the data showing the later inclusion of additional criteria not seen in any of the documents such as extra-curricular contribution, educational philosophy, community involvement, energy and interview performance. However this changing pattern was supported by two trustees who noted that there had been a change in criteria emphasis at the end including, they believed, a change in gender preference from a male to a female principal, and a premium placed on a candidate's energy levels. Another trustee drew attention to possible reasons for criteria change:

I think it changed at interview because ... just that the information changed. The first candidate [at shortlisting] went down to last [at interview]. I don't think it was totally objective but ... the decision was justified partly because of interview technique and partly because of gaps in experience we hadn't picked up in the c.v.

SUBJECTIVE INFLUENCES

Selective coding of data from individual trustee interviews and from observational recording of the Central selection meetings was again used to determine the possible influence of subjective elements emanating from the incumbent principal, authoritative sources, prior knowledge of candidates, impressionism, and other external features.

From all the meetings of the Central Board of Trustees, there was only one passing reference to the incumbent principal. The reasons for this became apparent when each trustee was asked if the qualities of the incumbent could have had an influence on the criteria for selection. Six of seven trustees felt that the incumbent had a very considerable impact on their selection criteria. A number liked the individual approach to education and caring attitude towards people. However, it was clear that the Board saw a need to move in an opposite direction in terms of principal involvement, enthusiasm and energy, forward planning and staff support, to the extent that one trustee

believed it had a direct influence on the type of questions asked at interview and of referees. Another trustee remarked: *Without being conscious of it, I was looking for an opposite.*

This notion of diametrically opposed preference was also reiterated by a third trustee on the qualities and direction sought from the new principal appointment:

We know what we don't want and now we have to decide what we do want. I don't think we were really looking for someone to stand in X's shoes, I think we were looking for someone with a completely different footprint.

There were a number of instances where prior knowledge of candidates influenced individual and Board outlooks. These included knowledge derived through personal acquaintance, associates at another school, teachers of Central School, indirect experience, anecdotal evidence, parents and family. Six of seven trustees acknowledged that prior knowledge had partially influenced their views on different candidates. Several admitted they were conscious of their own bias and, in their attempt to be scrupulously fair, felt that they were in danger of overcompensating. This influence seemed to be evenly spread in regard to one trustee's support of a particular candidate: *Prior knowledge influenced others to vote against X as much as it influenced me to favour X.*

Referees' reports and the referees themselves had an influential role in selection decisions. Considerable reference was made to these reports during the shortlisting phase, with trustees taking particular note of who the candidates had nominated as a referee and their professional status or otherwise. One applicant had nominated no referees which was a retrograde step in the trustees' eyes. As previously indicated, trustees made use of phone contacts with referees as a necessary check on areas of concern which the interview had revealed and about which they were uncertain. They found these phone contacts extremely useful and commented how much more of an insight these provided than the conventional referees' reports.

A transcript from the pre-interview discussion highlights the limitations of traditional reporting methods:

Steve: Just all the c.v.'s, they're just all the same and referees' reports are just good words from their mates.

Jane: It's what people don't say that counts.

Leo: You won't get negative references off your friends.

Gillian: The referees' reports varied a lot in presentation, style ...

Nan: ... more a reflection on the referees themselves.

All trustees later commented on the deficiencies of the referees' report system, on the inability of references to describe practical skills, and that the reports were not necessarily a reflection of a candidate's ability but rather of the quality of the referee's writing style. Several trustees registered their concerns about the validity of the report information, and the need to "read between the lines" to find the truth: *the whole area of reference reports is all about silences, about what isn't said.*

Although the Central trustees did not use the assistance of a principal adviser, they unanimously agreed that the outside educationalist whom they used to instruct in interview techniques was an important factor in their subsequent confidence in and awareness of the realities of the interview process. Nan, in fact, believed that the Board would have struggled without such external help and Leo appreciated the use of the training video to help prepare him for knowing what to expect from candidates' answers. Opinion was divided on whether such a consultant should have been employed to assist the Board throughout the whole process. Nan believed earlier assistance may have been advantageous:

Personally I would have liked her brought in earlier, in hindsight, because ... in our lack of experience in reading and selecting through c.v.'s, we may have missed one or two candidates at the shortlisting stage that were real gems.

Jane, as chairperson, acknowledged the usefulness of an external adviser to help answer awkward questions but wanted the Board to assume ultimate responsibility for the appointment:

Maybe that's me not wanting someone else to be in charge, I don't know. I didn't want the decision to be shared with someone else who could then be blamed for it.

Impressions clearly played a part in the trustees' perceptions of their new principal. During shortlisting, it was evident that the curricula vitae were responsible for creating initial impressions whether by their presentation, layout, spelling errors or by trustees variously interpreting their own reactions to this personal information. Examples included:

You've got a feeling that there's something there.

I didn't see panache there.

I got the impression of a likeable, humorous, energetic person.

Some trustees also commented on the use of photographs to accompany an application and opinion was divided on their efficacy; two liked looking at the personal aspect of a photograph while a third said they reacted positively to a family scene; two found a photograph to be off-putting: *its unfair if the candidate doesn't happen to be photogenic.*

When asked if impressions had played any role in the selection process for them as individuals, the Central trustees unanimously affirmed, often for different reasons, that their feelings and intuition were formidable ingredients. While rejecting the role of impressionism at its extremes of 'mana' or 'X factor', the trustees' interpretations of impressionism varied widely. Gillian's first impressions were based on listening skills, personality, humour and capacity to smile! Leo's immediate impressions were made on a comparative basis: *You try to judge them on comparing them with people I know, put them into niches, particularly the way they speak or dress*

Jane's immediate judgement was definitive:

I immediately wanted X as soon as they walked in ... no, not as soon as they walked in, but by the end of the interview. I had absolutely no question that they were miles better than any of the others, and it wasn't just me, other people felt that as well.

For Eleanor, the principal's personality was part of a wider impression of leadership:

It was really the personality and how they would act as a leader that was important. We all had these sheets we were supposed to be ticking but that wasn't important to us at that stage; it was much more subjective impressions.

This was closely associated with the notion of which candidates would provide the best fit with the school and its community.

Nan felt strongly that the halo effect has been a dominant feature at the interviews and that impressions in general are highly underrated: *The reality is that people make snap judgements and those are the ones you rely on, and your intuition.*

Steve offered a realistic summation of the role of impressionism in his comments on trustees' ability to differentiate between a candidate's performance at interview and the reality of performance in the job:

That's the bit you've got to have a gut feeling on. I know I don't like going back to intangibles because it's totally unscientific but with human beings, it's just part of our nature to do it.

The Central trustees found a major external factor in the impact of the candidates' interview technique. They were impressed by candidates' calmness, use of trustees' names, eye contact, use of personalised examples, and the ability to make relevant responses. They were concerned about some candidates' inability to give specific examples, their overconfidence, brief or irrelevant responses, and they particularly

commented on nervousness when candidates had failed to overcome their unease even by the end of the interview.

GENDER EQUITY

The tone was set on the gender issue at the first planning meeting when the chairperson reiterated to the Board that gender and age should not be a factor in the selection process, and that EEO obligations required them to be neutral and 'resist the lobbyists', especially from among the parent group. There were no references to gender during the shortlisting stage but nine references were recorded at the post-interview discussion. With an all female staff, the Board was aware of the concept of gender balance and various trustees raised questions, in the event of a female principal being selected, regarding staff reaction and the possibility of maintaining a gender balance by appointing a male to the vacant deputy principal's position. The issue of women's promotion in educational leadership also provided some discussion points for the trustees, following one candidate's revelation of the difficulty faced by women teachers in her city in gaining primary school principalships.

During the decision-making time, some trustees declared their positions on gender issues. Jane openly admitted: *I came preferring a man but now I prefer a woman*, while Steve believed that a male authority figure would be a retrograde step for the school. The ability of women principals to assert discipline was also referred to and drew a typically blunt response from Steve: *Why is it easier for a man to suspend a pupil than a woman?*

When asked if the concept of gender equity had had any influence on selection, one trustee believed it had influenced the presence of two women candidates on the shortlist. However, while the remaining six trustees acknowledged that they were all conscious of the gender issue, they believed it had no direct bearing on the result. Most trustees had initially thought of a male as a preferred leader but had tried hard to be objective, and were clear at the end that they had selected the best person for the job and believed they had managed to overcome any overt gender bias:

It made us all think, we're modern! It was true. We genuinely had decided not to care about the gender of the candidates so it reinforced a decision we'd already made - that was quite a telling way to finish it.

From a close analysis of trustees' personal comments, it was apparent that a shift in selection criteria had occurred between the beginning and the end of the selection process. Perceptions of maintaining a gender balance on the staff as role models, and of a strong male to address disciplinary problems, had promoted in trustees' minds an initial preference for a male principal. However, subsequent candidate interviews, trustee discussion and further consultation with referees later moved trustee opinion away from these generalistic criteria based around gender to more specific criteria focussed on candidates' leadership style and personality.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: SELECTION PROCESS

Research Question 5: Selection procedures

Sequence consisted of preliminary meetings, shortlisting, external assistance with interviewing technique, interview organisation, candidate interview, selection decision-making.

Points of interest

Shortlisting:	trustees ignore grading system for differentiating applicants
Interviews:	non-specific nature of trustees' questions fail to elicit specific answers
	No 1 ranked candidate at interview had been placed bottom of the shortlist
Selection decision:	critical factor in appointment rests on preferred leadership style
Time involved:	trustees spend approximately 35 hours each on principal selection

Research Question 6: Criteria identification

(a) Identification of specific criteria across documentary sources

Leadership:	provision of leadership for staff and pupils curricula knowledge and development appropriate qualifications relationships with and support of staff ability to discipline
Classroom teaching:	teaching skills previous teaching experience special needs
Administration:	administrative skills financial management
Personal attributes:	ability to communicate cultural appreciation

(b) Consistency of criteria application

Documents reveal inconsistent application and assessment of criteria.

No person specification.

Five additional criteria noted: extracurricular contribution, educational philosophy, community involvement, energy and interview performance.

Research Question 7: Subjective influences

Role of incumbent principal:	trustees sought an opposite direction for the school
Prior knowledge of candidates:	6/7 trustees acknowledged influence
Referees reports:	used as reference points but their validity questioned
Principal adviser:	Board used consultant to assist with interview training
Impressionism:	unanimous agreement on influence. trustees looking for 'best fit' for local school community
External factors:	candidates' interview technique

Research Question 8: Gender equity

6/7 trustees believed gender had no direct bearing on result.

Observations revealed references to gender, only at post-interview phase.

Initial undeclared preferences for a male for staff gender balance changed to preference for a female because of leadership style and personality.

3 TRUSTEE REACTIONS TO THE PROCESS

At the conclusion of the trustee interview, each trustee was invited to offer comment on the selection process, particularly any future assistance which might be given to Boards of Trustees in relation to principal leadership qualities and selection procedures. There was general agreement that assistance should be available to Boards to help them develop their own principal criteria, even in the form of a generic checklist of necessary qualities currently required in a school principal. They were insistent, however, that such a checklist was to be a means to an end and that Boards could adapt this 'menu' of qualities to fit their local school needs and to maintain their measure of independent control over the choice made.

Major suggestions for enhancing principal selection procedures included the use of a principal adviser for guidance throughout the process including technical issues, a standardised checklist of procedures to ensure important stages were not omitted, and a two hour training session which could include a practical interview situation. Several trustees commented on the lack of physical and human resources which, they believed, should have come from central government. Carol, in particular, argued strongly for better guidelines for Boards to follow in their role as employers:

It's difficult to believe the Ministry of Education puts out no guidelines for principal selection. The makeup of Boards of Trustees can vary from year to year. You're not guaranteed a Board will contain people who have experience in hiring staff. I can't believe that Boards are left in the dark without guidance from the Ministry. I mean, it was very useful having that lady come round to talk about interview techniques; but when you consider that that was really the only outside input that we had into the whole thing, I think that's quite scary. It's no wonder bad decisions are made, just on the basis of inexperience. There should be a process by which, when it comes time to hire a new principal, you notify the Ministry and they send you out a package on current employment codes, resource lists even, people you can contact to become familiar with interview techniques, there should be someone, even a consultant Boards across the country are responsible for hiring hundreds of people a year. Even

someone liaising with Boards to make sure they know what they're doing or have some confidence in their ability to hire properly ... it's a big decision.

Further reflections on the overall appointment process offered rich data on what trustees felt about the employment exercise they had just completed. Earlier negative responses about the effectiveness of referees' reports and the capacity of the interview to assess practical skills were reiterated. A measure of trustee frustration was emphasised by Jane's tongue-in-cheek comment regarding the difficulty of finding valid instruments to assess skill levels:

How do you measure how supportive they are of staff? Rely on referees' reports? It would have been nice to have given them a test-run ... we could carry the interview approach a little bit further and have them in as a practice principal for a week!

Trustees were also surprised, at the conclusion of interviews, at the dominant role played by the personality of the candidates in their final decision-making. They believed that all shortlisted candidates possessed the required qualifications, experience, and leadership qualities for the position. Most felt that the ultimate decision was based around the personality and leadership style most appropriate to the needs of the school.

The concept of 'best fit' or 'personal fit' for the school community was another frequently raised issue. The ability of the successful candidate to relate to the Board and have 'the same sort of ideas as us' were obviously important to them. One trustee's comments are relevant when they describe the fit on a personal level rather than necessarily the macro level of the wider community:

The person chosen reflects the type of people on the Board ... and I've decided that's what the job thing's about in schools now - its finding a Board that matches you and your personality ... but before, it was more structured than that. I think if our Board had had a different make-up, there could have just as easily been a different appointment.

Trustees expressed their difficulties in identifying with each candidate, in bridging the gap between the knowledge base of information revealed in the application form, curriculum vitae, and referee's report, and the reality of the image of the person sitting in front of them at the interview:

I became more impressed with some of the candidates. This ghastly clearfile c.v. system doesn't really do them any good: it standardises them ... they were all so much the same, it was hard to know if you would feel excited about getting a c.v. presented differently, or suspicious!

This clearly puts considerable pressure on the interview to provide that personal reality for the trustees within a very brief time frame, to contradict or support their impressions gained from the written material:

... that's why the interview counts for so much and that's why it's so difficult to put it down into words because it's all manners, style, and actual behaviour of people in the room.

To support the weight of influential impressionistic evidence, it was observed and acknowledged by the trustees that the successful candidate at the end of the interview had, in fact, been the bottom-placed candidate in the shortlisting rankings. What may have contributed to such a dramatic shift in the course of a days' interviewing? From the post-interview discussion and trustee reflections, the cause lies within the mix of personality, leadership style and perceived personal fit with the school community and with the Board members themselves. It also demonstrates the pivotal role played by the interview to reveal the personal aspect of each candidate:

It did bother us initially that X was at the rear of the shortlist ranking but at the top at interview. I believe any one of the four or five could have done the job. But the interview is still a powerful part of the process and its important to know how to conduct yourself in front of other people.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: DIRECTIONS FOR TRUSTEE TRAINING

Research Question 9:	Future trustee training suggestions
Principal qualities:	use of a generic checklist adapted to local conditions
Selection procedures:	use of principal adviser better resources from central authorities
Reflections:	dominant influence of candidates' personality of trustee decision-making notion of 'best fit' locally based rather than any particular educational rationale

Reflecting on their past three months, the trustees of Central school indicated that they had increased their knowledge about the process and felt positive enough to undertake the principal selection process again. They also believed that the process had matched, as far as possible, a person with the educational objectives and future direction of the school. Nonetheless, they acknowledged the weight of responsibility of such a serious task, with its lasting implications for children, teachers and parents. Trustees highlighted particularly stressful areas which included dealing with unknown variables, unfamiliarity with the selection process, and levels of tiredness at the end of the interview day. It was, they felt, a crucial decision which had to be taken in the future interest of their children but one for which, as a group of lay people, they had not been adequately resourced or trained. Said one trustee in an apt summary:

Someone used to do this for a job Here you are spending two or three nights and several days reading stuff - all for essentially a voluntary position. I don't mean you want money or necessarily any recognition out of it. You're doing it because you're doing it for the school.

Chapter Six

CASE STUDY: MIDDLETON PRIMARY SCHOOL

SCHOOL SETTING

Middleton school has a student population of 25. It is situated in a rural farming area and caters for new entrant to Form 2 pupils. The majority of its pupils travel to school by bus and are drawn from a range of socio-economic groups. The school has two teachers including a teaching principal, and a part-time secretary.

The Board of Trustees consisted of seven members: the outgoing principal, teacher representative, and five parent representatives. They covered a range of paid and unpaid employment, from part-time professional positions to farmers. All of the trustees were women, of European origin within the 31-40 age grouping, with an average of 2.5 years of school trustee experience.

It must be recorded that the equilibrium of the school setting was severely affected by the sudden announcement from the Ministry of Education, after the first advertisement of the principal vacancy, that the school would be asked to consider closure and subsequent amalgamation with a choice of nearby schools. The effect of this euphemistically termed 'Education Development Initiative' (EDI) on the trustees and on the principal selection process would be profound.

1 EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research Question 1: Knowledge of principal responsibilities

In their post-selection interview, the four women trustees expressed moderate or low levels of confidence in the knowledge of the tasks of a principal. One trustee's employment took her outside of the district which reduced the amount of contact with the work of the principal. An area which did attract unanimous agreement was the

enormous variety of tasks and attendant pressures faced by the teaching principal of a small rural school: curriculum matters, funding of the school, and stresses imposed by local community issues, a point reiterated by Karen:

I think it is doubly difficult because the principal's job at our school has a wide range of classes and areas to be covered so it's quite a demanding role. I don't think any of us realise, to the full extent, what a principal does. A comment was made to me that school is like a social agency at times, to solve people's problems. So it's quite a wide brief. I wouldn't envy anyone in that position.

This, for Yvonne as a new Board chairperson, had meant extra time and effort to understand the principal's wide-ranging role by having to ask a lot of questions, both of the principal and at monthly Board meetings.

Research Question 2: Essential characteristics of an effective principal

The Middleton trustees' opinions of essential principal qualities were gauged at the beginning of the selection process and at its conclusion during their post-appointment interview. This would indicate their preferred qualities and any changes in perception over time. The results are displayed in Table 6.1, with each major principal quality placed in a top three priority ranking order, according to frequency of response.

Table 6.1 Trustee perceptions of principal qualities by grouped ranking:
Middleton Primary School

Principal Quality	Pre-selection (questionnaire response)	Post-selection (interview response)	Average Ranking
Communication skills	1	3	2
Relationships with children	2	1	1.5
Sensitivity to rural needs	2	2	2
Classroom teaching skills	3	2	2.5
Curriculum knowledge	3	3	3
Commitment to rural education	3	3	3
Financial skills	3	3	3

From the averaged rankings of principal qualities over the time of the selection process, the trustees' essential characteristics formed into the following priority groupings:

- 1 Relationships with children
- 2 Communication skills
Sensitivity to rural needs
Classroom teaching skills
- 3 Curriculum knowledge
Commitment to rural education
Financial skills

Overall the Middleton trustees viewed their important principal qualities to be in the areas of establishing positive relationships with children, an ability to communicate clearly to all members of the school, and a sensitivity to the particular needs of a small rural community. The Middleton Board's essential perceptions remained remarkably constant over the period of the selection process, except for a lack of emphasis placed on communication skills at the end. This was borne out by all four trustees who responded that they had not deviated from their original perceptions of what qualities they were seeking in their new principal.

There were some differences in the rural Board's perceptions compared with the previous two case studies, which were strongly allied to the prospect of school closure. This accounted for the high ranking quality for the principal to be sensitive to and aware of the rural community's needs. Several trustees commented on the **social** aspect of the principal's role in a small rural community when dealing with cultural or welfare issues:

I think in some ways in country schools, there's even more pressure on a school principal because the school's the last focus in the community ... the parish priest has gone, the shops have gone where you used to vent your frustrations so the principal's the only one left ... especially if they live in the district.

In addition, all trustees were extremely concerned that, given the destabilising effects of possible closure on the children, it was vital that the new principal should be able to relate very positively to the pupils and provide that stability for them during school hours, hence the increased priority for such a principal quality by the conclusion of the selection process. Helen, in particular, was most insistent:

For the children, changes that they hear from rumour and bits and pieces, it's almost like a marriage break-up, the impending thoughts of all the things that are happening, they need that stability ... they see their world as being pulled out and taken away from them. Whatever decision is made is really hard for them so that's why you need somebody that's got it [stability].

To complement these perceptions and ascertain further their notions of educational leadership, the three trustees on the appointment sub-committee were asked to describe leadership qualities which they identified in the candidates at interview, either in a positive or negative way.

Table 6.2 Leadership qualities identified at candidate interview:
Middleton Primary School

Quality	Karen	Yvonne	Wendy
Community service	•		
Potential leadership	•		•
Sensitive to all needs		•	
Communication skills		•	

Karen and Wendy both commented that there was nothing at the interview concrete enough to enable them to focus on particular leadership traits although the few qualities they did identify were compatible with their earlier perceptions.. However, they felt they had gleaned sufficient personal information from the interview and from one candidate's curriculum vitae to be able to discern that candidate's potential leadership capacity, given the opportunity to show it in a position of educational responsibility.

Again, the trustees were presented with a 'hung parliament' scenario where they were asked to identify essential leadership factors which would differentiate the candidates and which in turn would reflect their individual selection priorities. The results are listed in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Priority order of essential leadership qualities:
Middleton Primary School

Quality	Karen	Yvonne	Wendy	Helen
Positive relationships with parents and community	1			4=
Positive relationships with children	2=	2=	1	3
Teaching skills	2=	1		
Adaptability	4=			
Vision for school	4=			
Firm decision-maker	6			
Communication skills		2=		4=
Management skills		4	3	
Leadership			2	
Stability				1
Enthusiasm				2

The ranking figures in Table 6.3 reflect the Middleton trustees' perceptions of essential principal leadership qualities. As with the other two Boards, there is a range of qualities identified and a spread of priority order. From a total of 18 quality rankings, only 2 coincided in terms of the actual quality with the same rank order. In addition, Table 6.3 identifies three highly rated leadership qualities which were nominated by two or more trustees: relationships with children, teaching skills, and relationships with the school community.

As in Table 6.1, the Middleton trustees maintained a clear preference for the principal to be able to interact positively with the children, together with sound teaching skills and an ability to establish a good working relationship with the parents and community in general, and to have the necessary communication and management skills to lead the school into a new but yet uncertain future.

Observational data recorded by the researcher during the post-interview phase were analysed and ranked in groupings according to the frequency of reference by trustees to particular critical factors affecting discussion. The objective was to compare the

observed factors with essential principal qualities which the trustees had identified in their questionnaire and during their interview with the researcher. This would indicate the interrelationship between essential qualities the trustees wanted in their principal and the factors in discussion leading to appointment. The data results are listed in Table 6.4 (Trustees qualities are denoted in ranked order).

Table 6.4 Critical factors during shortlisting and post-interview discussion:
Middleton Primary School

Group Ranking	Critical Factor	Shortlisting	Post-interview	Trustees' essential qualities
1	Teaching experience of applicants	(not applicable)	1	-
2	Interview technique		2	-
3	Multi-level teaching skills		3	2
	Potential experience/ability to cope		3	-
4	Ability to form positive relationships with children		4	1
	Confidence		4	-
	Discipline		4	-
	Organisational skills		4	-

From this data, trustee qualities were reflected in only two out of eight critical factors discussed during the post-interview discussion. By considering the top four groupings of eight critical factors in total, trustee qualities corresponded with two out of eight factors. This serves to indicate that the trustees' perceived essential principal qualities did not contribute substantially to the final decision-making phase of the selection process.

Research Question 3: Concepts of leadership and management

The Middleton trustees were asked about their understanding of leadership and management skills displayed by a principal. The results would help establish, when compared with Tables 6.1 and 6.3, the preference of trustees for a leader or a manager as their new principal.

Table 6.5 Concepts of leadership and management:
Middleton Primary School

Concept	Karen	Yvonne	Wendy	Helen
LEADERSHIP				
Mana/presence	•			
Ability to discipline	•		•	
Ability to deal with social issues	•			
Ability to deal with and guide the Board	•	•		
Good communications		•		•
Direct and decisive			•	
Ability to delegate			•	
Setting clear goals				•
Involvement in school activities				•
MANAGEMENT				
Administration: bookkeeping, paperwork	•	•	•	
Financial	•	•	•	•
Ministry of Education requirements	•	•	•	•
Managing staff	•			
Physical resources	•			
School house		•		
Policy updates		•		
Adherence to curriculum		•		
Board of Trustees operation			•	
Good communicator				•

The data in Table 6.5 records 12 different references to a principal's leadership skills compared with 17 separate references to management tasks, an increase of 42% on knowledge of leadership features. Of the concepts which elicited two or more trustee references, three were leadership tasks and three were involved with management: the leadership skills related to discipline, communication, and an ability to engage with and guide the Board of Trustees, while management concepts centred on administration, financial skills and meeting the legislative requirements of the Ministry of Education.

In contrast to the previous Boards, the Middleton trustees appeared to have a sound grasp of management issues in a school context and were more confident in this aspect than in defining the leadership concept as indicated in the data figures. This is a reflection, borne out by the trustees in subsequent interview discussion, of their involvement in the daily management function of a small rural school, and of their practical support for the teaching principal. However, the results show that their knowledge of leadership and management issues was limited to three major areas each, which reinforces the trustees' moderate to low levels of confidence in their knowledge of the principal's job.

Research Question 4: Preference for a leader or a manager

The results from Table 6.5 supported trustees' greater awareness of a principal's management function rather than a leadership role, and provided background data against which to view the results of Tables 6.1 and 6.3 in terms of the leadership/management dichotomy. Trustee perceptions of essential principal qualities did not rank leadership per se in either pre-selection or post-selection responses (Table 6.1) while one trustee ranked leadership second in the 'hung parliament' scenario (Table 6.3).

In comparison, the managerial function received more emphasis than the leadership role. Financial skills were ranked in the third important grouping of principal qualities from the trustee questionnaire and post-selection responses (Table 6.1), while management skills ranked fifth overall in Table 6.3.

These results were supported by the trustees when asked, as part of their interview schedule, if they had a leadership or managerial preference for their principal. One

trustee had a preference for leadership while the remaining three trustees recognised the relative merits of both leadership and management skills, and placed a continued emphasis on the management skills required of the principal, not only because of the multitude of administrative tasks falling to the principal of a small rural school but also to guide and advise the trustees in matters of educational management with which they were not always familiar. Overall, the Middleton trustees chose to remain equivocal on the leader/manager preference for their new principal.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Research Question 1: Knowledge of principal responsibilities

0/4 trustees felt comfortable in their knowledge of principal responsibilities.

Research Question 2: Essential principal characteristics

(a) Trustee perceptions by grouped rankings

- 1 Relationships with children
- 2 Communication skills
Sensitivity to rural needs
Classroom teaching skills
- 3 Curriculum knowledge
Commitment to rural education
Financial skills

(b) Trustees' major priorities for essential principal qualities

- Teaching skills
- Relationships with children
- Relationships with school community

(c) 2/8 critical factors at shortlisting and post-interview phases corresponded with trustees' essential principal qualities.

Research Question 3: Concepts of leadership and management

Trustees expressed greater familiarity with a principal's managerial function than with the leadership role. The former included administration, finances and legislative requirements; the latter discipline, communication and guidance for the Board of Trustees.

Research Question 4: Leader or manager preference

3/4 trustees declared no specific preference but emphasised the importance of the principal's managerial function for a rural board.

2 SELECTION PROCESSES

PROCEDURES

The following represents an account of the Middleton trustees' selection procedures. It is based on the researcher's observation field notes and subsequently validated by the trustees as an accurate record of proceedings. It traces the sequence of procedures from initial events to establish the process, the workings of the principal appointment sub-committee, to the candidate interviews. It concludes with a retrospective review of actual selection decision-making processes leading to the sub-committee recommendation.

Initial events

Events leading up to the appointment of Middleton's new principal were extraordinary to say the least. The selection process began in a procedurally 'normal' way after notification of the incumbent principal's acceptance of a promoted position. A generalised advertisement was formulated by the Board and forwarded for inclusion in the regional newspaper and in the forthcoming issue of the Education Gazette in two week's time. Simultaneously, a community survey was prepared for distribution to parents in the surrounding district. This anonymous survey listed some principal qualities and asked the respondents to indicate their degree of importance, together with any other unsolicited comments which would assist the Board in their selection.

Four days before publication of the Gazette advertisement, representatives of the Board were summoned to a special meeting convened by the Ministry of Education. Its purpose was to invite a cluster of small rural primary schools to consider amalgamation under an Education Development Initiative (EDI). This was the first indication any of the schools had of possible closure. Consequently all the school representatives were deeply shocked and threatened by the prospect. The Middleton Board had indicated at that meeting that they would consider the options of the EDI proposal but would make no further comment until the suggestion of closure and amalgamation had been discussed both at Board level and with the wider community.

Shortly after the advertisement for a permanent principal appeared in the Gazette, the Board of Trustees was asked formally by the Ministry to consider its options under the EDI proposal. It was now one week until the official closing date for applications and the Board had received seven confirmed expressions of interest. The trustees reluctantly agreed that because of the school's uncertain future, they would not offer the permanent position as advertised and contacted the applicants accordingly with the prospect of appointing a relieving principal instead.

At their next monthly Board meeting some days later, the trustees debated the ramifications of changing the status of the principalship from a permanent to a relieving appointment and the usefulness of undertaking a selection process for a short-term relieving position. They decided to follow due process and advertise the relieving position locally rather than wait for the next issue of the Gazette. They elected a principal appointment sub-committee and had wanted it to convene in a week's time. However, another EDI meeting had been called for that date by the Ministry and the sub-committee meeting had to be deferred a further week. Understandably, it was an extremely testing and stressful time for the trustees and their community, now forced to downgrade the principal's position to relieving status as well as face the likelihood of school closure. There was among the trustees an undoubted feeling of threat and uncertainty, yet underneath a quiet determination that educational bureaucracy would have more than a battle in the face of imminent rural resistance. Their relieving principal selection process would proceed.

Principal appointment sub-committee

The three member sub-committee comprised Yvonne as chairperson, Karen and Wendy. Their 2½ hour meeting in the school library was almost exclusively devoted to drawing up selection procedures. The appointment panel made considerable use of other schools' materials as it drew up the various components of the selection process, beginning with referees' reports. They examined several schools' formats, commenting on specific design features such as the amount of space to leave for answers, whether they should invite reports from two or three referees, and an accompanying guideline sheet for referees. Like the other Boards, the trustees here noted the problem that referees

invariably all write glowing comments about the applicants, and the need to establish some way of finding out applicants' negative aspects.

They used another school's covering letter as a basis for writing their own, substituting the phrases "relieving principal" and "term by term" position. The application form was re-written in a similar manner. The panel also examined the school's mission statement, redrafted the community background section of the school profile, and reviewed the currency of the present principal's job description. The focus on interview questions was based on those of another school; the trustees examined each question and elected to keep it, adjust it or substitute it with their own version. Yvonne was keen for a question to be included on homework while Wendy produced interview questions from a second school which, after discussion, produced questions on discipline and cooperative teaching skills. The panel agreed which materials were to be photocopied under the school letterhead before inclusion into the information package to applicants in two day's time. They also agreed to ask a neighbouring teaching principal to act as the principal adviser.

The Board had been forced by time constraints to move quickly to assemble its selection components and hence had been completely reactive in their production. There had not been established any agreed criteria from which to base the new principal appointment and the community survey results were not discussed. The panel had relied heavily on one particular school for its application form, referees' reports, interview questions, weighting procedure, and candidates' overall assessment schedule. There was uncertainty among the panel regarding educational terminology, eg the difference between the principal's job description and performance agreement; selection procedures such as the type of questions to ask at interview, whether to include interview questions in each applicant's information package, and the necessity to establish a time frame for the entire selection process.

For the trustees, it was clear there was to be no escape from the spectre of EDI during their deliberations. The appointment sub-committee meeting concluded with a lengthy discussion on the possibility of school closure and was joined by the incumbent principal. The principal stressed the need to convene a community meeting to gauge the district's opinion on the topic, followed by discussion on the retention of the school

swimming pool and the hidden agendas of the Ministry. One trustee had been looking over the borrowed interview questions and ruefully noted the irony and futility of the final question addressed to candidates: *Where do you see yourself in five years' time?* It was an impossible prospect for the Board too and this uncertainty had been reflected in the trustees' preparation for interview.

Interviews

The Middleton trustees had prepared for the eventuality of a shortlisting meeting but this was not required. Of the seven teachers who originally expressed interest in the permanent vacancy, only two applied for the relieving principal position, and so the Board moved directly to the interview of a male and a female candidate. The interviews were held during the evening beginning at 7 pm in one of the school classrooms and were conducted by the three women on the appointment sub-committee with the teacher representative and principal adviser in attendance. It was noticeable during the thirty minutes prior to the first interview that there was frantic activity among the trustees as they copied interview questions, decided who would ask them, and made decisions on the seating arrangements in the interview room.

The post-interview discussions were led initially by the principal adviser and teacher representative as they sought to establish precisely what the Board's selection criteria were and give their professional assessment of candidates' answers. In particular they commented on the preparedness of candidates for interview and for the job itself. The principal adviser also clarified the teacher representative's role upon request and summarised three critical selection factors which the Board should consider in the light of EDI proposals: the children's needs, the administrative and daily functioning of the school, and the principal's working relationship with the Board of Trustees.

After prolonged discussion, the trustees had reservations about both candidates and examined the possibility of re-advertising the position. One trustee was very keen to re-advertise but further reflection revealed that any future advertisements may produce no more applicants in view of the EDI publicity and the term-by-term basis of the relieving principalship. It represented a major risk for applicants to apply for such a

position, as Karen quickly pointed out: *It's a no-end job and to have that on your CV ... so they're taking a risk too.*

The additional prospect of employing a principal on a **daily** relieving basis was abhorrent to the Board so they resolved to persevere with the present process. In spite of fears of the Privacy Act, they decided to contact the two candidates and ask for the names of other referees whom they can contact by phone for further information.

The principal adviser and teacher representative departed from the meeting at 10.15 pm, leaving the three trustees to make the final decision. Following a brief coffee break at 10.35 pm, the appointment sub-committee resolved to do its best for the two applicants and confirmed its future phone contacts with referees on particular areas of concern: *We don't want to grasp at straws and get someone we're not happy with.*

An immediate phone contact with one referee confirmed the Board's concern and that candidate was eliminated. They decided that if the second candidate's references were also negative, they would readvertise the relieving vacancy in the regional newspaper in two days' time. As with the Highfield and Central Boards, the Middleton trustees had a comparatively lengthy post-interview discussion of 2½ hours. With the appointment decision still unresolved, they emerged from their selection meeting anxious and weary at 11.30 pm.

Selection decision-making

The Middleton Board was in the unenviable position of not having a range of candidates from which to choose and therefore was constrained to differentiate between two candidates only. The critical factors which emerged from the early post-interview discussions centred on negative aspects of each candidate's educational background: concerns about candidate A's lack of leadership experience and range of teaching experience (factors particularly identified and stressed by the principal adviser and teacher representative) and candidate B's presentation at interview and past performance in previous schools. It was notable that in the early stages, only two positive references were recorded on behalf of candidate A and one for B, a reiteration of the concept of

inverse decision-making first identified in the Highfield selection process. The principal adviser clearly saw the dangers of making an appointment decision based on relative degrees of negativity and minimal risk to the school:

Be careful of the way you make a decision. Tonight may not be the best time to do it.

Considerable discussion ensued with no reference made to the assessment schedule which had been prepared for evaluating candidates from their application form, referees' reports and interview, nor to any agreed set of criteria. This was recognised by the teacher representative who drew the appointment panel's attention to the problem:

Are you breaking this [discussion] down to look at criteria like leadership ... according to the interview questions? That might stop any subjective things coming into it. Your impressions count but ...

The panel got no further than its negative critical factors and a state of impasse was reached. They believed they required further information on each candidate and decided to ask both candidates for names of additional referees who could be contacted to check the Board's concerns. Lengthy discussion about readvertising the position was terminated by the teacher representative's second request of the panel to define the reasons why they were unhappy with each candidate. The same critical factors emerged as before and the selection impasse continued. The focus returned to the mechanism of readvertising the position before the principal adviser intervened to alert the panel to its circulatory discussion and to the need to obtain further data on each candidate before any informed decision could be contemplated. He also advised that the panel employ a simple system of assessment based on the Board's preferred criteria.

Following the departure of the teacher representative and principal adviser from the meeting, the panel appointed one trustee to phone a referee of candidate B. This contact produced a negative picture of lack of organisation and an inability to deal with pressure situations. While the panel acknowledged B's ability as a classroom teacher, the negative outweighed the positive and that candidate was eliminated from further consideration. The choice for the panel then became a matter of readvertising or, as a result of positive

referee contact, increasing their confidence in A's capacity to cope with principal responsibility.

Now, for the first time, the trustees referred specifically to the assessment schedule in an attempt to rate A's performance. Reference was made to the difficulty of getting specific answers from candidates at the interview, with a growing realisation that it may not so much have been the fault of the candidates but rather the panel's method of interview questioning. The panel decided to contact A's referees the following day, in regard to administrative skills and potential for the position. The feedback from these phone contacts would dictate the future pathway of the selection process.

The direction of the decision-making process, to this late stage, had been circulatory. The panel now recognised the need to move away from generalisations and 'gut feelings' to more specific data. At 11.05 pm, the panel compared the two candidates according to their interview responses on computing skills, setting high standards, relationships with children, and their capacities in mixed ability teaching, with candidate A rated more positively in setting and establishing positive relationships with children. If A's referee contacts proved successful, the panel resolved to recommend A to the full Board of Trustees for approval:

We knew what we didn't like and we were unsure of the other ... so we just had to go with who we felt was the better candidate.

Subsequent to this meeting, Karen contacted A's referees and found no reservations expressed at all in the perceived areas of concern. All the Board members were contacted with a summary of the interview meeting findings. As a result, A was invited to meet the full Board "for a chat" four days after the interview. This hour-long follow-up interview proved beneficial to the Board in clarifying a number of aspects not apparent in the formal interview, and to the candidate who was offered, and accepted, the position of relieving principal at Middleton school.

Time schedule

The selection process for the Middleton principal appointment lasted two months, beginning with the community survey for the permanent principal position and ending with the Board's formal ratification of the successful candidate. A total of four afternoon and evening meetings were partly or wholly directed towards the selection process, the total meeting time for trustees on the appointment sub-committee being ten hours. For those three trustees, no less than ten hours were spent in private preparation for selection; overall, each sub-committee member devoted approximately 20 hours work to the appointment of their new principal.

CRITERIA IDENTIFICATION

The documentary sources of the Central Board of Trustees were analysed to identify what specific criteria were used in the selection process. Each document was searched, and selection criteria extracted and grouped under four classifications: educational and professional leadership, classroom teaching, administration, and personal attributes. The two dimensional grid framework relating documentary sources to selection criteria enabled identification of both essential criteria and the consistency of criteria application. The results are listed in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Documentary analysis:
Middleton Primary School

CRITERIA	BOT categories	Community survey	Job description	Performance agreement	Newspaper advertisement	Application form	Referees' report	Interview questions
Education/ professional leadership	•	•	•	•	•			•
ability to delegate							•	
curriculum knowledge/ development	•			•				
commitment to rural education	•							
educational initiatives				•				
ability to discipline	•			•				
extra curricular	•							•
staff development				•				•
update own skills	•							
staff appraisal								•
assessment and evaluation			•	•				•
special needs			•					
ability to work collaboratively			•	•				•

CRITERIA	BOT categories	Community survey	Job description	Performance agreement	Newspaper advertisement	Application form	Referees' report	Interview questions
qualifications			•			•		
computer skills			•					
staff support				•			•	•
conflict resolution				•				
Classroom teaching skills/experience	•	•		•	•	•	•	
mixed ability teaching skills	•							•
self discipline of pupils			•					
special/individual needs				•			•	
classroom management/ homework								•
cooperative teaching methods								•
Administration				•	•		•	
financial skills	•	•	•	•				•
management of staff		•		•				
relationships with BOT			•	•				
support charter			•					

CRITERIA	BOT categories	Community survey	Job description	Performance agreement	Newspaper advertisement	Application form	Referees' report	Interview questions
resource management			•					
Personal:								
ability to communicate	•	•	•					
skills and attitude						•		
relationships with children	•	•	•				•	
sensitivity to rural needs	•				•		•	•
energetic	•							
approachability	•	•						
enthusiasm	•							
sense of justice	•		•					
sense of humour	•	•						
well-rounded personality	•							
honesty	•							
relationships with community	•		•	•			•	•
tolerance	•							
open-mindedness	•	•						

A summary of the major criteria identified in three or more documents is listed under the four main focus areas and includes the following recurring themes:

Educational/professional leadership

- provision of leadership for staff and pupils
- assessment and evaluation
- ability to work collaboratively
- provision of support for staff

Classroom teaching

- teaching experience and teaching skills

Administration

- financial skills

Personal attributes

- ability to communicate
- ability to establish positive relationships with children
- sensitivity to rural needs
- ability to establish positive relationships with parents/community

There were variations in internal consistency of criteria application. Inconsistencies were noted in a number of areas. For example, 'approachability', 'sense of humour', and 'open-mindedness' were personal attributes designated by both the Board and community but which were not specifically followed up later, especially in the referees' report; the 'ability to delegate' was a criterion featured in the referees' report form but it did not occur in any previous documentation.

Found in the job description or principal performance agreement but not covered specifically in either the referees' report or interview were a total of 11 criteria including 'curriculum knowledge / development' and 'relationship with the BOT'. Again the generalised nature of the application and referees' report forms, both borrowed from another school, and the reactive formation of the interview questions, were probably the

major cause for the dysfunctional linkage between the established criteria and the subsequent assessment procedures employed. As Wendy reflected:

... but thinking back, the [interview] questions, having been copied, were not all relevant to our situation.

Observational records of the interview meeting were also examined to establish the level of criteria consistency with that identified in the documentary analysis and by trustee perceptions, and to observe any change in criteria application over time. Again selection criteria were extracted and grouped together under the four major categories, as displayed in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7 Major criteria identified across a range of sources:
Middleton Primary School

Major criteria	Trustee perceptions	Documents	Shortlisting	Interview
EDUCATIONAL/PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP			(not applicable)	
curriculum knowledge/development	•			
commitment to rural education	•			
provision of leadership for staff and pupils		•		
assessment and evaluation		•		
ability to work collaboratively		•		
provision of support for staff		•		
ability to cope as principal				•
CLASSROOM TEACHING				
mixed ability teaching skills	•			•
practical teaching skills	•	•		•
ADMINISTRATION				
financial skills	•	•		
PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES				
ability to communicate	•	•		
positive relationships with children	•	•		•
sensitivity to rural needs	•	•		
positive relationships with parent/community		•		
confidence				•
maintain discipline				•
organisational skills				•
interview technique				•

Results indicate a variation in consistency of application from the early phase of the selection process which include trustees' perceptions and documentary criteria, to the later stages where more informal criteria play a role in the final decision-making. While initial criteria are spread among the categories, the emphasis latterly has moved, with the exception of the classroom teaching component, towards personal factors and interview performance. When the trustees were asked about the Board's application of selection criteria, they all believed they had been relatively consistent. However, the data shows additional criteria such as the ability to cope, self organisation, maintenance of discipline, personal confidence and interview technique being introduced in the concluding stages. This lack of consistency is supported by qualifications made later on this topic by the trustees; Karen in particular acknowledged some change in emphasis as a result of extra information received during phone contacts with the referees.

SUBJECTIVE INFLUENCES

Selective coding of data from individual trustee interviews and from observational recording of Middleton selection meetings was used to determine the possible influence of subjective elements emanating from the incumbent principal, authoritative sources, prior knowledge of candidates, impressionism, and other external features.

An examination of the observational data from all meetings of the Middleton Board revealed only a single reference to the incumbent principal. During their individual interviews the trustees confirmed that they were all looking for a change in leadership style. They acknowledged and appreciated the incumbent's interpersonal skills with the children and stabilising effect on them, teaching ability and empathy with the community. They were, however, seeking an opposite direction in aspects of leadership such as a structured direction for the school, educational challenges for the pupils, precision in delegated duties and disciplinary procedures, and an enhanced relationship between the principal and the Board. All agreed that the performance and qualities of the incumbent principal were powerful influences on the selection process and several trustees reinforced this independently: *You do make a comparison with that person, you've only got that person to judge with.*

Prior knowledge of the candidates was another consideration of influences on the trustees' decision. There were instances during the post-interview discussion when trustees were aware of candidates' past experiences in other schools including the knowledge of a resignation from a previous post. The knowledge had been gained through other teachers and parents of other communities. The trustees indicated that prior knowledge had a partial influence on their views of the candidates and acknowledged that while it was not good to have such information in the back of their minds at the interview, it was useful to have a basis upon which to verify any past concerns by gathering concrete evidence about candidates' backgrounds, both to be fair to the candidates and to protect the school's future.

The influence of referees' reports was again an important factor in the selection process. Trustees found them a useful starting point but too prone to making glowing comments. They resented having to "read between the lines" and expressed a real need to receive honest comments from referees:

To me, referees' reports are in some ways invalid because they're only going to ask a person they know well enough who is going to give a reasonable report for them ... referees' reports are a waste of time; I'd rather have a free hand and be able to ring up past people.

This, in fact, occurred when the trustees employed consequential phone calls to contact referees to obtain more specific information on areas of concern emerging from the candidates' interviews. This follow-up to the referees' reports, in the eyes of the trustees, had been absolutely crucial in making an informed selection decision.

The principal adviser played an influential role during the Middleton principal appointment. The adviser was asked to peruse the initial set of interview questions and make comment on them, as well as attend the interviews. He contributed in the early stages of the post-interview discussion by encouraging the panel to interview according to their set criteria and to avoid introducing priorities which had not previously been stated, and by clarifying issues of teacher registration and the role of the teacher representative on the Board. In addition to this procedural role, he contributed directly by commenting on one candidate's suitability for the position and on their interview

responses, and summarised for the Board the critical factors behind the principal selection decision, especially in light of the EDI debate. The trustees appreciated the assistance of such an external person who could maintain a professional watch over proceedings. They did, however, register their concern that the adviser was not impartial in supporting the cause of one of the candidates, despite an earlier assertion that his role was not to make their minds up for them.

Impressionistic features also played a part in trustees' perceptions of candidates throughout the selection process. During the sub-committee meeting and interview discussions, trustees were observed to refer to "taking an instant like or dislike to someone", "gut feelings" and "you have to go on your first instinct". When asked what role impressions had played for them as individuals, all three Middleton trustees present at the interview unashamedly agreed that impressionism was a major influence on them. The sources ranged from the manner of curriculum vitae presentation as an indication of a candidate's organisational skills to personal traits observed at interview, including a genuine interest in the school, manner of speaking, body language, levels of confidence. One trustee was particularly honest in her own self assessment:

I'm a terrible person for meeting someone and summing them up in the first two minutes! And that summing up sometimes, be it liked or not, will carry me through. Either I like a person first off or I don't like a person. I have been known to change but very seldom. I am swayed by first impressions.

There were two other factors observed in the process which contributed to the Middleton trustees' perceptions of candidates. The first related to the teacher representative's opinions about the respective candidates. As with the principal adviser, it was clear that the teacher supported one particular candidate, despite an indication that they were prepared to work with either candidate. In the event, the sub-committee recommended otherwise. This resulted in the teacher's non-attendance at the Board ratification meeting and subsequent preference not to communicate with Board members, and in the principal adviser reportedly "saying in no uncertain terms what he thought of our final outcome!" The second factor was the impact of each candidate's interview technique on the trustees. While they did not comment on any positive features, the trustees did express

concern about candidates' lack of confidence, nonchalant manner, non-specific answers, and a lack of knowledge about rural education.

GENDER EQUITY

During the events leading up to interview, there were brief references made to gender issues within the selection process. The sub-committee of three female trustees commented that they liked the section of the borrowed application form which allowed applicants to describe their non-paid work experience, that "this was good for women with broken service". This appreciation of women's variable work opportunities was again demonstrated during the post-interview discussion when the female candidate's lack of full-time teaching experience was being argued. One trustee came to her defence: *You can't wipe her out because of her personal reasons [Time out to care for children]* and later, at the end of the interview meeting, the trustees were accepting of the candidate's part-time teaching as a result of "having to chase her husband round the country" and therefore not a fair reason to exclude her from consideration.

As individuals, three of the four trustees interviewed believed that none of them had a preference for appointing a male or female principal nor did they believe there were any particular community preconceptions. Analysis of their interview data revealed few specific comments on gender issues. It indicated that they were looking for the best person for the job, in spite of being very aware of gender balance for the children and that they had a female teacher and an all female Board of Trustees. The fourth trustee would have preferred a male in the principal's position on the basis of the perceived difficulty that two women teachers would have to face in dealing with boys' disciplinary problems.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: SELECTION PROCESS

Research Question 5: Selection procedures

Sequence consisted of sub-committee meeting, candidate interview, selection decision-making.

Points of interest

Selection organisation:	trustees rely heavily on another school's selection format
Shortlisting:	not required, reduced number of applicants resulting from Education Development Initiative
Interviews:	hasty organisation of interview details non-specific nature of trustees' questions fail to elicit specific answers
Decision-making:	inverse decision-making critical factors in appointment rest on capacity to cope with principal responsibility and administrative skills
Time involved:	trustees spend approximately 20 hours each on principal selection

Research Question 6: Criteria identification

(a) Identification of specific criteria across documentary sources.

Leadership:	provision of leadership for staff and pupils assessment and evaluation ability to work collaboratively provision of support for staff
Classroom teaching:	previous teaching experience teaching skills
Administration:	financial skills
Personal attributes:	ability to communicate positive relationships with children sensitivity to rural needs positive relationship with parents/community

(b) Consistency of criteria application

Documents show inconsistent application and assessment of criteria

No person specification

Five additional criteria noted: ability to cope, self organisation, discipline, personal confidence, interview technique.

Research Question 7: Subjective influences

Role of incumbent principal:	trustees sought an opposite direction for the school
Prior knowledge of candidates:	4/4 trustees acknowledged partial influence
Referees reports:	phone calls to referees more constructive than reports
Principal adviser:	positive and negative influences
Impressionism:	unanimous agreement on influence
External factors:	staff opinions candidates' interview technique

Research Question 8: Gender equity

3/4 trustees had no preference for gender of principal: one trustee preferred a male for disciplinary reasons.

Credit given for candidate's broken service.

3 TRUSTEE REACTIONS TO THE PROCESS

At the conclusion of the trustee interview, each trustee was invited to comment on the selection process. The trustees of Middleton school presented various reflections on their principal appointment process, both in terms of selection procedures and principal leadership qualities. Their suggestions for future trustee training for principal selection included a need for guidelines on the sort of qualities to look for in a principal, especially the professional aspects, as trustees had to "glean a lot of criteria from word of mouth". They expressed a definite preference for on-site assistance rather than travel great distances to attend a training course. The four trustees interviewed also believed that a basic outline of selection procedures "for the everyday person to understand" would be of considerable help. Of particular benefit to them in their appointment process would have been information on timelines, permanent/relieving status, interview techniques, ramifications of the Privacy Act, use of external advisers, post-appointment protocols and contractual arrangements.

The trustees' reflections on the overall principal selection process revealed a range of topics and underlying concerns. The problem of which candidate provided the best match or fit with the school community again surfaced. Yvonne, the Board chairperson, alluded to this aspect in her reference to the crucial working relationship between principal and Board:

We're not an easy Board to get on with, and X would have problems with Boards and we were definitely not the one, definitely not in a position to go and make the same mistakes - for X, it wouldn't have been fair.

The leadership and managerial style of the new principal at Middleton would also have to be compatible with the Board's mode of operation if there was to be a functional relationship between the two.

The opposing factors of past experience and potential experience posed a critical issue for trustees during the decision-making process. Did they take the safe option and opt for the previous experience of candidates or did they risk employing a candidate on the promise of potential performance? Helen articulated the trustees' philosophy on this

point: *It's important to look at not just work experience but life's experiences are really important in teaching too.*

The selection panel had viewed favourably one candidate's involvement in different community groups and their parental role in a range of social and educational activities outside of teaching:

In doing that, you have to learn an awful lot to put yourself second; it's not easy, you learn a lot from that, and you've got to take full advantage of that time [out of the work force] ... really valuable learning experiences and very valuable for our children.

The limitations of the one-off interview method for assessing candidates were exposed when the appointment sub-committee's recommended candidate attended a full Board of Trustees meeting for a second interview. The trustees commented that nothing concrete enough had been revealed at the first interview to show the candidate's real leadership qualities but that considerably more was learned from the second interview with the Board. For Karen, the difference was quite apparent:

I think personally, from the interview situation, that didn't really help sometimes. The next time we actually met X, it was better: we could actually find a lot more - definitely a more positive picture of X.

It was of interest to note the trustees' reaction to their employer role during the principal selection. There were concerns expressed by individual trustees about their role as an employing authority and the heavy responsibility that Boards carried as a result, compared with the previous school committees prior to 1989:

It's a major job, you've got to make the right decision and that's always going to be a problem ... you're always going to be a bit concerned that you haven't made the right decision and it's only going to be time which will tell if you have or not ...

In addition to the employment of the principal, there also surfaced concerns about ongoing management responsibility which has been given to Boards in their employer capacity. Wendy not only disliked the task of arranging contractual details at the conclusion of the selection process but was unhappy with the whole employer responsibility for the payment of staff:

I had imagined that the Ministry of Education did the pay ... I was quite surprised they gave us that hand. That's another thing I think the Ministry shouldn't have put on the Board, they should do that. I don't like being involved with salary.

The underlying threat of school closure was, not unnaturally, always at the back of trustees' minds throughout the entire appointment process. Helen could appreciate the positive and negative aspects and did not deny the per capita cost of operating a small rural school. Her concern was for the fear of an uncertain future sown in the children's minds. The pressure of possible closure was felt keenly by other trustees and seen as a major impact on the selection process. Wendy sadly remembered feeling buoyed by the initial registrations of interest from teachers for the permanent position, only to be faced with a severely limited choice brought about by circumstances beyond her control:

We had seven expressions of interest. Once they found out it was term by term, they didn't want to know about it. It definitely made the situation more difficult in the fact that people just weren't interested. They wanted to know what was happening but we didn't know either.

No one was subjected to more pressure from the EDI proposal than Yvonne in her responsibility as Board chairperson. She had to lead the Board through EDI meetings, change the status of the principal's position from permanent to term reliever, at the same time knowing the community and the trustees felt strongly about the prospect of school closure. To compound these problems, she also had to deal with Ministry approaches during the advertising phase, in the knowledge that the school's fate was inextricably linked to the employment and status of the new principal:

If we didn't start the year with a principal, the Ministry could come in and say you are closed, so we did have a deadline. And if we started putting in temporary relieving principals, it would have been easy for the Ministry to carry on, it's going to be easy enough anyway. When our advertisement was first in the paper, the Ministry were on the phone that day so they just didn't waste any time We would have been at another school if we hadn't managed to employ somebody - that put a bit of pressure on.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS: DIRECTIONS FOR TRUSTEE TRAINING

Research Question 9: Future trustee training suggestions

Principal qualities:	need for guidelines on professional qualities
Selection procedures:	outline of procedures in non-technical language
Reflections:	notion of 'best fit' based on local needs and working relationship with the Board
	potential versus past experience
	added employer responsibilities
	pressure of possible school closure

Looking in retrospect at their selection process, the Middleton trustees all agreed that their learning experience had been considerable and that they felt more confident of undertaking a principal selection again. This positive attitude was counterbalanced by the realisation that their first-time principal appointment had been approached with little knowledge of the principal's position or the processes of selection, and had been hastily effected to have at least a temporary appointee in place as soon as possible. This was intended to deflect some of the pressure for possible school closure which was being exerted during the appointment by the central education authority. It was, as Karen later remarked, the worst possible scenario for selecting their new principal.

In the following chapter, the focus of the thesis moves from the settings of individual case studies to an analysis of combined research results, as they relate to the research questions on principal selection perceptions and processes.

Chapter Seven

FROM PERCEPTION TO PROCESS: AN ANALYSIS

In Chapter 1 it has been argued from the conceptual literature on educational leadership that a dichotomy exists between school leadership and management, and that this tension continues to play a major role in principals' effectiveness in the present climate of change in New Zealand schools. This is the contextual backdrop against which Boards of Trustees must form their perceptions about the sort of leader and person they seek to be their new principal. Similarly, the context of international research findings in Chapter 2 presented a less than positive picture of principal selection systems which, while parading fair and objective practices, in reality had succumbed to localised perceptions of what a principal is "supposed to be", undeclared criteria, a reliance on candidate performance at the interview, and a lack of knowledge of the principal's current role.

The analysis in this chapter will illustrate not only similarities and differences among the three case studies but also how the case study research results reinforce or contradict the conceptual and research literature as they relate to principal selection perceptions and process. Following Schatzman and Strauss' (1973) model of data analysis using a substantive - logical lever combination, the results are investigated from the trustees' and the researcher's observational viewpoints. This has the advantage of gaining distance and variability in the research perspective. The analysis and subsequent findings are based around the first eight research questions within the major thematic classifications of trustee perceptions of educational leadership, and the selection process itself.

1 Trustee Perceptions of Educational Leadership

Knowledge of principal responsibilities

- Are all trustees fully aware of the tasks currently demanded of a school principal?

Of the seventeen trustees interviewed, only five felt confident that they were fully aware of the tasks currently demanded of a school principal, of whom two were the teacher representatives on the Board and would have been expected to answer affirmatively.

This finding supports the evidence established previously by Morgan et al (1983) and Williams (1988) whereby selectors displayed a vague knowledge of the principal's job, precluding a valid job analysis of the position as it was performed in that particular school. The redeeming feature of this aspect in these case studies was that two of the three Boards reviewed, with the outgoing principal's assistance, the currency of the existing principal's job description and performance agreement at an early stage of the selection process. Nevertheless, it remains that 12/17 of the trustees in the sample were not confident in their knowledge and certainly their understanding of the array of tasks carried out by their principal.

Trustees gave a variety of reasons for this lack of knowledge, ranging from the demands of a full-time job to being recent arrivals on the Board. Most trustees referred indirectly to the difficulties they experienced, as lay people, of being knowledgeable about the tasks and overall performance of the principal. For example:

One thing that worries me, as a Board member, I don't know how to check up to see how good he is, apart from ERO. They say, as a Board, we're supposed to monitor teaching levels and all that. As a Board we're not qualified to monitor how a principal's working. As long as the kids are getting educated, that's my main worry. As for the running of the school, that's another thing altogether

This topic of lay supervision and appointment of a professional will become one of the emergent issues as the analysis progresses.

Principal leadership qualities

- a What are the essential characteristics which trustees seek in an effective principal?
- b Are there changes in trustee perceptions of principal characteristics over the time of the appointment process?

The first four tables of results in each case study were designed to inform, from a variety of sources within the selection process, on particular qualities trustees were looking for in their new principal, during shortlisting, interview, pre and post-selection

phases. In addition, the forced scenario situation of a 'hung parliament' enabled an analysis of the trustees' priority order of essential leadership qualities while the tables of critical factors provided further clarification of principal qualities under discussion.

Data from the first four tables of each case study were analysed for priority groupings of principal qualities, condensed, and essential qualities extracted according to frequency and ranking of priority ratings. The results are presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1 Essential principal qualities in ranked order:
Highfield, Central and Middleton Primary Schools

Quality	Highfield	Central	Middleton
Practical teaching experience	1	-	2
Ability to work collaboratively	2	-	-
Positive relationship with children	3	1	1
Ability to communicate	4	-	4
Positive personal attributes	5	2=	-
Leadership of staff and pupils	-	2=	-
Curriculum development	-	5=	-
Public relations	-	4	-
Professionalism	-	5=	-
Positive relationship with parents/ community	-	-	3
Management skills	-	-	5

Over the range of data collection points of questionnaire, interview and observation, three qualities consistently appeared:

- positive relationships with children
- practical classroom experience/teaching skills
- positive personal attributes

Less consistently but strongly supported qualities included:

- ability to communicate effectively
- leadership of staff and pupils
- ability to work collaboratively
- positive relationships with parent/community.

These findings are not dissimilar to those principal qualities identified in Chapman's (1985a) investigation of school administration selection in Australia. Parallels are noted in functional areas of responsibility such as establishing positive working relationships, effective communications, provision of leadership and shared decision-making. In these New Zealand settings, the top three qualities of all Boards are a reflection of appointing a teaching principal with associated classroom and leadership responsibilities, while the range of emphasis given to different qualities amongst the Boards serves to underline the role that local conditions or needs play in principal selection decision-making.

It was also of interest to note any change in trustees' perceptions of principal qualities over the time of the appointment process, to check for additional qualities emerging at the final stages. From Table 4.1, it can be seen that the Highfield Board maintained consistency in its top four qualities with an increased emphasis on relationships with parents and management skills, as demonstrated by increases in their rankings from fourth to second across the duration of the selection process. Similarly Table 6.1 shows the Middleton trustees' consistency in two of their top qualities with a reduced emphasis placed on communication skills at the end of the process, as that quality dropped from first to third in the grouped rankings.

However, Table 5.1 indicates that the Central trustees had some variation in perception over time. Although its top two qualities remained static, 'relationships with children' and 'qualifications' gained a higher profile, as indicated by their movement from pre-selection rankings of third and fourth respectively to first ranking by the post-selection phase. Lower priority qualities such as management skills, curriculum knowledge, educational vision, caring attitude were replaced by a public relations role and personal characteristics of integrity and a sense of humour.

Overall, while there were no significant fluctuations in the 17 trustees' perceptions over time, there were definite changes in emphases in the concluding stages of the process, especially as further information about the candidates became available to them through observation at interview or through subsequent phone contact with referees. Such changes in emphases given to principal qualities serve to reinforce earlier findings by Baltzell and Dentler (1983) and Morgan (1986) that particular principal qualities such as educational leadership become only one element to consider amongst a number of other qualities and non-job related factors. They may also underline the latent but influential nature of trustee assumptions about qualities necessary in a principal, and reflect some variability in commonsense attitudes about how we judge and relate to others.

The clear preference for personal leadership qualities by these three New Zealand Boards of Trustees is supported by the research literature. Driscoll (1982) points to certain qualities in a school head which go without further definition: integrity, energy, commitment, ability to communicate and lead diverse groups towards common goals, courage, humour and a potential for growth. She sees that the job to be done will determine other qualifications such as skills in fiscal and plant management, public relations and staff development. Likewise Jordan (1988) claims that personal characteristics of the principal cannot be ignored when studying what constitutes effective instructional leadership, while the personal contribution of the principal cannot be devalued:

The literature already recognises creative individual input as the contribution which leadership alone can make You need to find somebody who can find the tall ground and stand on it ... successful educational reform requires leadership from within, and that could amount to nothing more not less than the creative input of a single individual (Sungaila 1990 pp 10-11).

It is this personal and professional contribution to the school and its participants which all these case study Boards have highlighted as essential qualities in their respective principal selections.

Leadership and management

- Are trustees aware of leadership and management activities currently performed by the principal?
- Do trustees have a preference for a leader or a manager as the new principal of their school?

The conceptual literature on school leadership and effectiveness had strongly pointed to problems caused by an over-emphasis on managerialism in educational administration, and to a growing awareness that the bureaucratic administrator is no longer the most effective school principal (Kanthak 1991) and that rational management alone cannot assist schools to cope with the complexities of change (Bowe et al 1992). The research questions in this study sought to determine trustees' awareness and understanding of the respective concepts of leadership and management leading to ascertaining their preference for a leader or a manager as the new principal of their school.

From the interview data, Highfield and Central trustees' knowledge of the concept of school leadership exceeded that of their concept of management by 35% and 60% respectively. However, the trustees at Middleton School reversed this trend in their 42% greater knowledge of school management, which reflected their personal commitment to assisting the daily running of their small rural school. Arising also from trustee comments during their interviews was the lack of in-depth knowledge of the principal's leadership and management activities, a finding which parallels the trustees' overall lack of confidence in their knowledge about what a principal actually **does** in a school. This trustee uncertainty about the concept of leadership and management has been replicated by Barrington's (1992) national survey of primary trustees' views on governance and management where just over 50% of respondents could make a distinction between the terms. Both sets of findings suggest that there is a need for further information or training in the areas of school leadership and management.

Preliminary results from trustees' perceptions of essential principal leadership qualities, which were strongly directed towards personal characteristics, gave an early indication of whether trustees' preference would be for a leader or a manager of their school. Data from Tables 4.1/4.3; 5.1/5.3; 6.1/6.3 confirmed trustees' preference for leadership qualities than for managerial skills. This was substantiated by trustee interviews which

revealed that 13/14 trustees preferred their principal in a leadership role while three Middleton trustees did not differentiate between the two roles. This leadership preference was exemplified by one trustee who, at the same time, acknowledged the managerial pressures currently placed on school principals:

I prefer them to spend more time educating the children than worrying about the running of the school as such - but then that's an unfair thing for us to say because, well, the requirements that the Ministry put on them They can't afford to do that for their own sake.

The evidence, from these case studies and from the literature for supporting leadership as a prime quality in our principals, is compelling. The three primary Boards of Trustees in this study have clearly indicated their preference for leadership skills while a consensus is building in the literature and research that managerialism is not a factor in producing effective schools (Codd 1990, Blairs 1992, Silins 1994, Grace 1995). To add to this gathering support for leadership before management, educational theorists and researchers point to further change in the principal's role:

Future school administrators, in order to be effective, will have to transform their roles from an emphasis on management, enforcing conformity and administrative control, to roles that emphasize two overarching elements. The first is transformation from management to instructional leadership ... another will be as a facilitator, coordinator and extra organisational representative (Menacker 1994).

This will be closely allied to a reorientation of schools from bureaucratic control to professional empowerment of teachers, or control through "professional socialization, purposing and shared values, and collegiality and natural interdependence" (Sergiovanni 1991 p 60). This concept of professional empowerment has also encouraged other groups of researchers to advocate further reconstruction of the role of educational leadership with reference to leadership style, particularly women's style of leadership. It is a style in which leadership looks to empower others rather than have power over others (Blackmore 1989).

Throughout the gathering of data on leadership and management issues for this study, there continued to surface the essential dilemma facing principals (and teaching

principals especially) in their daily workload in New Zealand schools, and Boards of Trustees as they investigate the core skills now required of a new principal: how does a teaching principal teach, lead **and** manage in the present climate of today's schools? How does a teaching principal adequately hope to meet children, parent, staff and Board expectations that their predominant task is to teach and lead, while Government pressure maintains its drive for managerial efficiency and its persistent notion of the school principal as the Chief Executive Officer?

It is little wonder then, against this background of competing demands and desirable competencies within the principal's job, that lay people on Boards of Trustees experience difficulty in defining precisely the nature of the position as it is currently performed, or as they would like it to be performed. One wonders also for how much longer the thrust of managerialism on a teaching principal's workload can continue before it ultimately impinges upon classroom teaching and learning and begins to affect schools as satisfying places for our children to be educated.

2 The Selection Process

Appointment procedures

- What general procedures are followed by Boards in their selection process?

The task of principal appointment faced by the three Boards of Trustees was a most demanding one and seemed on occasions to be almost daunting in its magnitude. It is a task with far-reaching consequences:

The aim must be to recommend the appointment of that applicant who, with the strictest application of the criteria, will provide the greatest possible opportunity for the school to achieve its goals in the short, medium and long term (Chapman 1985b p 27).

The appointment procedures employed were similar in essence, with some major variations brought about by individual Board choice or dictated by circumstances beyond the Board's control. Two of the Boards held preliminary meetings to outline the procedures involved while all three developed surveys from which they could gauge

more extensive opinion about the qualities the community was seeking in its new principal.

Consistent use was also made of an initial planning meeting to set the foundation for future appointment directions: review of job descriptions and principal performance agreement, time frame for the process, election of appointment sub-committee as appropriate, qualities the Board expected in the new principal. It was notable that only the Highfield trustees had a policy on principal appointment and that the Central Board alone chose to employ full Board participation to direct the selection process, in contrast to the delegated responsibility given to a principal appointment sub-committee by the other two Boards.

During the shortlisting phase, with the exception of Middleton school, two Boards utilized similar methods for selecting some candidates for interview and for eliminating the remainder. The Central Board provided a variation by employing a consultant to assist with training in interview techniques. For the actual interviews, two Boards used the sub-committee panel of three trustees together with a principal adviser, while the Central trustees employed a whole-Board approach without any external guidance, the locations varying from school classroom and staffroom to an off-site office.

The selection procedures of each case study were examined using data gathered from observation field notes and from trustee interviews. These revealed six features which support previous research or provide different contextual perspectives of the process of selection decision-making. Firstly, the localised nature of principal selection was reinforced by the range of different critical factors leading to an appointment decision in each of the three Boards. Highfield's critical factors centred on interview performance, personal qualities and the notion of 'best fit' for the local school community. For those trustees, the focus for the final decision was on personal rather than educational issues. In the case of the Central trustees, the critical factors rested on the preferred leadership style which the Board desired to move the school in a different direction. For the Middleton Board, with a shortlist of two candidates, their critical factors for selection were, in the end, pragmatic in their focus on administrative skills and on the candidates' capacity to cope with principal responsibility.

Secondly, a common source of difficulty for all three Boards lay in deriving a valid set of assessment instruments by which candidates' application forms and interview performance could be judged. Highfield's assessment categories were found to be incompatible with the information sought in the application form. Ironically Middleton borrowed and used the same application form and assessment schedule and were condemned to repeat the error. While Central's assessment criteria followed parent and teacher recommendations, it was nonetheless left to each individual trustee's discretion as to how they assessed their set of application forms.

Thirdly, in a further twist to the trustees' use of assessment schedules whose validity was questionable, all three Boards at some stage of their decision-making chose to ignore what their evaluations were telling them. This was particularly apparent in the Central Board's grading of their final four applicants for shortlisting where an eliminated applicant had a higher set of grades than ones who were shortlisted. This deficiency was dramatically exposed at the conclusion of the process when the bottom placed candidate after shortlisting won the position by the end of the interview. As a consequence of this change in ranking of the successful candidate from shortlisting to interview, serious concerns were raised retrospectively by Central trustees about the reliability of their shortlisting process: were there good applicants whom they had passed over in the early stages of selection? Trustees were worried about their ability to make a shortlisting decision "based on what's on paper". For some, their biggest concern about the whole process was getting the right people shortlisted. One trustee correctly suggested that it might have been prudent to check out numbers 6 to 10 in the rankings before shortlisting, to ensure that the best five were interviewed. As Adey (1989) observed in his study of English schools' selection processes, this lack of precision resulted in shortlisting unsuitable candidates. It is almost certain in this case study that it resulted in the rejection of a potentially suitable candidate.

A fourth feature emerged from the interview situation which offered a rich source of contextual insight into the manner in which trustees were coping with the pressures of the principal appointment process. From observation data recorded on the day of interviews and from trustees' own subsequent comments, all 17 trustees looked apprehensive and expressed their obvious feelings of nervousness, prompting one to admit later that he felt more nervous appointing a primary school principal than a new

staff member in his own company! Pressures too were apparent in trustees' last minute arrangements regarding the wording and sequence of interview questions. The effects of a lack of a planned approach to formalising questions at interview were reflected in two Boards' eventual realisation that the candidates' generalised answers were the result of the non-specific nature of the questions they were being asked. This lends weight to Morgan et al's (1983) argument that properly constructed interviews would improve the quality of the information acquired. It was noted also that all Boards made extensive use of phone contacts with referees prior to and during the interviews. Two Boards, however, felt considerable uncertainty about such contact in view of the ramifications of the Privacy Act but pressed ahead with their use.

The fifth feature of the selection process was the use of inverse decision-making to differentiate similarly rated candidates. Both Highfield and Middleton Boards displayed this tendency towards the worst-case scenario which shaped each candidate's fate in terms of who posed the greatest risk to the school's future. The reasons why appointment panels engage in this type of selection procedure are difficult to ascertain. One possible explanation may be that the Boards, having established that equally rated candidates met all the fundamental criteria to effect a positive principalship, then look for negative factors to determine their own "threshold of pain", ie what defects in each candidate can they tolerate and which foibles will prove intolerable to them and to the community? Another explanation, following Middleton's process, is that there was insufficient data gathered initially, and the assessment systems were inadequate to provide the panel with a means by which they could elicit a positive picture of the candidates' strengths, thus forcing a focus on the weaknesses they saw in the candidates' interview performance.

The difference between the Highfield and Central trustees' critical pathway leading to appointment invites a different hypothesis. The Highfield critical factors were characterised by inverse decision-making while Central's critical factors were based essentially on a choice between the leadership style and personality types of the respective candidates. Is there a link between the type of eventual decision-making and the characteristics of the incumbent principal? In the case of Highfield, it was apparent that many of the qualities the Board sought in its new principal were encapsulated by the incumbent; the trustees knew what they wanted, they had to decide what they did

not want. Conversely, the Central trustees were seeking to effect a principal selection which would take their school in an opposite direction than that set by the incumbent. They knew what they did not want; it was a case of deciding what qualities they **did** want in the next principal.

Finally, analysis of trustees' responses to this study's questions on the selection process revealed a major problem faced by all Boards in the interview situation: how to enable each candidate to demonstrate the range of skills necessary to meet the basic requirements of a teaching principal's position. They quickly realised the inability of the interview to predict future performance and in so doing reinforced criticisms of the interview by the literature of human resource management. The poor predictive power of the interview in hiring personnel has been well documented in the research literature (Dunnette and Borman 1979, Klitgaard 1985) although cases have been put that interviews have several other purposes including a vehicle to provide information, to confirm first impressions (Arvey and Campion 1982) and to check on verbal facility (Bredeson and Gips 1983).

In summary, the main defects in selection procedures identified in this study have been replicated by previous research studies (Morgan et al 1983, Baltzell and Dentler 1983): the mismatch between the competencies required for the job and the methodologies for gaining valid information about candidates' capacities to meet those competencies.

Criteria identification

- a To what extent do trustees identify specific criteria that will be used to select their new principal?
- b Are such criteria consistently applied throughout the process?

The documentary analysis of the three Boards' selection process in Tables 4.6, 5.6 and 6.6, indicated that the criteria employed were specific and could be categorised into four major groupings: educational/professional leadership, classroom teaching, administrative skills and personal attributes. What was of additional interest in this study was the extent to which the trustees translated their perceptions of a principal into the reality of

documented criteria, and their consistency of criteria application and assessment throughout the process.

The data from each case study in respect of major criteria identified in documentary sources were condensed to ascertain any patterns or dissimilarities among the cases. The results are shown in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2 Criteria identification across documentary sources:
Highfield, Central and Middleton Primary Schools

Criteria	Highfield	Central	Middleton
Educational/Professional Leadership			
Provision of leadership for staff and pupils	•	•	•
Provision of learning opportunities	•		
Provision of extra-curricular activities	•		
Ability to work collaboratively	•		•
Ability to delegate	•		
Knowledge of educational issues	•		
Professional development of self and staff	•		
Curricula knowledge and development		•	
Appropriate qualifications		•	
Relationship with and support of staff		•	•
Ability to discipline		•	
Assessment and evaluation			•
Classroom Teaching			
Practical teaching experience	•		•
Teaching skills		•	•
Special needs		•	
Administration			
Administrative skills	•	•	
Ability to plan	•		
Financial management		•	•
Personal attributes			
Ability to communicate	•	•	•
Ability to establish positive relationships with	•		•
Sensitivity to community needs	•		
Ability to establish positive relationships with	•		•
Cultural appreciation		•	
Sensitivity to rural needs			•

There was uniformity among all three cases in the criteria of leadership of staff and pupils and in the ability to communicate. Other major criteria supported by two of the three Boards' documentation included:

- working collaboratively
- relationships with and support of staff
- teaching experience and teaching skills
- administrative skills
- financial management
- ability to establish positive relationships with children
- ability to establish positive relationships with parents/community

Comparing the results of Tables 7.1 and 7.2, it is evident that a high correlation exists between the essential qualities trustees desired in their new principal and the criteria set out in their documentation. The only apparent difference was in the reduced emphasis given to managerial skills in trustees' lists of essential qualities.

On a case by case basis, by comparing each Board's preferred principal qualities (Tables denoted .1) with their resultant criteria (Tables denoted .6), it was found that 70% of Highfield's criteria related to the Board's preferred qualities in a principal, with an even spread over the four major classifications. For the Central trustees, 90% of their criteria related to their perceptions, although missing from the major criteria were their own preferences for a figurehead role, and someone who could establish positive relationships with children. The Middleton Board's data indicated that 70% of their criteria matched their own essential qualities in a principal, with three documented criteria in the educational/professional leadership category finding no basis in the trustees' perceptions.

As noted throughout the respective case studies, each Board lacked internal consistency in its criteria assessment, and in its application over the period of the principal selection. Particularly noticeable was the dysfunctional linkage between important criteria found in the principal's job description, performance agreement and personal specification, and their follow up, which could have been expected in one of the subsequent assessment instruments such as referees' reports or at the interview itself. Similarly, there were clear inconsistencies in all three Board assessments schedules used to evaluate data in

application forms, referees' reports, and candidate responses to questions at interview. This lack of valid data gathering and data assessment techniques in turn caused difficulty for trustees when they attempted to relate and compare candidates' performance levels to specific criteria.

Data from Tables 4.7, 5.7 and 6.7 were examined to determine the consistency of the three Boards' application of criteria during their selection process. It was found that the criteria established by the Boards at the beginning were consistently applied across the four major categories through the early and middle stages of the selection process. However, during the final selection stages, two Boards underwent a change in criteria emphases in the personalised context of the shortlisting and interview phases: Highfield focussed on practical teaching skills and personal attributes of the candidates while Middleton's trustees emphasised personal characteristics. All Boards at the concluding stage produced at least four additional criteria, often related to personal qualities, with candidates' interview performance being a common factor among the three Boards. From observation field notes and trustee comment, it was found that these additional criteria eventuated because new elements in the candidates' personality and leadership styles were revealed at the interview or because additional information came to light as a result of phone contacts with referees, the combination of both circumstances being used to resolve an impasse in the Central and Middleton selection processes.

While the results of this study confirm lack of validity in criteria data gathering and data assessment, they do stand in contrast to some of the research literature's earlier findings. The documentary analysis here reveals that criteria are specific, compared with early criticisms of a lack of criteria specificity leading to widespread reliance on localistic notions of fit or image (Baltzell and Dentler 1983) and idiosyncratic criteria (Morgan 1986). While additional criteria have been located in this study, for the most part they have been position-related compared with declared and undeclared criteria identified in previous principal selection studies such as a bias against women (White 1983, Chapman 1986), the applicants' political views (Boyer 1983) and ethnic background (Baltzell and Dentler 1983).

Subjective influences

- To what degree is the process characterised by subjectivity, impressionism, personal bias, and external influences?

The issue of extraneous criteria in the selection of principals has been a dominant theme in the research literature (Baltzell and Dentler 1983, Morgan et al 1983, Chapman 1985a) and a necessary factor for consideration in this study, in particular the degree to which the selection process is characterised by subjectivity, impressionism, and other external influences. From the observation field notes of Board selection meetings and focussed interviewing of the 17 participant trustees, it was established that there were indeed considerable subjective influences at work outside of the declared criteria.

Attention has already been drawn elsewhere in this study to the underestimated influence of the incumbent principal on trustees' perceptions and on subsequent decision-making practices. It is significant that 15/17 trustees believed that this influence was present in their deliberations, whether they were seeking a replica of the incumbent or were wanting to move in an opposite direction requiring a different set of principal skills and qualities.

The impact of the previous principal upon subsequent selection is supported in the research, indirectly by Whatley's (1994) investigation which found that teachers' impressions of new principals were based on their experiences with former principals, and directly by the interview experience of one headmaster in Evett's (1993) study:

The previous head had been here (for 34 years), so a very long-serving, very gifted head of a particular kind. But maybe in interviewing there was a desire for change, so some of the questions were geared towards developing information about the kind of person you were and your philosophy, and how that did or did not contrast with the previous occupant. So that was a strong factor in my appointment, that I was significantly different in outlook and philosophy (p 290).

15/17 trustees indicated that they had prior knowledge to varying degrees about the candidates. This was acquired through a range of sources including personal or family acquaintance, candidates' teaching associates, anecdotal evidence and through staff opinion of the shortlisted candidates. In their interview responses, trustees commented

that, contrary to penalising candidates because of any negative prior knowledge, they had in fact been in danger of overcompensating for that candidate in order to be scrupulously fair in their assessment. Some also commented that prior knowledge, where authenticated, was more use to them in building up a realistic profile of the candidates' ability than relying solely on overly optimistic information received from referees.

This does not negate the fact that all three Boards relied heavily on referees' reports to supply the first-hand information which they lacked. They valued their contribution as another reference point but openly questioned their reliability and validity; hence the use made of phone contacts with referees as a more realistic method of gaining essential feedback on particular principal competencies. That referees reports have been found wanting in this study as a suitable measure of reliance also finds considerable support in the literature of personnel selection. In the USA, for example, critical written references are unusual due to the possibility of candidate litigation (Muchinsky 1979) and written statements from nominated referees are shown to have a marginal validity in predicting future job performance, leading to the bleak conclusion that references are, for the most part, "largely a waste of time and open to abuse" (Anderson and Shackleton 1986 p 4). It must be only a question of time before the referees' report, if not properly constructed, becomes redundant as a meaningful information-gathering device in principal selection.

In Morgan et al's (1983) POST study of secondary school head selection in England and Wales, only 3/59 selection panels in the LEA's involved an experienced head teacher in the appointment process. In this New Zealand study, two Boards of Trustees used a principal adviser to assist while the other Board used a consultant to inform a part of the selection process. The adviser's role was predominantly that of facilitator of the process and interpreter of educational issues, but they also acted as verifiers of educational information, particularly emanating from candidates' responses at interview.

The research literature on personnel selection portrays the role of selectorial impressionism as a major influence in final decision-making, whether at the application, shortlisting or interview stages. Each selector brings to the process their own experiences, attitudes and biases and these are inevitably reflected in their interpretation

of the qualities and skills they perceive in each applicant. All 17 trustees acknowledged the part that impressions played in their assessment of applicants and these were confirmed by observational recordings during shortlisting and post-interview discussions. The trustees commented independently on the early impressions they gleaned from what was written in application forms and by the style, or lack of it, in the presentation of curriculum vitae. They also referred to a reliance on their intuitive feelings on the basis of past experience, especially in relation to the first impressions of a candidate gained in the opening minutes of the interview. For example:

All of us were slightly trapped by our first impressions ... all of us are reluctant to change our first impressions, which can be dangerous. It's [principal selection] an enormous lottery anyway.

The role of the interview itself, with its attendant depiction of candidate performance and personality, constituted a major subjective influence in the selection process. All Boards made reference to specific features of candidates' interview technique which impacted on them, notably the ability to cope well in a pressure situation, to project a positive public image and to give coherent answers as a sign of good communication skills. That 2/3 Boards used an inverse decision-making process based on evidence emerging from the interviews, lends weight to another view that the employment interview is primarily a search for negative information (Cascio 1987).

The crucial importance of personal impact at the final interview was emphasised by the Boards during post-interview discussions. One of the more objective trustees commented:

I was actually surprised how important personality turned out to be. I think we felt that all the people we had shortlisted probably had all the actual qualifications etc and experience and leadership qualities, but the personality, I felt, turned out to be more important at the interview.

Morgan et al's (1983) comprehensive POST study confirmed the decisive weighting given to personality/personal qualities during principal selection:

As in the preliminary interviews, personality and interview performance were the significant determinants of selectors' choice. It would seem, once more, that the criteria for selection as a headteacher is the 'right personality' at this stage expressed through social impact at interview (p 85).

They also noted that, in the absence of explicit criteria and procedural controls, the human selectors sought personal traits they believed were job-related and worked from their own notions of the image and values appropriate for the job (Morgan 1986).

The validity of the interview as a stand-alone selection instrument, its susceptibility to personal bias and distortion and its low predictive value have all been questioned in the research literature, and from this study one can understand why. The reliability of the interview process must also be questioned if, as this study indicates, trustees are being influenced by the manner of a candidate's responses to the interview situation, where important judgements are being made in regard to confidence factors such as defensive attitudes, body language, and degrees of nervousness. Yet despite these established limitations, the selection interview continues to be widely used in both business and educational institutions.

A possible explanation can be derived by re-examining the assumption that a selection process should be an objective, rational series of assessment events based upon considered criteria applicable to a particular job. This study has highlighted previous research findings that subjective elements are present in decision-making and do influence final selection choices. Therefore, it seems appropriate to acknowledge and bring into the open the subjective factor as a criterion in its own right and acknowledge in particular that the selection interview is essentially a perceptual process (Arvey and Campion 1982).

This is borne out by the influence of impression formation of the trustees during the interview, and by their comments which indicated that they viewed their principal selection as a dual process: the job-perception process where job-related criteria were applied to secondary information gathered from the application form, curriculum vitae and referees' reports; and the person-perception process, where personal criteria were applied, albeit variously, to primary information gathered from first-hand contact with each candidate at the interview. This finding of a two-phase perception process within

the overall selection process is supported not only by trustee comment but also by the textual discussion of criteria across the range of sources following Tables 4.7, 5.7 and 6.7 in each of the case studies. Results showed that additional criteria and criteria emphases in the latter stages of selection were commonly focussed on personal attributes, as opposed to job requirements in the early stages. These findings also link to the conceptual psychometric and social models proposed by Iles and Salaman (1995) discussed in Chapter 2, to indicate that the two models may not be mutually exclusive, but in fact occur at different phases within the same selection process.

This then may account for the recurring phenomenon of candidate 'best fit' for the position. It appears that the suitability for the job is established in the shortlisting phase. Having agreed that shortlisted candidates meet the job requirements, the trustees then seek to define 'best fit' in terms of personal suitability to the school direction and philosophy, and compatibility with the Board of Trustees itself, with an emphasis on being able to get on with one another so as to produce productive educational outcomes for the pupils. This was evident in both the Highfield and Central Boards' selection process. As one trustee commented, in reference to impressions of candidates gained through their curriculum vitae:

*They might be suitable for some other school but not suitable for us, it just didn't sound like us. And that was the thing about the candidates we all felt strongly about: they **did** sound more like us.*

The concept of 'best fit' also finds its parallel in the literature of human resource management, where personality profiles or 'types' of candidates are viewed in relation to the organisation's ethos, exemplified by the use of biodata questionnaires to establish the level of relationship between an individual's background and the culture of the organisation (Townley 1989). The increasing recognition that selection assessment processes are also social processes can apply not only to 'fit' but also to other aspects such as how the selection panel feel about their ownership of and contribution to the decision-making process, and how the candidates perceive the organisation as the type of group they would like to work for.

This finding must have implications for the definition of merit-based appointment processes as discussed in Chapter 2 and may serve to explain why selection decisions are not necessarily consistent with a strict definition of merit. In a monograph on the redefinition of merit, Burton (1988) identifies reasons for preferring to select people like oneself, not simply to be more comfortable but on the basis of social similarity to ensure a sharing of common values - "so a preference tends to be exercised for those who 'fit in', and away from those who are different in socially significant ways" (p 5). The observation of trustees at work in this study would reinforce this notion, not so much in terms of bias but rather in terms of a co-operative reality based around a shared social and educational ethos. While the Boards did apply a range of job and personal criteria in their selection processes, it seemed that, all criteria being equal, what differentiated candidates in the concluding stages were the related concepts of best person for the job and best fit for the school community.

Gender considerations

- Does the gender of candidates influence the Board's selection decisions during the shortlisting and appointment phases?

Based around this concept of appointment by merit, one of the research questions sought to determine if the gender of candidates influenced in any way the Board of Trustees' selection decision-making. Following observation of all trustee selection discussions and collating their individual views, no overt evidence was found of gender influence directly affecting decision-making within the Boards' selection process. Only 3/17 trustees across all three Boards admitted to a particular gender preference for their principal, a finding which is not surprising given today's climate of increased awareness of 'political correctness'. Similarly, in research by Middleton and Oliver (1990) into the educational perspectives of New Zealand Boards of Trustees after the 1989 reforms, few trustees mentioned gender as an issue in the appointment of staff.

However, there were underlying gender issues which arose from analysis of observation field notes and from trustee interviews. From a positive perspective, it was noted that the Middleton Board gave credit to its female candidate for her broken service and appreciated the reasons behind her apparent lack of teaching experience. In this way, the candidate was not disadvantaged for reasons beyond her control.

Conversely, there were four factors present which had the potential to act against the interests of the women candidates. A total of three trustees across two Boards referred to female candidates' capacity to enforce disciplinary measures amongst male pupils. While not observed to have any bearing on candidates' selection chances, it nevertheless reinforces the concept of male hegemony¹ and the stereotype that effective school discipline may only be exerted by male teachers: "In schools, for example, a hegemonic linking between physical force and masculinity has worked to create beliefs that principals need to be strong men who can control and discipline disruptive boys" (Court 1994 p 36).

A second feature centred on the topic of staff and community gender preferences which arose from discussions at two Board pre-selection meetings. While it was not an issue for one Board, there were indications from three trustees of the other Board that the all female staff were clearly in favour of a male principal, as were an unknown number of parents. Reasons for such a gender-directed appointment were not disclosed. This is consistent with the potential for what Burton (1988) describes as "consumer-based discrimination", where the selection panel is pressured to allocate positions according to school community expectations. This notion of a gendered leadership preference, while not a definable influence, does highlight the role which gender dynamics may play in what are purported to be merit-based selection processes. This is supported by recent research writing such as that of Butler and Schmuck (1994) which shows how links between masculinity and leadership qualities have sedimented into almost unconscious assumptions about what kinds of people best fit or do not fit as leaders.

It also reinforces the potential for gender stereotyping to shape attitudes, and points to underlying hegemonic links between masculinity and authority/leadership issues, as discussed in Chapter 2. With the current emphasis on technico-logic managerial skills required of a school principal, this could be seen to favour men rather than women as those best suited for the position. The impact of such stereotyping again puts women at a disadvantage for educational promotion:

¹Male hegemony has been described as "man's position of power which assures that his standards become generated as generically human standards that are to govern the behaviour of men and women alike" (Simmel 1911, translated by Coser 1977).

While these kinds of (shifting) associations resource men for leadership, they simultaneously 'cool out' women, both in their own and in others' perceptions of their fitness for leadership positions in schools. Within the persisting domestic and material ideologies, women's primary place is more likely to be seen to be in the private world of the home or in the classroom as teachers where they can use their so-called feminine skills of caring and nurturing (Court 1994 p 36).

The issue of previous experience in the principalship is a third feature which may impact on women's aspirations for promotion. From the small sample of three Boards in this study, it has been established from critical factors emerging during shortlisting and interviews that previous teaching experience and school administration experience are significant factors. If only 3% of women teachers were primary school principals in 1992 compared with 32% of male teachers, then opportunities for women in promotion to the principalship may be lessened, should previous principal experience be a major determining factor for Boards of Trustees nationally in their final principal selection. It is of interest to note also that, from national figures (Slyfield 1993), women are being appointed at the level of a teaching principal in small schools but still infrequently to non-teaching principalships in larger schools. In relation to the findings of this study, it could be that the **teaching** component of the principalship is working to assist the selection of women in smaller schools as Boards are forced to consider both administrative and classroom teaching skills in the appointment of their new principal.

The final feature to emerge was the preference, directly and indirectly expressed by one trustee on the Highfield Board and at the beginning of the selection process by four Central trustees, for a male principal on the basis of maintaining a gender balance within an all female staff. It was felt that this would provide children with a range of gender role models, and for two of the Central trustees, provide disciplinary support for women teachers. It therefore appears to be a situation of 'reverse' positive discrimination, whereby trustees may act to restore the staff imbalance in the ratio of women teachers to men teachers by means of their principal appointment. For some of these trustees, there also seemed to be an underlying notion that a male in a **leadership** position would balance up a number of women in **teaching positions**. Yet there is an irony in this situation. In any attempt to argue for male principal appointment on the basis of maintaining a gender balance on the staff, trustees may be in fact discriminating against women's advancement to principal positions. Slyfield's (1993) New Zealand figures

indicate that women occupy 78% of primary teaching positions, therefore a male candidate for principalship will always be advantaged under the criterion of 'maintaining staff gender balance'. This invites a self-fulfilling prophecy: for as long as women form the vast majority of the primary teacher work force, and if trustees have gender balance as a determining critical factor in their principal selection decision-making, then men will remain in an advantaged position and women will continue to struggle to achieve primary school principalships, especially in larger schools, in the proportion which their teaching numbers would suggest.

Despite earlier research concerns regarding differential treatment of women candidates in principal selection (Morgan et al 1983), the three Boards in this New Zealand research displayed a sound working knowledge of equal employment opportunity requirements. Of the total of ten candidates selected for interview, there were four women and six men. In the final phase of each selection decision, the Boards had narrowed the choice to male and a female candidate, although that was the sole option open to the Middleton trustees. At the conclusion of the three selection processes, two female principals were appointed and one male principal. Overall, there was no concrete evidence of gender inequity in the final appointment decisions of trustees in this study. However, unconscious assumptions on the part of some trustees may have been at work in terms of gender stereotyping and of what kinds of people are best fitted for that particular leadership position.

In summarising the operation of each Board of Trustees' principal selection as they moved from perceptions of principal qualities through the selection process to appointment, the influence of the human dimension became apparent. The ability to build personal relationships and practical teaching experience formed major perceptions of principal qualities, with trustees preferring their new principals to be leaders rather than managers. Selection processes revealed weaknesses in assessment methodologies and in consistency of assessment application. Subjective elements played a dominant part in the evaluation of candidates, reinforcing the dual processes of job and person perceptions as trustees endeavoured to find the candidate who best fitted their principal position and their school community. Chapter 8 examines the implications of these results for trustees, and formulates a series of recommendations for future training and improved practice in the field of principal selection.

Chapter Eight

PRINCIPAL SELECTION: TRUSTEE IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding analysis of three primary school Board of Trustees' principal selection process has illuminated events and perceptions at the micro level of each school's unique way of exercising its executive personnel function. It is important also to consider the macro perspective of broader educational themes arising from this research. The overriding issue to emerge from this study lies in the magnitude of the task facing groups of lay people appointing an educational professional, with limited knowledge of the principal's job, minimal experience of selection processes, and with the prospect of maximum risk to children's learning if they make the wrong decision.

Since the advent of Boards of Trustees in New Zealand in 1989 and their increased employment responsibilities, little training has been provided for trustees on staff appointment procedures, although there are now clear guidelines that may be followed. The situation thus exists where approximately 25,000 volunteers in New Zealand schools may be called upon to appoint a new principal with inadequate preparation. It is a task where the stakes are high. These include parental expectation that their children will be secure in their learning, staff expectation of a stable and developmental teaching environment, and the heavy burden on school leaders in the course of their principalship to be responsible for thousands of dollars worth of educational spending and for the future educational careers of hundreds of children.

This concluding chapter will summarise a key area from the contextual literature on governance and personnel issues in schools: the capacity of lay personnel to appoint a professional and in particular how this group of New Zealand trustees have reacted to their added employment responsibilities. In response to the final research question, directions for trustee training and recommendations for future practice in the area of principal selection will be identified from this study and from other research.

Trustees' employer role in the 1990's

The key issue arising from devolved personnel responsibility to school trustees has been the extent to which those lay trustees feel confident about and able to engage in such professional activities. In major research work on school governing bodies in Britain - Bacon (1978), Kogan (1984), Golby and Brigley (1989), Field (1993) - it was established that lay governors found many aspects of educational practice difficult to understand or did not have the confidence to involve themselves in professional issues. It is evident from this New Zealand study that this sample of trustees have experienced similar difficulties in the area of personnel management, in spite of the availability of procedural guidelines and reported evidence of improved appointments procedures¹.

All trustees in this research were surveyed after the principal appointment about their reactions to the process, and their attitudes towards their employer role. The common concerns of all three Boards centred on the capacity of lay trustees to assess the skills and experience required to meet the demands of making a successful professional appointment. The pressure points for Boards during their selection process came from various sources. There was external pressure evident from within their respective communities, from individuals who doubted the trustees' knowledge and ability to carry out the task, to more subtle pressure to make the 'correct' choice with which the community at large would feel comfortable. In smaller communities where the chances of anonymity are reduced, trustees acutely felt the weight of direct accountability to the school community and of responsibility to present and future pupils in the event of a less than satisfactory appointment.

The internal pressures for the trustees, especially in the final decision-making phase, came from a combination of unknown or insufficiently understood variables. These included a lack of knowledge of the principal's job as it is currently performed and of the core competencies for such a position; how to assess accurately the required skills and personal qualities required of a modern principal; a lack of familiarity with the

¹Ramsay (1991) reports from the *Monitoring Today's School Project* that fears of nepotism and unfair appointments in their secondary school sample have been largely without foundation. However Wylie's (1994) research figures from 121 New Zealand intermediate and primary school trustees showed that 57% of trustees reported having some issue or problem in making staff appointments including the principal's position. From the small sample in this research study, the current figure could well be higher.

selection procedure format, and a reliance, apart from personal contact with the shortlisted candidates at interview, on indirect information from third parties on candidates' practical suitability for the job. The influence of these variable factors manifested itself in the difficulty of teasing out all the trustees' views to arrive at a final agreement for appointment.

None of the final decisions for the Boards were reached easily. Recommendations for appointment were made but not without reservations from some trustees or further data gathering required on pertinent matters of concern. Some trustees were unprepared for the challenging of privately-held principal perceptions and educational views, and the inevitable onerous decision-making process, especially those accustomed to their Boards working and achieving in a consensual mode. It was not surprising, therefore, that levels of apprehension and tiredness were high in all three Boards at the conclusion of selection proceedings.

Clearly the employer mantle does not yet rest comfortably on trustees' shoulders, especially in these three case study Boards who were appointing their principal for the first time. Interestingly, in later communications with the researcher, trustees from two Boards revealed that they had subsequently made another teaching appointment at the school and found the second selection easier than the first because of increased knowledge of the process itself ie reduction of one of the unknown variables. One Board had made a teaching and a caretaker appointment, prompting a trustee to remark that "by the time we got to the caretaker, the selection process seemed more rigorous than for the principal!"

The new administrative reforms in education in 1989 have been linked by some commentators to a "general questioning of professional education power in New Zealand" (Alcorn 1993). The power of making principal and staff appointments has been devolved from the central control of the former Education Boards to school Boards of Trustees. However, the devolution of power and control from a regional bureaucratic level has not been matched by requisite resource and personnel support at the local level, as the trustees in this study have testified. They remained uneasy about the lack of obvious physical resources to assist the process, as well as the availability of creditable human resources to offer advice, facilitation or actual training in specific

selection skills. While acknowledging that the current system of trustee employment responsibility is better than the former Education Board's principal appointment procedures based on candidate seniority and involving selection panels with little first-hand knowledge of the school and its community, nevertheless they saw an urgent need for external guidance or training to be readily available, a point highlighted in one trustee interview: *If Boards are going to act as professional bodies and govern schools, then they have to be given support to do the job properly.*

Recommendations for training and future practice

- What principal selection training needs for Board of Trustees are suggested by the research results?

The results from this study, together with trustee reactions to the process and the researcher's observations and communication with trustees, point to a common need for Board of Trustee training in a variety of selection areas. The 17 trustees in the three case studies were unanimous in their call for Boards to have access to training help, and that it should be mandatory for trustee selection panels making a first-time appointment. This is a stronger expression of need than that reported in Wylie's (1994) research figures where, from a sample of 121 trustee returns in 1993, 46% wanted training in staff appointment procedures and personnel issues.

Clearly from these findings, there is an obligation on Boards to invest in their own professional development if they are to keep up to date with critical issues in educational administration such as staff selection. Equally, if they are to demand excellence in those whom they employ, they should meet the highest standards themselves. The research results suggest three major areas for training:

- understanding of the legislative framework of staff selection
- understanding of school leadership and management issues including job analysis and core competencies
- use of systematic selection procedures and instruments

UNDERSTANDING OF EMPLOYMENT PRINCIPLES

Firstly, in the appointment of employees, Boards of Trustees are governed by legislative obligations and by the requirement to be a good employer under the State Services Amendment Act 1989, which includes notifying vacancies to enable suitably qualified people to apply and appointing the 'best suited' person to the position. In addition equal employment opportunity provisions are enshrined in the Race Relations Act 1971 and the Human Rights Commission Act 1977, as are the principles of confidentiality in the Privacy Act 1993. An understanding and appreciation of these fundamental employment principles are an important foundation for establishing a soundly based selection process.

KNOWLEDGE OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A second focus for training assistance can be found in the area of school leadership and management. Trustees in this and other selection studies require an enhanced knowledge and understanding of the principal's job, especially with the complexities inherent in a teaching principal's position. This would increase the validity of any ensuing job analysis, resulting in more relevant job descriptions, performance agreements and person specifications, against which are set subsequent selection criteria. Similarly, in order to determine specific criteria for appointment, there is a need for trustees to gain further knowledge of the core competencies and skills required by present principals to perform effectively in their position. It is only relatively recently that central government bodies have offered broad criteria to selection committees to assist merit selection procedures (Department of Education, New South Wales, 1989). In New Zealand, the Education Review Office (1995) released guidelines which may assist Board of Trustees to know what knowledge, skills and abilities are essential for the principal of their school. The Office hopes that by publishing these core competencies, it will promote debate about the demonstrable behaviours of principals that can be sought at recruitment and appointment, and developed through training. It will be important for trustees not only to know **what** constitutes effective educational leadership and management skills but also **how** to assess each candidate's leadership and managerial potential.

USE OF SYSTEMATIC SELECTION PROCEDURES

A third area for trustee training lies in the systematic use of selection procedures and candidate assessment methodology. While the aim of this chapter is not to produce an exhaustive list of recommendations for future practice, the following represent aspects of the selection process which this study has highlighted as requiring further attention:

■ Principal appointment policy

Only one Board in the case studies had established a policy for principal appointment. It was a necessary template for the selection process to follow, incorporating legislative principles, shortlisting and interview procedures. Such a guiding policy should be mandatory for all Board principal selections and is particularly useful for consistent procedural application if Boards experience frequent changes in their own personnel. Trustees in this study were also keen to see a standardised checklist of procedures issued to Boards in language they could understand and which could be appended to the school policy on principal appointment for future use.

■ Use of valid assessment instruments

This study has shown an evident need to reassess the validity of instruments used to evaluate candidate suitability, particularly in the practical skills necessary for the job. Valid assessment methods are crucial to provide an accurate shortlisting of candidates while erroneous assessments can lead to poorly informed decision-making at the vital concluding stages of the selection process. For example, the use of conventional written referees' reports failed to differentiate candidates sufficiently, and variable procedures within the interview situation open that method of assessment to scrutiny once more. Previous research has advocated the need for interviewer training in educational appointments (Banfield and Fearn 1984, Harris et al 1992) to correct interviewer mistakes including "failing to know about the job, failing to have a plan for the interview, asking questions 'off the cuff', talking too much, overreacting to initial impressions, and failing to evaluate the interview" (Harris et al 1992 p 118). The obvious assistance the Central trustees derived from their outside help in interview techniques is testimony to the benefits of such training.

The questioning of the validity of traditional assessment instruments has led the way to researchers and employing authorities considering other multiple means of candidate assessment. These include written statements of philosophy, cognitive and personality tests, work sample tests, peer assessment by candidates' teaching colleagues, while Anderson (1991) has advocated on-site visits to a candidate's school and community. This present study has pointed to the effectiveness of two-way telephone communication with referees as a more informative background to an applicant's performance level than a one-way communication of a written reference report. There is an assumption that oral statements will be more frank than those placed on written record:

An antidote to the sterility and sameness of many letters of recommendation, as well as to invigorate fact finding, judicious use of the telephone is necessary. Calling a referee usually yields far more fruitful and precise information (Goldstein 1986 p 116).

■ Consistency of criteria assessment

Problems experienced within the three Boards with internal consistency in their criteria assessment were clearly in evidence and may be alleviated by using a two dimensional grid matrix. Such a matrix would record the criteria from job description, performance agreement and person specification and match up with a corresponding point of evaluation in the assessment instruments such as referees' reports, interviews, or forms of diagnostic testing. Trustees could then see at a glance which agreed criteria have not been evaluated or which criteria have been evaluated to a greater or lesser degree than others.

■ Controlling the influence of impressionism

As suggested in Chapter 7 and by other research, the subjective element does play a role in the selection process, particularly that of impressionism, and should be accorded some status as a criterion in its own right. In this way it can be openly acknowledged, accounted for, and a degree of control exerted over its pervasive influence. It can then be viewed in perspective alongside the core competencies for the position. This is particularly relevant in less definable areas such as gender awareness where training for

trustees would be a significant factor in uncovering unconscious assumptions about male and female stereotypes in educational leadership.

■ Planning for decision-making

The final decision-making phase for all three Boards proved exhausting and at times traumatic. It would be advantageous for trustees to discuss in advance the guidelines and mechanisms for arriving at a final decision. Such an agreed procedure, reached in the calm of pre-selection activities, would allow them to cope with the pressures of absorbing divergent opinions and of physical tiredness. It would also help avoid situations where the elimination of candidates "becomes dependent on social negotiation, encompassing bargaining, trade-offs and compromise" (Morgan et al 1983 p 149).

■ Evaluation of selection process

It was noticeable, in the three case studies and in overseas examples of principal and staff selection procedures, that there was no planned evaluation of the appointment process at a later date. Such an evaluation is seen as providing vital feedback to Boards on an equally important decision-making exercise (Cascio 1987). Rabey (1985) suggests that it should become standard practice that some three to six months after the appointee takes up the position, work performance should be assessed and related back to the diagnoses produced from the assessment instruments, thereby matching actual performance to the potential indicators identified at the time of appointment. In simple terms, did the trustees get what they thought they were getting?

■ Delivery of training

The trustees in this study saw their training being delivered by a variety of personnel. They welcomed an earlier involvement of the principal adviser or a trained facilitator to guide them through or instruct them on parts of the appointment process. This is not dissimilar to the situation in Victoria, Australia where on each selection panel, there are two appointed people, one from a list of principals and the other from the Ministry of Education. Their professional input and expertise have been highly valued by the parent members of the selection panel at all stages of the process (Gardiner 1990). In

New Zealand external facilitation could be provided in future by the Ministry of Education or its appointees, School Support Services advisers attached to Colleges of Education or by qualified personnel consultants with an understanding of school operations and of the demands of the principal's job.

It is hoped that this identification of areas for future development and training within the selection process will enable other Boards of Trustees to recognise problems and alert them to strategies for solving similar challenges in their own principal appointment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study has been to conduct a series of case studies of New Zealand school Boards of Trustees during their principal selection process. Three primary Boards of Trustees were observed for the duration of their appointment process with the aims to define their perceptions of educational leadership, and to record and analyse the manner in which each Board set about selecting their new teaching principal.

Review of methodology

The strengths of the research methodology centred on an in-depth qualitative case study approach which involved multiple case studies and a pilot study, observation and recording of all meetings and discussions, a focussed interview of all trustees, and subsequent placement of case study findings within the broader context of a conceptual and research framework. A further strength lay in the variety of data sources within the research design: documentary analysis, trustee questionnaire, observational recording and trustee interview. Data was then collected from these sources and analysed through a system of selective codings based on research questions derived principally from the conceptual and research literature.

The limitations of the methodology have been acknowledged in the small size of the sample (17 trustees) which prevents generalisation across the wider field of all trustees. There were also constraints within the research design framework. During the analyses of the three case studies, it became apparent that perceptions and process were not mutually exclusive operations but were inextricably linked in a complicated interaction. As the research design had been predetermined, in terms of research questions and topics for the trustee questionnaire and focus interview, it allowed little scope to pursue, with the trustees in particular, the social process elements as they began to emerge from the data analyses. Thus limitations occurred by deriving the themes for investigation from educational concepts and previous research rather than from the fieldwork data itself.

Role of literature reviews

The review of conceptual and research literature identified three areas for investigation in this study: local school governance, trustees' new employer role and their future training needs; effective educational leadership in the face of pressures on school principals to be both leader and manager; and critical aspects influencing the efficacy of the principal selection process such as trustees' knowledge of the job, principal qualities necessary for today's schools, criteria identification, subjective factors and gender considerations. Interwoven through the literature reviews in Chapters 1 and 2 have been the underlying conceptual bases for this study which have included major concepts of devolution of educational control to New Zealand Boards of Trustees, leadership and management, the merit principle of selecting the person best suited for the job, process models of personnel selection incorporating psychometric and social elements, and the role of gender in school principal appointments.

Research findings

The findings of this research study can be summarised under three main headings:

1 Trustee perceptions of educational leadership

The dominant leadership qualities which the trustees were seeking in their new teaching principal were in the area of relationships with children, practical teaching skills and experience, and personal attributes. Their variable knowledge of leadership and management issues would suggest further information or training, especially since 12/17 of the trustee sample lacked confidence in their knowledge of the principal's job. They expressed a decided preference for their new principal to have leadership rather than managerial skills, a view supported by mounting evidence in the literature and research that managerialism is not a factor in producing effective schools.

2 Selection Process

Investigation of the respective case studies revealed the necessity for trustees to identify relevant competencies for the principal's job and to use valid assessment methods in

their evaluation of a candidate's ability to meet those competencies, whether from written application forms or from personal contact at interviews. In contrast to previous overseas research, criteria employed by the trustees were specific but they did experience problems of internal consistency in their assessment of selection criteria. Changes were noted in the emphasis given to certain criteria in the concluding stages of selection decision-making, and in the appearance of additional criteria which more often related to candidates' personal qualities.

The influence of subjective factors on each Board's selection process has been considerable. These included the role of the incumbent principal, prior knowledge of candidates, referees' reports, principal adviser, trustee impressionism and gender considerations. Of significance was the criticism directed at the validity and reliability of both the referees' report and interview formats, and the identification of dual processes at work, whereby trustees exercise their notion of 'best fit' for the job (job perception) and 'best fit' for the school community (person perception). There was no concrete evidence of gender inequity in trustees' selection decision-making. However unconscious assumptions about gender stereotypes and criteria of gender balance and of previous principal experience, if heavily weighted as determining critical factors, could lead to women being disadvantaged in primary school principalship appointments.

3 Directions for trustee training

Field observation and trustee comments indicated that the trustees in these case studies were not yet comfortable in their employer role. Results suggested that training needs lay in assisting Boards in their understanding of employment legislation and of school leadership and management issues, and to increase their proficiency in the use of valid assessment methods for selecting the most appropriate candidate.

Contribution to the field of principal selection

The major contributions of this thesis study to further understanding in the field of principal selection can be found in three identified features: the leadership/management dichotomy, the need to redefine the principle of merit selection and in the exposure of difficulties experienced by groups of lay people appointing a professional educator.

Firstly, the trustees' clear preference for their new principal to be a personable leader rather than an administrative manager is in direct contrast to the manner in which central government views today's principals as Chief Executive Officers. Not only does this study reflect a conflict in school leadership perception between local and national operational levels but highlights the tensions and pressures faced by teaching principals in primary schools. They too are caught in a role dilemma between the desire of trustees for them to be predominantly a teacher and leader, and external political pressure for them to be the manager of a successful educational enterprise. Such competing demands on their time and energy confirms that the New Zealand principal's role post-Picot "is not for the myopic nor the faint-hearted; only those with a clear vision and firm resolve should apply" (Bennett 1994 p 43).

Secondly, the requirement for a redefinition of merit selection advocated by Burton (1988) is reinforced by the findings of this study. The results here indicate that the merit principle is objectively observed in the relative suitability of the candidates to the **job**. What also impacts on selection decision-making are trustees' subjective perceptions of the suitability of the **person** to provide the 'best fit' with the current school and community ethos.

Finally, in its in-depth perspective of the workings of three Boards of Trustees, this research has offered a necessary insight into the challenges and the difficulties faced by lay governing bodies in New Zealand since responsibility for personnel selection was devolved to them in 1989. The picture that presents itself is one of genuine commitment and voluntary endeavour, but one in which trustees have struggled to come to terms with the knowledge of the principals' job and the mechanisms of principal selection procedures and assessment methodologies; hence the necessity for them in future to have sufficient resources and training for this most critical of staffing appointments.

Suggestions for further research

There have been issues raised during this study, either from the research findings or from the literature reviews, which offer suggestions for further research in the area of principal/teacher selection and in personnel selection in general. It is evident from

literature on the principal selection process and from the literature on human resource management that there is an urgent need for development of a theoretical base for principal selection from which to theorise selection problem areas. Until now the emphasis has been primarily concerned with assessing the efficiency of the selection process from an objective viewpoint rather than looking further to test the significance of broader social implications.

From the results of this study, a theory of principal selection could be developed around the argument of its being essentially a perceptual process, involving dual processes of job perception (objective model) and person perception (social process model). While there has been an abundance of research on the former process, much less attention has been focussed on the latter. Themes for future study in a social process model of educational selection could include the interrelationship between selection, knowledge and power, taking its basis from Hollway's (1991) assertion that the process of selection is an example of the exercise of power within the framework of an 'objective' process of competency-based assessment. In a school trustee environment, the study of power relations could focus, for example, on power over the candidates and power sharing among the trustees themselves.

Selection, therefore, is a process managed and negotiated by selectors and candidates alike in which competing claims are arbitrated and legitimated and in which different world views are made. All of this seems a far cry from arid reductionism implicit in terminology that views selection as a 'technique', 'apparatus' or 'instrument' (Gronn 1986 p 20).

It would be pertinent for research to be directed towards developing, in greater depth, an overall social process model of staff selection. The findings in this study have indicated a complex interaction between a complicated decision-making process and an equally intricate web of human perception and influence. They have also demonstrated that the principal selection process is not an objective linear event. Rather it is a process subject to a range of human dynamics and influences set in a particular social and educational context. This holistic view of selection is reinforced by Brederson (1985) who sees that the personnel selection process takes place within an environment characterised by values and situations.

The findings from this study suggest two other areas for future research. One Board's determining factor was based on the candidates' leadership style which would suggest further investigation into appropriate leadership styles for principals, incorporating work by researchers such as Dunlap and Schmuck (1995), Shakeshaft (1995), into gender and alternative models of leadership in education, particularly women's style of leadership. A second focus would involve a longitudinal study of principal selection, to include the views of the successful candidate about the selection process, and an investigation of the principal's performance after a year in the position, to match the potential identified by trustees at the time of selection with the reality of performance in the job, and to test the validity of selection assessment methods.

Epilogue

One trustee spoke for all trustees in the study when he completed his personal interview with the following conclusion: *I'm really conscious of only getting glimpses of the candidates... the whole process of making appointments is very much an imperfect science.*

His sentiments underline the disadvantage which lay trustees face in using an unfamiliar process containing many variables to make an important professional appointment. The recruitment and selection of a school principal, while not as problematic as "trying to design God", nevertheless invite the trustees to take a step forward in faith. Until that appointee has been working in the position and her/his performance evaluated in the new setting, the Board of Trustees will not know whether or not their selection was the correct one for their school. No one model has yet been devised which will provide an error-free selection procedure nor, after years of empirical/analytical studies, do we seem closer to deriving a meaningful total view of personnel selection.

As principals are vital to the effectiveness of schools, they must be selected with care and in the knowledge that reliable and responsible selection procedures used by Boards, who are properly resourced and trained, will increase the probability that the best candidate is chosen for the position. For the future education of pupils, and leadership of the staff and wider school community, the cost of selecting the wrong person is too high a price to pay.

Appendices

Appendix 2

Observational recording format

X. You look at him and then A - they all have a strong sense of community	RQ2 - Community orientation
Y. Referee said "gets along with <u>most</u> people"	RQ7 - RR
X. 2 definite yes : B + C	
Z. How much of a worry that B has no experience at F2 level?	RQ2 - no experience at F2
X. It <u>is</u> a worry but the personal strengths are good. It's something to think about later.	RQ2 - personal strengths : overcome lack of experience
C : depends on what he comes out like at the end.	
X: He shows enthusiasm	RQ2 - enthusiasm
Z. ... the only one who said he loved teaching	RQ2 - enjoyed teaching
X. Ref. report said he teacher <u>all</u> his children.	RQ7 - RR
He was highly regarded enough to go and set out school	{ RQ2 - Teaching exp. RQ7 - PK
Y. Ref. said a character to follow in present principals' footsteps.	{ RQ7 - RR RQ7 - PR
X. He had style.	
Z. .. had substance to his application	
X. We've got 2 definite .. Now the Maybe's... - could see no warmth in it	RQ2 : warmth
Y. 25 yrs teaching experience.	RQ2 : Tchg experience
Z. He was at T. Call with my husband.	RQ7 : PK
Y. Why not snapped up?	
X.	
Z. Where's the comment from the last school?	
(Ref. report still hasn't arrived.	RQ7 : RR
Y : ... says nothing about children	RQ2 : focus on students
X : <u>Not</u> a teaching principal, he's an administrator	RQ3.. <u>MANAGEMENT.</u>
Z . Politically, how do we get on if he thinks he's a sitter?	
X+Y : No problem at all	
X. Average in personal qualities. Relationship with kids (Av.) Individual needs (Av).	{ RQ2 : personal qual. RQ2 : relation with kids RQ2 : meet individ. needs.

Appendix 3

Trustee interview schedule

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

RQ1 Knowledge of principal responsibilities

How confident do you feel about your knowledge of what a principal does?

RQ2 Essential principal characteristics

- (a) What particular qualities were you looking for in your new principal?
- (b) During their interview the candidates' displayed a range of leadership qualities. Which ones were you very happy to see come through? Which ones did not surface that you might have expected?
- (c) "Hung parliament" scenario explained. You are asked to confirm your final criteria. Please think carefully and list your top four criteria in priority order.
- (d) Do you feel your opinions about principal qualities have changed over the months of the selection process? If so, what could be the reasons?

RQ3 Concepts of Leadership and management

- (a) What would a principal be doing if s/he displayed leadership skills in a school?
- (b) What would a principal be doing if s/he displayed management skills in a school?

RQ4 Leader/manager preference

Do you have a preference for your new principal to be a leader or a manager? Can you explain your reasons?

SELECTION PROCESS

RQ6 Criteria identification

Review criteria used by the Board in selection

Do you feel the Board kept to these criteria throughout the whole process?

RQ7 Subjective influences

(Introductory question) There are frequently outside influences on the way we perceive other people eg school principals. In the case of a school principal, where do these influences come from for you?

From your viewpoint, what influence did the following have on the selection process?

- (a) incumbent principal
- (b) prior knowledge of candidates
- (c) principal adviser
- (d) referees' reports
- (e) impressionism (explain)

RQ8 Gender equity

Do you think the gender of candidates influenced the Boards' decision at any stage?

RQ9 Future trustee training

From your experience of the process, what future training or help would you recommend for Boards, to assist them with selecting a principal?

- (a) in general
- (b) qualities to look for in a principal
- (c) selection procedures

Other comments?

Initial probe question to gauge opinion of employer role: would you willingly undertake the selection process again?

Appendix 4

Letter requesting participation

Dear

I am presently studying for a Masters degree in Educational Administration through Massey University. This year, I am preparing a Masters thesis on the topic: "*Principal Selection by Boards of Trustees*". This will involve the study of primary, secondary, or area school Boards of Trustees in Otago prior to, during, and after the appointment of their new Principal.

The main objectives of the thesis are:

- (i) To investigate what qualities Trustee members are looking for in their new principal.
- (ii) To record the process used by the Board to arrive at a principal appointment decision.
- (iii) To establish what principal selection training needs for BOT's are suggested by the research results.

This letter is to ask you and your Board if you would consider being part of my thesis study during your forthcoming principal appointment.

I will follow up shortly with a phone call to you to gauge your initial reaction to the above proposal. If agreeable, I would then like to meet briefly with your Board to explain how the data would be gathered, what time would be involved on their part, and general ethical research principles such as informed consent and confidentiality, prior to their making a final decision about participation.

I have enclosed an accompanying letter of support from the School Trustees Association, Otago branch, and would very much welcome the opportunity to work with you and the Board.

Yours sincerely

Ross Notman

Appendix 5
Letter of support


26.5.94



Dear Board of Trustee Chairperson,

I am writing in support of the research into Principal Selection which Mr Ross Notman is proposing to carry out.

It is our hope that our knowledge of Board of Trustees' training needs in this area will benefit from the research results.
We encourage you to participate.

Yours sincerely,



Lynne Guy.

Appendix 6

Agreement of understanding

- DEGREE: Master of Educational Administration
- INSTITUTION: Massey University
- RESEARCHER: Ross Notman
- THESIS TOPIC: Principal selection by Boards of Trustees: perceptions and process.
- PURPOSE: To undertake a case study of 3 Boards of Trustees and their perceptions of the qualities of a "good" Principal, and to record and analyse each Board's process of Principal selection.
- OUTCOMES: It is hoped that research results will identify
- (a) Board of Trustees prevalent notions of educational leadership.
 - (b) Future Trustee training needs for selecting school principals.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The following constitute the major ethical principles in the conduct of research as formulated by the Higher Degrees Committee of the Department of Education, Massey University.

- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| (i) informed consent | (of the participants) |
| (ii) confidentiality | (of the data and the individual providing it) |
| (iii) minimising of harm | (to all persons involved in or affected by the research) |
| (iv) truthfulness | (the avoidance of unnecessary deception) |
| (v) social sensitivity | (to the age, gender, culture, religion, social class of the subjects) |

The interests of society in general, and the welfare of research subjects in particular, takes precedence over the interests of the researcher.

AGREEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING:

The researcher will undertake to

- abide by the ethical considerations above.
- ensure that participants understand that they may decline to participate or withdraw from the activity at any time without penalty of any sort and that their privacy and confidentiality will be protected.
- give feedback to the participants on the research and provide an opportunity for any misconceptions to be clarified and questions answered.
- ensure that disclosure of applicants' personal information remains confidential (Privacy Act 1993, Principle II, Exception h).

The Board of Trustees will assist the researcher to

- gather data on the Principal selection process, using documentary sources, questionnaire, observation and interview methods.

Chairperson
Board of Trustees

Researcher

Date: __/__/__

Appendix 7

Interview transcript

RQ1

Trustee: To what they do well obviously one can surmise and can make up and have a fairly accurate idea. As an actual knowledge of it I am sure I haven't got any.

RQ1: no
knowledge.

Ross: You would not be alone in that either, I can assure you. OK, fine.

RQ 2 (a)

Trustee: I think one that I really wanted to stand out was relating to the children. A person who is able to gain the respect and confidence in as much as people enjoy going to school. What I don't want to have was somebody who had a serious amount of administration skills and was able to manage and sort out and become more aloof to the children themselves, I would much prefer to have a child running to the headmaster and wanting to be with him and talk to him, than somebody thinking, oh, there's the headmaster, oh, I have to keep out of the way, and be afraid of him, sort of thing, Much as what it was at my school. You know you didn't go to the headmaster sort of thing; he was over there, but that was the culture in those days. So I think that's good.

RQ2: relations
with children

RQ3: Not
manager to
detriment of
pupils.

RQ7: reaction
to past experience
of own principal

The fact that he is probably a very lively, entertaining character and a bit laid back and let things happen around him, I think was fine; is quite a good quality in a way. One has to obviously; you can't be laid back in the horizontal, and let people walk all over top of you. You have to ... the expression ... the leader is not a driver idea. You don't want to have to lead from the back, but you don't want to lead from the front either. You want to be able to mould the people around you. You want to feel as if you're in charge. But at the same time be diplomatic.

RQ2:

RQ3: leadership
style

RQ2:

- directive
- diplomatic
- relations with
staff.

Appendix 8

Trustee meeting summary sheet

BOT Meeting

Date:

Place: School

Time: 9.15 - 10.15 pm

* MEETING TOPICS

- (1) P. Adviser - report ex chair on recent meeting with him
- role in the interview
Q. raised re P. Adviser's background / biases
- (2) Person specification approved
- (3) Referee report form - sample supplied by P. Adv.
- (4) Issues raised by privacy act - ringing referees
- (5) Legal aspects of application form - criminal convictions
- (6) Areas for advertising - which newspapers?
- (7) Outside applications
- (8) Gender / EEO question with choosing "right type of person"

SELECTION PROCESSES1. Principal Adviser

- Chair. reported back on meeting with P Adv. Major points
- (i) expressed faith in parents' ability to pick a good P - pleased with other appointments.
 - (ii) provided some sample Q's for interview
 - (iii) will advise on curriculum matters
 - (iv) all interview will follow through with a candidate
 - (v) will comment on post-interview discussions
 - (vi) produced form of declaration of prior knowledge

Paul asked Q re P. Adv's background : age / dating network
: was he pleased with other appointments because he
was involved?

[* For Paul's interview : obvious concern : outsider
to be checked out - follow up] .

Appendix 9

Data sources for research questions

DATA SOURCES FOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions	Data sources
Educational leadership	
RQ1 Knowledge of principal responsibilities	Interview
RQ2 Essential principal characteristics	Questionnaire Interview Observational record
RQ3 Concepts of leadership management	Interview
RQ4 Leader/manager preference	Interview Cross-referencing of tabular results from RQ2
Selection processes	
RQ5 Selection procedures	Documentation Observational record
RQ6 Criteria identification	Documentation Observational record Interview
RQ7 Subjective influences	Observational record Interview
RQ8 Gender equity	Observational record Interview
Directions for future trustee training	
RQ9 Future trustee training	Interview Observational record

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