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**The use of time by second-level school principals in Ireland:
a study of perceptions and reality**

by

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of
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I hereby declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work
and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree
at this or any other university.

Robert Kerr.

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ABSTRACT

THE USE OF TIME BY SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN IRELAND: A STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS AND REALITY

The vast majority of principals of second-level schools in Ireland have been appointed to their positions without any pre-service training or explanation of what their job will entail. There are few, if any, genuine indicators of what is expected of the principal as leader of the school community and there are very limited opportunities for those in authority to convey their appraisal of the principal's performance. Despite this serious lack of prior specification, this thesis that there is a remarkably high degree of consistency among the principals in the patterns of work which they display, both within this country and when comparisons are made with overseas.

An extensive literature review examines what is said about the nature of the manager's job and the characteristics this displays. Much research into the work practices of school principals, from many countries around the world, is considered and the common trends are highlighted. In particular, the analysis of the work performed by the principals using the sTAMp classification system as designed in the UK by Torrington and Weightman for the training of school principals found that the literature was consistent in recording principals overusing their time for administration at the expense of both genuine managerial activities and tasks which kept them in direct contact with the students in their schools.

The various methods available to the researcher, including the structured interview and questionnaire with both closed and open questions, the diary method and direct observations, are considered and the advantages and disadvantages of each are noted. This thesis uses a combination of all these methods to try to reinforce the results obtained separately from each. A non-random sample of 26 second-level school principals was chosen to cover the various sectors (including voluntary secondary, community, comprehensive and vocational), a range of sizes (from less than 200 pupils top more than 1000), a spread of locations (including urban and rural and from different parts of the country) and school which had boarders as well as those with day pupils only. The division of their work into the various categories for the principals in each of these groups was then found and the general degree of similarity was noted.

The thesis concludes that secondary principals in Ireland work longer hours and have more work events per week than do their colleagues elsewhere. However, they display the same characteristics in their work patterns as do other heads. About 80% of their time is spent as the school's chief executive with only 20% as the leading professional. The demands on the boarding school principals are particularly onerous. The thesis recommends a comprehensive system of training for all principals prior to their taking up office. Further research leading to a job description for secondary principals is also advised.

Robert Kerr,
August 1994.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Many managers might consider it to be self-evident that their working day is full of variety, with many brief and fragmented interactions. It is very likely that most secondary school principals would also relate easily to a description of their working time as varied and fragmented and with long working hours; indeed, such are the essential findings of the literature from research carried out in the UK, the USA, and in several other countries around the world. These studies also indicate that school principals and other managers tend to spend less time than they think on genuine managerial work and too much time on low-value administration and maintenance tasks. The primary aim of this thesis is to examine the use of time by secondary school principals in Ireland and to see if this is consistent with other research from elsewhere.

1.1 Definitions

The term “secondary school” will be used throughout this thesis in the manner in which it would appear that the Department of Education intends it to be used in the future and as announced in the 1992 Green Paper on Education where it is proposed (Government of Ireland, 1992, 142) that the term “secondary school” should be used to denote all types of second-level schools. This would include the voluntary secondary school the comprehensive school, the community school, the community college, the vocational school and the secondary top.

The term “principal” will be assigned to the leader of the school community, whether appointed as a principal, headmaster, headmistress, warden, or other similar position. In the vast majority of these cases, the principal is also the school manager.

More specific terms dealing with the analysis of a principal’s working day (such as the different types of work) will be defined in chapter 3. These will broadly follow the classification used in the UK by Torrington and Weightman (1987, 1989) and the more detailed headings as originally used in the USA by Mintzberg (1973, 1975).

In trying to analyse the principals’ work pattern, the following objectives will be addressed:

1. To review and assess the relevant literature on how managers and, in particular, school principals, use their time.
2. To describe a typical working day for a secondary school principal in Ireland, by analysis into its component parts under each of the classification headings.
3. To establish whether or not Irish secondary principals are allocating their working time in a proportion supported by the management trainers.
4. To determine whether or not there are significant differences in the work pattern of principals in the different types of schools –
 - (i) Boarding or day,
 - (ii) Voluntary secondary of community/comprehensive/vocational,
 - (iii) Urban or rural,
 - (iv) Large or small.

To this end, a range of schools from varying parts of the country and from different sectors of the educational community will be chosen, but all with principals having at least three years' experience.

1.2 Contents

Chapter 2 will describe the situation in which a second-level principal (whether newly appointed or not) finds him/herself today. Reference will be made to changing scene nationally in recent years with the falling number of religious available for principalships. The lack of qualifications to serve as a principal and the lack of both pre-service and in-service training for principals will also be considered.

Chapter 3 will review some of the literature available on this topic. Much of this stems from Britain or the USA and a significant proportion of it deals with principals of primary schools, but it will be shown that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the general pattern of work behaviour is broadly similar across the world and across the various sectors within a single system.

Chapter 4 will consider the various methods available to the researcher in this field and the merits and demerits of each. The reasons for the final choice of methods will be explained and the methods of implementing this choice will be considered.

Chapter 5 will include detailed results of the questionnaire, interviews, diaries and observations of principals in action. Various conclusions will be drawn and analysed and comparisons will be made with the existing research as reviewed in chapter 3. Some implications of these conclusions will then be considered.

Chapter 6 will state the conclusions reached and will make recommendations for further work, with some tentative suggestions from remedial action for deficiencies found between the ideal and actual work patters of secondary principals.

The main body of the thesis will then be followed by a number of appendices and a bibliography.

Chapter 2: BACKGROUND

2.1 Appointment as a principal

Only a small percentage of those serving the teaching profession will ever become principals, but those that do always have had, and will very likely continue to have, a very considerable effect on those that do not. Before a person may register to teach in a second-level school in Ireland, he or she must

- (i) show evidence of having an appropriate academic qualification,
- (ii) satisfactorily complete one year's teaching in a recognised second-level school in Ireland,
- (iii) produce satisfactory evidence of character, and
- (iv) pass a test of competency in oral Irish administered by the Department of Education (Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland [hereinafter referred to as ASTI], 1993, 66).

Following registration, any teacher may be appointed to a "B" post of responsibility after one year's whole-time teaching experience and to an "A" post after three year's whole-time teaching experience (ASTI, 1993, 111). There is automatic promotion for lay teachers from a "B" post to an "A" post (ASTI, 1993, 114). The appointment of a vice-principal is also covered by the memorandum on posts agreed between the Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland (ASTI) and the Joint Managerial Body (JMB) and, while there are no further specific requirements for appointment as a vice-principal, the intention is quite clear that the vice-principal should be the most senior candidate applying for the post (ASTI, 1993, 111). Among the agreed duties of the vice-principal is stated that "the vice-principal shall act as principal when the principal is absent, assuming the responsibilities and authorities of the principal's role" (ASTI, 1993, 116). Perhaps surprisingly, there are no conditions at all for appointment as a principal, although it is noted that "the vice-principal shall not have automatic right of succession to the post of principal" (ASTI, 1993, 116).

2.2 Training and preparation for a principalship

It is apparent from the above that the requirements for appointment as a member of the so-called "middle management" team are minimal. It must be of even greater concern that those who are placed in charge of a school need have no formal training at all in any aspect of the administrative or managerial tasks that must be faced after appointment. In very many

cases, the principal is the person who takes charge on a daily basis of physical resources valued in millions of pounds and of human resources including perhaps fifty graduates and, say, ten other adults, not to mention eight hundred or more students. To expect any person to take on such a task without any compulsory training or formal system of assistance from the Department of Education is surprising, to say the least, and may be rather foolish and short-sighted. In fact, the Department of Education is currently establishing an in-service unit, part of whose function will be to examine the pre-service and in-service education of principals. This tacit admission that there is a need for such training in the modern world of education is welcome and it is to be hoped that any future courses established for trainee principals will be eagerly supported.

Traditionally, the vast majority of second-level principals in Ireland came from the religious sector and many were moved within their order from one school to another. However, with the dramatic fall in the number of vocations to religious orders in recent years, the situation has changed to such an extent that currently there are very few schools still with religious principals, even those that are run expressly by an order of priests or nuns. The advent of a lay principal in any school which formerly had a religious head brings financial implications which will not be considered in this paper. However, it must also draw attention to and question the present method whereby principals can be appointed without any management training.

The report on the National Education Convention makes reference to the “inadequate nature of the preparation of principals for their role” and comments that this gave rise to “much discussion” at the Convention (Coolahan, 1994, 175). This clear lack of preparation for what is, perhaps, the single most important role in the effective functioning of a school, and the process of selection of principals, which is described as “somewhat of a gamble” (Coolahan, 1994, 174), receive several further comments in the report, including the following:

- The changed role of schools call for a high level of skill in school leadership and management. The range of responsibilities on principals and senior staff has become very extensive and the satisfactory performance of these functions is crucial for the effectiveness and efficiency of schools.
- More opportunities, both in the areas of training [of principals] and application, need to be developed. It was felt that the role needs to be specific before selection can proceed.
- The perceived lack of clarity about the role, the work level involved, inadequate support systems, poor remuneration and the absence of suitable exit arrangements, may be

important factors in deterring suitable applicants from applying for posts. (Coolahan, 1994, pp. 148, 174, 174/5)

2.3 Aim and method of this thesis

The aim of this present research is to examine the actual use of a principal's working time, with the intention of trying to partly clarify the work level involved in being a secondary school principal. No consideration is given here to the actual role of the principal and his/her effectiveness, nor to the remuneration and exit arrangements. As the National Education Convention report says, "The research literature consistently identifies good leadership as one of the key features of successful schools" (Coolahan, 1994, 41). This thesis does not attempt to either examine or observe any of the characteristics normally associated with "good leadership". Rather, it is merely a first-stage effort at identifying precisely what Irish secondary school principals do, as opposed to what they should be doing (according to the literature) or what they think they are doing. However, it is hoped that this first step will show that there is a clear need for comprehensive management training of all principals, both before and after their appointment.

Ní Thiarniagh noted that more observational studies of school principals were needed (1987, 128). Southworth referred to the need for "richer and detailed description" of principals at work (1993, 79) in order "to show the complexity of their work in greater relief" (1993, 85) and he said that what was required was more studies of the kind undertaken by Hall, Mackay and Morgan (1986) when they observed headteachers at work. In Australia, Willis (1980, 28-29) noted that "with the lack of empirical data on the work of the principal, a more sustained observational study of the work of a small sample of principals from different kinds of school systems would provide in-depth case study material". This present thesis attempts to address these suggestions by studying the work practices of a number of secondary principals.

Twenty-six selected principals were interviewed at some length and were asked to classify their time in an ideal setting (i.e. what they think they should be doing) and then to give their actual use of time as they perceived it without recourse to any records (i.e. what they think they are doing). A number of these principals were observed in action and half the sample completed a simple diary of their activities during a period of several days (thus showing what they were *actually* doing). The results thus generated will be analysed in chapter 5.

2.4 A principal's use of time

The report on the National Education Convention comments that “in practice, direct day-to-day responsibility for the smooth and efficient running of the school is vested by the Board of Management in the principal”. Indeed, at the Convention, “there was general agreement that the principal had an important leadership role in the school, although there was somewhat less evidence, as judged from the discussions, that this role was at present being exercised as portrayed in the Green Paper” (Coolahan, 1994, 42). In fact,

It also emerged from the Convention discussions that there was a fundamental mismatch between the role of the principal as outlined in the Green Paper and as agreed by the participants, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the manner in which this role is being exercised at present in many of the schools. Instructional leadership, according to the participants, was the most neglected aspect of the principal's work in the school. Pressure of time, with the urgent taking precedence over the important, and insufficient back-up support services, were cited as the main reasons for this neglect. (Coolahan, 1994, 43).

While this thesis does not attempt to examine the role of the principal as either chief executive or instructional leader, there are clear indication from the principals' interviews and from their diaries and observations that their work as leading professionals is being seriously neglected because of the extreme pressure from executive work, mainly administration, in particular.

It will become apparent from chapter 3 that all principals are faced on a daily basis with a very substantial job which is demanding both in pace and content. It would appear from the literature that many principals find this combination extremely difficult and rather stressful and that many succumb to the temptation to deal with the tasks with which they feel more comfortable – generally those less demanding and of lower value – and to give in to the pressure to allow the urgent to displace the important. It will be shown that the principal faces a daily avalanche of administrative work and bureaucracy which tends to keep him or her from the real work of managing the entire school. This over-concentration on administration is raised repeatedly by Torrington and Weightman (1989, 102) who strongly recommend principals to delegate routine administration to clerical staff and to maintain a high level of technical (e.g. teaching) work. Conversely, Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (1986, 69) refer to the tendency of principals to overuse their professional skills from the past, at the expense of real managerial work. Perhaps this dilemma should be addressed by training for principals.

Pedler *et al.* (1986, 63-69) also say that time is scarce and so principals should make priority lists of their current tasks, should allocate percentages of their time to each category on the list (things they 'must do', 'should do' or 'would like to do' within the next day or two) and then compare their actual situation at the end of a week with their plan. Pedler *et al.* remind principals of their tendency to omit family and friends from their priority lists and to concentrate on doing the things which are enjoyable at the expense of the difficult things, even if these are the most vital. The suggestion for prioritising activities is supported by Wilkinson (1990, 114) as being a constructive response to the heavy demands placed daily on the principal. However, it will be shown that the vast majority of principals do not appear to consciously plan either their day or their activities but seem prepared to work in a reactive way and to take whatever chances are afforded them during the day for genuine managerial interactions. This contrast quite sharply with that the principals themselves think they are doing – it will be shown that the actual amount of real managing work which they perform in the course of a normal day is disappointingly small.

2.5 Conclusion

It is to be hoped that research such as this present piece might be of use to those interested in becoming principals in the future, or those concerned with the training of principals, by setting out the typical scenario faced by principals in their normal working day. Other recent research in Ireland (Leader and Boldt, 1994) supports the findings of this thesis and also makes several useful recommendations for future action. This present work identifies some areas which require further examination of secondary school principals in Ireland are to be empowered to act in the manner envisaged by the Green Paper of 1992 (Government of Ireland, 1992).

Chapter 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

That the typical working day of a secondary school principal is both long and busy comes as a statement of the obvious to many. Nevertheless, it is often necessary to check that the 'obvious' is, indeed, accurate. Furthermore, the extent to which the principal's day is fragmented into a high number of brief and chance encounters is often underestimated by parents. Teachers and students who seem to assume that the principal spends his or her day either tucked away in the office or out of the school at a meeting.

In spite of the fact that a school principal is a high profile person in the life of all families with one or more school-going children, little attention has been paid in this country to their work patterns and there has been virtually no attempt her as yet to try to assess what the principal's job actually entails. While attention has been given to the more nebulous area of school and principal effectiveness, the issue of efficiency has been largely ignored. As a first step in the consideration of efficiency, it is helpful to try to identify exactly what it is that school principals do all day and how long they spend performing each activity. A great deal of attention has been paid to these questions by industry around the world and by some educational institutions, in the UK and the USA in particular.

3.1 General research

Little work was carried out in a systematic way into the work of the manager until the seminal work by Henry Mintzberg in 1973 which gave an analysis of what a manager actually does (Mintzberg, 1973). Since then, much other research has been carried out which has examined this work profile in greater depth and for a wider variety of managers, including school principals. Nevertheless, Michael Fullan (1991, 145) says that "systematic research on what the principal actually does ... is quite recent."

Rosemary Stewart (1986) points out that the efficient use of time is not the same as doing the right thing. Effective use of time, she says, implies deciding what ought to be done, whereas efficient use of time is merely organising one's time better. She suggests that managers interested in examining their own use of time should keep a record in detail of what they do for a week or longer – the diary method used by many of the modern researchers. She concludes that "many managers find that their picture of how they spend their time is different from what they really do" (Stewart, 1986, 195).

Bertie and Everard and Geoffrey Morris (1990, 63) say that the efficient use of time depends on having and keeping to a structure suited to the situation. They also stress that “thinking is one of the most positive uses of time” (Everard and Morris, 1990, 122) – this enables planning, organising and controlling – and they go on to suggest that managers keep an action diary to investigate their own work profile. A time log and an analysis sheet are also given (Everard and Morris, 1990, 137-140). Lewis and Dennison (1991, 47) state that they believe the questionnaire and structured interview methods to be too subjective, while the time diary method of heads recording their own activities on pre-coded charts has the disadvantage of being too simplistic. Hence, they used the observation method of recording the principals’ activities against, for example, the Mintzberg roles.

Geoff Southworth concludes his examination of school leadership by saying that

We need more detailed, close-up studies of heads in action to show the complexity of their work in greater relief. We also need to investigate what motivates heads and where they find job satisfaction (Southworth, 1993, 85).

He suggests that, even with the passage of twenty years since the Mintzberg study, much work remains to be done in this area.

3.2 The lack of job specification for principals

It may at first seem almost self-evident that, before a principal (or any other manager) can be expected to manage his or her time effectively and efficiently, it is necessary to carefully identify what the job entails (Rees, 1991, 24). It has long been accepted that the job of any general manager is a very demanding one, both intellectually and interpersonally (Kotter, 1982, 92). Hellowell (1987, 41) said that it appeared that a principal’s job “is not well delineated in such a way that the job description could be used as a basis for performance appraisal”. In his study of the job descriptions of many vacancies for principalships, Hellowell found that there was generally no indication of what constituted “suitable qualifications” or “suitable experience”. In fact, he said that generally the description of the school was much more detailed than the description of the job (Hellowell, 1987, 42). This is confirmed by Chase and Kane (1983) who say that principals’ job descriptions are “vague, leaving their instructional leadership duties to their own discretion”. The report from the National Education Convention also suggests that “the role [of the principal] needs to be specific before selection can proceed” (Coolahan, 1994, 174). Leader and Boldt (1994, 98) report that the principals whom they

surveyed “expressed the view that a ‘clearer definition’ of their role would assist them in becoming more effective principals”. However, as we have seen, systematic research on what the secondary school principal actually does is quite recent. The fact that this is surprising is emphasised by Cuban (1976, xiv):

While we know to the penny what salaries administrators received, what degrees they earned, and where they were born, we know very little about what they, as executives actually do each day.

It would also appear that other principals and other managers know little about what they themselves really do each day! As Mintzberg says (1975, 49):

If you ask a manager what he does, he will most likely tell you that he plans, organises, coordinates and controls. Then watch what he does. Don’t be surprised if you can’t relate what you see to those four words.

Leithwood (1989, 1-2) suggests that what a principal does is most directly a consequence of what he or she thinks and he asks why there exists such variety in the manner in which different principals operate. Blease and Lever (1992, 189-190) report one principal as having said that he had to prepare the budget under a new system for the coming year for his school “by determining headings, allocating resources, etc. – the governors merely adopted my financial statement. ... I am heavily involved – more than I want to be, more than I hoped would be necessary”. Perhaps the widespread lack of any specification of what is expected of the principal results in, among other things, the wide variety of work content and practices reported by Leithwood. This is supported by Wilkinson (1990, 112) who says that “while headteachers are not required to become experts in accounting, marketing, law and so on, the range of their responsibilities, nevertheless, has widened”.

The Toronto Board of Education report (Edu-Con, 1984) showed that 90% of their principals reported an increase in their workloads in the previous five years and 61% reported a decrease in their effectiveness. Wilkinson (1990, 112) reports that many headteachers identify “the limitation of a finite amount of time” as one of the most serious constraints they face in their daily work, and he suggests that something as simple as a realisation of the effective cost of a staff meeting in teachers’ time “puts a premium on the worthwhile utilisation of time”. Morris and Murgatroyd (1986, 277) comment that all leaders must be “able to tolerate high levels of ambiguity and paradox, be entrepreneurial and action-oriented and work with

and for people” if they are to succeed. According to McGeown, “principals receive little practical guidance from nebulous job specifications and vaguely articulated role specifications held by competing constituencies” (Harling, 1984, 202). Nevertheless, it is accepted that the only direction that could be given at that time without further research into the organisational behaviour of schools is “a rather blurred road map which locates potential hazards and havens and the likely consequences of following alternative routes, depending on one’s destination and one’s travelling companions” (Harling, 1984, 202).

In a study of first-time high school principals, Parkay, Currie and Rhodes quote from several principals commenting on their work and their surprise at its nature and extent even after several years in the job, including “the principalship is much more complex and demanding than I ever envisioned” (Parkay *et al.*, 1992, 43) and “I never in my wildest imagination realised what this job was like. ... You just never can know until you sit in this seat” (p. 55). It would appear that the lack of preparations for a principalship has long-term and continued effects.

3.3 The nature of the principal’s work

Rosemary Stewart points out that “a study of the use of time is simpler, both conceptually and methodologically, than a study of what managers do” (1988, 4). It is clear from even a brief review of the literature that there is widespread agreement on the fragmented nature of all managers’ working time. Stewart (1988, 114) gives the main characteristics of the manager’s time as: (i) fragmentation, where the average duration of each episode is only minutes; however, she points out that the interruptions sometimes come from the manager himself who thinks of something else to be done and switches to that; and (ii) mainly talk – about 67% of a manager’s time – and mostly face to face. From these, she summarises the manager’s work as establishing cooperative relationships, using informal information and piecing it together, and managing on the run.

Stewart was not interested in the actual decisions taken by the managers, or their effectiveness, and she summarises the typical manager’s day as consisting of 36% paperwork, 6% inspection, 50% discussions (including 7% committee meeting and 6% telephone conversations), and 8% either travelling or at social activities (1988, 104). This is vastly different from the traditional picture of the manager as working in an office directing operations towards the implementation of some all-embracing plan previously created in that office. In

fact, Stewart says that managers are not people who plan, organise, coordinate, motivate or control, contrary to popular opinion. Rather, she suggests that the manager is weighed down by administration and by casual and/or chance encounters, thus effectively precluding the possibility of spending significant amounts of time on planning and reflecting (1988, 113). Stewart also discusses several different types of managers, who differ significantly in their use of time, from the “emissaries” who spend 37% of their time in their own offices and 22% of their time at external events to the “writers” who spend 67% of their time in their own offices and just 3% at external events (1988, 101). This, it is important to record that, while the average picture may show certain trends, no implications can be made for the activities of any individual within the set studied.

Stewart also points out (1988, 117) that there are great temptations towards inefficiency for the manager which leave him or her not in control, such as superficiality (perhaps by delegating) or overworking. The literature would appear to support the suggestion that school principals spend long periods of time working each week. This begs the question as to whether this implies that the workload is too great for one person or the efficiency of the typical principal is less than ideal.

3.4 Classification of a principal’s activities

Mintzberg, in his seminal work, classified a manager’s work under ten different headings, as follows (1973, 54-99):

- (a) Interpersonal roles: manager as figurehead,
manager as leader,
manager as liaison;
- (b) Informational roles: manager as monitor,
manager as disseminator,
manager as spokesman;
- (c) Decisional roles: manager as entrepreneur,
manager as disturbance handler,
manager as resource allocator, and
manager as negotiator.

Blease and Lever (1992, 186), amongst many others, refer to the fact that secondary school principals are expected to be both “chief executives” and “leading professionals” (or

“instructional leaders). They say that “one of the headteacher’s primary functions is to create the conditions in which others can operate effectively” (1992, 186). Blease and Lever gathered these interpersonal, informational and decisional roles together under the heading “chief executive” while under the heading “leading professional” they included goal setting, evaluating, curriculum coordination and developing, teaching, and being an exemplar of professional values.

To the above roles Coulson (1986, 97) added ‘motivator’, ‘control’ (i.e. discipline) and ‘personal problem resolution’ under interpersonal, ‘consultant’ and ‘focus and filter’ (i.e. the person in charge of exchange of information) under informational, and ‘systems maintenance’, ‘organiser of major tasks/events’, initiator of development projects’ and ‘long term planner’ under decisional. This gave a very detailed set of roles for a manager. While it is clear that the school principal is no different from the general business manager in the range and extent of activities in which he or she is involved, it was not felt that such a precise analysis of work was merited in the present study. Furthermore, with so many separate categories of work there was the greatly increased risk of inconsistent classification among the different principals observed.

Leithwood and Montgomery (1986) developed the “principal’s profile” which contains four levels of effectiveness resulting from an analysis of the work carried out by principals. It is not the aim of this present thesis to assess the relative contributions made to the principal’s workload by the chief executive and leading professional roles referred to above, nor to consider the various characteristics which might affect a principal’s effectiveness as a head. However, it will be interesting to recall these classification later following a consideration of the results of direct observation of principals in action.

A more manageable analysis of a principal’s work was devised by Torrington and Weightman (1987) specifically for secondary school principals and subsequently amended slightly by themselves (1989) to include all activities under just five separate headings. The main classifications were as follows (Torrington and Weightman, 1989, 101):

- (i) ‘Technical’, which is work done because of a principal’s professional training, experience or qualifications, including such activities as teaching, preparing and marking, anything involving pupils directly (but not discipline), and discussing curriculum issues with colleagues;

- (ii) ‘administrative’, which is any work concerned with organisational maintenance, such as carrying out official or other regular duties authorised by others, and clerical work including filling in forms, making lists, on the telephone, photocopying and sorting papers; and
- (iii) ‘managerial’, which is any work which entails setting precedents, including influencing others to assent to agree to some non-obvious decision or behaviour or getting something done which would otherwise not have been done such as discussing with teachers how the timetable could be better the following year, regrouping pupils, walking around the school to see what is going on or deciding the agenda for a meeting.

Together these three roles were expected to account for the vast majority of a principal’s working time. The remainder was divided between ‘social’, which is essentially the numerous everyday interactions with others in the school community, and ‘personal’, which is anything undertaken during the normal working day for the benefit of the principal but not for the school or a member of its community. Given the anticipated dominance of the technical, administrative and managerial aspects of the principal’s work, the acronym given to the classification system was written “sTAMp” (Torrington and Weightman, 1989, 101). Despite the greatly reduced number of headings, there still remains the likelihood that certain activities could be classified under more than one heading. For example, during any brief conversation with a member of staff a principal may ask how the teacher is feeling (social), comment on the progress of a particular pupil in the teacher’s class (technical), ask the teacher to complete and return a form (administrative), and pass on a copy of the agenda for a forthcoming staff meeting (managerial). Thus, even within a very short space of time the apparently one activity may in fact conceal a larger number of purposes which are subsequently ‘lost’ by classification under only one heading. Indeed, the recorder may not be aware of the multi-intentional aspect of the activity unless he or she is party to the actual conversation. This aspect of the principal’s work is commented on later and is described as “the efficiency of the inefficient”.

3.5 Analysis of a principal’s working time

3.5.1 Number of activities per day and total working time per week

Very many authors either or both of the total number of activities per day for managers (some of whom were secondary school principals) and the total time spent working per week. A summary of a selection of these is given in Table 3.1; a “-” indicates that no figure is given for that category in that particular source. When a simple arithmetic average is calculated,

these results show a mean number of 66 activities per day and a mean working week of 49.5 hours.

Table 3.1 Mean number of activities per day, N, and mean length of working week, T, for managers.

Source	Date	N	T
Mintzberg (small companies)	1973	77	-
Mintzberg (Large companies)	1973	22	-
Lyons	1976	-	53.5
Willis	1980	60.4	59.9
Martin and Willower	1981	149.2	53.2
Kmetz and Willower	1982	122.3	49.7
Kotter	1982	-	59.0
Walsh	1984	-	41.5
Arubayi	1986	-	54.0
Harvey	1986	40	45.0
Davies	1987	50	46.2
Ní Thiarniagh	1987	34	42.5
Torrington and Weightman	1987	60	-
Clarke	1988	53	-
Hannaway	1991	63	45.0
Blease and Lever	1992	-	42.0
Fredericks and Brown	1993	-	55.0
Leader and Boldt	1994	-	45.8
Average		66	49.5

3.5.2 Analysis of time using a Mintzberg style classification

Mintzberg, from his study of general managers, found significant differences between the managers of small and large organisation, particularly in the total number of activities each undertook in a ‘typical’ day, with the managers of the smaller companies undertaking 3.5 times as many activities as in the larger companies (1973, 105). In fact, the only category under

which the managers in the large companies had a higher total was “scheduled meetings”. Mintzberg’s classification system was subsequently used by many other researchers, some of their findings are summarised in Table 3.2, using the key shown in Table 3.3:

Table 3.2 Percentage of principal’s/manager’s working time spent on different activities using Mintzberg’s headings

Activity #	Source								Average
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
1	16.0	35.0	22.0	21.0	18.6	26.0	22.0	15.0	22.0
2	17.3	21.0	59.0	14.0	10.3	6.3	19.6	26.0	21.7
3	27.5	15.0	10.0	29.0	32.5	18.2	30.0	25.0	23.4
4	9.0	-	-	8.0	6.0	3.9	9.1	15.0	6.4
5	5.8	17.0	6.0	6.0	8.0	3.5	6.7	9.0	7.7
6	7.7	12.0	3.0	15.0	4.2	4.2	4.6	9	7.5
7	5.5	-	-	-	4.4	1.2	2.8	-	1.7
8	2.2	-	-	1.0	5.4	18.7	1.4	*	3.6
9	0.7	-	-	-	0.7	0.4	0.6	1.0	0.4
10	2.4	-	-	-	2.5	2.8	2.7	-	1.3
11	0.7	-	-	-	1.9	2.2	0.5	-	0.7
12	0.1	-	-	-	1.9	0.0	0.0	-	0.2
13	5.1	-	-	6.0	3.6	12.6	0.0	-	3.4

- Sources:
- A: Martin and Willower, 1982
 - B: Mintzberg, 1973 – for small companies
 - C: Mintzberg, 1973 – for large companies
 - D: Martinko and Gardner, 1990
 - E: Kmetz and Willower, 1982
 - F: Chung and Miskell, 1989
 - G: Willis, 1980
 - H: Wolcott, 1973

Table 3.3 Key to activities listed in Table 3.2

Activity #	Activity title	Examples of activity
1	Deskwork	Correspondence, form filling
2	Scheduled meetings	Usually with teachers or students
3	Unscheduled meetings	Informal or unexpected gatherings
4	Verbal exchanges	Very brief encounters with others
5	Telephone	Either incoming or outgoing
6	Tours of the school	Usually supervising or inspecting
7	Monitoring	Supervision in a single area
8	Trips away	Delivering students or errand
9	Announcing	Usually via a public address system
10	Observing	Watching teachers
11	Processing	Regular administration with forms
12	Teaching	Includes preparation and marking
13	Personal	Anything not related to work

3.5.3 Analysis of time using classifications similar to Mintzberg's

Other writers have used the type of general headings Mintzberg employed for his classification of the work of managers already outlined. Lews and Dennison, for example, found that, although designated as non-teaching, the principals in their study spent a significant amount of their time (16.7%) in teaching and a very small percentage of their time (4.1%) in establishing, developing and refining goals (1991, 52). In all, they concluded that principals spend just over 40% of their working time as leading professionals with the balance acting as chief executive.

Hall, Mackay and Morgan, from observation of fifteen heads, concluded that they spent 13.7% of their time teaching, 10.3% as the figurehead (involved in ceremonial or in establishing the ethos of the school), 10.0% on educational policy and curricular matters, 33.1% on operations management and routine administration, 22.6% on human management (whether staff or pupils), and the remaining 10.3% on external management (of parents, governors, etc.) (Hall *et al.*, 1986, 15). Hall *et al.* also give an interesting and detailed account of a week in the life of four principals (1986, 19-62). The very large amount of time shown here as being taken

up by routine (generally low-value) matters such as maintenance of the building and plant or recurring administration is a common thread running through the literature. Other frequently occurring themes, possibly corollaries of the time spent on low-value tasks, include the very small amount of time spent in making decisions as the manager and a high proportion of the time spent in conversation, either face to face or over the telephone.

Martinko and Gardner summarise their observation of the work of school principals (1990, 339) as 31.7% interpersonal, 49.4% informational, 15.2% decisional and 3.7% other. This again supports the contention that principals spend a great deal of time both talking and administering, but relatively little time planning or evaluating. It would also appear from Martinko and Gardner's survey that almost three-quarters of a principal's time (74%) is spent either seeking or passing on information and that almost one-half of their activities (47%) are initiated by themselves (1990, 339). Clarke says that 47% of a principal's activities are initiated by others (1988, 22). Chung and Miskell (1989, 46) say that secondary principals spend half to two-thirds of their time either talking or listening (with 75% of their contacts being brief verbal communications of average duration just one minute) and that they take the initiative in about two-thirds of these encounters. This might indicate that principals should be in a position to take greater control of their working day by reducing the number of contacts they initiate, so freeing themselves somewhat for planning and reflection.

However, this thought is not generally supported by the literature as being realistic, mainly because the work of the principal is constantly interrupted. Very many authors describe the rapid and constant change from one activity to another throughout the principal's day and the consequent brief time spent on each event. 90% of a manager's time in a small organisation is spent on activities of less than 9 minutes' duration, according to Mintzberg (1993, 105). This reduced to 49% for large organisation, but it is still a very substantial proportion of the day. Martin and Willower record that 81.4% of the activities they observed among five secondary school principals were between one and four minutes long; they also give the modal time for the 3730 events observed during 25 days as one minute (1981, 79). Martin and Willower's mean time for all activities is just four minutes (1981, 72) and this, they suggest, gives rise to 'polychronics', where principals are seldom involved in doing just one thing at a time (1981, 74).

Davies found that 60% of all activities undertaken by four observed principals were less than nine minutes long and that only 7% lasted longer than one hour; his recorded average for all activities was 13 minutes (1987, 44). Pitner gave similar figures for a recorded 60-hour week and commented that “this does not coincide with the image of an executive as a reflective planner” (1981, 286). Kmetz and Willower list 842 activities (‘exchanges’) out of the 3000 observed as lasting just one minute each (1982, 66). Willis observed three principals for three weeks each and recorded 67% of their activities at less than 5 minutes, with 93% lasting less than 20 minutes each (1980, 41). Clarke says that, of the typically 53 activities each day, 50% are less than 5 minutes each (1988, 22) and Herron found that, even for the longest activities, about half were of less than 15 minutes duration each (1983, 118).

3.5.4 Analysis of time using the sTAMp classification

Many of the researchers who give results for the percentage of time spent by principals on each of a number of different types of activities state their findings in such a way that it is possible to translate them into the sTAMp system without undue coercion. A summary of some of these is given in Table 3.4, which also includes the average figures generated in Table 3.2. It will be seen clearly here that a significant percentage of a principal’s working time is indeed generally spent on administrative matters and other low-value tasks as suggested by the previous set of results.

To translate the Mintzberg style results into the sTAMp system of Torrington and Weightman, deskwork, processing and announcing have been combined under “administration”; all meetings, whether scheduled (either within or outside of the school) or unscheduled, telephone conversation, tours of the school, monitoring and observing have been brought together as “managerial”; verbal exchanges have been listed as “social” (regardless of the intention of the interaction); all teaching activities appear under “technical”; and other activities not related directly to the principal’s paid work are called “personal”.

The weighted average in Table 3.4 was calculated by adding the averages from the eight sources in Table 3.2 and the thirteen sources in Table 3.4 in the ratio 8:13 and then dividing the totals by 21. Hence, the weighted average for administrative work is given (to two significant figures) by:

$$A = [(8 \times (22.0 + 0.7 + 0.4)) + 13(33)] / 21 = 29$$

Table 3.4 Percentage of principal's/manager's working time spent on different activities using sTAMp classification system

Source	Date	S	T	A	M	P
Lyons	1976	0	18	79	3	0
Pitner	1981	17	0	23	60	0
Herron	1983	15	17	35	33	0
Walsh	1984	17	21	29	28	5
Arubayi	1986	0	12	44	44	0
Harvey	1986	12	31	19	33	5
Ní Thiarniagh	1987	19	16	42	23	0
Torrington and Weightman	1987	21	9	14	56	0
Stewart	1988	8	7	36	49	0
Torrington and Weightman	1989	3	23	11	61	2
Leithwood and Musella	1991	5	10	45	30	10
Blease and Lever	1992	13	17	15	41	14
Leader and Boldt	1994	5	10	32	49	4
Average for above		10	15	33	39	3
Average from Table 3.2		10	1	23	63	3
Weighted average of all results		10	10	29	48	3

The sTAMp classification shows (Table 3.4) almost half (48%) of the principal's time as being spent on 'managerial' activities. However, this includes all meetings so that there will, inevitably, be some non-managerial tasks in this figure. On the other hand, some of the verbal interaction, listed as 'social' activities, may include a managerial element. Furthermore, the range of percentages recorded as 'managerial' (from 3% to 61%) is such as to indicate some considerable confusion among writers as to what exactly constitutes such an event.

The time spent on administrative events would also appear to fluctuate widely from school to school if the literature is to be believed. Leader and Boldt comment that most principals underestimate the amount of time they spend on administration outside school hours (1994, 93). There is also, of course, a considerable variation in the figure for 'technical'

activities, since many principals are non-teaching while other are still involved in the classroom.

3.5.5 The principal's work patter throughout the day

These summaries of a typical principal's day do not show variations within the day. For example, many writers refer to the constant stream of interruptions suffered by a principal during the course of his/her typical working day. Ní Thiarniagh found that about 50% of the principal's working day is either unplanned or unpredictable (1987, 128). Hannaway, who observed six principals for one school day each, reported that the principals themselves felt that at least 75% of their day was unpredictable (1991, 92). Clarke gave this unplanned figure as 52%, with 50% of activities being interrupted (1988, 22). Davies says that nearly one quarter of all activities are interrupted (1987, 44). Willis reported (1980, 42) that over 20% of deskwork activities were interrupted and that, of these, 26% were not resumed. These interruptions, Willis says, frequently come from external telephone calls which were given priority over any other activity currently under way (1980, 34). It is partly for this reason, he says, that principals spend an average of 22.6 hours per week working after hours. Lyons gives a figure of 14.6 hours per week of a principal's own (personal) time spent working on administration in order to try to keep up to date (1976, 196). Wilkinson points out that interruptions can be either valid or invalid and that principals have to judge which is which (1990, 120). He suggests that all attempts to converse with the principal should be screened through a secretary. Wilkinson also comments that principals often interrupt themselves when the task at hand becomes difficult, but he warns against the ever-present danger of trivial administration swamping the principal at work (1990, 121), a danger also echoed by Coulson (1990, 105) and Arubayi (1986, 37).

Thody concludes that principals devote little time to reflective planning which, she says, is "generally done during car journeys or interwoven simultaneously with other activities at work or at home" (1991, 55). Pitner comments on how principals' time and energy is "for the most part expended on the more routine aspects of their work" (1981, 290). Lyons reports how, out of 467 planned minutes for an observed principals, only 230 (49%) were as planned and, of these, 190 were teaching, a scheduled meeting or lunch (1976, 21). In fact, Blease and Lever conclude that principals seem to be forced into activities by circumstances (1992, 195) and Fredericks and Brown state that the principal's time is "too heavily driven by job demands rather than by individual goals" (1993, 10).

Another trend evident during the course of a working day is the gradual increase in the average length of time spent on each activity as the day progresses. Lyons reported that the principal's earliest activities (especially before school starts) were the briefest, that the events grew longer throughout the day and that they became even longer at weekends, when interruptions were dramatically reduced (1976, 192). This is supported by Martin and Willower who commented that the initial portion of the day tended to be the busiest and that the first third of each day's activities were performed in the smallest amounts of time (1981, 74); by Davies, who said that the highest number of activities for principals is in the morning (1987, 44); and by Wolcott, who said that brief encounters were most likely in the first few minutes at school in the morning, or at break or lunchtimes (1973, 88).

3.5.6 The apparent lack of a prioritised plan

The concept of the principal as a reflective planner is also put under considerable strain, if not entirely shattered, by figures from the literature showing the amount of time spent with others during the day. Stewart records that 34% of a manager's time is spent alone, 32% with one other person and the remaining 34% with two or more others (1988, 102-3). Herron found that 35% of the principal's time was spent in meetings (1983, abs.), a figure which is very similar to the 33% of time recorded by Davies as being spent in scheduled meetings, although Davies also found an average of 89 unscheduled meetings per week, or about 20% of the time (1987, 44). In addition, Davies' study produced a figure of only 17% of time spent alone by principals (1987, 45). Clarke lists 22% of the principal's time as being alone with a substantial 53% in face to face contact during which he/she interacts with an average of 226 people per day (1988, 23). Kotter records just 24% of the manager's day as being able to work alone (1982, 79). Willis found that for 25% of the time a principal worked alone, for 37% of the time he/she was with one other person and for the remaining 38% work was conducted with two or more others present (1980, 38). The vast majority (63%) of these other people, he says (1980, 36) are internal to the school. Morris *et al.* found that the principal spent up to 60% of his/her working time either listening or talking, with an average of less than three minutes per person (1984, 52). Perhaps these figures help Adair come to his conclusion that, as with all applications of the Pareto Principle, 80% of the manager's really productive work is done in just 20% of the time (1982, 75).

Everard and Morris (1990, 122) say that principals often tackle the tasks which they consider to be urgent but which, in reality, should have been delegated. Indeed, Torrington

and Weightman (1989, 102) comment that it is “ridiculous to see well-paid professionals doing work that a properly trained clerk could do better”. Herron noted that female principals tended to delegate more than their male counterparts (1983, 121) and Ní Thiarniagh found that male principals spend more time out of their offices than in, while the female heads spent more time in their offices than out (1987, 79). Davies concluded that middle management staff, such as heads of departments, generally feel that they are not used enough in school in meaningful ways and he encouraged principals to delegate more (1983, 173).

According to Rees, “time is the manager’s only resource” so he strongly advises all managers to clarify their objectives and to order these into a priority list, thus reducing the waste of other people’s time, too (1991, 39). Rees also encourages managers to delegate more and pass on the work of lowest priority, although he does recognise that this process can be time-consuming at first (1991, 113 and 117). Wood suggests (1992b) that principals should write out a priority list for each day, as does Pippel (1992). Mortimer describes the benefits to the principal of a few days’ planning before the start of each school year (1990) but Harling noted that, while principals rated planning as their most important activity, they listed assessing the outcome of adopted procedure as their least important task (1984, 196-7), thus placing a question mark against the seriousness of their intention to plan thoroughly. Leader and Boldt also found that few principals engaged in planning and yet they felt planning and leadership to be among the most important dimensions of their role (1994, v).

The central concern according to Kmetz and Willower (1982, 77) is how to allocate attention to valued pursuits while handling the continuous action demands of administration. Willis concludes that it is not reasonable to teach people to plan their time when interruptions are such a basic feature of the principal’s work and so he says that planning is of limited benefit (1980, 50). On the other hand, Neal is certain that principals waste time by not planning (1983) and Dunn concludes that principals who teach need to plan their time better (1986, 25). Wilkinson says that establishing priorities and goals is a key activity (1990, 114). He also reminds principals to say “no” to demands of their time occasionally and he suggests that they review their utilisation of time periodically, perhaps each term or every six months (1990, 129).

Johnson also recommends delegating as much work as possible and he suggests starting each day with the most difficult jobs on the priority list. He urges principals to make time for reading and reflection when they are fresh, not after normal working hours (1990, 240-1).

Clarke also concludes that there is little time in the principal's day for reflective leadership and that what reflection does occur is largely in the principal's subconscious (1988, 27).

3.5.7 The over-emphasis on administration and other low-value tasks

Torrington and Weightman (1987) remind us that we must not confuse the task, which is the purpose of the activity, with the activity itself happening at that time. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note such figures as, for example, 17% of a principal's time being consumed by student management but only 11% being spent on curriculum development, according to Fredericks and Brown (1993, 10). Alvy and Coladarci (1985) refer to the significant discrepancy which they found between the actual time spent on instructional leadership and the desired time, especially for newer principals, and Hilsum and Strong conclude that a classroom teacher spends only 3% of his/her time on administration (1978, 56). Such differences between a teacher and the principal lend support to the argument for specialised training for principals, both pre-service and in-service.

There are several references in Torrington and Weightman to the dominance of administration in a principal's day at the expense of managerial and technical work, and they say how this is a problem which the principals can solve themselves (1987). They describe how a great deal of managerial time is in fact spent on low grade clerical duties (1989, 102). They are also very keen that principals should retain their technical work aspects, i.e. be leading professionals, since, they say, this is often a source of pride in being able to do something well and is also the only way of really keeping in touch with the school's work. They also feel that teaching is the basis of being an authority through expertise (1989, 102). On the other hand, Johnson comments on the fact that many principals do wish to continue teaching and he notes how this is in sharp contrast to most other managers who do not wish to maintain such direct ties with the workplace (1990, 240-1). In questioning why principals spend such a high percentage of their time on administration, Torrington and Weightman suggest the possibility that school managers are attracted to those tasks which they can actually complete and that administration is the most obvious such category. They conclude, therefore, that schools need more non-teaching staff (1989, 102). Neal also concludes that a principal needs a capable secretary (1983).

Sarason found that most of a principal's time is spent on administrative house-keeping matters and maintaining order. He also notes that "many principals expect, or feel they are

expected, to keep everyone happy by running an orderly school, and this becomes the major criterion of the principal's ability to manage" (1982, 80). For many new principals, it seems, order is synonymous with completion of administration. Hall *et al.* (1986, 12) felt that this preoccupation with administrative work is the reason why principals do not spend enough time in formal meetings.

Blease and Lever found no great evidence to show that principals were involved in curriculum development work (1992, 192-3). Ní Thiarniagh also found that principals do not spend enough time on curricular matters but too much on general administration and she concludes, therefore, that more administrative support is needed in schools (1987, 128). Conversely, Lewis and Dennison concluded that the managerial aspects of the principal's work tended to dominate, although they did agree with Torrington and Weightman that the heads seemed to be too busy with their fragmented role and the demands of being the school's chief executive to act overtly as leading professionals (1991, 52/54/57).

Hedges lists administration as the main time waster for principals, along with interruptions, and he feels that increased planning could go some way to improving this situation (1991). Arubayi says that the tasks of general school administration are too time consuming and complex for the principal to deal with and he found that principals are likely to spend precious time dealing with trivial issues if plans are not made for the allocation of time and the execution of administrative functions (1986, 37). Harvey (1986, 62) found that such time as was 'lost' through dealing excessively with administration was often made up by principals working at home after hours.

3.6 Characteristics of the principal's working time

3.6.1 Brevity, variety and fragmentation

The above results indicate several characteristics common to the majority of principals and to most of their working days. The most obvious of these is what is termed the "brevity, variety and fragmentation" of their work. These describe the constant interruptions to the principals, when the urgent regularly takes precedence over the important, which reduce the average time per event to minutes or less, which necessitate frequent changes of activity from the profound to the trivial and which leave many activities unfinished during the course of the day. Such characteristics have been mentioned in the preceding section and are common to a great number of writers. A short selection of such comments is given here to show the very

considerable uniformity found in the literature when describing the overall impression of the principal (or, indeed, the general manager) at work; further supporting quotations are given in Appendix F.

The first two quotes, including Mintzberg's original summary statement, refer to the constant change of activity throughout the day:

The activities of the manager are characterised by brevity, variety and fragmentation. ... The lack of pattern among activities, with the trivial interspersed with the consequential, requires that the manager shifts mood quickly and frequently. (Mintzberg, 1973, 51)

The principal's work is characterised by the broad range of activities undertaken, the fragmented nature of these activities, their unpredictability and the lack of a clear job description (Hannaway, 1991, 79) ... The principal's work is characterised by brevity, variety and fragmentation (p. 126).

Many writers comment on the frantic pace with which principals, and other managers, must conduct their daily work and, when this is combined with the unfinished nature of so many of their actions, it is clear that "the tasks do not approach the lofty ideas of 'leadership'" (Pitner, 1981, 286) which one might expect of the school principal. In fact, as Marshall and Stewart recorded from one manager, "there's no time to think, no need to decide what to do, things just come at you" (1981, 184). Clerkin also refers (1982, 298) to the "high intensity of tasks with frequent interruptions" which, instead of a systematic implementation of a previously agreed plan, is characteristic of a principal's day. This, he says, can sometimes lead to situations "where the majority of a head's energy is devoted to 'keeping the school ticking over' in the short run with only limited opportunity to consider important long-term issues (1982, 298).

Southworth comments not just on the discontinuous nature of the principal's day but on the fact pace at which they must constantly work, and Willis mentions the high level of uncertainty in the job:

The heads' work displayed an unrelenting pace throughout the day, characterised by brevity, variety and fragmentation. ... They were chronically busy, reactive as against proactive, and caught up in, and tied down by, the unceasing demands of others for their attention. ... The interruptions, decisions on the run, and chance encounters are the media for the message. (Southworth, 1993, 78-79)

The principal's work is marked by uncertainty ... hectic in pace, varied in its composition, discontinuous in any pursuit of tasks, with the unexpected always one of the few certainties of the job. For survival, the principal must cope with such an array of ambiguity, frustration and disruption. (Willis, 1980, 46)

It seems, as Stewart says, that "the manager typically switches every few minutes from one subject or person to another, rarely completing one task before being involved in another (1984, 326). Rees says that there are so many interruptions for a manager that it is difficult to think in a concentrated and systematic way about the job. He goes on to suggest that this may have to be done away from the normal place of work (1991, 40). In fact, Copeman, Luijk and Hanika record one manager as saying "the office is no place to work ... the only effective way for an executive to make sure he is not interrupted is to be out (1963, 113-114).

3.6.2 Volume and pace

The second most commonly cited characteristic of managerial work, including that of the secondary school principal, is the large volume and fast pace at which the work must be done. A typical comment would be the following from Mintzberg (1973, 51):

Because of the open-ended nature of his job, the manager feels compelled to perform a great quantity of work at an unrelenting pace. Little free time is available and breaks are rare. Senior managers, in particular, cannot escape from their jobs after hours, because of the work they take home and because their minds tend to be on their jobs during much of their "free" time.

Hannaway also comments on the "unrelenting pace", the "heavy volume" and the "long working hours" of the secondary principal (1991, 124 and 137). Southworth describes how the principals he observed coped with numerous incidents; dealt with accidents and unannounced visitors wanting to see them; responded to parents' concerns (anything from lost property to the 'statementing' of pupils); oversaw the school site; handled administrative tasks and communicated with a multitude of external agencies (1993, 75). He goes on to say that

The tasks of managing a school ... are full time and demanding. No one was ever at a loss for something to do. Indeed, quite the reverse. They saw no end to their work and even when exhausted felt there was something else they should be getting on with (Southworth, 1993, 80).

Wolcott says that "the greatest part of a principal's time is spent in an almost endless series of encounters, from the moment he arrives in school until the moment he leaves" (173,

88). Martin and Willower (1981, 79) list the high volume and pace of the principal's work as the first characteristic. They say that this was demonstrated not only by the length of the average work week (exceeding 50 hours) but also by the large number of tasks which the principal performed (17.7 tasks per hour). Interestingly, they report further that principals appear to have preferences, not just for verbal media, but for "live action" where they engage themselves in the most current or pressing situation, giving priority to those task which could be completed quickly, preferring to undertake and complete tasks as rapidly as possible (Martin and Willower, 1981, 80).

Willis supports this assertion, saying that principals seem "to savour this contact with live action" (1980, 43) and he comments that the principal's work "certainly did not end when they left at the end of the day" (1980, 37). He describes the "hectic, disjointed and constant pressure of work" (1980, 47) on principals and he says that

In the present study it cannot be said that the principals had any sort of break from the pace of work except in the actual variety itself. So a twelve minute tour was a "rest" from the office; five minutes' desk work was a "rest" from a string of visitors to the office. Morning tea was taken either during work in the office or in the "visibility" sessions in the common room. Lunchtime was committed to a meeting, spent "talking shop" with senior staff or otherwise got over quickly. (Willis, 1980, 39)

In fact, he says (1980, 40), the trend was for principals to move randomly among the media, both by their own choice and because of the pressure of events. The demands on the principals were constant and heterogeneous, "calling for almost chameleon-like performances throughout the day". Furthermore, the peripatetic nature of the job was shown by the fact that 35.8% of their activities marked a change of location for the principal's work. Willis summarises his observations by saying that his overall impression was that the principal was "beginning, in the middle of, and ending numerous issues all at the one time, some dormant but many of them likely to resurge in their demand for attention" (1980, 41).

Lloyd, in her description of her first 120 days as a headteacher, comments on the sheer unremitting pace of the work: "In spite of very long working days, I have worked most week evenings and for some of the weekends, frequently experiencing uncomfortable time pressures" (1986, 51). Lyons concludes that it is difficult to find a "quantifiable index which reflects with any degree of accuracy the pace and the pressure of work at certain parts of the

school day or the school term” (1976, 190-191). Lyons describes how events impinge one upon another and how interruptions are themselves interrupted. He gives one example of a vice-principal who achieved just five activities in 190 minutes with 96 interruptions, or one every two minutes (1976, 191). Davies also says that the principals he observed “hardly ever had a true break, e.g. coffee break was spent talking about pupils, etc.” (1987, 44).

Blease and Lever also refer to the pace of the work when they say that principals “do not have time to themselves during the day” (1992, 193). However, they criticise principals for spending “a considerable amount of time on low value tasks and activities” (1992, 194) but they do recognise that, while the principals themselves severely underestimate the time taken by such tasks, other groups also fail to recognise the range and time-consuming nature of these activities. In fact, they say that “considerable time was spent in discussion and conversation with the caretaker who appears to have had a powerful influence on the headteacher’s behaviour” (1992, 195).

Hales refers to the “pressure and conflict” in the principal’s job which result in compromise and negotiation. Principals, he says, “have to think on their feet, take decisions in situ and develop a preference for concrete activities” (1986, 102). Stewart describes how managers “often manage ‘on the run’, working in a whirl of activity (1991b, 6). This means that they do not always have time to think and assess a situation fully before being required to act or make a decision – they must frequently rely on habit as a guide to quick responses, and intuition when there is no time for analysis. They must be “opportunistic”, taking their chances wherever and whenever they can. In fact, says Stewart, they can be too busy even to pause to ask whether the activity is worthwhile (1991b, 6).

Southworth questions what motivates heads to work as hard as they do (1993, 81). Chung and Miskell found that Korean principals worked shorter hours but were more deskbound than their American counterparts; however, the cultural differences were relatively insignificant, they said, and both sets of heads had a working week in excess of 50 hours (1989, 50). They conclude that the lengthy, fast and highly verbal work undertaken by principals lacks organisation and predictability (1989, 55-56). Martin and Willower found principals frequently performing several tasks simultaneously in an effort to conserve time, but they still recorded considerable use of time at weekends, including school functions and meetings (1981, 74).

Clarke looked at a list of tasks required of principals by the Department of Education in Victoria, Australia, and he concluded that, “if this is the music to which the Department required principals to dance, we should not be surprised that they are doing a fandango rather than a modern waltz” (1988, 29). He notes that the Department of Education there requires principals to sign everything and he comments “schools are highly complex organisation and to insist that the principal be held responsible for almost every detail of their management appears both unnecessary and unreasonable” (1988, 29).

Leader and Boldt were also struck by the pace and content of the principal’s workload, which they describe as “formidable” (1994, 92) and they, too, comment on the high percentage of their time spent on low value tasks such as maintenance, fund raising and responding to problems and incidents as they occur. The excuse given by the principals, it seems, is that they feel that such tasks are essential and that if they do not undertake them they will be left undone (Leader and Boldt, 1994, 93). All this frenetic activity implies that the principals are so involved with the immediate that they cannot lead and plan adequately. Principals, in their daily round of events, interact with a wide range of people on a continuing basis “often determined by problems requiring immediate resolution” (Leader and Boldt, 1994, 92).

3.6.3 The reactive nature of the principal’s work

This ‘reactive mode’ is another common characteristic of school principals at work and one which arises directly out of the high volume and fast pace of events around them throughout the day. As Wilkinson says, “the vision of the way forward becomes lost in the clinging mud of day-to-day problems and emergencies” (1990, 114). This gives rise to the opportunism of such managers, described by Kotter as “the efficiency of seemingly inefficient behaviour” (1982, 88-92) showing how even brief conversations or chance encounters can be used to forward a manager’s aim by reacting to the flow of people around them in an efficient way.

Wolcott comments that the principal he observed at work over the course of two school years “seemed to be moved about through most of his day by little problems brought to him or created for him by others rather than by any grand design of his own of what he wished to accomplish” (1973, 34). These problems were felt by the principal to be “the kind of thing you have to do something about” even though he was “not really very interested” in them (1973, 95). Wolcott concludes (1973, 177) that the principal’s “unconstrained time at school was taken up almost totally by demands placed on him by others”. Martin and Willower concur

with this and note that “all the principals demonstrated a tendency to engage themselves in the most current and pressing situation. They invested little time in reflective planning” (1981, 80).

Mintzberg suggests that managers actually appear to prefer brevity and interruption in their work, becoming conditioned by their workload and developing an appreciation for the opportunity cost of their own time (1973, 51). Consequently, he says that managers gravitate towards the more active elements of their work – the current and the specific – thus pushing out planning and “encouraging the manager to become an ‘adaptive information manipulator’” (1973, 52). This is supported by Willis, who says that principals tend to choose those problems that can be solved most readily and rapidly; hence the familiarity and security of administration may be more comfortable for many principals than the greater uncertainties of managerial work (1980, 47).

Rees also refers to the conflict between what a manager prefers to do and what he actually does and he says that if the manager is not going to be controlled by events he must develop a strategy for influencing them (1991, 40-45). Mintzberg’s earliest study of the manager suggested that he controls little of what he does (1973, 53) and authors such as Duke have recorded principals who have said that “all you do all day is go around taking care of other people’s needs” (1988, 310). House and Lapan showed the principals’ tendency to deal with any problem that arose and they concluded that most principals had “no set of priorities except to keep small problems from becoming big ones” (1978, 145). This approach – one of continuous crisis management – leads to the principal being always on call, leaving no time or energy for developing a plan of his or her own. The principals in Martin and Willower’s study (1981, 80) “displayed a penchant for task closure”. Willis also noted their tendency to gravitate to the active or problem areas (1980, 28) and Wilkinson, who says that most managers are “reactive”, also describes how managers will often “choose to do things which they like or can do well” while they tend to leave undone those tasks that are “disagreeable” or where there is “a lack of competence” (1990, 116-118). This “bias for action”, according to Morris and Murgatroyd (1986, 280) implies that the management structures in schools should be kept simple, with few administrative layers.

Kmetz and Willower found that “events ordinarily controlled the principals rather than the other way around”. These heads “seemed to spend little time thinking about the activities

in which they were engaged or attempting to anticipate and give meaning to future ones” (1982, 77). Pitner, in her study of the differences between male and female principals, found that for both sexes “routine work drives out non-routine” and also that the “trivial problems may all be dumped on the leader’s desks”. Clarke points out the negative impressions to the principal from interacting more with those students who are in trouble and the subsequent stress increase (1988, 26). It seems clear, therefore, that a high priority for the training of principals must be teaching them some methods of mastering the many interruptions and of handling the numerous problems brought to the head during the day so that they can actually feel as if they are exerting at least some element of control over what they are doing rather than merely dancing to the tune played by all the other members of the school community. They must be shown how to overcome the tendency for self-inflicted “task jumping”, as Wilkinson calls it (1990, 120), and implement a priority plan for their day.

3.6.4 The lack of feedback to principals

“Feedback is the breakfast of champions” according to Blanchard and Johnson (1983, 67). In other words, feedback keeps us going. This regular reporting to the principal of how his or her actions and decisions have worked out in practice is essential if the head is to have some basis for future actions and decisions. Yet Willis was able to report, after nine weeks of observation of principals, that he had a

lingering impression ... that the principal’s job was a thankless one. So often did the principals commend the actions of others during personal conversations, meetings and assemblies, during incidental encounters, trips to the common room and in passing during tours. Yet never was this noticed to be reciprocal. It was as though the principal should express appreciation of the work of others in the organisation but was not entitled to receive similar approval from others of any part of his or her work performance. It was evidently taken for granted that the principal would and should perform well and needed no approbation. Much of human learning depends on the reception of valid and timely feedback of one’s behaviour. The present study indicated that the principal is denied feedback about his performance and must proceed with the job unchecked until, perhaps unknowingly, offence is caused, a norm violated, a particular policy enforced, communication forgotten, or a lapse in others’ expectations of one’s performance occurs. (Willis, 1980, 47)

Duke reported one principal as saying “early on, if you’re successful, you have gotten feedback that you are able to be all things to all people. And then you feel you have an obligation to continue to do that which in your own mind you’re not capable of doing” (1988,

309). This early success breeds new demands and, says Duke, sometimes guilt at not being able to meet them all (1988, 310). Wolcott also comments on the lack of positive feedback for principals. He says that only negative news and evaluations tend to be passed on (1973, 318).

Feedback should come from several quarters, most frequently, perhaps, the teaching staff in the school and yet, as reported above, this does not appear to be the case. Possibly this is due to the fact that, according to Harling, the most striking finding of an examination of the principal's leadership role was "the magnitude of the discrepancies between principals' reported actual behaviour and the expectations expressed by teachers" (1984, 201). This may, of course, be a further source of stress for heads. Willis reports that each of the principals in his study admitted that it was quite possible that most of the staff in their schools did not really know what the principal did on the job (1980, 43). In fact, he says that teachers do not see what the principal is doing, except perhaps "wandering about the corridors" or "leaving the school 'early'" (1980, 48). In such circumstances, positive feedback is highly unlikely.

Blease and Lever conclude that the reality is clearly very different from the perception. Perhaps surprisingly, they found that the principals in their research did not always recognise themselves in the results – "they thought they were different (generally better) or they 'knew' they were doing badly but thought they were unique" (1992, 195-6). Suggested reasons given by Blease and Lever for this disparity include the lack of a job description, the constant series of unexpected situations, those visitors to the school who refuse to see anyone other than the principal (and thereby upset the day's plan, if there is one), and the fact that the principal may be the only person 'free' to deal with low-value but perhaps highly visible tasks (1992, 197-198). However, perhaps the most important cause is the simple fact that the principal's day is not the same as the school day. As one of the principals in Blease and Lever's study said, "the length of my day is the length of time it takes me to be no further behind at the end than I was at the beginning" (1992, 198). Perhaps another compulsory element of principals' training should be how to establish a system for regular feedback so that the pressures of trying to complete tasks which are not essential are eased.

3.6.5 Other common characteristics

Among the other points noted by the many writers include the small amounts of time spent by principals communicating with their superiors or directly supervising teachers (Martin and Willower, 1981, 87). Perhaps this is related to the apparent lack of immediate feedback

experienced by principals (Hannaway, 1991, 134). Johnson describes (1990, 243) how principals occupy isolated, often thankless posts. They rarely receive acknowledgement for successes or sympathy when their efforts and plans fail". This may well also be connected to the "invisibility" of much of the principal's work in the office, after school hours or away from the school altogether, as described by Johnson (1990, 243) and Willis, who comments on the fact that 60% of the principal's work is invisible to staff and students in the school and, hence, those "whose prime function was to teach in the classroom ... were least likely to have an understanding of the nature of the principal's work" (1980, 44 and 48). It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that the principals studied by Clarke felt that they needed to be accessible especially to teachers (1988, 29).

On the other hand, of course, their very accessibility leads to the constant interruptions considered above. Peters mentions how "it is sometimes difficult to convince other people that they do not need to see the head. Officials, inspectors and a host of outside agencies expect the head to be accessible and conversant with the topic of their enquiry" (1976, 119). This also leads to the people-centred nature of the principal's job and their preference for verbal media and one-to-one encounters, generally face-to-face (Willis, 1980, 50; Mintzberg, 1973, 52); Coulson, 1990, 105; Davies, 1987, 44; Morris *et al.*, 1984, 56; Stewart, 1984, 326).

3.6.6 The training of principals

After his study of managers at work, Mintzberg concluded that "although the management school gives students MBA and MPA degrees, it does not in fact tell them how to manage" (1973, 187-188). This is supported by Wolcott, who makes reference to the inadequacy of the training received by principals in the USA before they start their jobs (1973, 323). He also records that those acting as principals did not feel their formal academic training was of much use to them (1973, 198). Leithwood suggested that the training of its principal was by far the most cost effective way to improve a school (1989, 4). According to Whitley, managers need to be able to synthesise information from a variety of sources and, for this, they need motivational and leadership skills (1989, 219-220), supplemented by what Mintzberg calls "peer skills" (1973, 189). Clerkin felt that principals need to be trained in communication skills and the delegation of administrative and technical duties to others (1985, 294), and Lyons suggests that there is also a growing need for teachers to be trained in school administration so that they can act more efficiently as assistants to the principal (1976, 2).

Duke found that one of the reasons why heads consider quitting their jobs was the lack of preparation for the realities of being a principal (1988, 310). This is supported by Thomson, who found that only five out of 22 principals interviewed indicated that they had received any preparation in educational administration or leadership prior to taking up their appointments. Coolahan (1994, 54), in the context of no compulsory pre-service training at this time for principals in this country, recommends that introductory courses for new principals should be provided and that they should be taken well in advance of taking up office. One may well question how the only formal training for becoming a teacher, in the form of the Higher Diploma in Education course, could prepare anyone for becoming a principal. While there are elements which give preparation for instructional leadership, there is little which could be said to prepare teachers for the transition to the position of chief executive with its accompanying characteristics of frenetic and endless activity as described in the foregoing sections. Possibly the most useful function which could be performed by management trainers would be how to prevent the important tasks from being displaced constantly by the urgent.

3.7 Summary

The principal's day is long and varied, with activities ranging in time from seconds to perhaps two hours and with anything from 50 to 200 events per day (Morris *et al.*, 1984, 32). Although their work is superficial (Willis, 1980, 46), principals make a large number of decisions each day (Davies, 1987, 44). Many principals complain about the increasing amount of administration with which they are expected to deal daily and the consequent reduction of time which they can allocate to instructional leadership in their schools (Katz, 1988). A principal's activities may be determined by job description, by prescription from above, by negotiation, by established practice or by self-determination (Wilkinson, 1990, 116) but Stewart concludes that "managing must often be a responsive rather than an analytical activity" (1984, 326). Stewart also notes that many managers find that their picture of how they spend their time is different from what they really do (1986, 195). Managers, of course, do not all use the same style of behaviour (Kotter, 1982, 120) but Clarke suggests that the demands of the job force principals with very different personalities to behave in very similar ways (1988, 23).

Arubayi proposed that school size is a predictor of time usage by principals, more significant than either location or experience (1986, 38). Lyons showed that the existence of a school bursar made little impact on the use of time by principals (1976, 247). Arubayi also

found that most principals looked on themselves as instructional leaders (1986, 40), while Johnson found that principals accept their important role as chief executive and that they, therefore, assume minimal responsibility for classroom teaching in their schools (1990, 241). Blease and Lever, on the other hand, recommend principals to “commend their leadership to staff by demonstrating their skill in the classroom” (1992, 188-189). Trump says that the biggest obstacle to the principal being the instructional leader is student discipline (1986) and Pellicer (1982) felt that filling the role of instructional leader may be the most difficult task a principal faces. Chase and Kane said that instructional leadership could best be improved by a better description of the job.

Mintzberg summarises the situation neatly (1973, 51) when he says that the manager “lives continuously with an awareness of what else must be done at any time”. Superficiality, he says, is an occupational hazard of the manager’s job. It would appear from this review of the relevant literature that the secondary school principal is generally a typical manager (e.g. Wolcott, 1973; Lyons, 1976; Willis, 1980; Martin and Willower, 1981; Morris *et al.*, 1984; Arubayi, 1986; Hall *et al.*, 1986; Torrington and Weightman, 1987 and 1989; Clarke, 1988; Chung and Miskell, 1989; Wilkinson, 1990; Hannaway, 1992; and Leader and Boldt, 1994), with a very high number of different activities and very many interruptions each day, causing long working hours and rapid changes of both topic and location, and with an increasing amount of administration causing the instructional leadership aspect of the job to be largely ignored. Interestingly, in spite of the obvious demands placed on all school principals, Wolcott comments that “the presence of the principal is not essential to the routine operation of the school. No calls a substitute on a day when the principal is going to be absent” (1973, 93). Perhaps this apparent paradox of being both essential and unnecessary at the same time should be examined more closely in training new principals.

Chapter: METHODOLOGY

In an examination of the actual work performed by a set of individuals it is desirable to include a variety of methods of measurement in an attempt to reduce, if not entirely eliminate, the possible fluctuations caused by some members of the set being more skilled at one type of measurement than others. Further, with a range of different types of measurement of the same data, there can be some corroborating evidence of trends as well as some indication that answers given, say in interviews, may not be fully supported by directly observed evidence. The list of possible methods open to the present researcher included interviews, both structured and open, the so-called dairy method whereby the worker keeps his or her own record of work done, and direct observation of an individual for a number of hours at a time.

These three main methods of recording how a person, in this case a secondary school principal, spends his or her time working are described by Rosemary Stewart in her study of managers and their jobs (Stewart, 1988). In this book she says that a study of the use of time by managers is simpler, both conceptually and methodologically, than a study of what managers do, by which she means the effects they have in their own organisations. This present study is also an examination of the actual work carried out by the principals on behalf of their schools rather than how effective that work is, so it is appropriate that the methods used in this thesis should be broadly similar to those employed by Stewart in her own research.

4.1 Available methods

The first method of gaining the required information is to ask the principals themselves to estimate how they divide their time among the different activities which they have to undertake. This is by far the simplest and quickest method, and was included in the structured questionnaire (see Appendix B) administered to the principals chosen. The analysis of the information received in this way is quick and straightforward and so this method is useful for large numbers. However, it is vital to note and remember that all the estimates may be wrong. It is always difficult to know by exactly how much the estimates vary from the reality – there are considerable differences between the estimated and the records times for some activities for the 200 managers observed by Stewart in her *magnum opus* and as shown in a number of other studies (Stewart, 1988). In general, it seems fair to say that most managers (and that includes school principals) tend to overestimate the proportion of their time spent on genuine

managerial work and to underestimate the time spent on menial and trivial tasks including routine administration and maintenance.

The second method, called the diary method, is to ask the principals themselves to keep their own record of how they spent their time over the course of at least a number of days. This has the advantage over the simple questionnaire that the list should bear a very direct correlation to the actual work carried out. It is also much less time consuming than direct observation, far less expensive and also less restricted in locality. Hence, large numbers of principals can be studied in this way, as, for example, in Leader and Boldt (1994). It is also possible to continue this method of recording for a lengthier period of time than is usually possible with observation, so a sizeable quantity of information can be gathered in this way. On the other hand, the classification of the records must be made by someone who knows and understands the work of the principals and this can take a significant amount of time in itself. Furthermore, it is essential that all of the time spent working by the principal is recorded and this is by no means guaranteed, especially given the frantic pace at which most of the principals seem to work. In particular, it is at the very time when the principals are busiest, perhaps with several interruptions with the space of just a few minutes and possibly changing from one form of work to another and back again very quickly, that the record of activities is abandoned in favour of the work itself. It is precisely this hectic change of topic, both in number and frequency, that is of interest to the researcher, as well as the mechanisms used by the principals in dealing with them. Consequently, the diary which is completed later on in the day with an entry such as “60 minutes on administration” but which conceals many other “hidden” activities and changes of direction within that time is of limited use to the researcher. It seems fair to suggest that the busiest principals are those who are least able to keep a full and complete diary of their activities for even a short period of time. Perhaps the difficulties experienced by the present writer in obtaining the diaries from the principals is a further indication of their high level of activity. It must be borne in mind in the analysis of these diaries that they may not, in fact, realistically represent the true picture of a principal’s day. Some measure of how true this may be is obtained by comparison of the results from the diaries with the results from the direct observations.

Wilkinson comments on the use of the diaries to record how time is being utilised at present as a first step towards a more appropriate use of time (1990, 114). The problem with the diary method, he says, is the difficulty of analysing “the myriad of data obtained” and he

points out the danger of simply ending up with “what headteachers in schools already know – that their working day is hectic and fragmented and their activity characterised by brevity and variety” (1990, 114). Willis found that the diaries and logs kept by the three principals he studied showed limitation “such as the inconsistency of managers in maintaining self-records and their varying interpretations of categories in the records” (1980, 30).

The third and last method to be considered is that of the direct observation of the principals themselves as they go about their daily work. Here the observer has far more time to record the activities of the principal than the principal would have him/herself. Thus, the record from an observation is likely to be much more complete and accurate than the diaries kept by the principals. Furthermore, a constant standard in the recordings can be used, so that analysis of the data generated is made somewhat easier, although, as Harvey says, there is a danger of the figures being distorted unless the classification of activities is very clear (1986, 60). The observer should record the activity being undertaken and the amount of time spent on it before moving to a new activity. Ideally, the level of interaction between the observer and the principal should be very small or zero but, in practice, there is an occasional necessity for a question from the observer to clarify what the principal is actually doing at any particular time. In fact, it appeared from the research that some of the principals so observed welcomed the opportunity for a number of brief verbal exchanges with the observer throughout the day as a way of relaxing and/or in an attempt to find other methods of dealing with a particular situation.

Several writers comment on this interaction between the observer and the observed, including Willis (1980, 29-31), who started out by assuming that the minimum amount of participation by the observer would provoke a more valid account of the principal’s work – a ‘time and motion study’ rather than an ethnography such as Wolcott’s (1973). Nevertheless, Willis points out that observed study is a controversial method of research because of the possibility of influence by the observer on the principal’s actions and the validity of the data thus recorded (1980, 31). In the end, Willis chose to study three principals for fifteen consecutive school days each since he felt assured that none of them could change his natural style of activity for that sustained period of time. By merely noting every activity in which they had a part, with the minimum of interaction, it was assumed that there would be no feedback which could result in a modification of their behaviour.

Morris *et al.* chose to observe each of their principals for up to twelve working days, not necessarily sequential, over the course of three school years (1984, 30). Lews and Dennison concluded that questionnaires and structured interviews were too subjective and that diaries were too simplistic, so they used observation, recording everything they saw and then classifying the data later against the Mintzberg or other roles (1991, 47). Walsh asked the principals of his study to keep diary records for up to three weeks, listing their intended work, their actual work and what was left undone (1984, 3). Wolcott himself considers the dilemma of the effects of observation (1973, 13-14) but decided that the advantages of direct observation outweighed the dangers because such a method would show “not just what a principal ought to be doing as reported by himself but what he actually does as observed by someone else” (1973, xii). Indeed, he felt that this distinction between how things actually are and what people say they are or should be was of vital importance (1973, xiv). Given the various merits and demerits of the methods described above, it was decided to combine all of the three types of record in this present research. However, it was recognised that, as Martin and Willower say (1981, 87), structured observation does not lend itself to qualitative analysis since infrequently performed but vitally important tasks can be lost in a sea of numerical appraisal.

4.2 Design of questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed in three sections to obtain personal details about the principals (including their degree of experience and their level of pre-service and in-service training), details about their schools (including type, size and support structures), and their own impressions both of what their job is and of what it should be (see Appendix B). Following a pre-test on a small number of principals, the questionnaire was modified very slightly into its final form.

The questionnaire uses the ‘sTAMp’ classification system as originally defined by Torrington and Weightman (1987, 1989), which divides all the principals’ activities into five main types. Thus, it is simple to operate while remaining effective, especially since it was devised for use with secondary school principals. ‘Social’ (s) activities are those everyday interactions with others which may or may not have a direct connection to the principal’s work of running a school. They are frequently very brief, perhaps just seconds, and likely to be very large in number. ‘Technical’ (T) work is anything done which uses the professional training of the principal, such as teaching (including preparation and marking), discussing study habits with pupils, or considering curriculum development either by oneself or with one or more

colleagues. ‘Administrative’ (A) work is anything concerned with organisational maintenance, including reading, writing or dictating letters, making or receiving telephone calls, clerical work such as form filling, or carrying out some official duty as authorised by others (e.g. the Board of Management). ‘Managerial’ (M) work involves setting precedents, influencing others to agree or assent to some, perhaps, non-obvious decision or behaviour, or getting something done by others that would otherwise not have been done. Ideally, managerial work is work that can only be done properly by the principal him/herself. Finally, ‘personal’ (p) work is anything which is done by the principal not relating to the running of the school, and ‘other’ (o) work is anything not readily classified by any of the above codes (see Appendices D and E).

The questionnaire was then pre-tested on a small number of principals not included in the final sample. The only modification made was in the order in which the questions were asked of the principals in the actual study.

4.3 Sample population

Twenty-seven secondary school principals, all personally known to the writer, were chosen from around the country so as to represent a broad range of schools, both in type and location. (One of these principals was not in a position to cooperate with the research; this left the sample population at 26.) Thus, the research includes schools from urban and rural areas, large schools and small, day only and both boarding and day, and from the various sectors within the secondary system, including voluntary secondary schools, community schools, comprehensive schools and a vocational school. Hence, the sample is not random and thus may not accurately reflect the true picture of secondary school principals in Ireland. However, since all the participants were well known to the writer, it was felt that the level of honesty given in the answers to the questionnaire and when observing might be higher than if the observer was not known to the principals. (There has been no attempt to measure whether or not this is the case in the present study, but it was a definite factor in the choice of the principals for the research.)

4.4 Administration

Of those principals asked, using the letter given in Appendix A, twenty-six agreed to cooperate and were interviewed using the structured questionnaire already explained. This elicited much factual information from the many closed questions, used for correlation of the

data in chapter 5, as well as principals' ideas, feelings and suggestions from a number of more open questions. The interviewed principals were not required to write anything during the interview – all the information from the closed questions was recorded by the researcher on a simple coded sheet prepared in advance, together with comments and suggestions given by the principals in response to the open questions. This allowed the interviewees to concentrate more fully and in a more relaxed manner on the matters under discussion.

These twenty-six principals were assigned letters (A to Z) to identify their schools for the research but so as to keep their identities hidden in the final thesis. Twenty-five of these principals were then asked (Appendix C) to record a diary of their activities during the course of about a week. In the end, 13 diaries were returned covering a total of 70 days or 654 hours of principals' work. These were subsequently analysed by coding the work using the 'sTAMp' classification system of Torrington and Weightman, as explained above and in Appendix D.

Finally, after a pre-test observation of a principal for a day and using the more complicated Mintzberg classification system (Mintzberg, 1973, and Appendix D), it was decided that the simpler 'sTAMp' system of Torrington and Weightman (1987), which had been designed for use with school principals, would be used. Six principals were then 'shadowed' for a day each (for a total of 46 hours) and these results were classified using the modified 'sTAMp' scheme given in Appendix E. The data provided by these observations was then reduced to the simpler form used for the diaries and the interviews, and comparisons and conclusions were drawn.

Chapter 5: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Results from the questionnaire

5.1.1 Section A: The principals

The first section of the questionnaire asks about the principals themselves. The results from these questions are tabulated in Table 5.1. The responses show the modal principal in this survey to be male, lay and married, in his first principalship, with a mean length of teaching career of 28.0 years, of which 11.6 years have been spent as principal. On average, the modal principal has spent 15.0 years in his present school, of which the last 9.8 years have been as principal, and he has served in a total of 3.4 schools during his career.

Table 5.1 The principals

Q no.	Question		Responses
2.	Sex	Male Female	22 4
3.	Years of teaching experience	Mean Range	28.0 18 – 42
4.	Years as principal	Mean Range	11.6 3 – 28
5.	Years in present school	Mean Range	15.0 4 – 27
6.	Years as principals of present school	Mean Range	9.8 3 – 23
7.	Number of schools where served	Mean Range	3.4 2 – 6
8.	Number of principalships held	Mean Range	1.3 1 – 2
11.	Religious status	Religious Lay	1 25
12.	Marital status	Married Single	20 6

Two questions asked about the training (if any) received by principals both prior to their appointments and subsequently. The results, shown in Table 5.2, indicate that a majority of principals did not receive any form of pre-service training and, of those that did, only 57% found it to be satisfactory – that is, sufficient for their needs at the time. Thus, for the sample population as a whole, only 15% of the principals felt that they had been given adequate pre-service training for their positions.

Table 5.2 Principals' training received

Q no.	Question	Responses	Number
9.	Pre-service training?	Yes	7
	From whom?	Previous principal	1
		Other individual	0
		Own association	2
		Other body	5
	Satisfactory?	Yes	4
No		3	
Pre-service training?	No	19	
	Should have had?	Yes	16
No		3	
10.	In-service training?	Yes	22
	From whom?	Previous principal	0
		Other individual	0
		Own association	11
		Other body	18
	Satisfactory?	Yes	21
No		1	
In-service training?	No	4	
	Should have had?	Yes	2
No		2	

The replies to question 10 indicate that most principals (85%) had undertaken some form of training since their appointment. Of these, 95% had found the training to be satisfactory. Of those who had received no form of in-service training, half felt that they did not need any such assistance. Only three principals (12%) recorded that they had received neither pre-service nor in-service training. 22 out of the 26 (86%) were satisfied by the training they had received.

For pre-service training, the main source was “other bodies”, although two principals recorded training from their own association and one from a previous incumbent. One principal had received training from both his own association and another body. With in-service training, 11 of the 22 principals who undertook this (50%) received it from their own association while 18 of them (82%) had attended in-service provision with other bodies. Thus, seven of the principals, or 27% of the total sample, had attended more than one in-service course for principals.

It may be concluded from the above that the typical secondary school principal in the sample in this study feels he did not receive enough training for his position before his appointment; however, he has attended at least one in-service training course for principals since he took up office and he found this to be satisfactory.

5.1.2 Section B: The schools

The second section of the questionnaire asked about the school itself so that the results could be correlated with section C. The results, given in Table 5.3, show the modal school to be in the voluntary secondary sector, coeducational but with day pupils only, a full six-year cycle, located in a mainly urban area and with a mean of 590 pupils, which number is remaining steady (or rising).

Table 5.3 The schools

Q no.	Question	Responses	Number
1.	Type of school	Voluntary secondary Community Comprehensive Vocational	14 7 4 1
2.	Pupils day/boarding	Day only Boarding only Day and boarding	16 0 10
3.	Pupil sex	Boys only Girls only Coeducational	3 2 21
4.	Number of years in cycle	Five Six	9 17
5.	Location	Mainly urban Mainly rural Mixed urban and rural	16 1 9
6.	Number of pupils	Mean Between 1 and 400 Between 401 and 800 Between 801 and 1200	590 8 12 6
7.	Trend of pupil numbers	Rising Steady Falling	12 13 1
10.	Number of buildings	Mean Range	3.9 1 – 15
11.	Own office for principal?	Yes No	26 0

It was hoped that the mix of schools selected, ranging in size from less than 200 pupils to more than 1000 and including both urban and rural locations and a number from each sector of second-level school types, might reflect reasonably well the general balance within the secondary system in this country. Perhaps the proportion of coeducational school chosen (81%) may be somewhat higher than the national average but it was hoped that this would not affect the statistics unduly. Some further thoughts on how representative the sample group is will be given later. Undoubtedly the fraction of the sample schools offering boarding as an option (38%) is much higher than the corresponding national figure and this has the obvious effect of increasing the percentage of schools with a six-year cycle (65%), since all the boarding schools in the study had full cycles. This larger than average number was deliberately included in the survey in an attempt to give meaningful statistics for principals of boarding schools which could then be compared with the figures for principals of day schools.

Table 5.4 Teaching staff and vice-principals in the schools

Q no.	Question	Responses	Number
8.	Number of teachers	Total: mean range	44.3 17 – 70
		Total EWTs*: mean range	37.8 11 – 63
		Whole-time: mean range	35.2 13 – 61
		Part-time: mean range	9.1 0 – 30
9.	Vice-Principal	Yes	26
		No	0
		Male Female	21 5
		Years as V-P: mean range	9.8 1 – 21
		No. of schools: mean range	2.1 1 – 4

*EWT = equivalent whole-time teacher

The mean school in the survey had 44.2 members of the teaching staff, whose total teaching hours were equivalent to 37.8 whole-time teachers. This gave an average pupil-teacher ratio for the sample of 15.6:1, which is more favourable than current Department of Education figures, thus indicating some measure of extra provision of teachers in the fee-

charging schools. Included in this typical staff would be 35.2 whole-time teachers and 9.1 part-timers. All the schools had a vice-principal who, on average, had served 9.8 years in that position and who had been a member of staff in 2.1 different schools (mode = 2). Of the 26 vice-principals, 21 were male and 5 female. Only one school (an all-girls school) had both principal and vice-principal female, while 18 had both leaders male.

Table 5.5 Support personnel in the schools

Q no.	13	14	15	16
Support person	School secretary	Personal secretary	Caretaker	Bursar
Yes	25	8	25	9
No	1	18	1	17
Number: mean	1.6	1.0	2.0	1.1
range	0 – 6	1 – 1	0 – 4	1 – 1
Sex: male	0	0	25	9
female	25	8	0	0
Status: whole-time	20	7	23	9
part-time	5	1	2	0
Experience: mean	9.5	12.0	15.3	7.9
(years) range	1 – 20	1 – 25	1 – 46	3 – 18

All the principals in the present study had their own office and a vice-principal and all but one had a school secretary. (That school had a bursar and a personal secretary for the principal who undertook the normal administrative duties assigned to the school secretary or clerical officer.) Only eight of the schools (31%) had a person apart from the school secretary who acted as personal secretary to the principal. All the secretarial assistants were female, the great majority of them being whole-time and with considerable experience in their positions. Only nine of the schools (35%), all in the voluntary secondary sector, had a bursar, all of whom were male and who had an average of almost eight years' experience each in their jobs. The eight schools with personal secretaries for their principals all had bursars as well; all these schools were in the voluntary secondary sector and their mean number of pupils was 535, or 10% smaller than the mean size of the school in the total sample. All bar one school (96%) had at least one caretaker or maintenance person, of whom nearly all were whole-time and with lengthy experience in their posts. The mean number of caretaking staff per school was 2.0 and, of the 53 persona involved, 52 were male and just one female.

We can conclude from Table 5.5 that, on average, the principals had about two clerical assistants and two caretaking persons each. However, within this statistic is concealed the range from, on the one hand, just one secretary and no bursar in one of the community or comprehensive schools with over 750 pupils to, on the other hand, six secretaries, a personal secretary and a bursar in a voluntary secondary school with just over 500 students. The great difference between the clerical support in the different secondary sectors is further shown in Table 5.6, where the figure for the mean number of secretaries (not including bursars) per 500 students in the voluntary secondary schools is found to be almost twice that in the other schools.

Table 5.6 Secretarial assistance per 500 pupils

Mean number of secretaries	Voluntary schools	1.71
	Other schools	1.46
Mean number of pupils	Voluntary schools	461
	Other schools	741
Mean number of secretaries per 500 pupils	Voluntary schools	1.86
	Other schools	0.98

At least some of this difference might be attributable to the boarding element in many of these schools and the extra administrative load this entails. However, not all the voluntary schools offered boarding and one of the other schools, with over 500 students, had a sizeable boarding element but had only one school secretary with no personal secretary or bursar. Clearly, the provision of additional clerical personnel is not simply a factor of either size or the presence of boarders. It may, however, be connected to whether or not the school charges fees of its pupils.

Table 5.7 shows the physical support systems available to the principals in the schools. Most (73%) of the schools had a public address (P.A.) system. All those seven schools without were in the voluntary sector; five of these had a personal secretary for the principal and the other two had at least two school secretaries. All the schools had a telephone with at least two lines. The average number of lines in the voluntary schools (4.9) was slightly higher (10%) than that in the other schools (4.5). 15 of the principals had their own direct telephone line in addition to the above. When these were included in the calculations for the mean number of lines per school, the average for the voluntary sector (5.4) was found to be closer, though still above, the average for the other schools (5.2). 23 of the schools had a 'fax' machine; those that did not were all in the voluntary sector.

All the schools kept at least a few of their records on computer and half of the principals had their own terminal, usually in their own office. However, one three of the 14 principals in the voluntary sector had their own computer, while ten of the 12 principals in the other schools did and two of these had a second terminal in their homes. This may reflect the poorer level of administrative support in the community, comprehensive and vocational schools in the sample, with their principals being required to undertake a larger amount of clerical work. Most of those principals who had their own terminals used them ‘very often’ or ‘frequently’ but one, in a voluntary school with a personal secretary and a bursar, never used his computer.

Table 5.7 Support systems in the schools

Q no.	Question	Responses	Numbers
12.	P.A. system?	Yes	19
		Used by?	Self 12 Others 13 Not at all 4
		No	7
17.	Telephone?	Yes	26
		Number of lines	mean 4.7 range 2 – 13
		No	0
	Own direct line?	Yes 15 No 11	
18.	Fax machine?	Yes	23
		No	3
19.	Records on computer?	All	7
		Some	14
		Few	5
		None	0
20.	Own computer terminal?	Yes	13
		Where?	Office 13 Home 2 Elsewhere 0
		Used?	Very often 5 Frequently 4 Occasionally 3 Rarely 0 Never 1
		No	13

5.1.3 Section C: The principal's job – impressions

When asked if their job was as they imagined it would be before taking up their appointment, 21 of the sample (81%) said 'pretty much' and three (12%) said 'somewhat', while only two said 'not really'. This contrasts sharply with the lack of training received by principals and noted in section 5.1.1. Of the seven who had received some form of pre-service training, six recorded that their jobs were 'pretty much' as they had expected and one said 'somewhat'. When asked to comment further on any discrepancies between their expectations and the reality, twelve of the sample (46%) said there were no major surprises. Four of these twelve had previously been a vice-principal, two of these deputising for their principals for prolonged periods, and two others said they had worked very closely with the principals in their previous schools.

Several principals commented on the extensive workload, which they had not expected:

- The amount of trivial paperwork is staggering.
- There is far too much time required for the paperwork and too little left over for the pupils.
- I thought I worked harder than the principal when I was vice-principal! The principal's job is less quantifiable than the vice-principal's; it is never-ending.
- The extent of time I have to work and the amount of things to be done surprised me.
- I did not realise the amount of time which would be taken up by Board of Management administration.
- I was shocked by the pressure of the rapid changes within a day. You need to know so many things in your head at the one time.

or on certain aspects of their job which they had not realised would be delegated to them:

- I did not realise that I would have to deal with all the finance. Neither did I appreciate the extent of the boarding work to be done by the principal.
- I had not known that there were no records at all from the previous principal and that I was expected to create a records system.

A small number of the principals referred to unanticipated difficulties with the teaching staff, generally arising from being an 'outsider' or an unexpected appointee, and one was disappointed by the lack of support structures within the staff, with no effective middle

management system. Many of the sample spoke of the unforeseen pressures of constantly dealing with so many different people and the demands which they place on the principals:

- I was not prepared for the callers to the school who want to see the principal and nobody else.
- The percentage of my time spent reacting to ‘emergencies’ is much higher than I had expected.
- My biggest initial difficulty was in dealing with such a large number of people and yet maintaining individual relations with each of them. You need to be so elastic!
- This job [in a smaller school] is so much more person-oriented than being a teacher in my previous school.
- I was surprised by the immaturity of people – teachers and parents with such inferiority complexes!
- You have to be so personable to everyone. At home I am very quiet because I am so tired!

It seems highly likely that, while many of these elements could be explained to principals before taking up their appointments, the full realisation of what lies in store for them can only be reached when actually in the job.

21 of the principals classified their relationship with their vice-principals as ‘symbiotic’, where each works to their mutual advantage, and the remaining five (four of whom were in voluntary schools) said that they themselves were the dominant person. None of the principals said their vice-principal was the driving force or that he or she was ‘antagonistic’. Thus, these responses indicate a generally high level of satisfaction on the part of the principals with their deputies.

Of the total sample, only 13 (50%) had any teaching time; eight of these were in voluntary schools. The average time spent teaching per week was 2.4 hours for the whole sample or 4.8 hours per teaching principal. The average time per week per teaching principal in the different sectors was very similar: 4.9 hours in the voluntary schools and 4.7 hours in the other schools. The differences are shown more clearly when the size of the school is considered, as in Table 5.8, which indicates school size as the major factor in determining whether or not the principal will teach. Indeed, the principal of a small school (less than 400 pupils) is likely to have more than ten times as much teaching time per week (4.2 hours) as the

principal of a large school (more than 800 pupils) who has just 0.4 hours on average. The highest recorded time spent teaching per week for any principal was 10.5 hours in a small voluntary school.

Table 5.8 Teaching hours per week for principals

Size of school	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Number of pupils	1 to 400	401 to 800	801 to 1200	-
Number of schools	8	12	6	26
Number where principal teaches	6	6	1	13
Total teaching hours per week	33.8	26.0	2.3	62.1
Mean teaching hours per school	4.2	2.2	0.4	2.4
Mean teaching hours per teaching principal	5.6	4.3	2.3	4.8

Question 4 in this third section of the questionnaire asked principals about the level of control that they felt was exerted on their daily work by others and by themselves. The possible answers ranged from “total” to “not at all” and these were arbitrarily given scores from four to zero so that some indication of the relative influence of each group on the principal’s day might be calculated. This is, of course, very simplistic and no definitive conclusion could be drawn from such an elementary exercise. Nevertheless, as shown clearly in Table 5.9, the principals felt that, in deciding what work would come their way on any day, the most important groups were the teachers and the pupils, with the parents fairly close behind. On average, the principals felt that they had only moderate control over their work.

Table 5.9 Level of effect of different groups on the principal’s work

Level Score	Totally 4	Largely 3	Moderately 2	Very little 1	Not at all 0	Totals
Dept. of Ed.	0	1	10	15	0	38
Bd. Of Mgt.	0	2	11	12	1	40
Teachers	0	16	10	0	0	68
Parents	0	6	16	4	0	54
Pupils	0	17	8	1	0	68
Others	0	2	12	10	2	40
Self	1	5	11	8	1	49
Totals	1	49	78	50	4	357

Thus, the mean score per school for the influence of all groups was 13.7. When these results were further divided into the different secondary sectors, it was found that principals in the voluntary schools scored 1.8 for control of their work by themselves and 11.4 for all other groups (giving a total of 13.2), whereas those principals in the other schools scored 2.0 for control by themselves and 12.3 for all others (giving a total of 14.3). It would appear, therefore, that principals in the voluntary sector do not feel as much influence over their work from groups such as parents, teachers and pupils as their counterparts outside that sector.

The following question asked the principals what type of work, using the sTAMp headings, was expected of them by each of the groups already named. Each principal could say “yes” (scoring two points), “a little” (scoring one point) or “no” (scoring zero) in each category. Hence the maximum score in any category was 52 points, representing a ‘yes’ from all 26 principals, and the maximum possible total for any group was 260, if all principals had said ‘yes’ in all five categories. Finally, the highest possible score for each category was 312 (or 52 multiplied by six). The results for this question are shown in Table 5.10.

Table 5.10 Type of work expected of principals by different groups

Type	s	T	A	M	p	Totals	% of max.
Dept. of Ed.	2	29	52	39	3	125	48
Bd. Of Mgt.	24	35	47	52	20	178	68
Teachers	47	44	41	52	48	232	89
Parents	44	34	42	49	41	210	81
Pupils	40	44	50	48	47	229	88
Others	32	16	30	42	30	150	58
Sub-totals	189	202	262	282	189	1124	72
% of max.	61	65	84	90	61	72	-
Self	47	46	48	50	44	235	90

Key: s = social; T = technical; A = administrative; M = managerial; p = personal

It can be seen from Table 5.10 that the principals felt the teachers to be the most demanding group of all, very closely followed by the pupils and then by the parents. It is interesting to find that their overall impression of the demands of the Department of Education is the lowest of all the groups in total, as well as having the lowest score for technical work.

However, the Department scores a maximum 52 points for administrative demands, higher than for any other group. The low score for managerial demands is particularly surprising, since the Department of Education generally refers in correspondence to the principal as ‘manager’ of the school, even when there is a Board of Management in existence. The principals of the voluntary schools rated this category slightly higher than the other principals.

The ratings for ‘self’ were given by the principals on the basis of what they felt their jobs should entail. These scores, which are all high, are all above the averages for each category. Indeed, 18 of them (69%) scored maximum points in this rating. Clearly, the principals feel that their jobs should include substantial elements of all five types of work. Of all the scores in Table 5.10, only five out of 35 are less than 26, which represents one point per principal. These are for ‘social’ and ‘personal’ for both the Department of Education and the Board of Management (or Board of Governors) and ‘technical’ for ‘others’. With these few exceptions, it would appear that the heads of secondary schools in this country feel that they have to try to be all things to all people.

When asked if they found their job satisfying (question 6), three (11%) said ‘always’, twenty (77%) said ‘mostly’, one (4%) said ‘often’ and two (8%) said ‘sometimes’, which indicates a generally high level of satisfaction with their position. They were also given the opportunity at that stage to comment further and offer suggestions as to how their feeling of satisfaction might be improved. The most common thoughts here related to frustrations arising from dealing with people and to the general shortage of adequate resources, whether financial or human, which were felt to be necessary for successful completion of the tasks demanded of them. In fact, 13 principals (50%) mentioned the difficulties of unreasonable teachers and/or pupils who, it would appear, cause problems of various sorts and then “dump” them onto the principal. Such problems include unnecessary disagreements, telling lies and stealing, vandalism, as well as the more subjective area of poor teaching and a reluctance to address this. Nine principals (35%) referred to the lack of sufficient finance or personnel which they had requested or to the excessive workload which they were expected to carry as individuals. The next most common comment was about their own shortcomings and the stresses caused by not fulfilling the expectations of others. Typical comments from principals reflecting these summaries include:

- You break your neck for people but then they let you down – but I like people!

- There are great frustrations through not being able to achieve something achievable because of some outside reason such as lack of finance or Board of Management intransigence.
- If only I could do the job as it should be done! After all these years I'm still not in a position to do that – I think people would prefer a different style.

Question 7 asked the principals about feedback on their performance – whether they received any and, if so, from whom and how often. All 26 said that they were given reports on their work, but 15 (58%) said that this was only ‘sometimes’ while a further nine (35%) listed this as ‘often’. The remaining two gave ‘mostly’ as their answer; nobody said either ‘always’ or ‘never’. This shows a generally low level of feedback to the principals. As shown in Table 5.11, the heads also indicated that the Department of Education gives very little reaction – either praise or blame – to the principals for their work. Most of the feedback apparently comes from the vice-principals, the teachers and the parents of the students in the school. It would seem to be particularly disappointing and quite extraordinary that only just over three-quarters of the Boards of Management (77%) gave any assessments to their principals. Thus, almost one in four principals is working for the bodies by which they were employed without any indication as to whether or not they are doing a good job.

Table 5.11 Sources of feedback for principals

Source	Number
Department of Education	2
Board of Management	20
Vice-principal	24
Teachers	23
Parents	23
Pupils	14
Other staff	15

5.1.4 Section C: The principal’s job – ideal and actual workload

The eighth question in section C of the questionnaire sought information as to the length of time spent working by the principals during the course of a typical weekday, and on a Saturday and a Sunday. The total for the week was thus calculated (being five times the daily

average plus the figures for the weekend days). These figures were further analysed according to the various classifications and the results are shown in Table 5.12. The overall mean working time per week was found to be just over 60 hours, which is very high compared to the average of just under 50 hours as calculated from the literature and recorded in Table 3.1. Indeed, the highest figure from the literature (59.9 hours per week; Willis, 1980) is still lower than the mean calculated for the present sample. Furthermore, there was little evidence from the literature that any principal in any of the studies regularly put in a 90-hour week, as did two of the principals in this study. With the standard deviation for these figures being 13.1 hours, the total of 90 hours per week is 2.3 standard deviations above the mean, which is very high indeed.

Table 5.12 Time (hours) spent working by principals

	Type of school	Number	Mean	Range
Per weekday:	All schools	26	11.0	8 – 15
Per week	All schools	26	60.2	40 – 90
	Voluntary	14	66.1	51 – 90
	Others	12	53.3	40 – 80
	Boarding and day	10	70.8	57 – 90
	Day only	16	53.6	40 – 80
	Urban	16	58.0	40 – 90
	Rural or mixed	10	63.8	48 – 90
	Large (>800)	6	50.3	45 – 53
Medium	12	62.4	40 – 90	
Small (<400)	8	64.9	55 – 90	

The length of the working week for the principals of the voluntary schools was, at 66.1 hours, 10% higher than the overall average while the corresponding figure for the other principals (53.3 hours) was 11% below the overall average. This difference may well be explained by the boarding element in so many of the voluntary schools in the sample. Indeed, the difference between the mean length of the principal's week in the day schools (53.6 hours) and those with boarders (70.8 hours) is even more pronounced, with the boarding school principals working some 32% longer per week than those in day-only schools. It is interesting to note that the average for the day schools is very close to the overall average given in Table 3.1; in fact, none of the reports in the literature refers to boarding schools as all.

Perhaps it is worth considering the figure for the boarding schools in a little greater depth – a total working week of 70.8 hours represents over 10 hours per day *every* day,

including weekends. These ten principals recorded a *mean* working time per weekday of 12.4 hours (with half of them averaging 14 or 15 hours per day) and a further average of 9.2 hours at weekends. This punishing routine is not found in any of the literature, but it would appear as if boarding schools are the forgotten institutions in educational research. (Similarly, there is not even a single mention of boarding schools in the recent green paper on education (Government of Ireland, 1992) though it is understood that this deficiency is to be rectified in the forthcoming white paper.)

Table 5.12 also shows a difference, though small, between schools in urban and rural areas, with the principals of rural schools working about 10% longer than those in urban schools. However, possibly the most surprising difference in the mean length of the working week is for the size of the school. Here it was found that the principals of the six largest schools (all day-only schools) had an average week over 16% shorter than the overall average for all schools. Conversely, the principals of the eight smallest schools worked a mean week of 64.9 hours, or 8% above average. Furthermore, the longest week recorded by a principal in a large school (53 hours) was still shorter than the shortest week for a principal in a small school (55 hours).

In summary, the longest working week could be expected from the principal of a small, rural, boarding school in the voluntary sector (type A) and the shortest week from the head of a large, urban, community school with day pupils only (type B). Adding the percentage variations above the mean for each of the descriptive factors for type A gives +42%, thus predicting an average working week for type A principals of over 85 hours ($= 60 \times 1.42$), which is very close to the figures given by such heads in this sample. Indeed, it was the principal of one of the type A schools who recorded one of the 90-hour weeks and the head of one of those of type B who worked just 40 hours per week. This result is very interesting, if only because it is precisely the latter type of school which is more commonly designated by the Department of Education as 'deprived' or 'underprivileged'. It might seem from this present study that the principals in what are usually referred to as the more 'privileged' schools have to work a much longer week than those in other schools.

The final part of the questionnaire asked the principals to state what percentage of their working time should be spent on each category of their work and how much time actually is spent on each type, using first the sTAMp classification system and then the heading based on

the Mintzberg roles. The figures for each of these are given in Tables 5.13 and 5.14 respectively. For comparison, the equivalent results for actual time usage from the literature (and as recorded in Tables 3.4 and 3.2 respectively) are also reproduced in Tables 5.13 and 5.14.

Table 5.13 Ideal and actual use of time by principals (sTAMp headings)

Heading	Ideal %	Actual %	Difference, Δ	Literature
Social	12	11	+1	10
Technical	20	17	+3	15
Administrative	22	37	-15	33
Managerial	40	29	+11	39
Personal	6	6	0	3
Totals	100	100	d = 30	100

Table 5.14 Ideal and actual use of time by principals (Mintzberg headings)

Heading	Ideal %	Actual %	Difference, Δ	Literature
Deskwork	17.6	23.8	-6.2	22.0
Scheduled meetings	15.9	13.4	+2.5	21.7
Unscheduled meetings	9.5	11.9	-2.4	23.4
Verbal exchanges	6.6	5.8	+0.8	6.4
Telephone conversations	4.7	5.2	-0.5	7.7
Tours of school	7.5	5.3	+2.2	7.5
Monitoring	6.3	4.5	+1.8	1.7
Trips away from school	7.0	6.5	+0.5	3.6
Announcing	1.6	1.6	+0.0	0.4
Observing	6.6	2.9	+3.7	1.3
Processing	2.6	4.2	-1.6	0.7
Teaching	6.4	4.9	+1.5	0.2
Personal	3.5	2.3	+1.2	3.4
Boarding duties	2.6	3.2	-0.6	-
Other people's work	1.6	4.5	-2.9	-
Totals	100	100	d = 28.4	100

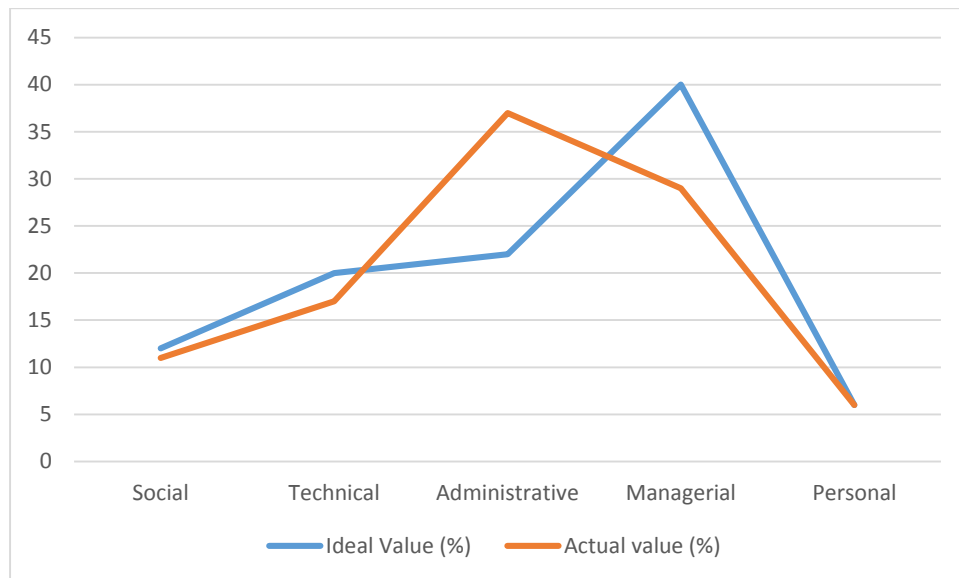
The column labelled 'Difference, Δ ' is calculated by subtracting the actual percentage use of time from the ideal value and this gives a crude impression of how comfortable the principals are with their existing work patterns. The total for these columns in each of Tables 5.13 and 5.14 is found by adding the absolute values of each number in the column (i.e. by ignoring the sign of the number). This produces a value which will be called 'the difference index', d . If d has a low value, the principals are happy with their present work patterns; the converse is true if d is high. The minimum value for d is, of course, zero and its maximum value is 200. However, it is only in cases of quite extreme mismatch between the ideal and the actual percentages that the value of d could rise above 100. In such cases where d is greater than about 80 it would be reasonable to conclude that there is considerable tension in the mind of the principal who recorded that value, caused by the disharmony between ideal and actual performance.

A more thorough examination of the difference index, d , for each principal using the sTAMp system yields a mean value of 37 for the sample, with a range from zero (one head who is completely at ease with his present division of work) to 110 for a principal who felt that the ideal amount of his time to be spent on administrative work was 10% compared with 65% in fact, thus seriously reducing the fraction of his time which could be spent on either technical or managerial tasks. Not one principal felt that the amount of time spent on administration was too short, and only one of the 26 wished to reduce his time taken up by managerial work, whereas 17 of the sample (65%) thought that they should be spending at least 10% more of their time (and up to 40% more) on managerial tasks. There were also quite a number of principals who regretted the restrictions on their teaching time but there were a few who were unhappy with the intrusion into their managerial or personal time by the teaching that was required of them.

Table 5.13 shows clearly the strong similarity between the actual time usage by the principals in the present study and the results from the literature. It also points sharply to the excess amount of administration which they must perform (15% too much for their liking) and the consequent reduction in the amount of managerial work which they can actually undertake (11% too little). Indeed, it is very largely these two figures which account for the value of 30 for the difference index, d , in this table. It is interesting to note that d has a very similar value (28.4) in Table 5.14, when the headings used are those of Mintzberg. Here again, the major component of the difference index arises from the substantially higher actual values for

deskwork, processing and other people’s work (i.e. administrative tasks) and the lower than ideal figures for scheduled meetings, tours of the school and observing teachers (all managerial work). This conflict between the ideal and the actual, with the unwanted shift from managerial to administrative tasks, is shown clearly in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 Comparison of ideal and actual percentage use of time by principals



It can be seen from the foregoing analysis that secondary principals in Ireland are broadly very similar to their counterparts elsewhere, undertaking the different types of work in approximately the same proportions and with the same dominance of administration at the expense of real managerial activity.

5.2 Results from the diaries

13 of the principals in the present sample kept diaries of their activities and interactions covering a total of 70 days, or 39,241 minutes, including 60 weekdays (34,461 minutes or 93% of the total time) and 10 weekend day (2,780 minutes or 7% of the time). Hence, the mean length of the working day for the principals in this section was over ten hours (608 minutes) during the week with more than nine hours (556 minutes) further at weekends. This gives a total mane working week for these principals of almost 60 hours (3594 minutes), which is very close indeed to the 60.2 hours recorded as the mean for the whole sample in Table 5.12.

Of these 13 schools, five were in the voluntary secondary sector and the remaining eight were a mixture of community, comprehensive and vocational schools; ten were for day pupils only and the other three also had boarders; three were in the size range described in this thesis as ‘small’, five were ‘medium’ sized and the final five were ‘large’. Thus, the principals who completed the diaries form a reasonably representative sample of the entire group and, possibly, of the larger number in the country as a whole.

Table 5.15 Comparison of time between diaries and questionnaires

Heading	Diaries %	Questionnaires	
		Ideal %	Actual %
s (social)	6.3	12	11
T (technical)	21.1	20	17
A (administrative)	25.4	22	37
M (managerial)	40.0	40	29
p (personal)	7.2	6	6
Totals	100.0	100	100

For comparison, the overall percentages calculated from the diaries are shown in Table 5.15 along with the ‘ideal’ and ‘actual’ percentages as recorded from the questionnaires, and as previously displayed in Table 5.13. It is clear from this table that the diaries record a pattern very much closer to what the principals themselves described as ‘ideal’ rather than what they thought they actually did. (This will be further compared with the results from the direct observations later.) However, some of the diaries included details of what work the principals were actually performing under each heading and it would appear from these that several of the principals had a tendency to be over-generous when describing their work as ‘managerial’. In fact, one of them notes that “this work may not really be ‘managerial’, but I have always done it and, if I don’t, nobody else will so I am including it under the type of work which I must do”.

Examples of such work include overseeing the setting up of an assembly hall area for a parents’ meeting that evening (and other similar caretaking jobs), supervising in a classroom or the lunchroom for an absent teacher, or visiting a class to check the roll. All of these tasks could very easily, and quite possibly more efficiently, have been performed by others within

the school community. All are low-value tasks and some should properly be classified as ‘administrative’ rather than ‘managerial’. Nevertheless, it is also apparent from throw away comments added in the margins of the diaries that it these very activities which tend to give the principals some sort of ‘break’ from the otherwise punishing routine of demands placed on them by others. For example, supervising a class offered an opportunity for interaction with pupils not normally met during the working week and this was generally welcomed by the principals as being some way of “touching base” and reassuring them that things had not changed beyond recognition since they had moved away from whole-time teaching.

5.2.1 Use of time in the different sectors

Table 5.16 Time use (%) by principals according to their diaries

Classification	s	T	A	M	p	Totals
All schools	6.3	21.1	25.4	40.0	7.2	100
Vocational schools	8.3	21.8	24.4	39.8	5.7	100
Other schools	4.5	20.4	26.3	40.2	8.6	100
Day only	4.7	24.2	26.9	36.5	7.7	100
Day and boarding	10.0	13.7	21.9	48.3	6.1	100
Small	6.4	34.1	24.6	27.2	7.7	100
Medium	6.9	15.0	22.5	50.7	4.9	100
Large	5.3	16.5	30.8	37.2	10.2	100
Weekdays	5.9	21.1	24.4	41.4	7.2	100
Weekends	11.7	20.7	38.3	21.8	7.5	100

Table 5.16 shows, for each sub-group, the total percentages of their time which the principals considered to have been spent on each of the five different categories of work. It is clear from this table and from Figure 5.2 that there is little difference between the diaries of the principals in the voluntary schools and all the other schools. (The small variations in the ‘social’ and ‘personal’ categories are insignificant.) However, it would seem that the principals of the boarding schools have a considerably greater amount of genuine managerial work and social interactions than the heads of the day schools (see Figure 5.3). In fact, when the different mean length of the working week in the boarding and day sectors is recalled (Table 5.12) it is found that the boarding school principal spends nearly 75% more time (an average of 34.2

hours per week) on managerial work than his counterpart in a day school (19.6 hours). The raw percentages in Table 5.16 also hide the fact that these boarding school principals are also spending slightly longer on administration (15.5 hours per week) than those in the day school (14.4 hours); here again it is the significant difference in the length of the working week which appears to reverse this statistic.

Figure 5.2 Comparison of time use in voluntary and other schools

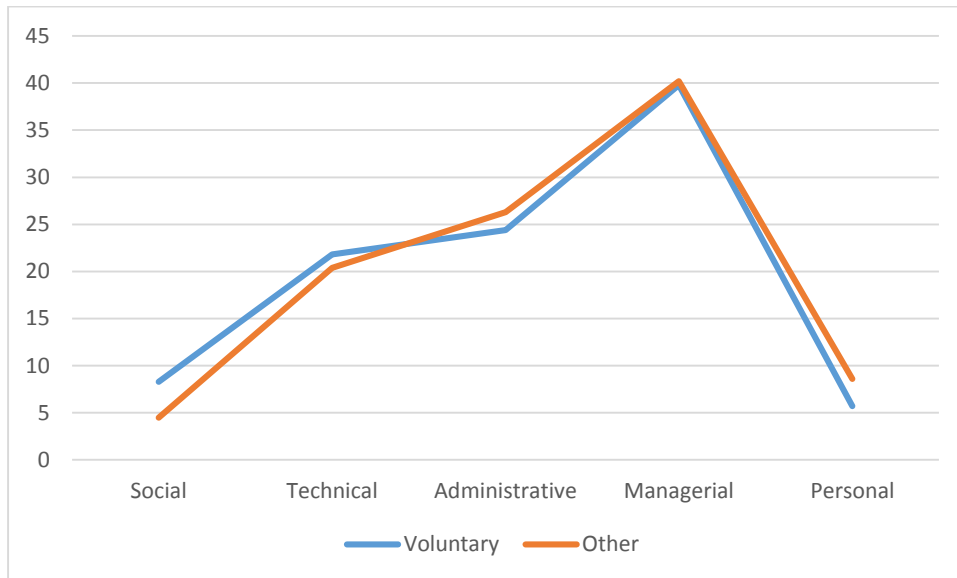


Figure 5.3 Comparison of time use in day and boarding schools

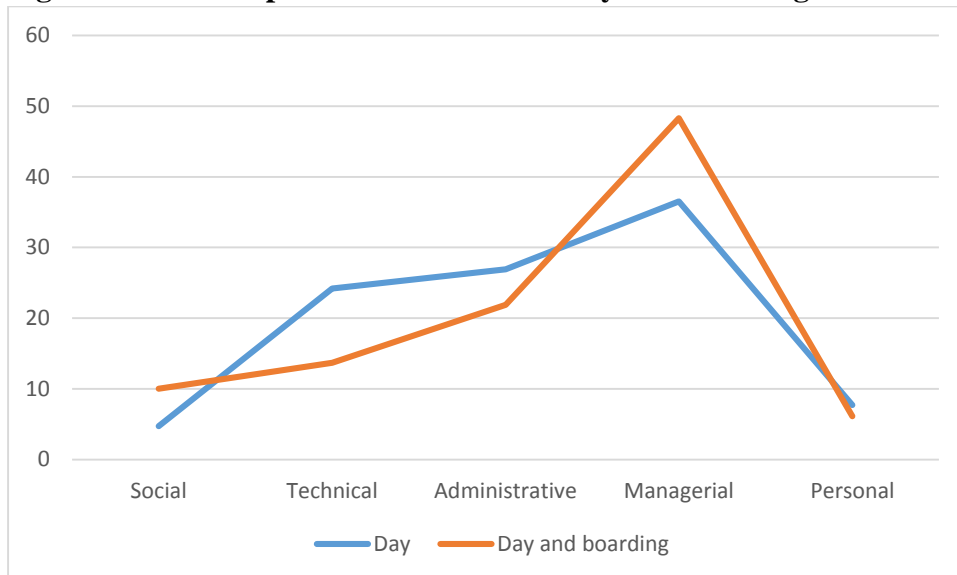
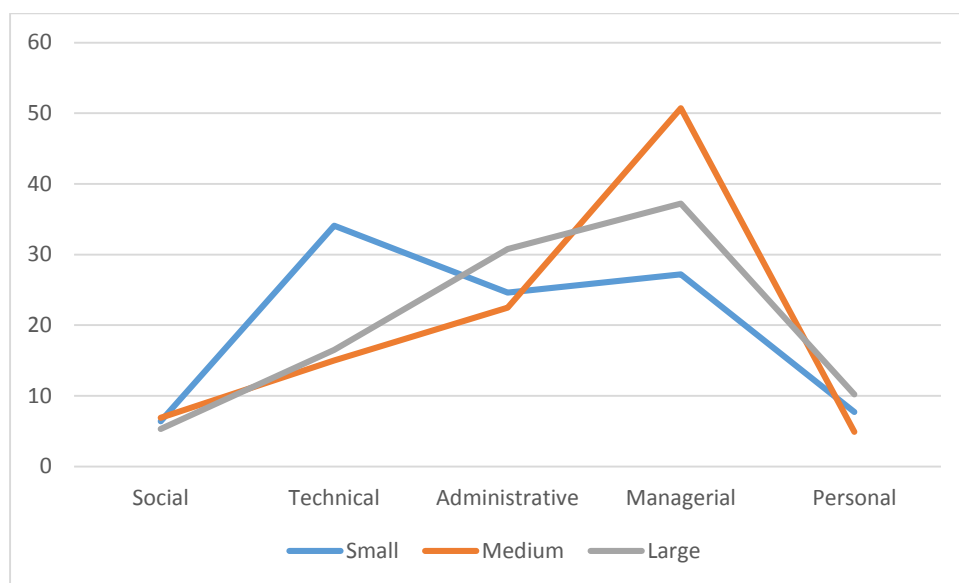


Table 5.16 also shows that the principals of the smaller schools spend a very much higher percentage of their time on ‘technical ‘ work – either classroom teaching, with its attendant preparation and marking, or dealing directly with pupils for matters other than

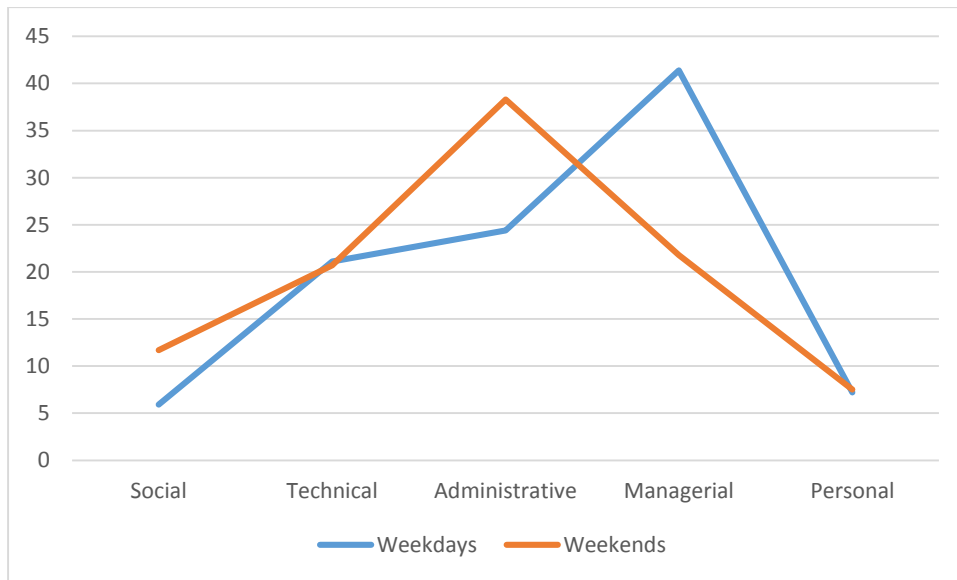
discipline – than those in the medium or large schools. When the longer working week for the heads of the smaller schools is also considered (from Table 5.12), it is found that these principals of small schools spend over twice as much actual time per week in dealing with pupils as do the principals of the other schools. The heads of the medium sized schools spend the greatest proportion of their time (and the greatest absolute amount of time) on managerial work while the principals of the largest schools spend a larger proportion of their time on administration than do the other heads. These results are shown graphically in Figure 5.4.

Figure 5.4 Comparison of time use in small, medium and large schools



It is also clear from the figures for the weekend work that these days provide an opportunity for many heads to catch up on some of the administration left untouched during the week – the percentage time spent on ‘administrative’ work rises sharply and that for ‘managerial’ falls dramatically for the weekends. When the figures for the day school only are considered for the weekends, it is found that only 7% of the time is spent on ‘technical’ work (usually marking homeworks) and 11% on ‘managerial’ but a massive 82% on ‘administrative’ tasks. No time at all was recorded for ‘social’ interactions at the weekends for the day school principals and most of the events for these days were shown as being completed, thus confirming that it is these quiet times with no interruptions that are used to get the routine administration done. Figure 5.5 shows these figures on a line chart.

Figure 5.5 Comparison of time use on weekdays and at weekends



Only one principal was able to record the number of interactions during the day for the full period of his diary (5 days). He found a total of 315 events in 2858 minutes, which gives an average of just over nine minutes per activity. However, even this masks the more frenzied activity of his Wednesday, with 92 events in 521 minutes (or 5.7 minutes per activity on average), compared with the relative tranquillity of the following day, when there were only 40 interactions in 520 minutes (or an average of 13 minutes each).

5.2.2 Summary from the diaries

These diaries, therefore, show that, in general, the principals tend to think they are acting as managers when, in reality, they are often doing clerical or other low-value tasks. The diaries support the findings from the questionnaires that the heads are working long hours each week and that those in the smaller schools spend much more of their time teaching or dealing with pupils than do the principals of the other schools. There is also the clear indication that the weekends are frequently used, especially by the principals of the day schools, to complete administrative work left over from the week. However, there is also the hint from comments made in the diaries that some of these principals were not able to record absolutely faithfully the amount of time they spent on each activity and the number of interruptions they received. Hence, these records are more subjective than is necessary for a detailed analysis and the production of really meaningful results.

5.3 Results from the observations

Over a six-month period six principals were “shadowed” for a school day each, giving a total observation time of 2755 minutes, or almost 46 hours. During that time, 558 activities were observed which implies a mean event time of less than five minutes. This is equivalent to more than 12 new activities each hour or, for the average working week of 60.2 hours (as in Table 5.12), more than 730 events per week. These figures alone strongly confirm the characteristic high volume and fast pace of the principal’s work as mentioned in the literature.

Of these events, 448 (just over 80%) were less than or equal to five minutes long each and only 22 (less than 4%) lasted 30 minutes or more. Eight of these longest activities were scheduled meetings (usually with staff or parents) and a further six were teaching periods. Only two periods of uninterrupted administrative work lasting 30 minutes or more were recorded. The modal time for all interactions was one minute and the second most commonly occurring time recorded was two minutes. This strongly supports the characteristic of brevity, variety and fragmentation which was so frequently listed in the literature.

5.3.1 The use of a principal’s time according to the observations

Table 5.17 Comparison of time use from observations, diaries and questionnaire

Heading	Observation %	Diaries %	Questionnaires	
			Ideal %	Actual %
s (social)	8.9	6.3	12	11
T (technical)	18.3	21.1	20	17
A (administrative)	27.9	25.4	22	37
M (managerial)	37.8	40.0	40	29
p (personal)	7.1	7.2	6	6
Totals	100.0	100.0	100	100

The total figures for the five main categories of work are shown in Table 5.17, together with the percentages calculated from the diaries and the questionnaires for easy comparison. It can be seen from this table that the observations produced figures which are very close to those from the diaries and the questionnaires. However, the sample of principals who were observed was definitely not representative of the whole group – five of the six schools were in the voluntary sector and five were boarding schools. This had a very marked impact on the amount

of ‘managerial’ work which was carried out in the observed periods, with extensive amounts of time – about an hour each – being given over to interviews with parents (of both present and future pupils). Another of the boarding school heads spent a total of almost an hour dealing with a discipline problem which had arisen during the previous weekend and was not directly related to tuition or academic progress.

Furthermore, five of the school fall into the ‘small’ category and the remaining one is ‘medium’ sized. This, as already seen, tends to distort the percentages towards the ‘technical’ work such as teaching and dealing directly with the academic performance of the pupils. Finally, none of the observation periods was at a weekend and all were ended by the late afternoon (the earliest start was 7.00 a.m. and the latest finish was 5.30 p.m.) so that the expected periods of prolonged administration during the evenings, for example, (as shown in Table 5.16), were not observed. Hence, the total figures for the various categories may not accurately reflect the figures which would be obtained from observation of one principal for a complete week.

Nevertheless, these results do show that the principals who were observed are reasonably representative of the whole group in their use of time and, thus, we may make a few tentative conclusions about the nature of their work patterns, even with such a small sample.

The more detailed records kept from the observations (using the codes shown in Appendix E) show that the single biggest user of these principals’ time is the scheduled meeting (17.7%), followed by teaching (16.2%), deskwork (16.0%), and unscheduled meetings (11.3%). Apart from the periods of deskwork, travelling to other meetings away from the school, some of the teaching time which is given over to preparation or marking of classwork, and some of the rest moments described as ‘personal’, all the rest of the principals’ activities were very heavily geared towards verbal interaction. Two impressions from this were outstanding to the observer – firstly, no principal could operate successfully (i.e. the way in which others expect him to operate) with laryngitis and, secondly, the principals were constantly praising others (teachers, caretakers, secretaries, pupils and parents) for various jobs well done (“keeping people sweet”, as one head put it) whereas this was never noticed to be reciprocated. Indeed, at the end of most of the observation periods, when the observer told the principals how many activities he or she had carried out during that day and gave some indication of the relative balance among the categories, the principals were generally surprised

at the high number of events but they seemed pleased to have been given some feedback which was not in any way critical of their activities. (This tendency was also found in the literature.)

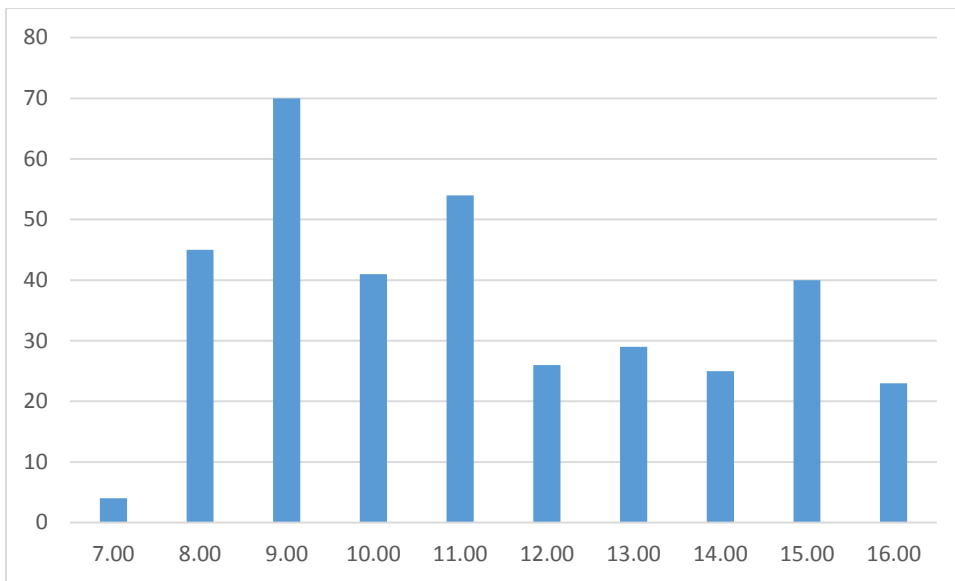
5.3.2 The changing pattern throughout the day

Table 5.18 shows the total number of activities started or resumed for three of the principals who were observed. This gives the clear indication that the principal's work is at its most hectic around 9.00 a.m., with a second peak in the mid-morning (i.e. at the break time for teachers and pupils) and a third, lower, peak towards the end of the school day, when the principals were seen to be trying to 'catch' various teachers or pupils before they left the school. (These results are also shown in Figure 5.6 for added clarity.) From the table it can be seen that exactly one-third of all the activities (119 out of 357) had been carried out by 10.00 a.m. (with the vast majority of these falling between 8.30 and 9.30 a.m.). The second third of the events took place in the three hour period from 10.00 a.m. to 1.00 p.m. and the final third occupied the remaining four hours of the observed day. Hence, the pace of activities tends to fall steadily throughout the day, with the periodic bursts of more frenzied interactions at times when others are 'free' to speak with the principal.

Table 5.18 Number of events per hour

Starting time	Number of events	% of total
07.00	4	1
08.00	45	13
09.00	70	20
10.00	41	12
11.00	54	15
12.00	26	7
13.00	29	8
14.00	25	7
15.00	40	11
16.00	23	6
Totals:	357	100

Figure 5.6 Number of events per hour



5.3.3 Summary from the observations

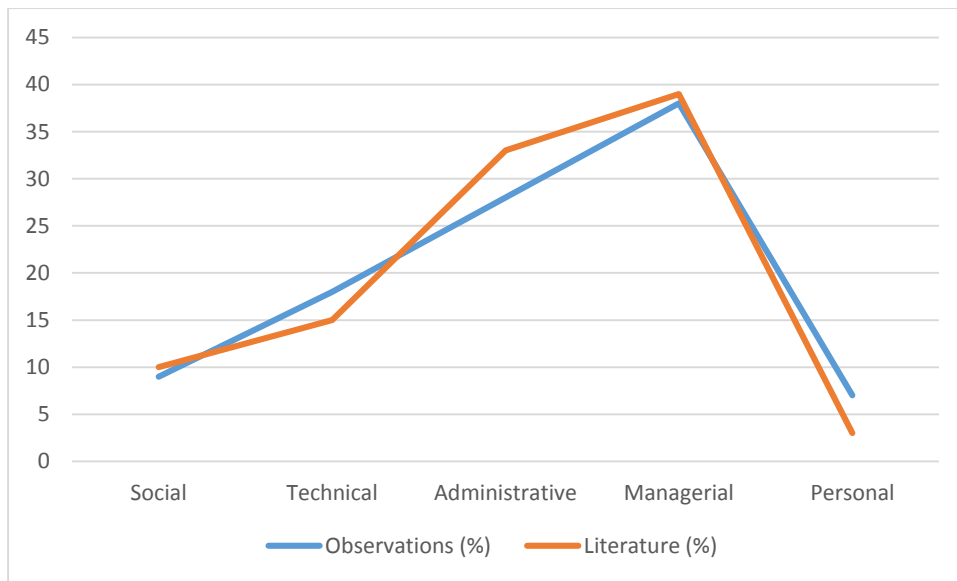
These observations of secondary principals in action for a day each confirm that they work long hours which are broken into very many short interactions and which necessitate changing topic, mood and tempo frequently and which are, for the most part, verbal in nature. Four-fifths of their events last less than or equal to five minutes each while only one in every twenty-five activities continues for half an hour or more. Their work appears to be chaotic at times, especially during those times of the day when teachers are free from class. These minutes contain a very large number of different types of contact – the brief social greetings, the questions or answers about a pupil’s progress, signing a form for a teacher or a pupil, considering a request from a teacher and giving a response, and (usually the last on the list) having a cup of coffee. The rate at which new activities are initiated gradually slows during the day, oscillating between the more frantic times before school, at break time, lunch, and at the end of the school day, and the comparative lulls at other stages.

The analysis of their activities shows that these principals have a work pattern broadly similar to those detailed in the literature, and very close indeed to the picture given by those authors who have used a method of classification close to the sTAMp system used in this work. These figures are given again in Table 5.19 and the close correlation is shown in Figure 5.7. It is clear from this that, in general, Irish secondary school principals work in a manner which closely reflects that found in other countries throughout the world.

Table 5.19 Comparison of sTAMp analysis from observations and literature (% of time)

Source	s	T	A	M	p
Observations	9	18	28	38	7
Literature	10	15	33	39	3

Figure 5.7 Comparison of use of time from observations and literature



Chapter 6: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary

The aim of this thesis has been to determine whether or not the use of their time by secondary school principals in Ireland is consistent with research from other countries around the world. To examine this in sufficient detail an extended review of the existing literature was carried out, including research from the UK (such as Torrington and Weightman, Stewart, Lyons, Hall *et al.*, Lews and Dennison), from the USA (e.g. Mintzberg, Wolcott, Martin and Willower), from Australia (e.g. Willis, Clarke), from Canada (Edu-Con), from Nigeria (Arubayi), from Korea (Chung and Miskell), and from Ireland (e.g. Leader and Boldt, Hannaway). This produced summary figures from the literature for the relative composition of a principal's working time. Headings used were based on the Mintzberg roles (Mintzberg, 1973, 54-99) and the sTAMp classification system of Torrington and Weightman (1989, 101). This latter system, suggested by the literature, was used because analysis of the observed and recorded data was made easier since the danger of uncertainty caused by a larger number of more detailed categories was reduced to an acceptable level. The results from the questionnaires and interviews with 26 selected principals, from the diaries of their activities kept by 13 of those heads, and from the direct observations of six of the sample have all been compared with the figures from the literature and have been found to be in very good agreement. This is particularly true of those authors who have used the sTAMp system, perhaps since these have almost always been with school principals.

These six sets of statistics are shown together in Table 6.1 along with an overall mean value for each of the 'sTAMp' categories, calculated by taking the arithmetic mean of the 'actual' figures from the questionnaires, the diaries and the observations. This method, of course, gives equal weighting to each source; this may be somewhat unreasonable since the number of principals included in each source varies. However, since the three sets of results show a very high degree of consistency, any error which is introduced by performing such a crude calculation is likely to be kept small. Furthermore, the mean values are left with no more than two significant figures, thus avoiding the temptation to ascribe too much meaning to the results. Given this slight reservation, it can be seen clearly from Table 6.1 that about one third of the working week for secondary principals is taken up by managerial tasks with another third being spent on administration. Half of the remainder is taken up with 'technical' work, such

as teaching or marking, and the rest is split almost equally between social interactions and personal time, which includes meal times.

Table 6.1 Percentage of a principal’s working time spent on each type of work

Source	s	T	A	M	p
A: Literature – Mintzberg roles	10	1	23	63	3
B: Literature – sTAMp system	10	15	33	39	3
C: Questionnaires – ideal	12	20	22	40	6
D: Questionnaires – actual	11	17	37	29	6
E: Diaries	6	21	26	40	7
F: Observations	9	18	28	38	7
Mean values for sources D, E, F	9	19	30	35	7

Key: s = social; T = technical; A = administrative; M = managerial; p = personal

It can also be seen that these mean values are generally in close agreement with the figure given by the principals as ‘ideal’, although the percentage of their time spent on administration is quite a bit higher than they would like, with corresponding reductions in the time allotted to managerial tasks and social interactions with others. The fraction of their time spent on technical work is close to their ideal for the whole group. However, this hides a wide variation that is evident within the sample where a considerable number of the principals are falling well short of the target of about 25% of their time which should be spent on direct interaction with pupils, according to Torrington and Weightman (1989, 102). In addition, such trainers of school principals as Torrington and Weightman continually claim that any system which requires the school’s head to spend such a high percentage of his or her time on administration – much of which is extremely trivial – is inherently unsound and that, therefore, the single most effective way to improve a school is to remove this burden from the principal (1989, 102). This problem would appear from the literature to be almost universal. However, while it may seem at first sight that the solutions lies with the heads themselves, the questionnaires tend to indicate that the principals in the present study actually want to be aware of everything that is going on in their schools and this, of course, may well imply a high level of familiarity with trivial details. Perhaps some progress towards freeing the principals from this aspect of their roles might be made if a clear job description were compiled and agreed.

It will also be seen from Table 6.1 that the proportion of their time spent by the principals in this study on personal tasks is a little higher than the literature might indicate. However, any such difference is meaningless when one recalls that the mean length of the working week for the principals in this study was 60.2 hours (Table 5.12) compared with the figure of 49.5 hours found in the literature (Table 3.1). In addition, the number of events undertaken by the principals who were observed directly was also significantly higher, at 730 per week, than the 66 per day (330 per week) also given in Table 3.1. The heads in this research felt that their work was very largely dominated and controlled by the teachers and the pupils in their schools, followed by the parents, but with the Department of Education and the Board of Management (or Board of Governors) having comparatively little direct impact on their daily work patterns. Perhaps the reason why principals feel that they must work such long hours and at such a breakneck pace should be examined in further study. In particular, an investigation into the professional relationship between the teachers in a school and their principal might elucidate some reasons why even minor complaints and difficulties are brought to the head almost automatically in search of a solution. The tensions that exist between the demands on the principal to be the school's chief executive and the desire to act as instructional leader could also usefully be considered.

The characteristics of the principal's work which are described in the literature were all found to be present and clearly visible in the work of the Irish principals. Any secondary school principal, it would appear, can expect to have his or her day constantly interrupted by others asking for some different work to be done there and then. This leaves a pattern of brief periods (80% of which are five minutes or less) of working on one task before being forced to jump to something perhaps totally different without first finishing the job currently in hand – the 'brief, varied and fragmented' characteristic so frequently mentioned in the literature. The high volume of work and the fast pace at which it proceeds have already been described, and the manner in which the heads appear to be controlled by the demands of others – their reactivity – is also shown by the high number of interruptions and the colossal number of 'new' activities each day which they try to perform. The very marked lack of feedback to the principals was also noted but no possible explanation for this serious omission has been proposed.

An example of the nature of the interruptions was provided during the course of one of the interviews to complete the questionnaire. In spite of the fact that it was known that the

principal was already in conference, the discussion had to be discontinued several times. The causes of these interruptions included the following:

- Dealing with a sales representative for fire extinguishers;
- Making a number of urgent timetable changes for the day due to staff illness;
- Explaining a particular problem to a maintenance person who had been called to the school;
- Discussing with two members of staff (separately) the academic and social progress of certain pupils;
- Conferring with a parent on the telephone regarding the behaviour of her son;
- Compiling the pay packets for the ancillary staff;
- Explaining to a member of staff the arrangements for the forthcoming school examinations;
- Receiving a telephone complaint from a parent about a school bill;
- Seeing a pupil about her career choice;
- Talking with a parent on the telephone about the approaching parent/teacher meetings;
and
- Going to class.

Some differences were found between the working patterns of the principals in differing circumstances, with the heads of boarding schools and the small schools working significantly longer hours each week than their counterparts in the day schools and large school respectively. The principals of the voluntary schools and rural schools had slightly longer working weeks than those in the community, comprehensive or vocational schools or those in urban areas. It was also found that the principals of the boarding schools spent a much greater percentage of their time on managerial tasks than did the day school heads and those in charge of the small schools in the survey used much more time in direct pupil contact than was apparent in the large schools.

It must, however, be remembered that the sample of principals used in this present study is not random, although they were chosen to try to represent certain characteristics of the general body of secondary principals in Ireland. Hence, extrapolations from the particular group here are tenuous at best. Furthermore, the basis of the coding of a principal's activities during an observation was simply the judgement of the observer at the time the event occurred, while the essential purpose of the activity from the viewpoint of the principal has not been

recorded. Such statistics, therefore, do not lend themselves to qualitative analysis so that infrequently performed, but vitally important, tasks may be lost in the vast array of numbers. Nevertheless, it has been hoped that unacceptable skewing of the results has been avoided by interviewing each of the 26 principals for approximately 90 minutes each, by encouraging each of the 13 principals who kept diaries to do so for at least five full consecutive school days, and by observing one in four of the sample for a full school day each. Indeed, the summary of results has shown that the figures are in close agreement with the literature and so it may reasonably be assumed that the conclusions drawn here hold true for the wider set of principals in the country.

In summary, with the constantly repeated daily pressures on the principal and the continuous heavy demands on his time, the role of the secondary school principal may be likened to the punishment meted out in Greek mythology to Sisyphus, who was condemned to push a huge rock up a hill but which, each time it came near the top, would roll back down again, forcing Sisyphus to start all over again. This syndrome, which is not an attractive one, may well be apparent to the teachers in the secondary schools in this country, since more than one principal expressed concern at the fact that the “best” teachers were no longer applying for principalships when they became vacant. The job of principal was described by one as a “life sentence” and he raised the question as to whether the calibre of applicants might be increased if there was, say, a ten year contract for the principal, with the option to either continue in office or return to teaching at the end of that period. Some examination of this suggestion would be worthwhile in the near future.

One principal said that he had been advised when he started in his present post to try to avoid the common pitfall where all the information necessary to run the school properly is “in the head of the head” but goes no further. Another described his role by saying that “the head contains the brains and the brains control the body”; such an aphorism is, however, open to several interpretations. This thesis does not consider leadership styles or effectiveness, which is beyond the scope of the present work. There is much recent research on successful (i.e. effective) schools and this generally identifies good leadership by the principal as one of the key factors in determining such success (e.g. Coolahan, 1994, 41). Unfortunately, there is currently no compulsory training for principals in this country to help them maximise their leadership skills or potential. The appropriate role of the school principal should be examined

in much more detail in research and should also be considered at some length in both pre-service and in-service training for principals.

6.2 Conclusion

- The pattern of work exhibited by secondary school principals in Ireland (35% managerial, 30% administrative, 19% technical, 9% social and 7% personal) is very like that observed in other countries. Similarly, secondary principals in Ireland spend too large a fraction of their time on administration, and other low-value tasks such as maintenance which should be delegated to others, at the expense of managerial work and activities which bring them into direct contact with their students.
- Secondary principals in Ireland tend to work longer hours (mean = 60.2 hours) and have a greater number of interactions (730) per week than their counterparts overseas. This, for a working year of even 40 weeks, the principals puts in over 2400 hours in the school, which is considerably more than three times the teaching hours expected annually from a whole-time teacher.
- The characteristics of the secondary principal's day in Ireland include reacting to many frequent interruptions which produces a very high number of short, discontinuous interactions each day, with over 80% of activities lasting five minutes or less each and fewer than 4% extending to half an hour. The modal time for events is one minute. In addition, their working time is unpredictable with the consequential interspersed with the trivial thus requiring frequent and rapid changes of mood and style. Hence, the principals are not reflective planners. Rather, they are reactive crisis managers.
- The quantity of work expected of principals (by both themselves and others) is formidable and covers a very broad range of topics and styles.
- In general, secondary principals in Ireland do not receive sufficient appraisal of their performance for them to improve their work habits. Furthermore, they receive virtually no feedback about their work from the Department of Education and too little from their Boards of Management or Boards of Governors. Their work is made all the more difficult by the lack of any form of job description.

- There are significant differences among the work patterns of the principals in different types of schools, with those in the boarding schools and the small schools working much longer hours than those in the day schools and the large schools. The principals of the voluntary secondary schools and the rural schools had slightly longer working weeks than those in the community, comprehensive or vocational schools or those in urban areas. The burden on the principal of a small boarding school in a rural area is unacceptably high, with a mean working week in excess of 70 hours.
- Secondary principals in Ireland do not feel that they received sufficient training for their jobs either before or since their appointments.
- More than 80% of the secondary principal's time is spent as chief executive of his school with less than 20% as instructional leader. This is in sharp contrast to their wishes.
- Principals in the voluntary secondary schools are less directly involved in 'hands on' administration than those in the other sectors, having more secretaries and fewer computers and 'fax' machines. They also are more shielded from outside influence than the other sector heads.

6.3 Recommendations

- In order to increase the chance of all schools becoming successful educators, secondary principals in Ireland should be given both pre-service and in-service training. This should be designed to assist with the following difficulties which they are likely to face on an almost daily basis (not in order of importance):
 - How to decide priorities for their work and how to delegate some of the less important tasks;
 - How to clarify the role of the principal in a modern secondary school;;
 - How to decide the appropriate fraction of their time which is to be spent on each type of work, particularly on teaching and direct contact with the pupils;
 - How to adjust from the highly planned day and year of the classroom teacher with many predictable blocks of 35 or 40 minutes to the fragmented and largely unpredictable scenario for principals;
 - How to plan for the future;

- How to handle the numerous daily interruptions and to maintain some feeling of self-control over one's own work;
 - How to establish a system for obtaining regular and meaningful feedback on one's own performance;
 - How to supervise teachers and to deal with complaints about poor quality teaching;
 - How to communicate one's vision for the school effectively to all others in the school community;
 - How to synthesise information received from various sources;
 - How to prevent important tasks from being displaced by urgent needs; and
 - How to deal with being apparently essential and unnecessary simultaneously.
- Further research should be carried out into the following areas:
 - Why do secondary principals in Ireland do what they do? Is their work set for them or expected by others? Is a principal who is not unduly influenced by the wishes of parents and other groups seen as a 'good' or a 'bad' school leader?
 - Why do these principals work such long hours each week?
 - What are the effects on the school and on the working life of the principal of the relationship between the teachers and the head?
 - What would be the effects on the work patterns of principals if they were appointed for a fixed term of office only?
 - What are the tensions that exist in the dilemma for principals between the demands on them to act as chief executives for their schools and their desire to perform as instructional leaders?
 - Is the administrative burden really different in the different sectors? If so, what level of secretarial assistance would be required to reduce the percentage of the principal's time which is spent on administration to a level acceptable to the management trainers?
- Extensive efforts should be made to compile an agreed job description for the position of principal of a secondary school in Ireland. The requirements, desires and expectations of the Department of Education, the Boards of Management, the parents' bodies, the teachers' unions, the pupils, the local community and the principals

themselves would all need to be established clearly in advance. The relationship between what principals should be doing and what they are actually doing should then lead to modifications of the training programme for new and existing principals.

- The personality traits and other human characteristics which are essential for a successful principal need to be elucidated.
- Consideration should be given to the implication of the finding in this research that the demands on principals in different school situations vary so enormously and some mechanisms should be investigated for equalising these pressures.

APPENDIX A: First letter to principals:

Date

Name and address of principal

Dear X,

I am writing in connection with a research project which I am currently undertaking for the M.Sc. degree in Educational Management in Trinity College, Dublin. As part of the course requirements for this year we are required to write a minor thesis on some relevant topic and I have chosen to study the work practices of principals in second-level schools. By this I mean what principals think they should do, what they think they actually do, and what, in fact, they actually do. Following a review of the relevant literature I have decided to use a combination of direct observation of some principals and a simple record of each principal's activities during a period of several days as recorded by that principal. IN order to get a fairly representative selection of schools I need to include principals of schools of all sizes, locations and types. I would be very grateful indeed if you would be able to help me with my research. At no stage during the writing of the report will any individual or school be identified by name or location.

What would be required is the following:

1. I would need to talk with you for about 45 to 60 minutes, during which time you would outline to me the amount of time you spend on various aspects of your job. I would explain how the research will take place.
2. I would like to observe you working for some time, perhaps up to a whole day.
3. You could keep a simple record of all your school-related activities during a subsequent period of a week or so.

At the end of this research I should be able to make some progress towards a job description for second-level principals in this country. I would also hope that I might be able to identify some areas in which principals could increase their efficiency. I hope that you will be able to help me with this research. I appreciate that it may seem like a lot of work for you but in practice this is not so. In fact, I believe that it can pay dividends by increasing your awareness of how and when you are currently being side-tracked from your ideal work pattern! I will telephone you within the next week to see how you feel about this and to try to arrange an appointment for stage one.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Robert Kerr.

APPENDIX B: Principals' Questionnaire

Section A: The Principal:

- Q1. Name: [N.B. This will **not** be used in the analysis of results.]
- Q2. Sex: Male Female
- Q3. Number of years of teaching experience (including H. Dip. Ed. year):
- Q4. Number of years as a principal:
- Q5. Number of years in the present school:
- Q6. Number of years as principal of present school:
- Q7. Number of schools in which you have served as teacher or principal:
- Q8. Number of principalships held by you:
- Q9. Did you receive any pre-service training for you present job (other than from a previous principalship which you held)? Yes No
- If "yes", from whom? Previous incumbent
Other individual
Own association
Other body
- Was it satisfactory? Yes No
- If "no", do you think you should have had any?
- Q10. Have you received any in-service training since your appointment? Yes No
- If "yes", from whom? Previous incumbent
Other individual
Own association
Other body
- Was it satisfactory? Yes No
- If "no", do you think you should have had any?
- Q11. Religious status? Religious Lay
- Q12. Marital status? Married Single

Section B: The School:

- Q1. What type of school is it? Secondary Community
Comprehensive Vocational
- Q2. Offering: Boarding only Day only Both day and boarding
- Q3. Pupil sex: Boys only Girls only Co-educational
- Q4. Number of years in main school? Five Six

- Q5. Location: Mainly urban Mainly rural Mixture
- Q6. Approximate number of pupils:
- Q7. Trend of pupil numbers: Rising Falling Steady
- Q8. Approximate number of teaching staff (excluding any for boarding duties only):
 Total number:
 Total number as equivalent whole-time teachers:
 Whole-time (including P, V-P, PWT, TWT and non-incremental):
 Part-time (including EPT and others):
- Q9. Have you got a Vice-Principal? Yes No
 If “yes”, give sex: Male Female
 Years as V-P:
 Number of schools in which V-P has served:
- Q10. How many buildings compose the school?
- Q11. Have you got your own office? Yes No
- Q12. Have you a public address system in the school? Yes No
 If “yes”, by whom is it used? Self Others Not at all
- Q13. Is there a school secretary or clerical officer? Yes No More than one
 If “yes”, give sex: Male Female
 Years of experience:
 Status: Whole-time Part-time
- Q14. Have you your own secretary (separate to any school secretary)? Yes No
 If “yes”, give sex: Male Female
 Years of experience:
 Status: Whole-time Part-time
- Q15. Is there a school caretaker: Yes No More than one
 If “yes”, give sex: Male Female
 Years of experience:
 Status: Whole-time Part-time
- Q16. Is there a school bursar? Yes No
 If “yes”, give sex: Male Female
 Years of experience:
 Status: Whole-time Part-time

- Q17. Has the school a telephone? Yes No
 If "yes", how many lines?
 Have you got your own direct telephone line? Yes No
- Q18. Has the school got a fax machine? Yes No
- Q19. Are school records (of any kind) kept on computer?
 All Some Few None
- Q20. Do you have your own computer terminal? Yes No
 If "yes", where is it? Office Home Other room
 How often do you use it? Very often Frequently Occasionally Rarely

Section C: Your Job:

- Q1 Is your present job as you imagined it would be before your appointment?
 Pretty much Somewhat Not really
 Comments?
- Q2. Approximately how many hours teaching do you do per week this year?
- Q3. How would you describe your relationship with your Vice-Principal?
 Symbiotic
 P dominant
 VP dominant
 Antagonistic
 Other
- Q4. How do these people or bodies affect your daily work?
 Totally Largely Moderately Very little Not at all
 Dept. of Ed.
 Bd. of Man.
 Teachers
 Parents
 Pupils
 Self
 Other
- Q5. What sort of work might you be expected to carry out for them?
 Social Technical Administrative Managerial Personal
 Dept. of Ed.
 Bd. of Man.

Teachers

Parents

Pupils

Other

Q6. Do you find your present job satisfying?

Always Mostly Often Sometimes Never

(Unless "always") How could this be improved?

Q7. Do you get feedback on your performance? Yes No

If "yes", from whom?

Dept. of Ed.

Bd. of Man.

Vice-Principal

Teachers

Parents

Pupils

Other staff

If "no", would you like some? Yes No

Q8. How many hours do you normally spend working on a typical weekday?

How many hours do you normally spend working on a typical Saturday?

How many hours do you normally spend working on a typical Sunday?

How many hours do you normally spend working on a typical week in total?

Q9. What percentage of your working time do you think should be spent (ideally) and is spent (actually) on each of the following areas of your activity?

(a) Activity Ideally Actually

Social

Technical

Administrative

Managerial

Personal

Total:

(b) <u>Activity</u>	<u>Ideally</u>	<u>Actually</u>
Deskwork		
Scheduled meetings		
Unscheduled meetings		
Verbal exchanges		
Telephone conversations		
Tour of school		
Monitoring		
Trips away from school		
Announcing		
Observing teachers		
Processing		
Teaching		
Personal		
Boarding duties		
Other people's work		
Total:		

Q10. Other comments, complaints or helpful tips for other principals?

APPENDIX C: Second letter to principals:

Address and date

Name and address of principal

Dear X,

I am writing again in connection with my research for Trinity College with which you have been kind enough to help me during stage one. I am pleased to be able to say that things are going well so far. I have interviewed quite a number of principals and have observed several in action. I am now beginning to produce meaningful results, but there is still a number of steps to go yet, of course – hence this letter. Stage two is where I ask principals to record their own activities on a simple time-sheet. I have taken the liberty of enclosing an explanatory page in the hope that you will be able to help me with this stage. My hope is that each of the interviewed principals will be able to complete this record each day for a week or more so that I shall have a sizeable quantity of information for analysis by the end of this term.

I would be very grateful indeed if you feel you could help further by recording your actions on a time-sheet. The ideal is that you note our encounters and actions as they happen for five or more consecutive days, but the length of time is not critical. In fact, even a small number of isolated days would be of use to me, so I would hope that you do not feel too pressurised by this request. The completion of the time-sheet should not take up a significant amount of time; however, you will need to be consciously aware of your actions and encounters throughout the day and then make a very brief entry consisting of a number and a single letter each time you move to something else. I would ask you, please, not to select days that you think will be typical of your normal working life since this will, inevitably, distort the final picture. Furthermore, please do not ignore days that are totally upset by some event (whether anticipated or not) which controls your actions – these, too, are typical of what principals face in their daily lives!

Finally, I would ask that, if you might be prepared to allow me to follow you around for a day and record your actions on a time-sheet (without knowing the content of your written work or conversations), you can contact me at home either by letter or by telephone (xxxx-xxxx). Of course, if you have a question about any aspect of my research, please get in touch with me.

I am very grateful indeed for all your help. I really do appreciate that requests such as these interfere with your normal work, so I hope that it might be possible in some way for me to be able to help you in return. Thanking you again,

Yours sincerely,

Robert Kerr.

APPENDIX D: Principals' Activities Diary

Explanation of codes (after Mintzberg, 1973):

Deskwork (Dsk)	correspondence, administration
Scheduled meetings (Sch)	mutually planned, with agenda, perhaps formal
Unscheduled meetings (Uns)	spontaneous, possibly informal and/or brief
Verbal exchanges (Ver)	contacts usually brief and with one other person
'Phone conversations (Tel)	either incoming or outgoing
Tours of school (Tour)	supervisory and/or assessing while on the move
Monitoring (Mon)	observing in a high-density area, usually stationary
Away from school (Trip)	to meetings or with pupils but not on personal errands
Announcing (Ann)	using public address system or in assembly or to class
Observing teachers (Obs)	in classroom or elsewhere
Processing (Pro)	absentees/other regular admin. Chores not in deskwork
Teaching (Teach)	own teaching time
Personal (Per)	anything not directly related to paid work
Boarding duties (Board)	including activities for boarders after school
Other people's work (Other)	work requested but not recognised as your own

Principals' time-sheets:

This time-sheet is intended to be a very simple (and somewhat simplistic) record of the type of activities a principal undertakes in a full working day. Each activity, however brief or incomplete, is coded using the system explained below and noted on any sheet of paper which can then be returned to me for analysis as soon as possible after the sheet is completed. The headings are the 'STAMP' letters used during the interview when I asked you to estimate your own use of time under each of these categories, and each is reduced to a single letter as indicated. Activities are listed by giving the number of minute at each type of activity in the order of their occurrence. Each record then simply consists of a number and a category letter. From time to time it is useful to note the time of day so that I can note any minutes not recorded. A circle can be added around any activity which is completed without interruption. Not all activities are easily classified, so please just use your best judgement and a split second decision at the time.

Social: S

Everyday interactions with others but not having a direct connection to your work. These are frequently very brief indeed (perhaps just of seconds) but should be recorded anyway to the nearest minute, if possible. There may be a very large number of these encounters during a morning break, for example, so that, say there were 17 encounters during one such break of ten minutes, these could be recorded as “10 S (17 encounters)”. In spite of a large number of S encounters, the total time here is likely to be quite small.

Technical: T

Work done because of your profession, experience, training or qualification, e.g. teaching, preparing and marking; anything involving pupils directly (but not discipline); discussing curriculum with colleagues. Time spent on T activities varies considerably from one principal to another.

Administrative: A

Work concerned with organisational maintenance; carrying out official or regular duties, perhaps authorised by others; usually clerical work, e.g. filling in forms, making lists, sorting papers, on telephone, photocopying, writing letters, etc. This usually forms a substantial part of any principal’s normal working day but there may well be days (such as when away at a meeting) when the amount of time spent on administration is very small.

Managerial: M

Work which entails setting precedents, influencing others to assent or to agree to some non-obvious decision or behaviour; getting something done (by others) that would not otherwise have been done, e.g. discussing with teachers how the timetable would be better next year; regrouping pupils; walking round the school to see what is going on; deciding the agenda for a meeting. M activities are really those which you alone can do – other activities which could be delegated to someone else (if they either had the time or were willing to accept the task) should probably be assigned to another category.

Personal: P

Private business not related directly to your paid employment. This is likely to be very small indeed.

Example:

[8.07 a.m.] 5A, 2S, 16A, 18M, 8S, 4T, 5A, 5T, 3S (5 interactions),
23A, [check: 9.36 a.m.], etc.

APPENDIX E: Codes used for observation of principals:

Principals' work patterns – revised codes for observations:

- S1 Verbal exchanges, including social telephone calls
- S2 Social trips

- T1 Own teaching, preparing and marking
- T2 Meetings re. curriculum or with pupils (not discipline)

- A1 Deskwork, including discussions with secretary, etc.
- A2 Meetings where Principal acts as secretary, etc.
- A3 Most telephone conversations
- A4 General (factual) announcements
- A5 Secretarial or other work not properly the Principal's
- A6 Moving round school en route to another activity

- M1 Most scheduled meetings, including assemblies
- M2 Most unscheduled meetings, including disciplining pupils
- M3 Observing school or teachers or pupils
- M4 Trips to managerial meetings (even within school)
- M5 Boarding duties

- P Personal trips or work or telephone calls

- O Anything not readily classifies as above

APPENDIX F: Further quotations for section 3.6.1

The manager's days are fragmented, where the average duration for each episode is only minutes; sometime the interruptions come from the manager himself, who thinks of something else and then switches to that. (Stewart, 1988, 114)

The principal's days are sporadic, characterised simultaneously by brevity, variety and fragmentation. (Martin and Willower, 1981, 79)

The breadth of topics covered by general managers in their discussion was extremely wide. ... They often behaved in a 'reactive' mode. ... Most of their time with others was spent in short and disjointed conversation. (Kotter, 1982, 79-91)

The nature of managerial work is brief, varied, fragmented and interpersonal. (Martinko and Gardner, 1990, 331)

Principals' work patterns lack organisation and predictability with 75% of activities interrupted. (Chung and Miskell, 1989, 55 and 50)

Much of what principals do is reactive rather than proactive management. There is a tension between handling the day to day demands and pursuing valued long-term goals. ... Principal activity is more often about tackling a high intensity of tasks with frequent interruptions rather than systematic ordering of curricular or organisational programmes based on agreed policies or clearly understood management structures. (Coulson, 1990, 104-105)

The principals' days were characterised by brevity, variety and fragmentation, similar to other empirical managerial studies. (Davies, 1987, 44)

These facts reveal the fractioned, piecemeal character of managerial life in a secondary school. (Morris *et al.*, 1984, 53)

The principal's work is characterised by variety, fragmentation and the brevity of many transactions. (Hall *et al.*, 1986, 12)

Observations of school principals have shown that little time is apparently devoted to reflective planning. ... Even when managers had opportunities for uninterrupted thinking time, they often chose to disrupt this themselves by undertaking tasks of seemingly minor importance, despite stating that they regret not having time to think. (Thody, 1991, 21)

The 'phone never stopped ringing and people were for ever popping in to see me. ... People don't appear to understand what the head is trying to cope with. (Clerkin, 1985, 293)

I had always thought of a chief executive as the conductor of an orchestra standing aloof on his platform. Now I am in some respects inclined to see him as the puppet in a puppet show with hundreds of people pulling the strings and forcing him to act in one way or another. (Adair, 1982, 33)

The work behaviour of school principals showed intensity, variety and fragmentation. (Kmetz and Willower, 1982, 62)

The central recurring themes of managers are variation and contingency. (Hales, 1986, 100)

The headteachers' working days are hectic and fragmented and their activity characterised by brevity and variety. (Wilkinson, 1990, 114)

The workload of principals in Irish voluntary secondary schools is characterised by its variety, demands and unpredictability. (Leader and Boldt, 1994, v)

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