CENTRALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE TECHNICAL INSTITUTES IN HONG KONG

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education
at the University of Leicester

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work and that it has not been previously submitted to this University or any other institution in application for admission to a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Cheng Wing Choi
20 October 1999
ABSTRACT

Centralization and Decentralization in Educational Administration: A Case Study of the Technical Institutes in Hong Kong

By

Cheng Wing Choi

This research attempted to gain an insight into the experiences and perspectives of staff in the Vocational Training Council (VTC) on the devolution initiative being implemented in its technical institutes. The research was developed from the conceptual framework of centralization and decentralization. It adopted a qualitative case-study approach to inductively understand human experience in context-specific settings. The data collection techniques consisted of documentary analysis, observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews to achieve the objectives of methodological triangulation.

Before the introduction of the devolution initiative, the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters was the supervisor of the technical institutes. It was considered to stifle the initiatives of the technical institutes because of its strong controlling emphasis. The strategic and organizational review of the VTC conducted in 1996 acted as a catalyst to set off the changes. It appears that the main thrust of the devolution initiative is to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. Staff in general welcomed release from the management and control by the headquarters, but considered the pace of change to be too fast. There was a remarkable degree of concurrence among staff in focusing student learning outcomes as the key to change. Although the devolution initiative is a major cultural change in the VTC, the senior management have paid little attention to the organizational culture of the technical institutes. Since staff have not been consulted and empowered, most of them are indifferent, or even resistant, to this far-reaching change. The scope of decentralization with respect to the use of resources, participative decision-making and curriculum development is limited. Changing the organizational culture, flattening out the hierarchy, opening up opportunities for teachers to contribute meaningfully to the decision-making process, and fostering greater professional development, together with good management and adequate autonomous funding, are promising strategies to change the VTC towards a more entrepreneurial one.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| LIST OF FIGURES                           | vi  |
| LIST OF TABLES                           | vii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS                         | viii|

## CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION

Preamble

1

Broad Context of the Research: The Education System in Hong Kong

1

Specific Context of the Research

2

- The Vocational Training Council
  2
- The Technical Institutes
  4
- The Technical Institutes Division Headquarters
  8

Policy Context

9

Purpose of the Research

9

Research Questions

12

Significance of the Research

13

Summary

14

## CHAPTER 2  LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

15

- Definitions of Centralization and Decentralization
  17
- Nomenclature of Decentralization of Education
  19
- Rationale for Moves from Centralization to Decentralization
  20
- Major Arguments for Decentralization of Education
  23
- Major Arguments for Centralization of Education
  24
Trends in Centralization and Decentralization of Education: International Experiences

England and Wales

The United States of America

Canada

Brazil

Australia

New Zealand

Hungary

Decentralization of Education in Hong Kong: The School Management Initiative

Research Findings and Observations on Decentralization

Future Developments

Conclusion

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigms in Education

Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Research Design

Site and Sample Selection

Access and Entry

Research Strategies

Data Collection Techniques

Data Analysis Strategies

The Human Instrument

Conclusion
CHAPTER 5  FINDINGS: OBSERVATIONS  106

Introduction  106
Process Issues  107
Content Issues  107
Background and Purpose of Decentralization  108
Changes in Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities  109
Process of Decentralization  111
Perspectives of the Staff in the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters on Decentralization  114
Conclusion  117

CHAPTER 6  FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS  119

Introduction  119
Historical Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities  120
Reasons Prompting the Vocational Training Council to Adopt the Decentralization Policy  123
Purpose of Decentralization  124
Staff Say over the Changes  126
Changes in Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities  128
Perspectives of the Staff in the Technical Institutes on Decentralization  131
Perspectives of the Staff in the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters on Decentralization  137
Process of Decentralization  138
New Role of the Principal and Staff in the Technical Institutes  139
Role of the Academic Secretariat  140
Conclusion  142
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Structure for the Resource and Academic Planning and Management of the Technical Institutes</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**LIST OF TABLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Distribution of Teaching Departments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Sampling of Participants</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Finally, this thesis would not have been possible without the endurance, support, encouragement and understanding of my wife, Kimmy. I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks for all she has done for me, and to apologise for my neglect of her during my studies.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

The story of Hong Kong is well-known. Its change from being a small barren island, totally devoid of natural resources, to being first an entrepot and then a robust trading and financial centre is well documented. What is not so well-known, however, is the efforts made by Hong Kong in developing a system of vocational education and training that has helped to make some of these changes possible. Such a system was designed ‘to meet the specified needs of the economy and seeks to match output of trained personnel with the economy’s requirements’ (Knight, 1988, p. 1). For more than two decades, the technical institutes have been playing an important role in providing vocational education and training, producing the trained manpower for the economy. This chapter sets out the contexts of the study, and introduces the purpose of this research, which is related to the recent changes in the management of the technical institutes.

BROAD CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH: THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN HONG KONG

Educational opportunities encompass kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, technical institutes, technical colleges and tertiary institutions. The majority of places from primary school upwards are provided either free of charge or at highly subsidised rates. All children must, by law, be in full-time education from the age of six to their 15th birthday or completion of Secondary 3, whichever is the earlier (Hong Kong Government, 1997b). Primary school normally begins at the age of six, and lasts six years. At about 12, children progress to a three-year junior secondary course. After Secondary 3, most stay on for a two-year senior secondary course leading to the first public examination, the Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE);
others join full-time craft courses of vocational education in the technical institutes, and a few leave formal education at this point.

After the HKCEE, students progress to a two-year sixth form course leading to the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination; or to a two-year or three-year vocational course leading to diploma or higher diploma. Post-Advanced Level Examination opportunities include a place on a three-year first degree or higher diploma course, or on a two-year teacher education programme. Those leaving full-time education at the end of the senior secondary courses have opportunities for part-time study or vocational education and training through to degree level.

Most primary and secondary schools are publicly funded, and are operated by non-profit-making voluntary organizations. Tertiary institutions are autonomous statutory bodies. A comprehensive system of vocational education and training is provided by the statutory Vocational Training Council (Hong Kong Government, 1997a, 1997b). The options for school leavers are now much greater than those in the past, particularly because of the expansion of higher education. Over the last 10 years the proportion of the 17-20 age group receiving tertiary education has increased from 5% to 18%, and there are now 14,500 places available in Hong Kong for first year, first degree courses (Hong Kong Government, 1997b). In addition, an increasing number of Hong Kong students can afford to pay for higher education overseas. This expansion of opportunities, combined with the strong family and peer group pressure to obtain the best possible education and qualifications, makes vocational education and training courses a relatively unattractive option to many school leavers (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996).

SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

The research was conducted in the seven technical institutes and the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters of the Vocational Training Council. They are outlined below.

1. **The Vocational Training Council**

   The Industrial Training Advisory Committee, one of the predecessors of the Vocational Training Council (VTC), was set up in September 1965 by the
government as a non-statutory body to identify the training and related problems and make recommendations to the government for measures to solve these problems (Knight, 1988). In October 1973, the government established the Hong Kong Training Council to replace the Industrial Training Advisory Committee, with wider terms of reference. Its main function was to advise on measures necessary to ensure that there was a comprehensive system of manpower training geared to the developing needs of the Hong Kong economy. It was also vested with the responsibility for recommending ‘an appropriate statutory body which could ultimately replace itself and which would have both advisory and executive functions’ (Leung, 1993, p. 6).

Resulting from the advice of the Hong Kong Training Council, the government established the VTC in February 1982 as a permanent successor to the Hong Kong Training Council under the Vocational Training Council Ordinance (Hong Kong Government, 1979; Vocational Training Council, 1992). The Ordinance was amended in August 1991 to widen the remit of the VTC to include vocational training for the disabled and the administration of the Apprenticeship Ordinance. It has both advisory and executive functions which include the following (Vocational Training Council, 1992):

(a) To advise the Governor on the measures required to ensure a comprehensive system of technical education and industrial training suited to the developing needs of Hong Kong.
(b) To institute, develop and operate schemes for training operatives, craftsmen, technicians and technologists needed to sustain and improve industry.
(c) To promote and regulate the training of apprentices.
(d) To provide and co-ordinate the provision of skills training to disabled persons aged 15 and over for the purpose of improving their employment prospects and preparing them for open employment.
(e) To establish, operate and maintain technical colleges, technical institutes, industrial training centres and skills centres.

The VTC, which is funded by the government, delivers a comprehensive system of vocational education and training (Hong Kong Special Administrative
Region Government, 1998). Its training schemes and institutions provide pre-employment and upgrading training at the operative, craft, technician and technologist levels to meet the changing needs of the economy. When the VTC took over the operation of the technical institutes in 1982, some 210 courses were being offered in 12 disciplines. There are now over 280 courses covering 16 disciplines, providing a total of 14,070 full-time (5,064 craft and 9,006 technician), 12,094 part-time day-release (7,681 craft and 4,413 technician), and 23,839 part-time evening (8,086 craft and 15,753 technician) places in the 1998/99 academic year (Vocational Training Council, 1999).

2. The Technical Institutes

Owing to the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 which resulted in an imposition of a trade embargo on China by the United Nations, Hong Kong had to turn from an entrepot trading post to manufacturing as the only means of survival (Hong Kong Government, 1996; Hong Kong Polytechnic, 1984). By the mid-sixties, the economic miracle of Hong Kong's successful conversion to a manufacturing centre was well underway. The government saw the need to increase the supply of trained craftsmen, technicians and technologists as an urgent one, and recognized that the shortage of personnel in these categories would restrict Hong Kong's further industrial growth and expansion (Polytechnic Planning Committee, 1971). Thus, it was considered necessary that the lower technician and craft level courses offered by the Hong Kong Technical College should be separately administered. This led to the planning of a technical institute in 1964 and the commencement of the operation of the Morrison Hill Technical Institute in 1969 under the Education Department. This was one of the major moves in the government plans to develop vocational education and training at the post-secondary level (Bailey, 1982).

In 1972, the Hong Kong Technical College was transformed into the Hong Kong Polytechnic so as to expand the scope of courses offered to meet the needs of the expanding industrial and commercial sectors. Discussions were held in 1972 and 1973 between the Education Department and the Hong Kong Polytechnic about further transfers of courses to the technical institutes (Hong Kong Polytechnic, 1973). Four technical institutes, namely Kwai Chung, Kwun
Tong, Haking Wong and Lee Wai Lee, were established between 1975 and 1979 to provide vocational education and training for craftsmen and lower technicians, thus freeing the Polytechnic from its lower-level courses. In July 1976, the Apprenticeship Ordinance and Regulations were enacted. This Ordinance promotes proper apprentice training in designated trades and regulates the employment of apprentices in these trades. It also requires contracted apprentices between the ages of 15-18 to attend a course of instruction relevant to their trade. This has thus created a large demand for craft-level courses at the technical institutes. In 1978, the White Paper on the Development of Senior Secondary and Tertiary Education was published (Hong Kong Government, 1978). Subsequently, a recommendation was made in 1980 to transfer 5,000 technician course places from the Hong Kong Polytechnic to the technical institutes over a four-year period commencing September 1981 to make room at the Polytechnic for higher-level work. The White Paper also proposed the establishment of the sixth technical institute at Tuen Mun.

In 1982, the VTC was set up by the government to take over, among other things, the responsibility from the Education Department for the management of five technical institutes (Vocational Training Council, 1992). The VTC also proposed, in addition to the Tuen Mun Technical Institute, the building of two more technical institutes, namely Sha Tin and Chai Wan. They were completed in 1986 and 1987 respectively. In 1989, the government formulated an overall plan for the expansion of tertiary education to combat the 'brain drain' problem in Hong Kong. In 1990, the VTC accepted the government's invitation to make proposals for the transfer of 6,750 places on sub-degree courses at higher diploma and higher certificate level from the two Polytechnics, namely the Hong Kong Polytechnic and the City Polytechnic of Hong Kong (Vocational Training Council, 1992). The transfers necessitated the establishment of two technical colleges, and enabled the two Polytechnics to develop 65% or more of their work to degree levels. From 1992/93, the number of technical institutes is reduced to seven as the newest of these technical institutes, the Chai Wan Technical Institute, has been upgraded to become one of the two technical colleges to take on the sub-degree level courses decanted by the two Polytechnics. The loss of one technical institute necessitated the reorganization of technical institutes, which resulted in the transfer of the
majority of full-time craft courses to the industry training centres, also under the management responsibility of the VTC.

At present, there are seven technical institutes. They are listed below for ease of reference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technical Institute</th>
<th>Year of Establishment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morrison Hill Technical Institute</td>
<td>1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwai Chung Technical Institute</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kwun Tong Technical Institute</td>
<td>1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haking Wong Technical Institute</td>
<td>1977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee Wai Lee Technical Institute</td>
<td>1979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuen Mun Technical Institute</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sha Tin Technical Institute</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The seven technical institutes have altogether 41 teaching departments covering 16 disciplines (Vocational Training Council, 1996, 1998). The distribution is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Morrison Hill</th>
<th>Kwai Chung</th>
<th>Kwun Tong</th>
<th>Haking Wong</th>
<th>Lee Wai Lee</th>
<th>Tuen Mun</th>
<th>Sha Tin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Applied Science</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Clothing Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Commercial Studies</td>
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<td>*</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Computing Studies</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Construction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Design</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 1.1 Distribution of Teaching Departments


The technical institutes provide vocational education and training to satisfy the needs of school leavers and people in employment on the one hand, and those of industry, commerce and the service sector on the other (Vocational Training Council, 1998). They offer courses at two distinct levels, namely, craft or post-Secondary 3 level and technician or post-Secondary 5 level, on a full-time, part-time day-release and part-time evening basis. Some 820 teaching staff were employed in the seven technical institutes in the 1998/99 academic years. They include seven principals, 41 heads of department and about 770
lecturers. All administrative authority within a technical institute rests with the technical institute management, namely the principal and the heads of department.

3. The Technical Institutes Division Headquarters

The executive arm of the VTC is the Technical Education and Industrial Training Department. It was set up by the government in April 1982 by merging the Technical Education Division of the Education Department and the Industrial Training Division of the Labour Department. Since then, the Technical Education Division Headquarters (renamed as Technical Institutes Division Headquarters in 1991) and the Industrial Training Division Headquarters have been responsible for the work of the VTC's technical institutes and industry training centres respectively.

The Technical Institutes Division Headquarters (now called the Academic Secretariat) was responsible for ensuring efficient management of resources and uniformity of education standards across the seven technical institutes. It has developed into a hierarchically organized bureaucracy exhibiting the following characteristics as identified by Weber (1947):

(a) Clear-cut goals understood by members.
(b) Areas of expertise with a division of labour among experts.
(c) A hierarchical ordering of offices, providing an authority structure based on the legally defined and circumscribed power of offices and regularized lines of communication.
(d) Clear definition of staff roles.
(e) Explicit rules defining people's responsibilities and how their tasks are to be co-ordinated.
(f) Career orientation based on seniority and achievement.

Since 1 September 1998 the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters has been deprived of all its traditional authority by being transformed into the Academic Secretariat.
POLICY CONTEXT

The key policies for vocational education and training have been established by the Education and Manpower Bureau, but these in turn are set within an overall context by the government’s stance of non-intervention. Despite its non-intervention policy, the government regards the provision of vocational education and training as an essential public service, therefore it provides almost all funding for the VTC, rather than expecting the private sector to make a substantial direct financial contribution (Hong Kong Government, 1997a; Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996). The funding not provided by the government is mainly earned through fees. According to Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, ‘there remains a strong commitment from the government to continue to fund vocational education and training in a significant way’ in the future (p. 87). As VTC is publicly funded, it works within a public policy framework that demands accountability for the use of funds and the most effective use of the resources. It has also to recognize that it is not totally autonomous and must maintain a dialogue with the government to ensure the proper implementation of its policy.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Helmore (1983) was invited by the VTC to undertake the task of advising on the system of technical education in Hong Kong between 24 October and 18 November 1983. In his report he points out:

To an observer from the UK the technical institutes appear to be over-administered from the centre. The areas of discretion available to the principal of a technical institute in Hong Kong seem limited in comparison with his UK counterpart. For example, the allocation of the full-time teaching staff establishment seems to be determined in a rather inflexible manner. I believe the technical institutes could be more effective and flexible in their own response to the changing demands made upon them if more authority was delegated to them in administrative (as distinct from policy) matters. This would sometimes mean heavier work loads at technical institute level for
principals and other senior staff but the greater scope for initiative would enhance job satisfaction. Such measures might also encourage staff to take new initiatives in areas where at present the heavy hand of bureaucracy may have an inhibiting effect. (p. 6)

Helmore therefore recommended that to achieve a more effective management at the level of the technical institutes, greater delegation of administrative matters to the technical institutes should be pursued as a general policy. However, his recommendation was not taken up by the VTC on the grounds that the newly established management structure was being tried out only in 1982.

For many years the government has been reforming its management procedures, with the aim of improving efficiency and giving a better service to the public with the resources available (Education and Manpower Branch, and Education Department, 1991). Following a review by consultants of measures already in place, a document called Public Sector Reform proposing a comprehensive programme of financial and management changes, was produced in late 1980s. The basic principles of the Public Sector Reform are, among other things, a continual review of the existing base of public expenditure, and appropriate organization and management frameworks. The Public Sector Reform is also extended to the education sector bringing about the School Management Initiative (SMI) in 1991 (Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991; Education Department, 1992; Wong, 1991, 1995, 1997; Wong et al., 1998). The SMI reflects the assumption that, under the existing framework of controls, schools neither manage effectively and efficiently, nor are conducive to quality reforms. A recommendation in the SMI (Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991) is:

The emphasis in Education Department's relations with the aided sector should change from detailed control to support and advice, within a framework defining responsibilities and accountabilities at all levels in the education system. (p. 33)

Similarly, the government appointed a consultant Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited in March 1996 to conduct a strategic and organizational review of the VTC. This was the first major external review of the VTC in its 14-year history (Segal
Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996). The review considered the efficiency and effectiveness of the VTC, examined the systems and procedures by which the VTC managed its activities and whether these activities met Hong Kong’s developing needs. The consultant carried out the work between March and May 1996, and submitted a report to the government in August 1996. The report was officially released in late September 1996 for public consultation. The consultant put forward altogether 44 recommendations, one of which being the need to devolve authority and responsibility from the central level to the operational units. In view of the wide variety of the work of the VTC, the review stopped short of attending to detail. The recommendation of decentralization was adopted by the VTC, and is in the process of being implemented.

The background described above aroused the writer’s interest in the topic of centralization and decentralization of authority in educational administration as a potential area of research. The writer took account of the following considerations and cautions when assessing the aim and title of the research:

1. The research topic chosen on the basis of personal interest will elicit greater commitment and result in more rewarding experience than one chosen for other reasons.
2. The topic is important because increased knowledge about people’s perspectives of a change in policy is needed.
3. The study is feasible in respect of time, difficulty, cooperation from others and access to needed resources.
4. The writer’s ethical obligation to protect his participants’ rights, welfare, and privacy is safeguarded.

In the light of the above considerations, the title of the research was decided as follows:

“Centralization and Decentralization in Educational Administration: A Case Study of the Technical Institutes in Hong Kong”

The purpose of the research was evident. It had its focus on the following five aspects identified in the title:
1. The topic is related to centralization and decentralization.
2. It is concerned with educational administration but not other types of administration.
3. It is a case study.
4. The specific institutional context of the research is the technical institutes.
5. The technical institutes under study are located in Hong Kong.

The objective of the research was to gain an insight into the experiences and perspectives of the staff of the VTC on centralization and decentralization. Based on this objective, the research questions were then derived.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

With reference to the purpose of this research, the present study attempted to investigate the following research questions:

1. What was the distribution of authority between the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters and the technical institutes prior to the implementation of the decentralization policy?
2. What prompted the VTC to adopt the decentralization policy?
3. How much say have the staff had over these changes?
4. How do the staff in the technical institutes view decentralization?
5. How do the staff in the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters view decentralization?
6. How is authority decentralized and implemented?
7. What is the new role of the principal and staff in the technical institutes?
8. What is the new role of the Academic Secretariat (the former Technical Institutes Division Headquarters)?

The final product of this research would enable people to learn about:

1. The content of the decentralization policy.
2. The dynamics of the implementation process.
3. People’s personal experiences and perspectives.
The research therefore focused on the people, situation, phenomenon, content and process under study.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

On average, a technical institute runs about 55 full-time classes providing some 1,950 places in each academic year, not to mention the part-time day-release and part-time evening classes (Vocational Training Council, 1999). About 110 full-time teaching staff are employed in each technical institute. In terms of the number of classes, student enrolment and teaching staff, a technical institute is, in general, bigger than a 'large' (with more than 24 full-time classes) primary or secondary school in Hong Kong. However, compared to the aided school sector as a whole, the seven technical institutes represent only a small part of the education system (Education Department, 1999). While there has been considerable academic interest in the impact of recent government-imposed changes such as the School Management Initiative (SMI) in the primary and secondary sectors of education in Hong Kong, the technical education sector has been largely ignored. Very little research on the operation of the technical institutes has been undertaken since the first Morrison Hill Technical Institute came into operation in 1969. Several pieces of research have been conducted so far and are largely confined to the performance of students in technical institute courses (Chan, 1982; Chow, 1988; Lo, 1988; Tam, 1983), or the development and planning of craft and technician education in Hong Kong (Waters, 1982, 1985). However, none of these pieces of research has attempted to explore and analyze the management structure of the technical institutes.

Helmore, during his three-week visit to Hong Kong in 1983, suggested that there should be some decentralization of central control to the technical institutes, giving principals more authority to manage their institutes. The issue has been put aside for more than 15 years. In contrast, the SMI scheme for the aided school sector has been introduced in September 1991, and the number of schools participating in the scheme is on an increase. All schools will by the year 2000 practise school-based management in the spirit of SMI so that they can develop quality education according to the needs of their students (Education Commission, 1997). Hence, it is timely to gain an insight into the experiences and perspectives of the staff of the VTC on
centralization and decentralization. Such meaningful research has not yet been conducted so far. It is hoped that this research will help the individual technical institutes to facilitate their planning and evaluation, but also provide the policy makers with enhanced understanding and implications for developing future strategies. It is also hoped that this study will prompt more research on the management and operation of the technical institutes in Hong Kong in the future.

SUMMARY

The technical institutes have not undergone any major organizational changes in their history. The traditional distribution of authority and responsibilities between the headquarters and the technical institutes has been accepted by both the VTC and its seven technical institutes since 1982. Following the strategic and organizational review of the VTC by the consultant Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited in 1996, the VTC is now in the process of implementing major structural changes in the technical institutes. One of the most far-reaching changes is the devolution of authority and responsibility from the central level (i.e. the headquarters) to the operational units (i.e. the technical institutes). This research will explore the experiences and perspectives of the staff of the VTC on centralization and decentralization. It will be the first piece of research on this particular topic. It is hoped that the research will provide the policy makers with enhanced understanding and implications for developing future strategies.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a growing international trend towards decentralization. Decentralization has aroused considerable interest for many policy makers, pressure groups and interest groups in both developed and less-developed countries since the early 1970s. It has gained ever-increasing prominence, and is particularly popular among newly independent countries. In countries which have gained political independence after a period of colonial rule or have undertaken political transformation, decentralization is often taken as a strategy to demonstrate that the countries are more concerned with achieving democracy and meeting local needs. For example, Papua New Guinea moved to one of the most decentralized systems in the world shortly after its independence in 1975 (Bray, 1984).

A change in the politically legitimate distribution of authority is usually extended to apply to the running of other organizations, including schools. Lauglo (1994) argues that ‘thought and tradition relating to political legitimacy in a given society are likely served as a global framework which conditions ideas about how authority should be distributed in a wide range of institutions - including education’ (p. 3). Sudan, Nigeria, Tanzania, Zambia and Ghana have attempted to reorganize their education systems to decentralize some authority to local governments after the colonial regime (Conyers, 1983). The three Hispanic nations - Venezuela, Columbia and Spain - have also executed the strategy of decentralization in making reforms in the public educational systems after the falling of dictatorships (Hanson, 1989). Brazil has moved towards decentralization and democratization of public school administration as a result of the introduction of the new Federal and State Constitutions and the Law of National Education (Santos Filho, 1993). In China, after a period during which attempts are made to consolidate power in the hands of the central government, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party announced its decision to reform education in May 1985 (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985).
The reform attempts to decentralize control over schools allowing far more autonomy and flexibility to the local, particularly provincial, government to finance and run educational services (Cheng, 1995; Cheng and Cheung, 1997; Ho et al., 1998; Holmes, 1985; Mok, 1997; Swanson and Zhang, 1987; Tsang, 1991). For all or most Central and Eastern European countries the 1980s represent the introduction of numerous and radical educational changes, particularly changes in the governance of education, taking place in parallel to their no less radical political and economic transformations. Decentralization and school autonomy in these Central and Eastern European countries was seen as 'a reward arising from the achievement of political freedom' (Halasz, 1993, p. 493).

Measures of decentralization are also introduced in some developed countries where education systems are highly centralized. France has instituted a major decentralization programme in the 1980s in response to intense grass-root pressure and dissatisfaction with the inefficiencies of central control (Broadfoot, 1985; Caldwell, 1990; Moon, 1996). The trend towards deregulation and greater autonomy for schools in the Netherlands got under way in the second half of the 1980s, following the example of other countries (Karsten, 1998). In Sweden, there has been a de-bureaucratization trend in relaxing control on pedagogical methods and the specification of staff functions, and the devolution of decision-making on resource allocation closer to the schools (Duignan, 1990; Lauglo, 1985, 1990). In Norway, efforts to decentralize the educational system to increase the professional autonomy of the individual schools and institutions was taken in 1985 (Granheim, 1990; Lauglo, 1990, 1994). Where control of education has traditionally been highly centralized at the state government level in Australia, several states have enacted legislation providing a high degree of decentralization in school management (Caldwell, 1994; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988).

Throughout much of the world, there have thus been initiatives to increase the autonomy of schools within publicly-funded systems of education (Caldwell, 1994; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Eide, 1990; Gaziel, 1998; Karsten, 1998; Lauglo, 1994; Lundgren, 1990; McLean and Lauglo, 1985; Seddon et al., 1990; Thody, 1992). Notable examples are from England and Wales, and Canada. In England and Wales, a high level of faith in the market mechanism has underpinned the Local Management of Schools and the introduction of Grant-Maintained Schools under the 1988 Education Reform Act. In Canada, school-site management to bring about school improvement...
has increasingly been adopted by more and more districts in recent years. What emerges from these diverse developments is a willingness to broaden or change the distribution of educational power, which can be termed as decentralization in a broad sense.

**Definitions of Centralization and Decentralization**

The concepts of centralization and decentralization are rather vague and imprecise, and centralization and decentralization are highly complex phenomena (Bray, 1984, 1991a; Beare, 1986; Brown, 1990; Caldwell, 1990, 1994; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Cerych, 1997; Kaufman, 1997; Lauglo, 1990, 1994; Lundgren, 1990; McLean and Lauglo, 1985; Purvey, 1991; Sharpe, 1994; Smyth, 1995; Weiler, 1990). They embrace a multitude of processes and structures and mean different things to different people. It may therefore be difficult to place individual systems along a continuum, with highly centralized systems at one end and highly decentralized ones at the other (Bray, 1991a; Caldwell, 1990; Chapman, 1973; Johnes, 1995; Sharpe, 1994). Such a categorization ignores the complexities involved, as systems which are decentralized in some respects are centralized in others, and that less central direction can be replaced by tighter control of the local government. The placement of a particular system on the continuum also depends on the relative weight given by the observer to the different variables. For example, whether a school which is more self-managing in relation to finances and staffing and less in relation to curriculum and specified outcomes, is more or less self-managing in the total sense, will be a matter of judgement of the relative significance of each of those variables by comparison with each other and all the rest.

Besides, if all that is delivered is administrative devolution, rather than a real transfer of power to make policy decisions, the result could well be more, rather than less, central control, as the location of control may be less important than the strength of control. In other words, decentralized control need not mean weaker control and more school autonomy. It is also likely that decentralization merely reflects competition between bureaucracies in the national and local levels, or that one level of bureaucracy may be juxtaposed on another. A particular feature of school-based management, for example, in England and Wales, and New Zealand, is the decentralization of decision power to a school council. This reflects central
government's greater constitutional powers over education and its desire to remove or emasculate regional government units as an intervening layer between it and schools (Levacic, 1995). Bray (1984) also observed, in both Tanzania and Zambia, that a high degree of decentralization was accompanied by increased central control. A similar observation was made in Australia between the 1970s and 1980s by Caldwell (1994).

McLean and Lauglo (1985) point out that there are three sources of conflict between the ideal proposals for decentralization and the realities of possible situations. Firstly, there is debate about whether the unit of local control should be the school or the local community. Secondly, there is conflict between the national/local dichotomy and the existence of intermediate authorities. The questions then are whether regional authorities exist for the administrative convenience of national governments or to reflect sub-national cultural identities. Thirdly, the size and population of local educational administration varies considerably and some are so large that it is unlikely that the ideals of local autonomy can be achieved. All of these add to the complexities of placing individual systems along a continuum or regarding decentralization as a unitary concept. Weiler (1990) thus makes the following comment:

The current emphasis on decentralization seems to be particularly resilient, however, in spite of considerable difficulties in agreeing on what exactly 'decentralization' means in practice. (p. 43)

Nevertheless, a simple model may help to understand this complex issue. As an overall concept, decentralization refers to a process in which subordinate levels of hierarchy are authorized by a higher level to take decisions about the use of resources, defined broadly to include knowledge (decentralization of decisions related to curriculum, including decisions related to the goals or ends of schooling), technology (decentralization of decisions related to the means of teaching and learning), power (decentralization of authority to make decisions), material (decentralization of decisions related to the use of facilities, supplies and equipment), people (decentralization of decisions related to the allocation of people in matters related to teaching and learning, and the support of teaching and learning), time (decentralization of decisions related to the allocation of time) and finance (decentralization of decisions related to the allocation of money) (Caldwell, 1994). Centralization is taken as the reverse of this
process. Three types of decentralization, namely deconcentration, delegation and devolution can be distinguished as follows (Bray, 1984, 1991a; Lauglo, 1990):

1. Deconcentration is a process through which a central authority establishes field units, staffing them with its own officers. Deconcentration can allow staff to be more sensitive to regional needs, to take more account of local views, and to exercise their own discretion in certain matters.

2. Delegation implies a stronger degree of decision-making at a local level. Nevertheless, it is ‘an easily revocable transfer of authority’ (Lauglo, 1990, p. 77). Authority in a delegated system will basically rest with the central authority, which has chosen to lend them to the local ones. The authority must be exercised within a policy framework established by the centre, and can easily be withdrawn without resort to legislation.

3. Devolution is the strongest form of decentralization. It is ‘transfer of authority by law, away from the state and to some regional or local (or private) authority that is not directly accountable to the centre’ (Lauglo, 1990, p. 77). The authority is formally held by local bodies, which do not need to seek approval for their actions. They may choose to inform the centre of their decisions, but the role of the centre is confined to collection and exchange of information.

Decentralization may also be viewed on either a territorial or a functional basis (Bray, 1991a; Brown, 1990; Conyers, 1984). The former, also called horizontal decentralization, refers to the transfer of control to regional level, or to local level, or even to the school itself. The latter, also named as vertical decentralization, refers to the division of powers over specific functions such as Ministry of Basic Education, Ministry of Vocational Education, and Ministry of Higher Education. It is territorial or horizontal decentralization that is used for the purpose of this study.

**Nomenclature of Decentralization of Education**

The idea of decentralization of education is increasingly pursued not only in the United States, Canada, England and Wales, Australia and New Zealand, but also in many other parts of the world such as Brazil and Hong Kong. Efforts to increase the autonomy in schools have differed in scope and nomenclature in different countries.
Terms used include devolution, school-based budgeting, school-site budgeting, school-site decision-making, school-based management, local financial management, devolved school management, local management of schools, grant-maintained schools, self-managing schools, locally managed schools, restructured schools, self-governing schools, self-determining schools, school autonomy and the like (Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Davies and Hentschke, 1994). Probably the most widely used term for decentralized school management is school-based management, and it is this term which is used, where appropriate, for the purpose of this study. Again, there is no precise definition for school-based management. Some definitions emphasize school autonomy plus participatory decision-making. Others stress decentralized resource allocation in the narrow financial sense in most instances, but often in the broader sense in the areas of curriculum, personnel and facilities (Bray, 1991a; Caldwell, 1988, 1990, 1997; Chapman, 1990; Cheng, 1993; David, 1989; Levacic, 1995; Sapra, 1995). The following three key elements, incorporating the different forms which school-based management can take, are used throughout this thesis:

1. The stakeholders to whom decision-making power and responsibility are decentralized;
2. The management domains over which decentralized power can be exercised, the main ones being resources including finance, staff and the curriculum;
3. The form of regulation which controls what the local decision-makers have discretion over and how they are held to account for their decisions and actions.

**Rationale for Moves from Centralization to Decentralization**

Rationale for moving to decentralization may be of a political, ideological or administrative kind (Blackmore, 1990; Bray, 1991a; Brown, 1990; Davies and Hentschke, 1994; Gaziel, 1998; Levacic, 1995; Lundgren, 1990; McLean and Lauglo, 1985; Weiler, 1990). Decentralization, be it in the form of deconcentration, or delegation, or devolution, differs in its rationale and its implication for the distribution of authority among different systems. Political rationale aims at maintaining or extending political power. Ideological justifications are based on beliefs that local autonomy is inseparable from desirable aims in relation to particular views of the nature of the individual, society and knowledge. Decentralized control is supported for
administrative reasons if certain independent aims are achieved more effectively and efficiently than centralized control. What follows is an analysis of the rationale for political (incorporating ideological) decentralization and that for decentralization concerning quality and efficiency.

1. **Rationale for Political Decentralization**

   There are different types of political decentralization which include federalism, local populism, participatory democracy and liberalism (Caldwell, 1990, 1994; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Lauglo, 1990, 1994; Levacic, 1995; McLean and Lauglo, 1985).

   Federalism exists in many countries as a political compromise in the state formation that has been established either as a largely voluntary combination of member states (e.g. Australia, Switzerland, and the United States), or as a concession to preserve unity in the face of strong separatist movements (e.g. Belgium and Canada). Thus, no uniform ideology legitimates federalism. Education is typically an area reserved for each member state, without being much subject to federal authority. Each state therefore has a 'constitutional right to fashion its own education system' (Lauglo, 1994, p. 7).

   Local populism is a reaction against the power and influence of established elites. Populism denies the cultural superiority of dominant elites and asserts in its place the authenticity of popular culture. For education, populism means that 'schools should be local, community-based institutions, run by local government in small population units' (Lauglo, 1994, p. 11). Norway is a country with a strong populist tradition in politics and culture.

   Participatory democracy is based on the assertion that the institution's participants should have equal rights to take part in decisions affecting the work of the institution. What characterizes the ideas of participatory democracy and the imprint they leave is a more egalitarian distribution of authority among those who are internal participants in an institution. There are thus implications of professional autonomy as a mode of decentralization of education.

   Liberalism means belief in the value of individualist liberties, and freedom from restraint. Liberalism favours a wide dispersal of authority and is hospitable to local government, which should be quite autonomous from the
state. It is also the stance which is most generally hospitable to private provision in education.

2. **Rationale for Decentralization Concerning Quality and Efficiency**

Four types of decentralization rationale relating to efficiency and quality can be identified, namely pedagogic professionalism, management by objectives, market mechanism, and deconcentration (Lauglo, 1994).

Pedagogic professionalism is a claim to specialized expertise and professional performance. Applied to education, the rationale of professionalism accords great autonomy to teachers, and it implies that their work should be regulated by others who themselves are within the profession, but not by lay authorities.

Management by objectives is advocated as a means to promote effectiveness and efficiency in terms of more goal-directed operations and more optimal use of resources respectively. Management by objectives has been offered as a superior alternative to management by rules and regulations and is intended to give those at lower levels in an organization more freedom in the choice of means and allocation of resources (Eide, 1990; Kvale, 1990; Lauglo, 1990, 1994; Lundgren, 1990). The approach implies a management with strong capacity to plan and to mobilize involvement in planning at all levels in the education system.

Use of the market mechanism is motivated by the desire to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, which can be achieved by competition. A competitive market structure is considered more effective and efficient in satisfying consumer preferences than bureaucratic administration (Caldwell, 1994; Glatter and Woods, 1995; Halasz, 1993; Mok, 1997; Sackney and Dibski, 1995; Smith, 1995; Tan, 1998). The market mechanism favours private schools, which are financed entirely by fees paid by private customers. It also implies a strong and externally pro-active management - to ensure efficient production of quality services for survival.

Deconcentration of a system that previously has been organized along lines of bureaucratic centralism means more authority to agents of the state who have responsibility for education at regional or local level (Bray, 1984, 1991a;
Lauglo, 1990, 1994; Tan, 1997). It seeks to offload central offices of routine matters, and achieves more regional planning.

**Major Arguments for Decentralization of Education**

School-based management has been claimed as a panacea, proposed as a solution or implemented as a policy in many countries' school systems (Lyons, 1985). It is often said that centralized systems are inefficient because they are inflexible and provide uniform solutions which fail to take account of the particular needs of local bodies, which have their own social and cultural identities (Bray, 1984, 1991a). The centre, for example, may devise the curriculum which is not relevant to the cultural, linguistic and economic needs of the rural population who make up the majority, and therefore risk producing graduates who are ill-adapted to life in rural communities. In this view, 'centralization tends to produce a mismatch between a student’s and a school's specific learning environment, on the one hand, and a centrally defined learning agenda or curriculum, on the other hand' (Weiler, 1990, p. 49). School-based management provides the means by which 'decisions for individual units within the educational system are best made by people within those schools rather than by national or local politicians or officials’ (Bush, 1997, p. 5). This is the subsidiarity argument, which states that decisions are best taken at that level in the organization where the knowledge most relevant to the decision is located and where the actions of the organization's members have most effect (Dimmock, 1998; Strembitsky, 1973).

The Venezuelan education system which was highly centralized prior to the 1968 reform provides some insight into the arguments favouring decentralization. Virtually everything concerning education such as curriculum development, textbook selection, examinations, budget formation and control, teacher training and appointment were made by the Ministry of Education in Caracas, the centre. Every decision came from the centre. Consequently, such an administrative centralization created a lot of problems. Firstly, it was inefficient. It usually took a local school nine to twelve months to obtain a decision for routine requests. Secondly, it normally hampered innovations. The system was so rigid that standardized procedures governed almost all processes at all levels. For example, the curriculum was strictly imposed on schools in all regions despite the presence of their cultural diversities. Teachers were not allowed to introduce any innovations. Thirdly, there was no local participation by
educators and citizens. Personnel outside the capital city always felt abandoned, misunderstood, unsupported and unappreciated (Hanson, 1989).

Hence, advocates of decentralization argue that a transfer of power from the centre to the locality is a panacea for solving the problems arising from centralization. They believe that decentralized systems are more responsive to demands and interests in an ever more complex and contingent environment, and that decentralized unit managers are better able to make choices to maximize professionalism, efficiency and effectiveness (Ansoff, 1984; Beavis, 1995; Blackmore, 1990; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Cheng, 1994; Davies and Hentschke, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Johnes, 1995; Sackney and Dibski, 1994; Wong et al., 1998).

**Major Arguments for Centralization of Education**

The above advantages must be balanced against the merits of centralization. Among all the powers that control education, finance is believed to be the most contentious issue. A number of statements have been made in the literature that greater diversity may imply less equity in terms of access to resources, with money being the major resource in most instances to meet the needs and interests of the students (Bray, 1984, 1991a; Brown, 1990; Caldwell, 1994; Ho et al., 1998; McGinn, 1990; Sackney and Dibski, 1994; Sharpe, 1994; Weiler, 1990). Bray found evidence in Papua New Guinea, the United States and Nigeria to show that decentralization allowed prosperous regions to control their own revenues to provide better education but it gave poor regions a big problem of obtaining extra revenues needed by themselves for developing better education. The second Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) review of the Norwegian educational policy, 'while impressed with the boldness and determination of the 1987 reforms', sees potential difficulties in decentralization with regard to both equity and standards (OECD, 1988, quoted in Weiler, 1990, p. 46). Similar findings were reported in Colombia (Hanson, 1989), North America (Brown, 1990; Sackney and Dibski, 1994), England and Wales, Australia and New Zealand (Caldwell, 1994), China (Mok, 1997) and Singapore (Tan, 1998). Weiler (1990) points out that when the responsibility for educational financing in California and a number of other states in the United States shifted quite dramatically from the local to the state level in the 1970s, one of the key arguments for this shift was that it would reduce the effect of the disparities in the local property-tax base from
which local school districts had traditionally derived their main income. These studies indicate that as long as there are discrepancies in the wealth of localities or regions, local autonomy in the financing of education, if not countered by fiscal policy by the central government, is likely to intensify or reinforce inequalities of access to education. The resulting regional diversity may also threaten national cohesion (Bray, 1984).

The quality of education relies to a large extent on the quality of personnel involved in education. When the appointment of teachers is decentralized, especially in a devolved system, there is a tendency for the sub-national units to develop their own sub-nationalist attitudes and cultures (Bray, 1991a). In Nigeria, for example, there was a strong pressure for state governments to employ only those who were indigenous and to exclude applicants from other states even though they had better qualifications. When there was a shortage of teachers or when local capacity was inadequate, state governments could not make use of resources from other regions and thus undermined the quality of education. This policy deprived them of the resource of other regions and accentuated inequalities.

Regional and local salary differentials related to qualifications are likely to promote, or sustain inequalities as a result of the lack of national salary scales (Holmes, 1985; Lauglo, 1994). If powers over teacher training, certification and pattern of schooling are devolved to local levels, standards of teachers cannot be assumed. It is also difficult for teachers to move from one locality to another, as different localities may have different certification requirements. The different pattern of schooling will also cause much inconvenience to parents when they move to another region that has a different pattern of schooling from the one they come from.

Similarly, the central level and local governing authorities are in a better position than local schools to determine district-wide or system goals. When goal setting and programme decisions are delegated to the school-site level it is inevitable that differences in goals and programmes among schools will increase at the expense of uniformity. This may not be a problem since the purpose of decentralization is to recognize and enhance differences among schools. However, the question arises as to whether individual schools in making goal and programme decisions that serve the interests of their own clientele are also making decisions that serve the broader public interest in education. Weiler (1990) points out
The notion of decentralizing the contexts and contents of learning so as to recognize the diversity and importance of different cultural environments in one society is generally considered meaningful and valid. At the same time, however, it encounters the conflicting claims for a kind of learning that is less oriented to the specifics of cultural contexts, and more to the national and international universalities of dealing with modern systems of technology and communication. (p. 51)

Some countries, notably England and Wales, have overcome this problem by designing decentralized systems that preserve centralized state control of curriculum and academic standards (Davies and Hentschke, 1992; McLean and Lauglo, 1985; Sackney and Dennis, 1994).

In general, substantial economies of scale can be realized by centralization of specific functions (Johnes, 1995; Weiler, 1990). For example, the market power of a large, central purchasing organization can enable goods and services to be obtained at favourable rates. Duplication of effort and dilution of managerial talent across numerous schools can be avoided by providing management services centrally (Law, 1999).

TRENDS IN CENTRALIZATION AND DECENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATION: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The last two decades have been characterized by movements for educational reform on an international scale and the rate of change does not look like abating in the 1990s. Developments in school-based management, in particular, have received enthusiastic promotion and support (Brown, 1990; Caldwell, 1994, 1997; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Davies and Hentschke, 1992, 1994; Lingard, 1993; McGinn, 1990; Sackney and Dibski, 1994; Simkins, 1992). A change to school-based management implies greater flexibility of decision-making, changes in role accountability (particularly for the principal) and the potential enhancement of school productivity. What follows is a brief account of the developments in England and Wales, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand and Hungary. The seven countries are chosen not only because they are heading towards increased autonomy for schools, but
also because they are doing so in ways which appear to be quite different. For example, Brazil is particularly chosen to demonstrate that decentralization can be authoritarian and technocratic in character, while the Hungarian reform of educational administration has emerged as a measure to abolish the existing structures of control rather than to establish new ones. Movements of related educational reform in Hong Kong are then examined.

1. **England and Wales**

In England and Wales, some local education authorities started pilot schemes for local financial management, notably Cambridgeshire's 'Increased Financial Responsibility' in 1977, and the 'limited cost-centre' schemes of Cheshire local education authority in 1976. It was not until the 1980s that there were major moves to give more decision-making power on finance to schools. It was Cambridgeshire and Solihull local education authorities that seriously began the first schemes of financial delegation in 1982, styled Local Financial Management in Cambridgeshire and School Financial Autonomy Scheme in Solihull (Downes, 1998). Within a year or two pilot schemes had sprung up in a number of local education authorities. There were by 1987, a year before the enactment of the 1988 Education Reform Act, over 20 local education authorities who had similar schemes in operation. The most notable feature of these schemes was that they delegated to schools the greater part of the finance to run a school including the cost of staffing. One of the main messages emerging from such financial delegation schemes was that delegated budgeting became integrated with all the other aspects of managing a school. It is argued that local financial management will liberate schools from the bureaucratic grip and ideological meddling of agencies of the local state like the local education authority (Ball, 1994). Local financial management was thus advocated both in terms of increased participation and in terms of greater efficiency in decision-making.

Until the 1988 Education Reform Act, local education authorities were able to exert considerable influence over the allocation of pupils to school places. The attenuation of the selective system and the protection local education authorities could offer to schools which might otherwise become
unviable due to a lack of sufficient students are considered to be the major factors in the perceived lowering of educational standards. The 1986, 1988 and 1992 Education Reform Acts embody an attempt to improve education through changing significantly power relations within the educational system. The main thrust of the reforms is to push decision-making outwards and downwards from the centre and nearer to the point of delivery of the service. The outcome of the Acts was a national curriculum, systematic testing with the publication of results in league tables, local management of schools, grant-maintained schools, as well as more parental choice as a means of introducing market forces into the education system (Bush, 1995, 1999; Caldwell, 1997; Downes, 1998; Evans, 1998; Glatter and Woods, 1995; Law, 1999; Maclure, 1998; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993; Pierson, 1998; Simkins, 1992, 1999; Wise and Bush, 1999). It is to emphasize the close interrelation between financial and other management tasks that the policy of delegated budgeting is renamed as local management of schools (Coopers and Lybrand, 1988).

The most significant difference between local management of schools and grant-maintained schools is that after a majority in a parental ballot, schools could opt out of local education authority control by applying to the Secretary of State for permission to become grant-maintained. They were funded at the same rate as other local education authority schools in the area but were accountable to the Department of Education and Science via the Funding Agency for Schools, thus by-passing local education authority control (Bush et al., 1993; Caldwell, 1997; Fidler and Bowles, 1989; Levacic, 1995; Richards, 1992). The net effect of this change was a loss of power by the local education authority, which is essentially the educational arm of the county or borough government. The national government has clearly taken a more powerful role in curriculum areas where decisions have traditionally been taken at the local or school levels. Local education authorities have also been weakened with the shift in budget responsibility, including wider powers with respect to staff, to the school level (Bush, 1999; Doe, 1999; Riley et al., 1999). It appears that the national government was trading on public dissatisfaction with the quality of education and, by association, with local education authorities, effectively to curtail the role of the latter (Chapman, 1990).
The legislation established is seen as a radical restructuring device to reduce the power of bureaucratic local education authorities and of vested educational interests by transferring power into the hands of parents, who, as consumers, can choose, as they perceive them, appropriate schools for their children. Through the 1988 Education Reform Act, schools have been delegated financial control at the site level either through local management of schools or through grant-maintained schools. This freedom to manage resources is vested in the governing body of local schools (Bush, 1999; Farrell and Law, 1999). The reforms have been given a dynamic driving force by the universal implementation of parental choice over which schools children attend. This open enrolment policy is designed to make schools responsive to parental wants and needs. They have been put in place by the national government to ensure that teachers deliver the quality of education which the nation requires. In this respect what has transpired in England and Wales may be viewed as a 'consumer-led' reform shaped by the interests and concerns of parents.

While teachers themselves are implementing the reform, they have not shared in its design or management. In either the first set of reforms, those of National Curriculum and pupil assessment, or the second set comprising school-based management and school choice, 'the involvement of teachers has been, at best, very minimal and at worst, non-existent' (Davies and Hentschke, 1992, p.120). Similar comments were made by Evans (1998) arguing that hierarchism 'overlooks recognition of the value and potential of those who are placed at the base of the hierarchy' (p. 426). Thus, the values of equity, efficiency, liberty and choice are addressed in the intents to decentralize control of budgets, increase access, foster diversity and allow state schools to be independent of local education authority control, with little, if any, emphasis on teacher empowerment.

In 1997, Labour was elected. Under the Labour government, the major features of the Conservative reforms remain, and local management of schools will be extended so that more than 90 percent of available funds will be directed to schools. With the introduction of the School Standards and Framework Act in 1998, the grant-maintained sector has been brought to an end by the government (Anderson and Bush, 1999). Nevertheless, the Labour government has also been imposing greater central control over the education system to
achieve strategic objectives and promote the effective implementation of national policy (Bush, 1999; Doe, 1999; Glatter, 1999; Simkins, 1999). According to Glatter (1999, p. 254), 'the system was until the 1980s widely regarded as one of the most decentralized in the world. Today it is among the most centralized of the advanced industrial countries'.

2. **The United States of America**

   In the United States the federal government has a limited role in education which is restricted mainly to particular areas of financial support. Education is constitutionally a state responsibility, with the school district the unit of local policy-making and administration. The precise distribution of powers between state, local district and the individual school, however, varies considerably from state to state (Caldwell, 1988, 1990; Caldwell and Spinks, 1990; Johnes, 1995; Koppich and Guthrie, 1993; McGinn, 1990). Prior to 1970 there were few comprehensive approaches to decentralization of education, and relatively low levels of interest in school-based management had been generated around the nation. Most of the more comprehensive attempts at school-based management were in California and Florida but even in these states the number of districts practising school-based management was small. A few districts in other states were also found practising school-based management. The practice was adopted in most instances in the 1970s, a decade which also saw administrative decentralization to regional or sub-district units, and political decentralization to community boards in some large urban school districts (Caldwell, 1994). The intents of school-based management were mainly addressed through the lump-sum allocation of money where the budget served as the chief mechanism for encouraging schools to more closely match their resources to the needs of the pupils.

   The drive for educational reform in the United States during the 1980s arose in large measure from the perception that academic standards in American schools had declined over the previous two decades (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Johnes, 1995; Koppich and Guthrie, 1993). In contrast to the English system driven by national legislation, the United States system is characterized, in part, by a plethora of commission reports from a wide variety of voluntarily
associated groups which have provided the ideology of reform. This ideology has supplied the blueprint for legislation. The many commission reports which were developed during the 1980s and early 1990s have served the function of developing and updating the overall ideology of school restructuring, within which school-based management is a key part. The National Education Association, the largest union of teachers in the United States, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, issued a joint report in 1986, stating that they would remain committed to the principle that substantial decision-making authority at the school site was the essential pre-requisite for quality education.

Relative to the system in England and Wales, where national legislation created the new structure within which schools are to be managed locally, the United States system can be characterized as highly localised with teachers much more in control of the process (Caldwell, 1997; Johnes, 1995). The locus of change has been felt first in large urban school district labour contracts which stipulate the working conditions (increasingly referred to as 'professional practices') in detail. The contents of this legislation, the joint product of union and management design, have teachers playing a major role in school-based management and have teachers' unions taking on major responsibility for the success of school-based management efforts. The purpose of school-based management is to create the minimal basic conditions for group decision-making at each school so that stakeholders in each school can, if they choose, pursue much more effective education strategies for their children beyond those made possible by current bureaucratic constraints imposed on schools. The process of gaining greater autonomy at the school site involves three steps, described in the contract as pursuing the status of school-based management school (Johnes, 1995). Firstly, stakeholders at the school site (teachers, administrators, parents) have to develop a proposal to begin development of this school-based management. Secondly, the proposal is submitted to and reviewed by a newly formed, district-wide central committee. Thirdly, if the school's plan is approved, the school is granted status as school-based management school and stakeholders at the school begin to carry out the plan.

Absent from the England and Wales version of school-based management is the emphasis on class teacher empowerment present in the
United States discourse and schemes. The importance for the United States system is to draw on the experience of participative decision-making. The empowerment of teachers in schools to ensure more commitment and contribute at a higher level of performance can thus be enhanced as they are treated as involved professionals rather than excluded employees (Davies and Hentschke, 1992; Levacic, 1995). Recent trends involve moves to further deregulate to bring about real change in a context of greater local-level decision-making such as the New American School Initiative and the New Futures Initiative (Caldwell, 1990, 1997; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Fullan, 1993; Hanson, 1991). For example, the New Futures Initiative states that restructuring should result in increased autonomy at the school building level, site-based management, and teacher empowerment that would free educators from centralized bureaucracies and their stifling effects. It should be noted, however, that the support for school-based management is not yet widely based, and the degree of school autonomy currently varies from state to state.

3. **Canada**

In Canada, there is a sustained interest in decentralization as a means of school district and school reform. Many ideas have been tried, such as voucher plans, magnet schools, zero-based budgeting and school consultative committees. However, the mechanism of school-based management has remained prominent among the reform possibilities. As a manifestation of decentralization, school-based management means that schools within a district are allotted money to purchase supplies, equipment, personnel, utilities, maintenance, and perhaps other services according to their own assessment of what is appropriate (Brown, 1990). Schools' authority to make decisions such as these is in contrast to standard practices in most districts, which require that such decisions be made at the central office.

A number of districts have been adopting school-based management. This is particularly true of Edmonton, Alberta, a large district which started the most sophisticated form of decentralization to be found in Canada in 1976, where the approach is generally described as school-site decision-making (Brown, 1990; Caldwell, 1990; Sackney and Dennis, 1994). Other districts
such as Cleveland and British Columbia follow suit. Many planning and decision functions related to the allocation of resources characteristically made at the district level are devolved to the schools for teaching and non-teaching staff, equipment, supplies and services. Approaches have been developed to allocating resources so that each school receives an aggregate according to the precise mix of student needs. Edmonton, for example, uses eleven levels of per-pupil allocation to meet forty-seven categories of student need when determining the aggregate for a school. Moreover, the districts define school-based management so that school-level decisions are addressed by schools themselves. The goals for decentralization in Canada intend to enable schools to be more effective, responsive, accountable and to link planning with resources. Nevertheless, such goals appear to reflect the belief that school personnel are sufficiently knowledgeable about local conditions to make appropriate decisions (Brown, 1990). The continuing evolution of the approach in Edmonton contrasts with an apparent levelling of interest in the United States after the initiatives of the mid-seventies (Caldwell, 1988, 1990).

4. **Brazil**

The present Brazilian society has begun a new historical period in which decentralization is starting to predominate over centralization, which was dominant during the last 25 years. In contrast to recent Brazilian history, there is now a search for political, democratic and participatory decentralization more consonant with grass-roots aspirations. The present trend also brings about a significant impact on the educational sector.

During the first period of the military regime of 1964, the central government tried to impose a form of decentralization of social policies and democratic and participative management in a wide range of institutions. However, this decentralization could only assume an authoritarian and technocratic character, in which what could or should be decentralized was decided by the top, it being left to the lower agencies to implement the higher decision. Santos Filho (1993) regards this as ‘authoritarian and technocratic decentralization or pseudo-decentralization, which in fact only reinforces and
consolidates in the country the long period of predominance of centralization and authoritarianism' (p. 392).

During the 1970s and 1980s, the experiences of democratic and participative administration of schools in the municipalities became well-known in the country. In these experiences, the popular classes succeeded to participate directly in the different councils, which define the policies of the schools. In 1990, a new Law of Directives and Bases of National Education were drafted. They established four basic directives in relation to organization and management of schools: decentralization; partition of responsibilities and collaboration among the three levels of power (municipal, state and national); autonomy of public school units; and democratic management of public educational institutions and of private educational institutions which receive public funds. According to the principle of decentralization, the national system of education should be run by simplification of bureaucratic structures, decentralization of decision-making and executive processes, and strengthening of the school units. Santos Filho comments that the idea of decentralization applied to state and municipal school systems will be limited if it does not extend to the school units, as 'the states and the municipalities can easily manage their school systems in a very centralized way' (p. 399). To avoid this distortion, the draft law also states that the normative agencies will assure pedagogical, administrative and financial autonomy to school units. Santos Filho further argues that the direct form of decentralization of education through public school autonomy is more adequate to the Brazilian historical, economic and cultural context than indirect decentralization via school municipalization.

It is, however, interesting to note in the Brazilian experiences of decentralization that more than half of the financial resources allocated to public education in the 1970s and the early 1980s was spent by the intermediate bureaucracy, with little benefit for the direct work of the schools. Such a policy of municipalized decentralization of schools only resulted in 'the reinforcement of the old vices of nepotism and greater deterioration of municipalized education' (Santos Filho, 1993, p. 393).
Australia

Control of education had traditionally been highly centralized at the state government level in Australia until the early 1970s (Caldwell, 1988, 1997; Caldwell and Spinks, 1992; Chapman, 1990). Curriculum was for the most part determined centrally, with tight control exercised through an inspectorate system and state-wide external examinations at the end of secondary schools. Most funds for education came from state sources, with centralized allocation of resources which provided little money for discretionary use by schools. There have been dramatic changes to this pattern of governance since the early 1970s. The need to decentralize was recognized in the Karmel Report of the Interim Committee of the Australian Schools Commission (now called the Commonwealth Schools Commission). The report commented in 1973 that the Commission favoured less rather than more centralized control over the operation of schools, and that responsibility should be devolved as far as possible. The early 1970s were marked by administrative decentralization of education departments through the formation of regional units in several states and decentralization to the school level of decisions related to a substantial portion of recurrent grants received from the Commission. The Schools Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training published a report in 1993, 20 years after the release of the Karmel Report, in which the same strategies were highlighted. It commented that in order to realize the goal of the self-managing school, school communities should be able to demonstrate sufficient flexibility to respond positively and swiftly to changing needs and circumstances.

Some states, notably New South Wales and Victoria, have moved to decentralize the management of their public schools even further since the early 1990s (Caldwell, 1994). In New South Wales, the government set up two review committees in 1988 to make recommendations on education reform. Both of them reported that the current state system was over-centralized and that the bureaucracy of the New South Wales Department of Education operated in such a way as to hinder the efficient running of schools. Hence, the Minister of Education asked the state government to commit funding for a continuing package of reform, directed the Department of Education to adopt a new,
decentralized, school-centred approach, and asked parents and school communities to provide more active and constructive support for their children. The reform package commenced in 1990. School councils were established and trials of budgeting, devolution of financial control and human resource management have begun. A cluster system has been introduced, based on groups of up to 14 schools to service member schools. Education resource centres were set up to serve 50-60 schools. Both are coordinated by semi-autonomous regional offices.

In Victoria, the trend to a decentralized system of school governance continued most markedly. Administrative decentralization to regional units proceeded throughout the 1970s and 1980s. All state-run schools have established school councils. Through the Schools of the Future Initiative, about 1700 schools have been transformed in dramatic fashion over the last five years since 1993. The initiative acknowledges greater control given to schools over the allocation and management of resources, and the need to shift resources from the centre to schools. It also recognizes the need for improved support of school councils, the need to develop new forms of block funding for schools, and the principle of decentralization of management and operational functions in the areas of curriculum, special programmes, finance, administration and facilities. It is the largest system anywhere to have decentralized as much as 90 percent of its total budget for school education (Caldwell, 1997). There are similar changes under way in other states, notably Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

There is thus an inexorable trend towards devolution across the whole country (Caldwell, 1992, 1994, 1997; Gamage, 1992; Sharpe, 1994). Consequently, Australian schools will have greater flexibility in organization and management. They can determine their own needs; function with a school council with greater community involvement; be entrepreneurial in promoting and marketing services; select their own staff; make decisions concerning resources within a global budget; co-operate within a cluster; and be serviced by a highly decentralized support system. The movements towards school-based management in Australia are associated with increasing complexity in the administration of education, achievement of greater equity among schools,
equality of opportunity for students, and desire to participate in decision by parent and teacher organizations (Caldwell, 1988).

6. **New Zealand**

   The New Zealand government introduced far-reaching changes to the administration of all sectors of education on 1 October, 1989. These reforms resulted from the Picot Report and a government White Paper entitled Tomorrow's Schools. The Picot Report concluded that the administrative structure has been overcentralized and made overly complex by having too many decision points. It recommended that an effective administrative system must be as simple as possible and decisions should be made as close as possible to where they are carried out (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993).

   The Tomorrow's Schools reforms are expressed in the Education Act, 1989 which calls for a virtual transfer of decision-making from the system to the school level. Consequently, the administrative structures for education have undergone the following four fundamental changes (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993). Firstly, all educational institutions receiving state funding have to develop a charter, which, once approved by the Minister of Education, provides a framework for operations. It is also a clear requirement that institutions have to consult their communities when developing their charters. Secondly, there is a significant devolution of responsibility from the system to principals and boards of trustees. Staff will be selected and employed by the school board. Thirdly, the operational grants to educational institutions are bulk funded such that the costs of running each school will be decentralized to the school level in a school-based budget. Finally, the performance of all educational institutions with charters is to be reviewed against their agreed charters.

   Underlying the education reforms are principles that the state should continue to fund state education; greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness are needed, coupled with greater choice for consumers of education; the decision-making locus should gravitate to schools and away from the state; objectivity and simplicity are emphasized for policy analysis at system level; and regional education boards are abandoned (Cusack, 1995; New Zealand Ministry of
Although there is a national curriculum framework, the number of staff employed at the system level is relatively few, serving mainly to audit operations at the school level and to provide limited support to schools, especially in the area of special education services.

7. **Hungary**

The political transformation in most Eastern and Central European countries, particularly Hungary, has been accompanied by changes in the governance of education since the late 1980s. The previous education system in these regions was criticized for excessive unification, rigid and bureaucratic control, dehumanization of pedagogical practice, and the blocking of local initiatives (Halasz, 1993; Cerych, 1997).

According to Kaufman (1997), Hungary is now ‘in the pivotal position of being a national decentralization model for other de-Sovietizing regions’ (p. 30). The first major steps towards decentralization in Hungary were made in 1985 when a new Education Act was adopted. The Act, which followed the peripheral restructuring of the country into 20 counties in 1971, is the first comprehensive piece of legislation to define the relationships in the governance of education between the Ministry of Education, local authorities and the schools themselves. The organizational relationship of Hungarian schools, and the legitimation of these schools as self-managing institutions, are the major change elements that mark the initial transition to contemporary restructuring. As a result, individual schools become units with the responsibility of defining their own goals and initiating locally decided activities.

The Act authorises the schools to define their own educational tasks, to elaborate their own local educational system, and to devise supplementary curricula. Every school is given the task of preparing their own internal statutes and pedagogical programme. It does not affect the official central curriculum but opens the way for locally initiated changes in curriculum. As a result the number of initiatives for local curriculum changes has rapidly increased. School inspection is also radically transformed. New regional advisory centres were set up and the former inspectors were transferred to these centres as professional advisors. A new model oriented towards global evaluation of
particular schools and assessment of learning achievements has been adopted in place of the old paternalistic supervisory model based on visiting individual teachers. The Act also defines the teaching staff as the most important consultative and decision-making body of the school (Kaufman, 1997).

The alleged shift in the power structure following the legalization and decentralization in 1985 is, however, regarded with scepticism by teachers, primarily because the financial management remained in the hands of the county council (Howell, 1988). The 1985 Act does not alter the former central curriculum, and new alternative programmes are only offered in a few fields. In fact, schools have to follow the same central curriculum as before. Both Kaufman (1997) and Ash (1990) comment that it is the residual veil of ideology that hampers change in a situation where decentralization is legalized but unactualized.

DECENTRALIZATION OF EDUCATION IN HONG KONG: THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

The political decentralization in Hong Kong in the transition to 1997, when the sovereignty over Hong Kong was returned to China, has involved citizen representation in policy-making through the election of legislatures, boards and officials, and the development of partisan politics since the 1980s. In the public sector, following a review by consultants of measures already in place, a Public Sector Reform proposal was circulated within the Hong Kong Government in 1989 suggesting a comprehensive programme of financial and management changes. As envisaged by Lauglo (1994), concerns to improve efficiency tend to relate to a larger range of institutions but they are extended to also include education. The Public Sector Reform is also extended to the education sector. Special effort was devoted to examining the role of the Education Department and its relationship with the schools in the aided sector. The study eventually brought about the School Management Initiative (SMI) in 1991 (Dimmock, 1998; Education Department, 1992; Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991; Wong, 1991, 1995, 1997; Wong et al., 1998).

The SMI reflects the assumption that, under the existing framework of controls, schools neither manage effectively and efficiently, nor are conducive to quality reforms. It identifies various problem areas in central government, the Education
Department and the primary and secondary schools, particularly the emphasis in the Education Department's relations with the aided sector, which has exhibited a strong controlling tendency. Similar comments are also made by Bray (1992a), Llewellyn (1982) and Postiglione (1992) that the education system of Hong Kong is highly centralized in the sense that schools have to comply with detailed regulations in most respects of their operations.

The SMI is based on the school-based management model, which gives schools greater control in finance and management, and provides for greater participation of teachers, parents and alumni in school decision-making. Altogether, 18 recommendations were made to improve the education system in Hong Kong. They are shown as Appendix 1. All these recommendations are aimed at ensuring the quality of school education in the 1990s and beyond. They can be grouped under five different functions as below (Dimmock, 1998; Education Department, 1992; Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991; Wong, 1995):

1. New Roles of the Education Department
   The emphasis in the Education Department's relations with the aided sector should change from detailed control over all aspects of school management (including funding, equipment, student allocation and curriculum) to support and advice, within a framework defining responsibilities and accountability at all levels in the education system.

2. New Roles of the School Management
   The respective roles and responsibilities of the School Management Committee, the sponsor and the principal are defined. Every School Management Committee is also required to prepare a constitution setting out the aims and objectives of the school and the procedures and practices by which it will be managed. The written constitution will become a tool for monitoring and evaluating the performance of the School Management Committee.

3. Participation in Decision-Making
   School management frameworks should allow for participation in decision-making, according to formal procedures, by all parties concerned including all teaching staff; the principal; the School Management Committee; and (to an appropriate degree) parents and students.
4. Flexibility in School Finance

Funds for aided schools should be provided as far as possible in the form of a block grant. Each school should have authority to decide its own spending pattern in the light of central education policies and its own defined needs. While government grants should be sufficient for a school to provide an acceptable standard of education, schools should have more flexibility to tap sources of non-government funding for above standard items.

5. Framework for Accountability

Each school should produce an annual School Plan to guide its activities, and prepare an annual School Profile detailing school performance in a number of key areas. This information will be made available to the consumers - parents, students and the general public.

The advantages of the SMI are claimed to be as follows (Brown, 1997; Education Department, 1992; Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991):

1. Schools will be freer to carry out their mission and to adjust what they do to meet their needs.
2. The opportunity for teachers to participate in decision-making and school management fosters job satisfaction and commitment. Greater participation in decision-making is a major step to increased teacher professionalization.
3. Participation of parents and past students will increase their understanding, interest and support of the school.
4. Resources are more likely to match pupil needs when decisions are made by those who work more directly with pupils.

Cheng (1992), Ma (1993) and Wong (1991, 1995) indicate that the SMI is inducing a great reform of management in Hong Kong aided schools. The changes brought from the SMI may be very large, involving changes in attitude, mentality and hierarchy of authority. In his study of the responses from key actors in school management in Hong Kong, namely teachers, principals and supervisors, Cheng (1992) found that they generally have a positive attitude to all the SMI's recommendations. Based on his findings, he puts forward several recommendations, one of which is to
provide principals and supervisors with professional training in the management of organizational change and the implementation of school-based management. Wong (1997), in his recent study of 21 schools implementing the SMI scheme, however, finds that ‘teachers were less enthusiastic and did not find the changes brought about by the School Management Initiative useful’ (pp. 91-92). He argues that unless teachers feel that the SMI addresses their needs, many of them will see it as unnecessarily increasing their workload without any worthwhile results. Based on these research findings, it seems that the results of the SMI are still precarious and uncertain.

Since the implementation of the scheme in September 1991, the experience from SMI schools has suggested that such management is helpful in achieving school goals and in formulating long-term plans to meet student needs (Education Commission, 1996, 1997). In the light of public views, the Education Commission therefore recommended in 1997 that ‘all schools should have put in place school-based management in the spirit of the School Management Initiative by the year 2000’ (Education Commission, 1997, p.17). This is to ensure that they can develop quality school education with greater flexibility in the use of resources, and according to the needs and characteristics of their students. Having said that, there are still some schools who are unwilling to join the SMI scheme (Hong Kong Professional Teachers’ Union, 1998; Postiglione and Lee, 1997; Wong, 1997). Certain principals are not currently able effectively to exercise increased management responsibilities, and school principals and teaching staff worry about the excessive administrative load associated with school-based management. Wong (1997) offers another important reason, as follows:

In the schools that have participated in the School Management Initiative scheme, the involvement of parents, and to a certain extent teachers, on the School Management Committee has been a stumbling block. For other schools, this has become one of their major objections to participation in the School Management Initiative. (p. 88)

In view of the introduction of various new initiatives and reforms, including the SMI, by the Education Department to improve the quality of education provision, the Government appointed a management consulting firm to conduct a review of the
management structure of the Education Department in December 1997 (Education and Manpower Bureau, 1998). The consultants put forward the following recommendations relating to the SMI:

1. Progress towards school-based management has been slow and disappointing. The role of the Education Department will need to change radically in response to school-based management and schools need to accept the associated accountability.

2. The Education Department should delegate further responsibility for resource and staff management to schools.

3. The Education Department should provide increased management freedoms to schools to allow them to use funds flexibly.

4. Training providers will need to gear up to assist principals (and others) to develop the necessary management skills.

5. The Education Department should stop performing functions relating to the vetting and approval of management decision in schools.

6. A fund to pay off principals who do not wish, or will not be able to make, the transition to school-based management to retire or leave the school.

7. The Education Department needs to require sponsoring bodies to introduce performance appraisal for their principals.

(Education and Manpower Bureau, 1998)

As discussed above, schools have to introduce the SMI by the year 2000. The Government has shown its determination to assist schools in making good progress towards school-based management, as evidenced in its emphasis on the importance of the School Management Initiative in the 1997 Education Commission Report No. 7, and its favourable response to the recommendations contained in the 1998 Review of the Education Department Consultation Document. The School Management Initiative is thus a milestone in the development of education in Hong Kong. As in most developed and industrialized countries such as Australia, New Zealand, England and Wales, Canada and the United States, Hong Kong has sought a systematic way to move towards school-based management. This is believed to be the way to transform schools into effective learning environments and therefore to improve the quality in education.
(Education Department, 1992; Education and Manpower Bureau, 1998). The school will be the primary unit of educational decision-making. The role of the central authority, that is, the Education Department, will gradually shift from that of telling to facilitating individual school action. It will support schools in developing their own objectives and making their own plans in relation to policy objectives.

**RESEARCH FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS ON DECENTRALIZATION**

Findings of the study undertaken by Brown (1990), and Sackney and Debski (1994), reveal that schools under decentralization are considered to be much more responsive than when they were under centralized management, that school-based management can be a viable avenue for school improvement, but that it does not appear to be a key stimulus for innovation. The evidence also demonstrates that principals strongly favour decentralization while teachers support school-based management less positively. Marren and Levacic (1994) undertook research in England and Wales to examine responses to local management of schools in 11 case study schools in one local education authority. Their studies reveal that, while greater autonomy of schools from the local education authority and enhanced responsibility for making their own decisions over a wide area are welcomed by senior management (headteachers, heads of department and governors), classroom teachers are largely indifferent or wary. They therefore suggest that teachers need to be involved in resource management decisions and to have a degree of empowerment through controlling their own budgets and the learning process if they are to respond favourably to local management. This recommendation is also supported by other studies (Arnott et al., 1992; Bullock and Thomas, 1997; Chapman, 1990; Davies and Hentschke, 1992; Dimmock, 1998; Evans, 1998; Ma, 1993; Thompson, 1991; Wong, 1997; Wong et al., 1998).

It is, however, not self-evident that delivering control and management of the central authorities into local hands will automatically bring about all or indeed any of the advantages widely claimed for them such as enhancement of education quality. There is a paucity of evidence that in handing budgeting, management and marketing to schools, teaching and learning improves as a consequence (Arnott et al., 1992; Brown, 1990; Bullock and Thomas, 1997; Caldwell, 1993, 1997; Cheng, 1992; Cheng and Cheung, 1997; Cheung and Cheng, 1996; Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Gaziel, 1998; Karsten, 1998; Knight, 1993; Levacic, 1995; Malen et al., 1990; Sackney and Debski,
Instead, research evidence shows that school-based management may not generate any substantial changes in pedagogy and in the ways teachers work together on instructional matters, and that school-based management has largely failed to deliver the benefits it has claimed. Experience in England and Wales, for example, might tend to suggest that while an increase in autonomy will confer some benefits, a parallel increase in financial obligations and burdens can lead to outcomes that militate directly against some of the educational goals. Instead, some negative effects have been reported. Chapman (1990) observes that teachers do not involve themselves in the decision procedures of their school if such involvement detracts from their teaching. He concludes that teachers have to balance their time commitments among administration, teaching and personal life, and the increased time demand of involvement in decision-making has contributed to increased tiredness and stress which in turn has affected classroom practice and attendance. Elmore (1995), Fullan (1995), and Sackney and Debski (1994) also argue that focus should be placed on good teaching first before the creation of the new governance structures.

Considering the trend or the concept of decentralization in education can be misleading since these developments have occurred at the same time as there has been a significant assumption of, or regaining of, power at the system level (Boyd, 1993; Bush, 1999; Caldwell, 1990; Doe, 1999; Duignan, 1990; Glatter, 1999; Glatter and Woods, 1995; Halasz, 1997; Law, 1999; Levacic, 1995; McGinn, 1990; Pierson, 1998; Simkin, 1999; Tan, 1998; Wise and Bush, 1999). In other words, trends of a decentralizing and centralizing nature have occurred nearly simultaneously. There are questions about what is genuinely being devolved. The evidence seems to be that far from shifting power from the centre, the reverse is actually happening. In England and Wales, for example, Wise and Bush (1999, p. 183) argue that ‘the Government’s Janus-like approach to educational policy produced a simultaneous process of centralization and devolution’. Likewise, Glatter (1999) points out that the trend towards the dominance of central government in education appears to have intensified. The 1988 Education Reform Act embodies a national core curriculum and provision for national testing and reporting. Alongside the national curriculum, there is a national testing programme at two points in primary education and two points in secondary education, with results made public on a school-by-school basis. These intentions are essentially centralizing in nature and are consistent with the general pattern which is emerging in
many Western countries (Caldwell, 1990, 1997; McGinn, 1990; Troman, 1997). Troman also points out that school-based management is a new and powerful form of control of teachers' work and schooling, and that school-based management systems interrelate with school inspections in order to provide a continuous, rigorous and pervasive mode of control and surveillance. This is why Doe (1999, p. 337) regards the Act and the various associated measures as having 'the dual effect of increasing central government control of the school system while at the same time devolving greater day-to-day operational management and accountability to the school level'.

In the United States, the two pioneers of the school-site management approach, Alachua County in Florida and Newport-Mesa in California, recentralized in some respects at the start of the 1980s. While the rhetoric of devolution and participation is prevalent in most Australian states, there are counter-balancing forces for, and evidence of, the development of centralist, corporate structures for decision-making, for example, the establishment of corporate management groups in Victoria and Western Australia (Duignan, 1987; Smyth, 1995).

In Hong Kong, the creation of the Curriculum Development Institute might seem a further concentration of resources in the central government machinery, but it is arguable that such a body is necessary if decentralization is really to be achieved. Besides, while the Education Commission recommended in 1997 that all schools should have put in place school-based management by the year 2000, the Education Department in the same year issued a medium of instruction guidance for secondary schools. Schools are required to adopt Chinese as the medium of instruction starting with their 1998/99 Secondary 1 intake and progressing each year to a higher level of secondary education, unless otherwise approved by the Education Department (Education Department, 1997).

Halasz (1997) observes that pressures for a return to centralization can be observed today in most of the Eastern and Central European countries that have started decentralizing their educational systems, while school-based management is seen by many people as a kind of negative policy and a simple decline of control. Similar phenomena can be observed in the centralized Swedish education system attempting to devolve decision-making to the schools (Duignan, 1990). This is because uncertainty caused by increased autonomy and lack of well-defined rules makes people feel the desire to go back to well-known patterns of order and central control. Such uncertainty and the feeling of being left without support is especially strong where the enlargement
of school autonomy has not been accompanied by the development of professional support services. For example, at the time of the introduction of its 1985 Education Act in Hungary, probably no one would have been able to define concretely the concept of school-based management. No attempts have been made to start appropriate management programmes to prepare the leaders of the autonomous schools for the new role. Halasz (1993) reports as follows:

In fact, during the second half of the 1980s a great number of teachers and educationists experienced a period of uncertainty and disintegration. The centre was not able to establish well-defined rules or to prepare the local actors for the conditions of autonomy. While a growing number of schools benefited from greater freedom, the majority of them simply had the feeling that the state did not assume its responsibilities and left them alone with their difficulties. (pp. 492-493)

Besides, decentralization to a particular level may imply centralization from that level downwards such that if school districts are decentralized down to the principals, schools themselves can remain highly centralized. Davies and Hentschke (1992) observe that in England and Wales delegation of power from the local education authority to the school has resulted in more centralization at that level. Similar findings are reported in other studies (Dimmock, 1998; Education Department, 1994; Evans, 1998). Wise (1983) also observes that educational policies such as school-based management often fail because policy makers tend to hyperrationalize. He argues that ‘hyperrationality occurs when those in power want to appear to share authority without, in fact, surrendering authority’ (p. 95). The response is a procedural rather than a substantive change. Existing procedures are not removed; rather new procedures are simply added to the old, resulting in no re-distribution of authority between the central authorities and the school level, or between the school principal and his/her staff.

**FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

Even though school-based management is aimed at improving school practice and enhancing education quality, it may not be sufficient if it involves only a simplistic
decentralization of power from the central authority to the site level. Cheung and Cheng (1996), after reviewing the current literature, point out that mere decentralization to the school-site level is not sufficient to ensure education quality, and suggest that the implementation of school-based management should be based on a multi-level system including school-site level, group level and individual level. This echoes the comments made by educationists such as Marren and Levacic (1994), Sackney and Dibski (1994), and Santos Filho (1993) that structural changes do not always lead to increased autonomy for those in the lower levels of organization; nor does devolution of management responsibility necessarily empower others. Cheng and Cheung (1997) explain that the initiative and commitment of teachers in discharging their daily duties is of prime importance in bringing about educational effectiveness and quality. This initiative can be considered as a kind of self-management of teachers’ professional tasks at the individual level and the group level. Therefore, school-based management should be ‘a type of self-management at the school, the group and the individual staff levels if education quality is to be pursued’ (Cheng and Cheung, 1997, p. 455). They suggest that in order to enhance education quality the policy efforts and school practices should be based on the multi-level conception of self-management in school rather than only a simplistic decentralization of power from the central authority to the site level. As a result, the school as a whole can continuously adapt to the changing environment and meet internal and external needs and challenges.

Similarly, Caldwell (1997) argues that the settlement that may be emerging is actually a settlement on one track of the reform agenda and that more lies ahead on two other tracks. What he means is what has occurred thus far may have been necessary, but it is not sufficient if there is to be the lasting reform that will yield a consistently high quality of education. He explains that there seem to be three tracks on which school reform is proceeding, as follows:

Track 1 is the creation of systems of school-based management.
Track 2 is marked by an unrelenting focus on outcomes for students.
Track 3 is the technology-driven transformation of schools for the knowledge society. (p. 359)

According to Caldwell, developments on these tracks have occurred in every nation and in every school over the last quarter century or more. Some countries
practising school-based management are on Track 1, some on Track 2, while a few may be considered as on Track 3. With settlement of the school reform on Track 1, it is likely that momentum will build for reform on Track 2, and likewise for movement from Track 2 to Track 3. In effect, movement from one track to another track recognizes that reform on one track alone will not, by itself, have an enduring impact on the quality of education.

On the other hand, even though school-based management has been regarded as one of the most robust education reforms, some educationists such as Elmore (1995), Fullan (1993, 1995), and Sackney and Dibski (1994) question the desirability of making school-based management a high reform priority. They comment that school-based management does not necessarily have an impact on classroom teaching of teachers. This is echoed by Bush (1994) that the links between school autonomy and school effectiveness are still tenuous. For this reason, they argue for putting more time and energies into instructional improvement before the creation of organizational structures. Thus, to solve this paradox, school-based management must be considered in the light of enhancing the quality of education.

CONCLUSION

Following rapid political and/or economic development, decentralization in education is advocated in a wide range of countries. The process and structure of decentralization are very complex. The extent and form of decentralization vary from one country to another because of different ways taken by governments to approach decentralization. Decentralization may have the advantage of lessening the burden of central governments in supplying finance to education to local governments, allowing flexibility according to local needs and promoting local participation. However, it may also reinforce inequalities among regions, and serve the interests of their own clientele at the expense of the broader public interest in education.

Each of the arguments for decentralization can be countered and so can each of the arguments for centralization. In fact, there is no one best system applicable to all countries nor any one system suited to the same country at different times. As no society is completely static, there is a need to examine the context of any one case at a particular time rather than just positing in general terms the advantages and disadvantages of shifts in the control pattern. As argued by Fullan (1993, 1995) and
Hurst (1985), changing a system from centralization to decentralization or vice versa may or may not bring about the associated advantages; it may leave matters no better than before, or make them significantly worse. King (1979) remarks that their history made Australian and New Zealand centralization prior to their decentralization in the management of schools very different in justification, operation, and concept from that in France. Dimmock (1998) contends that education is culture-bound and that policy makers need to be ‘mindful of societal and organizational cultural characteristics when formulating, adopting and implementing policies’ (p. 366). Similarly, Bray (1992a) points out that in order to achieve a form of decentralization in Hong Kong, it is necessary at least in the short run to provide more central inputs rather than fewer, and that the Macau system has first to be centralized before it can really be decentralized. Each case should therefore be examined in the light of political, historical, administrative and technological contexts.

No system altogether works as it is supposed to, nor is any system unidimensional. It is likely that at any one time an organization (e.g. a school) will be in the process of moving towards more self-management in relation to one variable and remaining static or even moving in the opposite direction in another. In the formally decentralized systems such as Papua New Guinea, England and Wales, and the United States, closer examination reveal that the central authorities retain many key powers (Bray, 1991a; Bush, 1999; Caldwell, 1994; Glatter, 1999; King 1979; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993). Conversely, in the highly centralized systems such as France, local bodies and teachers were much freer than they expected (King, 1979). Although Hong Kong had a coherent education system with a strong tradition of centralization in most respects prior to 1991, some major curriculum decisions were taken at the school level. The most prominent examples of these were in the choice of textbooks, and in the language of instruction. The result of leaving the medium of instruction to the school level is, according to Bray (1992a), ‘an anomaly in what is otherwise a highly centralized system’ (p. 19). Few governments elsewhere leave such an important decision entirely to the school level. It is, however, impossible that all powers are retained in the central level or are devolved to the local level (Ansoff, 1984; Caldwell, 1990; Fullan, 1993; Glatter and Woods, 1995; Johnes, 1995; Lauglo, 1990). The central authority has to retain or regain some key powers in order to improve equality, maintain unity and make management more effective. In countries such as England and Wales, and the United States, which have a tradition of local autonomy in
education, the central authority is seeking in the 1980s and 1990s to reassert its control by establishing a single national curriculum while decentralizing further control over management. There is therefore no quick solution, no simple formula suitable for all countries. Each society has to design its own proper mix to make things work.

Theories and perspectives from fields other than education have been offered in support or explanation of appropriate balance of centralization and decentralization. An example is contained in the work of Peters and Waterman (1982) whose studies of excellent companies led them to the identification of simultaneous loose-tight properties. They found that excellent companies are both centralized and decentralized, pushing autonomy down to the shop floor or production team for some functions but being fanatical centralists about the core values they hold dear. The parallel in education is thus centralization determination of broad goals and purposes of education accompanied by decentralized decision-making about the means by which these goals and purposes will be achieved, with those people who are decentralized being accountable to those centralized for the achievement of outcomes.

Decentralization is supported as a means to achieve popular participation in the process of decision-making. Local people are more sensitive to their needs. With their participation, planning will be more relevant and accurate as they are more aware of their situations and more committed to their work. Increased teacher involvement has thus been associated with greater commitment to educational changes through a feeling of ownership among the participants (Wong et al., 1998). However, there is no reason to suppose that the local bodies are any more representative of the community or responsive to its needs and wishes than the centre (Hurst, 1985). Wide representation such as teacher unions, school councils, and national parent associations can occur within centralized systems and influence policy-making at national level. The equation of centralization with autocratic policy-making and of decentralization with participation therefore does not survive closer examination (Holmes, 1985). Even if decentralization permits greater local involvement in decision-making, it cannot ensure that everybody is either able or willing to participate. Teachers vary considerably in relation to their desire for decisional participation (Evans, 1998). It is also highly probable that decisions are difficult to arrive at because of different opinions. As a result, more time and energy may be expanded on argument and debate than on accomplishing something worthwhile. A great deal of people's time may also be spent attending meetings, much of which is wasted because of their disinterest in every
agenda item, thus resulting in ineffective participation. Effective participation therefore requires a lot of participants' time and sometimes considerable skill in analysis of specific types of information (Bray, 1984). Evers (1990) echoes that there is no evidence that participation in decision-making is superior to more centralized approaches in increasing productivity.

Decentralization is not an aim in itself but a means to achieving other aims. Thus, there are no reasons why a country has to move towards decentralization if such aims can be achieved more effectively and efficiently under the centralized system. For instance, wide representation and participation in decision-making can occur within centralized systems. The crux of the issue is to combine the manifest advantages of centralized administration, provision, and planning with more opportunities for personal, local and functionally diversified choice of education.

The balance of power between the centre and local levels can be viewed as swings of the pendulum, which depend to a large extent on the specific contextual conditions. Nevertheless, the swings from centralization to decentralization in education systems will fail to take hold in the long term if the decentralized system does not deliver improved student achievement. The purpose of these new patterns of management must be expressed unmistakably in terms of their contribution to an end, that is quality of education, rather than simply as a means of ensuring greater efficiency in the utilization of resources conceived narrowly in financial terms. Connections must therefore be made between the new governance structures and the teaching-learning process. Models for management at the school level must therefore focus on learning and teaching improvement.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH PARADIGMS IN EDUCATION

There are three main paradigms employed in educational research, namely the positivist research paradigm, the interpretive research paradigm and the action research paradigm. They are outlined as follows:

1. The positivist research paradigm, also known as normative or rationalistic inquiry, uses quantitative and experimental approaches to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations. It contains two major orienting ideas: first, human behaviour is essentially rule-governed; and second, it should be investigated by the methods of natural science (Anderson and Burns, 1989; Bell et al., 1984; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Guba and Lincoln, 1988; Husen, 1988; Kemmis, 1988). The paradigm aims at theory testing, statistical description, generalisability of findings, searching for causal relationships between variables or prediction of social phenomena.

2. The interpretive research paradigm, also termed as naturalistic or phenomenological inquiry, adopts qualitative approaches to understand human experience and behaviour in context-specific settings inductively and holistically. It regards social phenomena as actions that need to be interpreted and understood in terms of intentions, values, beliefs, motives, feelings, behaviour and language (Anderson and Burns, 1989; Chadwick et al., 1984; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Kemmis, 1988; Patton, 1990; Vockell and Asher, 1995). It aims to develop concretizing and sensitizing concepts, describe and explain realities, as well as develop understanding. The purpose of interpretive inquiry is to discover rather than confirm meaning (Anderson and Burns, 1989). Thus, conclusions are usually limited to particular contexts.

3. The action research or critical paradigm has no particular theoretical framework, often based on commonsense theory and observations. Positivist and
interpretive paradigms place researchers outside the phenomena being investigated. Action research is participative indicating the importance placed in the participation of practitioners themselves trying to improve events and practice in their surroundings (Bryman, 1989; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Kemmis, 1988). Mason and Bramble (1989) argue that action research is designed to uncover effective ways of dealing with problems in the real world, and that this kind of research is not confined to a particular methodology or paradigm. Kemmis (1988) also points out that as its objective is situational and specific, and its findings are generally restricted to the environment in which the research is carried out, action research tends to lean towards the qualitative approach. Since both quantitative and qualitative approaches can be found in action research, only the first two paradigms will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

**Qualitative Versus Quantitative Research**

Qualitative research methods have become increasingly important modes of inquiry in education. A field once dominated by measurement, operationalized definitions, variables, and empirical fact has made room for a research approach that emphasizes inductive analysis, description, and the study of people's perceptions. Many educational evaluators are increasingly changing their emphasis from traditional positivist approaches using quantitative methods to test hypothetical-deductive generalizations towards the acceptance of qualitative, naturalistic or phenomenological approaches (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Fetterman, 1988; Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Mason and Bramble, 1989; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991; Sherman and Webb, 1988). Qualitative research has also become important with the growth in the number of small-scale educational research studies (Powney and Watts, 1987). Fetterman depicts this change in direction in educational research as a 'silent scientific revolution' (p. 17).

Considering research methods leads directly to consideration of the relative strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative data. Interpretive inquiry is typically more descriptive than confirmatory research (Chadwick et al., 1984; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Firstly, this is because one of its purposes is to understand the inner perspective and meaning of actions and events of those being studied. Secondly, words are the primary form of data, and they can often convey more subtle and deeper
meaning than can numbers. Qualitative data, in the form of words rather than numbers, are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes occurring in local contexts. They are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings, new theoretical integration and go beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks. As asserted by Miles and Huberman (1994),

Words, especially when they are organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, meaningful flavour that often proves far more convincing to a reader - another researcher, a practitioner - than pages of numbers. (p. 15)

Accordingly, qualitative methods permit researchers to study selected issues in depth and detail. Approaching fieldwork without being constrained by predetermined categories of analysis contributes to the depth, openness, and detail of qualitative inquiry. Quantitative methods, on the other hand, require the use of standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of people can be fitted into a limited number of predetermined response categories to which numbers are assigned. The advantage of a quantitative approach is that it is possible to measure the reactions of a great many people to a limited set of questions, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. This gives a broad, generalizable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously. By contrast, qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases. This increases understanding of the cases and situations studied but reduces generalizability. Nevertheless, some qualitative researchers point out that scientific research involves rigorous and systematic empirical inquiry, and that interpretive research also meets these requirements (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Marton et al., 1984).

Because qualitative and quantitative methods involve differing strengths and weaknesses, they constitute alternative, but not mutually exclusive, strategies for research. In fact, educational and other social science researchers have gradually come to accept the legitimate complementarity of paradigms, and advocate using both qualitative and quantitative data in the same study (Anderson and Burns, 1989; Chadwick et al., 1984; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Fetterman, 1988; Husen, 1988; Merton and Kendall, 1946; Morse, 1994; Patton, 1987,
Increasingly, quantitative researchers seem dissatisfied with purely quantified results and are turning toward supplementary qualitative analyses, while qualitative researchers have become less defensive about their modes of analysis and more open to working with quantitative researchers on research projects. Sometimes they combine quantitative methods with their qualitative ones. (pp. 277-278)

Tam (1993) asserts that there are three reasons for mixing qualitative and quantitative data and research methodologies. Firstly, quantitative data can reduce the thickness of qualitative research, thus achieving efficiency. Secondly, quantitative data can provide a useful check on qualitative data. Thirdly, combined qualitative and quantitative research provides a better understanding of reality. Elliott and Crossley (1994) also argue that educational managers who are able to research or evaluate practice in their own institutions by employing qualitative methodology can potentially mine rich seams of data which are likely to be missed by most official performance indicators and be less accessible to external research, particularly that using quantitative methods. When focused on the same problem, qualitative and quantitative studies can triangulate to assess the stability of the findings. As vividly described by Salomon (1991),

The practical winds of rapprochement begin to blow, not because of a great mutual love between positivists and qualitativists but because researchers have come to realize how potentially complementary the paradigms are on the practical level. (p. 10)

The use of a specific approach depends on the purpose of the study, the questions asked, and the setting. Elliott and Crossley (1994) make a case for the use of appropriate research methodologies by utilising the distinction between educational policy and educational action. They assert that policy is informed and validated by numerical data gathered, coded and analysed using a quantitative methodology, whilst a
concern with the consequences of policy decisions in practice, at the level of educational action, is ideally dealt with by using a qualitative methodology. The issue then becomes not whether one has uniformly adhered to prescribed canons of either logical positivism, or phenomenology, or combining both paradigms. Methodological appropriateness, or methodological congruity, which recognizes that different methods are appropriate for different situations, should therefore be advocated (Chadwick et al., 1984; Powney and Watts, 1987). Similarly, Patton (1990) suggests that 'methodological appropriateness should be the primary criterion for judging methodological quality' (p. 39).

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

The purpose of this study was to gain an insight into the experiences and perspectives of the staff of the Vocational Training Council on decentralization. The study attempted to increase understanding of the case and situations, and stressed the importance of context, setting and participants' frames of reference. The inquiry was therefore committed to understanding human social phenomena from the experiences and perspectives of the individuals. As such, qualitative research was considered most appropriate for this study. This was also in line with the comments of Elliott and Crossley (1994), discussed above, that a concern with the consequences of policy decisions in practice, in this case decentralization, is ideally dealt with by using a qualitative methodology.

Filstead (1970) provides a typical description of qualitative research:

Qualitative methodology refers to those research strategies, such as participant observation, in-depth interviewing, total participation in the activity being investigated, field work, etc., which allow the researcher to obtain firsthand knowledge about the empirical social world in question. Qualitative methodology allows the researcher to 'get close to the data' thereby developing the analytical, conceptual, and categorical components of explanation from the data itself - rather than from the preconceived, rigidly structured and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed. (p. 6)
Getting close to the data implies interaction with the people being studied; learning their culture, including their values, beliefs, behaviour patterns, and language; and attempting to feel or experience their motives and emotions. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) also argue that qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matters, and that qualitative investigators can get closer to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing and observation. This means that

Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 2)

Qualitative research is thus characterized as follows (Bogden and Biklen, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Janesick, 1994; Patton, 1990; Tam, 1993):

1. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand the social phenomenon from the actors' or insiders' point of view. Qualitative researchers have direct contact with the people, situation and phenomenon under study, and place findings in a social, historical and temporal context.
2. Qualitative research uses the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher as the key instrument. It is a naturalistic inquiry studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally.
3. Theories emerge in the process of data collection and analysis.
4. Qualitative research is descriptive, contributing detailed qualitative data, thick description and in-depth inquiry.
5. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products.
6. Qualitative researchers tend to analyse their data inductively. Inductive analysis involves immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships rather than testing theoretically derived (deductive) hypothesis.
7. Qualitative research has a unique case orientation, assuming each case is special and unique.
8. Qualitative research is flexible in adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations change.

9. Meaning is of essential concern to qualitative researchers.

The above characteristics are all of relevance to this research. However, the following comment made by Miles and Huberman (1994) is particularly relevant:

The conventional image of a research following an inductive model is one that keeps pre-structuring and tight designs to a minimum. The conceptual framework should emerge empirically from the field in the course of the study and the most important research questions will become clear later on. ... However, highly inductive and loosely designed studies make good sense when researchers have plenty of time. For some better-understood social phenomena within a familiar culture or subculture this may not be appropriate. The inductive model actually also operates with research questions, conceptual frameworks, but their choices are simply more implicit and the links are less linear. Research questions help to bound and focus the study. (p. 27)

The institutions studied in this research can be regarded as a familiar subculture, therefore the research begins with research questions and conceptual frameworks which help to bound and focus the study. Nevertheless, the research questions and conceptual frameworks are subjected to modification as real-world situations unfold naturally.

Qualitative research in this study provides an understanding of the individual organization's circumstances and its practices. However, it does not emphasize specified issues of objectivity, validity, and reliability. Because of the assumptions about the nature of reality and ways of understanding the reality in the naturalistic paradigm, the traditional concern for objectivity, validity, and reliability has little relevance for the design of naturalistic research (Owens, 1982; Shipman, 1988). As Chadwick et al. (1984) argue:

To a greater degree than in other research methods, qualitative research involves observation of unique events, usually by a single
observer and generally without corroboration or replication. Naturally, this over-reliance on a single observer creates serious questions about the reliability of the data obtained. The events reported may have been unique occurrences, or the observer may have unwittingly recorded biased information. Although reliability is an important issue in quantitative data collection, it is usually not defined as problematic by qualitative researchers. ... In the process of obtaining a rich, intimate understanding of a people, the researcher is likely to lose some objectivity. (p. 215)

Nevertheless, the writer focused on the objective analysis of subjective meaning to ensure validity. He also strove for validity, objectivity and reliability as far as possible through meticulous observations, extensive documentary research and in-depth interviews to achieve factual, reliable and confirmable data.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design included details concerning how the writer dealt with the following issues:

1. Site and sample selection
2. Access and entry
3. Research strategies
4. Data collection techniques
5. Data analysis strategies

**Site and Sample Selection**

As the study aimed to gain an insight into the experiences and perspectives of the staff of the Vocational Training Council on decentralization, it was site-specific. The research was conducted in the seven technical institutes and the Vocational Training Council headquarters. Regarding the sample selection, Patton (1990) remarks that there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size relies on what the researchers want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be
useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. Guba and Lincoln (1988) assert that in purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations. They recommend sample selection to the point of redundancy meaning that sampling is terminated when no information is forthcoming from new sampled units. Thus, redundancy is the primary criterion if the purpose is to maximize information. Similarly, Morse (1994) suggests that in qualitative research sampling should ‘contribute to ensuring the adequacy and appropriateness of data’ (p. 230).

In selecting samples, the writer therefore related to the purpose of the study and not the intrinsic interest of the documents, meetings and participants. He adopted controlled selection to ensure that no significant category was left out. Interviewing was the primary method of data collection in this research, supplemented by documentary analysis and observations. Altogether, 28 participants were purposefully sampled for interview. Details will be discussed in the following section (see pp. 73-76). The aim was to make as balanced a selection as possible, bearing in mind the constraints of time and the criterion of redundancy.

The site and sample selection in the present study approximated an ideal site for a research suggested by Marshall and Rossman (1989). Such a site is characterised as (1) entry is possible; (2) there is a high probability that a rich mix of many of the processes, people, interactions and/or structures that may be a part of the research question will be present; (3) the researcher can devise an appropriate role to maintain continuity of presence for as long as necessary; and (4) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured by avoiding poor sampling decisions.

**Access and Entry**

Researchers conducting qualitative studies have to propose and develop roles that enable easy entry, and facilitate receptivity of environments and participants. They need to demonstrate that the research will be conducted in such a way that neither the setting nor the people in it are harmed. As soon as the statement of the problem and its sub-questions, as well as the site and sample selection had been decided, the writer began to plan for appropriate entry through gatekeepers in the organization - people who could facilitate access to the potential sources of data. Formal contact involved approach through official channels in writing to top-level officials in the Vocational
Training Council headquarters and the technical institutes to obtain organizational sanction for the research. A letter was then sent to the respective participants briefly describing the study and the data collection techniques. Informal contact was initiated later through personal networks of relationships in a face to face situation, or by telephone.

Qualitative inquiry is not only highly personal and interpersonal, but is also more intrusive and involves greater reactivity than quantitative approaches (Burgess, 1985). The writer was therefore fully alert to the complex ethical issues in qualitative research. He always bore in mind the principle of informed consent in terms of participants' competence, voluntarism, full information, and comprehension (Cohen and Manion, 1994). The writer was not only alert to the problems caused by a researcher doing his own interviews and analysis, but also abided by the following principles in conducting the research:

1. Participants entered the research project voluntarily, understanding the purpose and nature of the study, and the risks and obligations that were involved.
2. The participants' identities were protected so that the information collected would not embarrass or in other ways harm them. They were assured that the interviewer would maintain confidentiality and high ethical standards.
3. Participants were treated with respect and their cooperation in the research was sought. They were not led to respond in a particular way.
4. The writer would tell the truth when writing up and reporting his findings. He was fully aware of the sin of fabricating or distorting data

**Research Strategies**

Qualitative research is associated with a rich array of strategies such as archival analyses, histories, case studies, field studies, and ethnography. All these strategies emphasize and build on several interconnected themes providing a direction and framework for developing specific designs and concrete data collection tactics of the research. Such themes include 'real-world observations through naturalistic inquiry, openness through inductive analysis, contextual sensitivity, a holistic perspective, personal contact and insight, attention to dynamic processes, appreciation of
idiosyncrasies through a unique case orientation, and a stance of empathic neutrality’ (Patton, 1990, p. 59).

The choice of possible strategies depends on the focus for the research and on the desired time frame for the study. Yin (1994) puts forward three conditions in determining the appropriate research strategies:

1. What is the type of the research question - is it exploratory, does it seek to describe the incidence or distribution of some phenomena, or does it try to explain some social phenomena?
2. Does the research require control over behaviour, or does it seek to describe naturally occurring events?
3. Is the phenomenon under study contemporary or historical?

This research, using a qualitative inquiry strategy, attempted to understand human experience inductively and holistically in context-specific settings. It investigated social and contemporary phenomena, and sought to explain naturally occurring events which were not created, sustained or discontinued solely for research purposes. The research focused on social processes and the meanings given to them by participants. Hence, a case study was the most adequate and efficient strategy for this research.

A case study is a detailed examination of a specific unit - an individual, a class, an institution, a community or an event, with its emphasis on naturalistic observation (Adelman et al., 1984; Bell, 1987; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Nisbet and Watt, 1984; Stake, 1994; Stenhouse, 1988; Walker, 1988). The purpose is to gather comprehensive, systematic, and in-depth information about each case of interest. Pashiardis (1998) advocates the use of case-study methodology because it would ‘provide rich information and a more authentic environment’ (p. 118). The great strength of the case study is that it allows researchers to concentrate on a specific instance or situation that gives it meaning, and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work. These processes may remain hidden in a large-scale survey but can be crucial to the success or failure of the systems or organizations (Bell, 1987). On the other hand, case studies are not without critics. The accounts cannot be exhaustive. They are subjective, biased, impressionistic, idiosyncratic and lacking in the precise
quantifiable measures that are the hallmark of survey research and experimentation (Atkinson and Delamont, 1986; Nisbet and Watt, 1984).

It must, however, be pointed out that case studies are not impressionistic essays made after a quick visit to a setting or after some conversations with a few participants. Researchers have to spend considerable time in the empirical world laboriously collecting and reviewing piles of data, and the data collected provide them with a much more detailed rendering of events than even the most creatively prejudiced mind might have imagined prior to the study (Burgess, 1985). Besides, all researchers are affected by observers' bias (Burgess, 1985; Menter et al., 1997). Questions or questionnaires, for example, reflect the interests of those who construct them, as do experimental studies. Donmoyer (1990) makes a strong case for rejecting traditional notion of generalizability for those researchers in education and human services who are concerned with individuals and the meaning in their lives. He argues that traditional ways of thinking about generalizability are inadequate.

Although generalizability is not usually possible for case studies, the important criterion for judging the merit of a case study is the extent to which research procedures enable one to draw reasonable conclusions, and the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for one working in a similar situation to relate his decision-making to that described in the case study (Bassey, 1981; Dane, 1990; Walker, 1986). Stake (1994) emphasizes designing the study to optimize understanding of the case rather than generalization beyond. He argues

The purpose of case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case. Criteria for conducting the kind of research that leads to valid generalization need modification to fit the search for effective particularization. The utility of case research to practitioners and policy makers is in its extension of experience. The methods of qualitative case study are largely the methods of disciplining personal and particularized experience. (p. 245)

The writer agrees that the worth of this research is the degree to which it generates theory, description, or understanding. He believes that the reasonability of the conclusions and the relatability of this case study, as well as the opportunity to learn from it are more important than its generalizability.
Data Collection Techniques

Researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected methods, hoping always to get a better fix on the subject matter at hand. They can collect documents and artifacts. They can observe persons, settings or situations. They can ask people to be interviewed, or to complete questionnaires. Collect, observe, and ask; these are the behaviours of researchers. The choice of which tools to use is not set in advance. It depends on the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context, what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Nelson et al., 1992).

The techniques used in this research consisted of documentary analysis, observations, and in-depth interviewing. The writer understands that studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method (e.g. loaded interview questions, and biased responses) than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks (Anderson and Burns, 1989; Bryman, 1989; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Denzin, 1988; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1989; Patton, 1990). He used methodological triangulation, that is, different data collection methods, to study centralization and decentralization to add rigour, breadth, and depth to this research, hoping that weaknesses in one technique could be compensated for by strengths of a complementary one.

I. Documentary Analysis

One particularly rich source of information is documents. Document is a general term for any artefact which has as its central feature an inscribed text (Scott, 1990). Although research can involve the analysis of films, videos, slides, and other non-written sources, the most common kind of documents in educational research is printed sources. The essence of a document is that it already exists in a definitive form. Unlike a questionnaire or interview schedule, it cannot be individually designed to suit a particular research purpose, but must be drawn on as a source of data in the form in which it stands (Johnson, 1994).
The writer investigated the origins and usefulness of the documents so as to focus on the proper use of existing evidence for his research purposes. Because of problems associated with the selectivity and bias of the documents, the writer attempted to gather multiple and varied sources of evidence in different settings and at different time periods. The documents used were mainly primary sources, which are those items that are original to the problem under study. They were capable of transmitting a first-hand account of an event. Secondary sources are those that do not bear a direct physical relationship to the event being studied. Though the value of secondary sources should not be minimized, they are usually of limited worth because of the errors that result when information is passed on from one person to another (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Mann, 1985). Hence, they were ignored more often than not in this study.

Besides, both witting and unwitting evidence were studied. Witting evidence is the information which the original author of the document wanted to impart, while unwitting evidence is everything else that can be learned from the document (Duffy, 1987). The unwitting evidence came from any underlying assumptions unintentionally revealed by the author of the document. The writer had attempted to assess the precise significance of both witting and unwitting evidence.

Convergence across these multiple sources of evidence, settings and time periods increased the validity of the inferences made based on the evidence gathered. The sources of evidence for this study included:

1. Consultancy Reports
   The Segal Quence Wicksteed consultancy report was officially released in late September 1996. It put forward altogether 44 recommendations, one of which being the need to devolve authority from the central level to the operational units. Another report, the Report of Consultant on Technical Education, was prepared for the VTC by Helmore (1983). He was invited by the VTC to undertake the task of advising on the system of technical education in Hong Kong in 1983. These consultancy reports provided the background knowledge about this study.

2. Policy Paper
   In response to the Segal Quence Wicksteed consultancy report, the Vocational Training Council prepared in June 1997 a policy paper delineating its five-year strategic plan 1997 - 2001. The recommendations contained in the paper were
being implemented during the research period, and provided valuable source of evidence to this study.

3. Minutes of Meetings

The Technical Institutes Division Headquarters had its management committee while each technical institute had its own executive committee. They held regular meetings throughout the year. There are standing orders governing the conduct and proceedings of meetings. The minutes confirmed and signed by the Chairman at the next ensuing meeting serve as an accurate record of the meeting. Any minutes so signed shall be received in evidence without further proof. The minutes of these committee meetings were therefore reliable official records.


Circulars and memoranda regarding staffing, administration, revenues and expenditures were regularly sent to the technical institutes from the Administration Division, the Finance and Supplies Division, and the Technical Institutes Division of the VTC headquarters. They provided important information about the level of centralization and the decentralization process.

The writer undertook the analysis of documentary evidence by both external and internal criticism. External criticism is concerned with establishing the genuineness (i.e. not forged) and authenticity (i.e. it is what it purports to be and truthfully reports on its subject) of the document, while internal criticism evaluates the accuracy and worth of the data contained therein (Cohen and Manion, 1994). In his concern to establish the meaning and reliability of data, the writer tried to establish the credibility of the author of the documents. He understood that it was important for him to assess whether fact or bias was the main characteristic of a document, and to expose them if possible. It was also important not to accept sources at face value (Duffy, 1987). Hence, the writer adopted the guiding principles that everything should be questioned and that empathy be developed.

Documentary searches proved that the documents were a basic and valuable source of information about the background, activities and processes of this study. They gave the writer ideas about important questions to pursue through observations and interviewing, and helped refine research questions. As a result, the gaps in data collected from observations and interviews were filled by those found in documents,
and the discrepancies among the different data collection techniques could be checked. As Johnson (1994) says, by examining research evidence from different points of view, the hope is that different sorts of data will point to the same findings, and reinforce the conclusions drawn.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Documentary Analysis as a Research Tool**

In conducting this study, the writer realized the major strengths and weaknesses of documentary analysis when compared with other techniques (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Johnson, 1994). Its strengths were as follows:

1. It covered the period from 1982 to 1999, a much longer time span than could be typically feasible using other data collection methods, and therefore the factors that impinged on the organizational change of the VTC and its technical institutes could be elucidated.

2. It brought together previously unrelated material, which illuminated a topic, and it increased knowledge by bringing to light material which had not previously had wide circulation. For example, according to the library record, the Report of Consultant on Technical Education prepared for the VTC by Helmore (1983) had been left on the shelf since 1984. Documentary analysis enabled the writer to realize that decentralization of authority had been proposed to the VTC since 1983.

The writer realized the following weaknesses while undertaking documentary analysis:

1. With reference to the purpose of this study, the available evidence from documentary analysis did not adequately represent the range of information required. Interviewing was a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding and making meaning of the experiences of the individuals. Direct quotations, capturing participants' personal perspectives and experiences, are an important part of this research and critical to understanding the phenomenon under study. The interview therefore allowed the writer to get
closer to the participants, situation, and phenomenon than documentary analysis.

2. The personal interviews were relatively flexible as the questions and the process in this study were modified where necessary to match participants and circumstances. They remained fully situational which was usually not possible for documentary analysis where existing data was used.

II. Observation

Observation can be defined as the act of noting a phenomenon, often with instruments, and recording it for a formulated research purpose (Adler and Adler, 1994; Johnson, 1994). There are two principal types of observation, namely participant observation and non-participant observation. In the former, the researcher engages in the very activities being observed, and is one of the group. On the other hand, a non-participant observer stands aloof from the group activities being investigated and eschews group membership. Gold (1969) expands them to four levels of participation. The complete observer is one who does not take part in the activity and whose status as a researcher is unknown to the participants. The observer-as-participant is one who does not take part in the activity, but whose status as a researcher is known to the participants. The participant-as-observer is one who does take part in the activities, and whose status as a researcher is also known to the participants. The complete participant does take part in the activities, but his or her status as a researcher is not known to the participants.

According to Spradley (1980), the nature of observations shifts in range and character from the early to later stages of an observational project. He discusses three stages of observation: initial observations, focused observations and selected observations. Initial observations are primarily unfocused and general in scope. In focused observations, researchers direct their attention to a deeper and narrower portion of the people, behaviours, times, spaces, feelings, structures, and/or processes whereas in selected observations, they focus on establishing and refining the characteristics of and relations among the elements they have previously selected as objects of study. In this research, selected observations were adopted as the writer at this stage had developed specific research questions, which are listed in Chapter 1.
Observing the content and process of meetings was part of this research. 'Content refers to what the group of people comprising the meeting is doing in terms of its purposes and objectives; process refers to the way in which the group goes about achieving its formal task' (Williams, 1984, p. 207). The meetings observed in this study were mainly advisory ones, which, according to Williams, called for the exchange of information and/or the seeking of opinions. For these advisory meetings, the most important process observations were the communication process where information was transferred among members.

In the present study, the writer was permitted by each of the seven principals to sit in on one of their executive committee meetings. Each executive committee has similar composition consisting of the principal, heads of department and an executive officer. The writer was an observer-as-participant in these seven meetings. However, he was a participant-as-observer in the three management committee meetings of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters. Its composition comprised the Division Head, two Section Heads and five Unit Heads. The writer was fully aware of the ethical principles so he made explicit his research topics and questions at the very beginning of the observation. In other words, overt rather than covert observations were adopted in the study.

The seven executive committee meetings of the technical institutes were observed between May and November 1998, while the three management committee meetings of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters were observed in November 1997, March and July 1998. Each of these 10 meetings lasted for three to four hours. Seven of these meetings were conducted in Cantonese, and the other three meetings were conducted in English because of the presence of expatriate staff. The majority of members' expressions were thus translated from Cantonese into English. Due to the linguistic differences between Cantonese and English, the subtle nuances in meaning might not be captured. Nevertheless, the spirit and originality of staff's concerns and comments were never undermined. Observations allowed the writer to check information provided by the participants in the interviews in a more natural setting, and discern situations described in interviews and thus become aware of possible distortions, if any.
III. Interviewing

The research interview has been defined as a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him/her on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation (Cannell and Kahn, 1968, quoted in Powney and Watts, 1987). Cohen and Manion (1994) suggest that the interview may serve three purposes. Firstly, it may be used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the research objectives. As Tuckman (1978) describes it, 'by providing access to what is inside a person’s head, interviews make it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes and dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)' (p. 124). Secondly, it may be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new ones; or as an explanatory device to help identify variables and relationships. Thirdly, the interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking. Oppenheim (1992) and Seidman (1991), however, state that the purpose of interviewing is not to get answers to question, nor to test hypotheses, and not to evaluate as the term is normally used. They argue that at the heart of interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience.

Interviewing covers a wide range of practices. Researchers see the alternative types as ranged somewhere on what they call a continuum of formality and structure (Fontana and Frey, 1994; Grebenik and Moser, 1962; Seidman, 1991). At one end are the tightly structured, formal survey interviews with pre-set, standardized, normally closed questions. At the other end of the continuum are open-ended, apparently unstructured, informal anthropological interviews that might be seen almost as friendly conversations. Quantitative interviewing strategies fall on one extreme end of the continuum using the fairly clear and well-maintained schedule or pre-organised plan whereas qualitative interviewing strategies lie at different points of the continuum. Patton (1990) distinguishes three qualitative interviewing approaches, namely the informal conversational interview, the interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview. The informal conversational interview relies entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the natural flow of an interaction. There is no predetermination of question topics or wording. The interview guide approach involves
outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each participant before interviewing begins. The interviewer decides the sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview. The standardized open-ended interview consists of a set of open-ended questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words.

Powney and Watts (1987) categorise interviewing into two main types: respondent interviews and informant interviews. The major distinction between the two types is in where lies the locus of control for what happens throughout the interviewing process. The main characteristic of respondent interviews is that the interviewer retains control throughout the whole process. The agenda might be tightly or loosely structured depending on the intentions of the interviewer. It is the interviewer's issues that matter. On the other hand, the purpose of the informant interviews is to gain some insight into the perceptions of a particular person within a situation. Again the agenda might be tightly or loosely structured, but it is primarily the interviewee who imposes it.

Of an eclectic range of methodologies, none is more valuable than interviewing (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Seidman, 1991; Southworth, 1987). It is 'one of the most common and most powerful ways' used to try to understand human beings (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 361). This is particularly so for this research where the writer has to get close to the participants, situation and phenomenon under study to capture their personal perspectives and experiences. Interviewing was therefore adopted as the primary method of data collection in this research.

In preparing interviews, the writer was very cautious about (1) To what extent might a question influence participants to show themselves in a good light? (2) To what extent might a question influence participants to be unduly helpful by attempting to anticipate what the writer wants to hear or find out? (3) To what extent might a question be asking for information about participants that they are not certain, and perhaps not likely, to know about themselves? The validity of interviews would be limited by all these three kinds of considerations. Having taken into account all the relevant factors, the writer adopted in this study the semi-structured interviews similar to Patton's interview guide approach and the loosely structured type of Powney and Watts' respondent interviews. The semi-structured framework gave the writer freedom within the interview situation to 'explore, probe, and ask question to elucidate and
illuminate’ the participants (Patton, 1990, p. 283). The personal, semi-structured interviews, each lasting for approximately an hour to an hour and a half, were useful in surfacing intensely personal issues, or issues where the writer had to probe participants’ perceptions with a succession of follow-up questions.

Sampling of Participants

Quantitative methods typically depend on larger samples selected randomly. The purpose is generalization. Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples selected purposefully. Patton (1990) suggests that the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. He identifies 16 purposeful sampling strategies such as deviant case sampling, stratified purposeful sampling, opportunistic sampling and convenience sampling. The sampling strategy to be employed depends on the purpose of the research. Morse (1994) also argues that ‘the situation of the sample is determined according to the needs of the study, and not according to the external criteria, such as random selection’ (p. 229).

In identifying appropriate participants, Powney and Watts (1987) point out that a good participant is one who has the knowledge and experience required, has the ability to reflect, is articulate, has the time to be interviewed, and is willing to participate in the study. Similarly, Stake (1994) argues

The choice is made, assuring variety but not necessarily representativeness, without strong argument for typicality, again weighted by considerations of access and even by hospitality. …

Here, too, the primary criterion is opportunity to learn. (p. 244)

Taking into account the purpose of this study, the stratified purposeful sampling strategy, which illustrates characteristics of particular subgroups of interest, was adopted. In selecting the participants, rank, sex, and discipline were considered to ensure that there would be a good spread of participant characteristics. It was hoped that probable participants of every kind and background could be tapped, even though this requirement is less important in qualitative approaches. The following were purposefully sampled for interview:
1. 7 out of 48 senior managers of the technical institutes (7 principals and 41 heads of department),
2. 16 out of 770 lecturers (representing the managed in the technical institutes),
3. 4 out of 24 professional officers in the TIDHQ, and
4. An elite in the VTC headquarters.

The samples were selected with reference to the criteria recommended by Patton, Powney and Watts, and Stake. The selection of the senior managers of the technical institutes, the professional officers in the TIDHQ and an elite in the VTC was arbitrary. In addition, the writer ensured that of the seven senior managers selected, one participant must be from each technical institute. All of them have been working in the field of technical education for more than 10 years, thus serving as information-rich cases. They are involved in formulating and implementing policy and practice. The four professional officers from different sections of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters were particularly requested to elaborate or clarify some policy issues with respect to the operation of the technical institutes. According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), elites are considered to be the influential, the prominent, and the well-informed people in an organization or community, and are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research. An elite who was in a top management position in the VTC headquarters and had recently retired was therefore invited for interview to give an overview of the situation.

Of the 770 lecturers, the sample was selected as the fifth entry in the staff list of each of the 41 teaching departments. This gave a quasi-random sample of 41 people, as shown in Table 3.1 below. The writer then introduced three additional variables, namely technical institute, discipline and gender in the selection process. The gender breakdown in the Vocational Training Council is 70% male and 30% female (Segal Quince Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996). The samples were distributed arbitrarily among the seven technical institutes and the 16 disciplines, as well as close to the overall gender breakdown. A person was firstly selected from each of the seven single-department disciplines indicated as S in the table, and the rest selected arbitrarily from the other nine multi-department disciplines indicated as M in the table to fit in with the three pre-determined criteria, namely technical institute, discipline and gender. If a particular person declined the invitation for interview, then a similar replacement using
the appropriate entry (either the tenth, fifteenth or twentieth entry in the staff list concerned) was sought. The sample (bold type) finally selected is shown as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Morrison Hill</th>
<th>Kwai Chung</th>
<th>Kwun Tong</th>
<th>Haking Wong</th>
<th>Lee Wai Lee</th>
<th>Tuen Mun</th>
<th>Sha Tin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Applied Science</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Clothing Technology</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Commercial Studies</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Computing Studies</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Construction</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Electronic Engineering</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. General Studies</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Hotel-keeping &amp; Tourism Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Manufacturing Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Marine Engineering &amp; Fabrication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Motor Vehicle Engineering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Printing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Textile Industries</td>
<td>S</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Participants</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Sampling of Participants
The cases in the sample of this research proved to have variety with respect to the specified characteristics of the population, with the proportions selected (68% male and 32% female) quite close to the overall gender breakdown, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. 7 Principals/Heads of Department</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. 16 Lecturers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. 4 Headquarters' Professional Officers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. An Elite</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There could be no definitive answer to the number of in-depth interviews, depending on the scale of the research (Bell, 1987; Chadwick et al., 1984; Oppenheim, 1992). The nature of the interview, with a large volume of verbatim recorded responses, dictates that the sample size should not be too large. Field (case adapted in Powney and Watts, 1987) points out that this kind of qualitative data is time-consuming and, therefore costly to analyse in depth and returns (in the sense of additional ideas and information) fall off quite fast. The sample is therefore designed as small as is consistent with obtaining valid data. The list of participants should give appropriate representation of the range of views relevant to the purpose of the research. These considerations, together with those discussed above (see pp. 60-61), led the writer to set the target at 28 personal in-depth interviews in this study.

**Piloting and Logistics of the Interviews**

Before devoting himself to the arduous and significant time commitment of this qualitative study, the writer conducted a pilot study. One officer in the TIDHQ and three technical institute lecturers (all different from the participants in the main study) were purposefully selected to pilot the interviews. The purpose was to test the logistics of the interview, and practise the writer's social interactive skills. After taking account of pilot participants' comments, the writer revised the interview guide. The guide attached as Appendix 2 was then circulated to all the participants in advance so that
they could consider the questions before the interview session. The writer then undertook an in-depth interview with the individual participants between March and May 1999, with follow-up telephone interviews for clarification where necessary.

The writer feels it is necessary to outline here the procedures that he followed for incorporating ethical considerations into the research. In all the interviews the importance of developing rapport as an essential element of building confidence and trust was always emphasized. All of the participants were aware that the comments made during the interviews might be cited in the thesis. The assurances of the writer that he would provide anonymity in all cases satisfied the majority of the participants, and it is only these whose comments the writer has used. Three participants agreed to be interviewed and spoke freely throughout, but asked the writer not to tape their interviews and use their quotes. The writer has drawn upon their comments for background information but has not used them as direct quotes. All other interviews were taped, with the complete agreement of the participants and at the conclusion of every interview the writer sought the participant's confirmation that he/she had no objection to the writer using the data in his work, under the conditions agreed. All the interviews were conducted in Cantonese. The participants’ responses were translated from Cantonese into English, but the spirit and originality of staff’s perspectives were maintained. Interviews were then transcribed as soon as possible.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of Interviewing as a Research Tool**

The direct interaction of the interview is the source of both its advantages and disadvantages as a research tool (Borg and Gall, 1989). The strengths of interviewing vis-à-vis documentary analysis had been discussed in the foregoing section (see pp. 68-69). The writer was particularly cautious about the following points:

1. Interviewing was a task of daunting complexity. The interviews that were recorded were later transcribed. However, the transcription was more of a coherent account than the actual recording of speech verbatim. Also, the interviews were conducted in Cantonese (a dialect used by all participants), but were transcribed into English. Difficulties arose because the translation could not capture the nuances of the original data. Nevertheless, the writer considered it more desirable to conduct the interviews in Cantonese as the participants
could express themselves in Cantonese much more proficiently, clearly and freely.

2. The writer, as the researcher-interviewer in this study, tried his best to guard against turning the participants into subjects and the dangers of self-fulfilling prophecies. He prevented himself from being guilty of imposing his categories on participants, and from using participants' data to fit his own categories and theories.

**Data Analysis Strategies**

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes, and other material that are accumulated to increase one's own understanding of them and to enable one to present what has been discovered to others. One approach to analysis involves collecting data before doing the analysis, while another approach is where analysis is concurrent with data collection (Burgess, 1985; Morse, 1994). Morse contends that the outcome of the concurrent processes of data collection and analysis is that 'the researcher maintains control rather than drowning in data' (p. 229).

The writer adopted the analysis-in-the-field strategy, but left the more formal analysis until most of the data had been collected. He believed that some analysis should take place during data collection, otherwise the data collection had no direction and the data collected would not be substantial enough to accomplish analysis later. Analysis during data collection allowed the writer to cycle back and forth between thinking about the existing data and generating strategies for collecting new - often better quality - data. This strategy was in line with the characteristics of interpretive research where data collection and analysis occur together. By structuring some of the analysis beforehand, the writer could therefore establish a focus to keep the data collection task manageable.

The purpose of this research is not merely to portray a specific situation, but also to do so in a way that illuminates some general principles by relating the findings to the empirically based literature. The emphasis of the research is on description and analysis rather than conceptualisation (e.g. grounded theory) and quantitative analysis (e.g. content analysis). This means that the analysis of data focuses on the development of themes (see p. 58). The thematic approach is therefore used in the analysis of the
findings. On the other hand, grounded theory is 'a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed' (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 273). Its emphasis is on theory development. Hence, grounded theory was not used in this research. As Tesch (1990) argues

Neither does one have to insist that all social inquiry, or even qualitative research, must lead to the development or utilisation of theory. Qualitative modes of interpretation run the gamut from ‘Let the informant speak and don’t get in the way’, or through theme analysis, and to the elucidation of patterns (biographical, societal, and so on), theoretical frameworks or models (sometimes only loosely developed), and theory formulated at various levels of abstraction. (p. 125)

All these modes certainly are useful for some purposes and not useful for others. So it would not be appropriate to consider that ‘creating theory is more important than any other mode of interpretation, or that it produces more useful or significant results’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1994, p. 279).

Another technique is content analysis, which is used for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages (Chadwick et al., 1984; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Holsti, 1969; Manning and Cullum-Swan, 1994). It is typically a descriptive process which leads to thin description, and is often used to transform qualitative data for quantitative analysis. It involves systematically coding messages, or information in them, into categories, thus allowing quantitative analysis. The content of messages is analysed to determine how often selected words, ideas, or themes appeared and how large a portion of the total communication they made up. Content analysis can be an insightful means to study social change, for the messages reflect changes in values, beliefs, and behaviours (Sanders, 1974). It is not used in this research because the emphasis of this research is not to describe the processes of the organizational change in the VTC, nor to study trends over time.

Miles and Huberman (1994) point out that researchers have ‘few agreed-on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing
conclusions and verifying their sturdiness’ (p. 16). However, they suggest several methods for data analysis, as follows:

1. Putting information into different arrays.
2. Making a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within such categories.
4. Tabulating the frequency of different events.
5. Putting information in a chronological order or other temporal schemes.

The thematic approach, together with these methods where appropriate, was adopted to analyse the findings of this research.

THE HUMAN INSTRUMENT

The researcher is the instrument of qualitative inquiry and analysis (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Elliott and Crossley, 1994; Janesick, 1994; Patton, 1990). The human element is the great strength and the fundamental weakness of qualitative inquiry and analysis - its strength is fully using human insight and experience; its weakness is being so heavily dependent on the researcher's skill, training, intellect, discipline, and capabilities. As Morse (1994) remarks:

Qualitative research is only as good as the investigator. It is the researcher, who, through skill, patience, and wisdom, obtains the information necessary during data collection and fieldwork to produce a rich qualitative study. Good qualitative researchers must be prepared to learn to be trusted in the setting; they must be patient and wait until they are accepted by informants; they must be flexible and resilient. (pp. 225-226)

Similarly, Guba and Lincoln (1988) comment on the flexibility, insight and ability of the researcher as ‘the peculiar province of the human instrument’ (p. 113). The writer understood that the quality of this study was dependent heavily on his own skill and industry, and that the product of the research represented his images, understanding, and analysis of the phenomenon under study.
CONCLUSION

The interpretive research paradigm was adopted in this study, and a case study was considered the most appropriate research strategy. A variety of sources of evidence from documentary analysis, observations, and interviewing were gathered to address the research questions. Personal interviews were, however, used as the primary method of data collection in the research design, and were based on the stratified purposeful sampling strategy.

None of the sources, however, was likely to yield perfect or error-free evidence. Since each had identifiable strengths and weaknesses, the writer bore in mind two important points when conducting this research. First, he attempted to match the strengths of particular sources of evidence with the demands of the research while at the same time recognizing and attempting to minimize the weaknesses. Second, multiple sources of evidence were more likely to provide the variety of evidence needed to understand the complexity of the research questions of this study. He believed that placing the burden of responsibility on a single source of evidence was most likely to result in disappointment. Methodological triangulation to study a single problem was therefore used to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. This eclectic range of methodologies not only permitted fairly comprehensive data collection, but also allowed mutually supportive data to emerge.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

The writer set out to explore what decentralization meant to VTC staff, and through the eyes of them what had been happening in the technical institutes ever since decentralization was adopted as a VTC policy in June 1997. The granted access to a wealth of documentary material, observations and the intensive interviews provided the writer with a privileged insight into the way the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters and the technical institutes work.

To achieve the objectives of this research, the writer adopted the themes of qualitative inquiry as his strategic ideals, which provided him with a direction and framework for developing specific designs and concrete data collection tactics. As discussed in Chapter 3 (see pp. 58-59), such themes guiding this research included naturalistic inquiry, inductive analysis, contextual sensitivity, holistic perspective, personal contact and insight, attention to dynamic processes, unique case orientation, empathic neutrality and flexibility. With this direction and framework, data collection and data analysis formed an interactive, cyclical process. The findings were organized around the research questions, which underwent constant review during the research process, to ensure their relevance as patterns and themes emerged in data analysis.

Throughout the research the writer ensured that the documentary analysis and observations were free from biases, and that the interviews were extricated from leading or prompting questions. He always tried to guard against the dangers of self-fulfilling prophecies, challenged views expressed and insisted on evidence, and traced through contradictions. By the use of these approaches and techniques, the writer believes that the findings are justified. The findings of the research from documentary analysis, observations and interviews are given in this chapter, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 respectively. The analysis of the findings is in Chapter 7.

The sources of documentary evidence for this study included the various reports, policy papers, minutes of meetings, memoranda, as well as administrative and
financial circulars. As discussed in Chapter 3 (see p. 68), the available evidence from documentary analysis did not adequately represent the range of information required compared with that from interviewing. This was because interviewing allowed the writer to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants through face-to-face communication. The findings from documentary analysis were therefore more restrictive. They were considered in terms of the following distinct themes, which related directly to the research questions raised in Chapter 1:

1. Historical Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities
2. Background and Purpose of Decentralization
3. Changes in Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities
4. Process of Decentralization
5. Staff Perspectives of Decentralization

**HISTORICAL DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The programme of devolution was formally implemented in September 1998 in stages. The historical distribution of authority and responsibilities therefore referred to the period before September 1998. Some of the practices have now ceased while others continue to operate. The findings are presented below.

**Organizational Structure of the Vocational Training Council Headquarters**

The VTC headquarters relating to the operation of the technical institutes included the Technical Institutes Division, Council Administration Division, Finance and Supplies Division, Library Section, Publicity and Public Relations Section, Estates Division, and Computing Division. These divisions and sections formulated rules, regulations and guidelines, and issued them in the form of memoranda and circulars to the technical institutes for implementation from time to time.

**Management Structure of the Technical Institutes**

The VTC has adopted a committee structure to manage the technical institutes since 1982. The terms of reference and composition of the committees and boards
were clearly set out. Each board and committee was representative of all interests concerned, and responsibilities for decisions were shared.

The Committee on Technical Education of the VTC dealt with matters related to the administration, co-ordination and development of technical education provided by the technical institutes. To assist the Committee to carry out its functions and responsibilities, a group of committees and boards were set up as follows:

![Committee Structure Diagram]

**Figure 4.1 Committee Structure for the Resource and Academic Planning and Management of the Technical Institutes**

The Technical Institutes Academic Board was responsible for the planning, co-ordination, development and supervision of all academic activities of the technical institutes, such as admission and progression of students, programmes of study and examinations, conditions for granting academic awards, and appointment of external examiners (Vocational Training Council, 1989, 1996). Basically, the aim of the technical institute operation was to execute the statutory functions of the VTC through the guidelines laid down by the Academic Board.

Assisting the Academic Board to perform its functions were the four committees and the 16 Departmental Boards. The Admission, Progression and Grants Committee was responsible for the review of the technical institutes' admission policy, progression and enrolment procedures, and for drawing up rules covering the awards of scholarships and grants. The function of the Committee on Academic Support Services was to promote the use of library services, audio-visual services, educational technology and other academic support services in the technical institutes. The Committee on Computer Services was responsible for co-ordinating and promoting computer services in the technical institutes, and to advise the Academic Board on policies concerning computer services. The major role of the Planning Committee was to initiate, review and appraise the resource requirements of all new and existing courses, and to pass its comments to the Academic Board for consideration.

The Departmental Boards were responsible for all academic matters relating to the department(s) in the same discipline including design of courses, admission of students, and student assessment. There was a Departmental Board for each of the 16 disciplines, as follows (Vocational Training Council, 1996):

1. Applied Science
2. Clothing Technology
3. Commercial Studies
4. Computing Studies
5. Construction
6. Design
7. Electrical Engineering
8. Electronic Engineering
9. General Studies
10. Hotel-keeping and Tourism Studies
Each Departmental Board set up its own Board of Examiners, Examination Committee, Course Committee(s) and Subject Committee(s) to assist it to carry out its functions (Vocational Training Council, 1989, 1996). The Board of Examiners was responsible for ensuring that the progress of, or award to, students was determined in accordance with the approved course scheme and the examination regulations. The Examination Committee co-ordinated the preparation of examinations, question papers and marking schemes of sessional examinations, and supervised the work of the setters and markers for examination papers. The Course Committee was responsible for reviewing and revising the course curricula, and for drafting proposal documents for the introduction of new courses. The Subject Committee assisted the Course Committee in the drafting and revision of subject syllabuses.

**Organization and Functions of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters**

The Technical Institutes Division Headquarters (TIDHQ), formerly called the Technical Education Division Headquarters (TEDHQ), was responsible for the coordination, academic planning and resource allocation of the technical institutes. It was also charged with the responsibility of providing the necessary services needed by the government and the VTC's committees in the management of the technical institutes. The main purpose of setting up the TIDHQ was:

*to ensure efficient management of resources and uniformity of education standards across the seven technical institutes, and to enhance the accountability of the VTC to the public and validity of its education provision.* (Vocational Training Council, 1989, p. 1)
The TIDHQ, headed by the Assistant Executive Director (Technical Institutes), was composed of four sections with the following functions:

1. **Programme Administration Section**
   The Section was responsible for coordinating programme administration and development of technical institute courses. It advised and guided the design of curricula and syllabuses.

2. **Planning and Development Section**
   The Section was charged with the responsibility for the development of technical institutes, and for ensuring an efficient use of facilities and accommodation in the technical institutes. It was also responsible for the planning of courses to meet the manpower needs of the community.

3. **Technical Institutes Administration Section**
   The Section was responsible for student admission, staff recruitment, training and development, student grants, scholarship, publicity and publication. It also set up guidelines on the provision and development of civic education and student counselling in the technical institutes.

4. **Part-time and Short Course Administration Section**
   The Section was charged with the responsibility for the planning and implementation of short courses, resource planning and estimates, financial control, as well as coordination and monitoring of evening class operation.

(Vocational Training Council, 1989, p. 2)

With reference to the operation of the technical institutes, a document entitled 'Functions of the TIDHQ' (1991) explicitly spelled out its roles as follows:

The TIDHQ plays a monitoring, co-ordinating and facilitating role. In its monitoring role, it ensures that the educational policies formulated by the Technical Institutes Academic Board are implemented by the technical institutes, and that technical institute practices are in order. To perform its co-ordinating role, it co-ordinates the activities of the technical institutes to achieve uniformity and to avoid duplication of effort. In its facilitating role,
it assists the technical institutes to acquire what they need, and provides advice whenever required. (pp. 1-2)

Under the management structure of the VTC, the TIDHQ was the supervisor of the technical institute management (i.e. the principal and the heads of department), who in turn were the supervisors of the technical institute staff. The TIDHQ, the technical institute management and the technical institute staff thus constituted a tripartite relationship. The very nature of the organizational relationships stressed issues of control, responsibilities and duties, that is, issues related to formal structure rather than social relationships. There was ample evidence from a variety of written sources such as minutes of meetings of the TIDHQ Management Committee, memoranda from the TIDHQ to the technical institutes, and minutes of the executive committees of the technical institutes showing the predominance of TIDHQ’s monitoring role over its other roles.

Academic Planning and Development

When the demand for a course emerged, the heads of department concerned would explore the feasibility of operating a course to meet this demand. After consulting the relevant Industry Training Boards, they had to discuss with their principal the new course proposal before putting it forward to the Departmental Board for consideration. This would ensure that the principal was fully involved in any new course planning and developments taking place in his technical institute.

Upon support by the Departmental Board (including one to two principals and teaching staff representatives as members), the Planning Committee (including four principals and teaching staff representatives as members) would scrutinize the resource implications of the proposal. If these were in order, the proposal would then be presented to the Technical Institutes Academic Board (including the seven principals and teaching staff representatives as members) to ensure that it fitted in with the overall development of the technical institutes (Minutes of Meetings of the Course Committees, Departmental Boards, Planning Committee, Technical Institute Academic Board, and Executive Committees of the Technical Institutes, Various Years).

Meanwhile, the curricula of the existing courses were revised and updated regularly to keep pace with the changing technology and environment through a course
review and evaluation exercise. This was to ensure that the current needs of local commerce and industry were being addressed.

**Preparation of the Triennial Course Plans**

The final product of academic planning and development was a set of course plans which served as the basis for budgeting the financial requirements of the technical institutes. The following were the main steps for preparing the triennial course plans:

1. Heads of department proposed to their principal a triennial course plan for their teaching department.
2. Having scrutinized the proposals, the principal prepared the triennial course plans for his technical institute.
3. Heads of department would gather the views of the respective Departmental Boards on the proposals and convey them back to their principal.
4. The principal would then finalize his proposals on the triennial course plans and submit them to the TIDHQ.
5. The Planning and Development Section of the TIDHQ consolidated the proposals from all principals to ensure that they were within the policy guidelines, and that the planned utilization of facilities in the technical institutes was reasonable.
6. The course plans would then be submitted to the Planning Committee for consideration, with a full picture of the views of the principals and Departmental Boards. The Planning Committee formulated its recommendations to the Technical Institutes Academic Board. In turn, the Academic Board formulated its recommendations to the Committee on Technical Education for approval.
7. The course plans would then be incorporated in the VTC's Programme of Proposed Activities, and were used as the basis for the preparation of the estimates. The resources required for the implementation of the course plans included staffing, accommodation, equipment, stores and materials.

(Vocational Training Council, 1989, pp. 33-34)
Provision of Teaching Staff

The provision of teaching staff for each technical institute was based on the aggregate of daytime teaching loads of individual classes and the norms for class contact periods for various grades of teaching staff. Changes in course plans or course curricula would result in changes in teaching staff in a teaching department. When the curriculum of a course was devised, each subject in the curriculum would be designated either as X-level or Y-level for the purpose of calculating the provision of teaching staff. X-level subjects were taught by graduate staff while Y-level subjects by non-graduate staff (Helmore, 1983; Vocational Training Council, 1989; Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years; Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of the Technical Institutes, Various Years). Thus, the requirement for teaching staff for each class could be worked out in terms of the number of X-level and Y-level teacher periods per week. By adding up these figures for all classes, the total teacher-period requirements for the whole technical institute were determined. On the other hand, the norm teaching loads for the various teaching ranks for the purpose of calculating the teaching staff provision was fixed by the VTC headquarters as follows (Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Periods Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior Lecturer (Deputy Head)</td>
<td>9-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer (Graduate)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer (Non-Graduate)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Lecturer</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Instructor I</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshop Instructor II</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Physical Education Instructor</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education Instructor I</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Education Instructor II</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To facilitate timetabling of classes, some X-level subjects were taught by non-graduate lecturers whereas some Y-level subjects were assigned to graduate staff. However, the administrative guidelines stipulated that such cross-level teaching should not be in excess of 5% (Vocational Training Council, 1989; Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years). There was little way, if any, for a principal to argue with the TIDHQ for staff provision more than the normal requirements. When a principal proposed the staffing request slightly above the normal requirement, it was usually not supported by the TIDHQ (Memos from the Technical Institutes to the TIDHQ, Various Years; Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years). The under-provision of staff would then be made up by the provision of temporary teachers.

**Provision of Temporary Teachers**

Not all teaching posts were filled in time when classes started in September of the academic year. Furthermore, some staff resigned in the middle of the term while others were granted approved leave. These factors resulted in a situation whereby a technical institute required the service of temporary teachers for day classes. Applications to employ temporary teachers regarding the number of man-days, the level of temporary teachers (X- or Y- level), as well as the basis of payments (daily or monthly rate) had to be submitted by the principal to the TIDHQ for approval (Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years; Memos from the Technical Institutes to the TIDHQ, Various Years).

**Accommodation Requirements**

In many cases, building conversions were required for running additional classes or even existing classes. A principal could make a request for alterations, additions and improvements detailing the work to be done and his justifications to the Estates Division via the TIDHQ (Vocational Training Council, 1989; Memos from the Technical Institutes to the TIDHQ, Various Years). If the request was supported by the TIDHQ, the Estates Division would estimate its cost. If it was under $50,000, the approving authority was the Assistant Executive Director (Technical Institutes). For
conversions costing over $50,000, the proposal had to be endorsed by an Alterations, Additions and Improvements Committee chaired by the Executive Director of the VTC. Likewise, requests for maintenance work had to be submitted to the Estates Division. A principal, however, could make arrangements for urgent minor repairs not exceeding $3,000 per job where health or safety was at risk, or where the work could not be undertaken by the maintenance contractor of the VTC, including repair of broken windows and clearance of blocked drains.

**Equipment and Stores Requirements**

A principal could acquire machinery, equipment and furniture for teaching purposes with unit cost not exceeding $50,000. Equipment with unit cost over $20,000 but under $50,000 would need to be supported by the relevant Departmental Boards and the Equipment Vetting Group of the TIDHQ. Equipment with unit cost exceeding $50,000 was termed capital equipment and additionally required approval of the VTC and the government. There were also requirements that books, audio-visual equipment, software and computer equipment should be purchased and authorized centrally (Vocational Training Council, 1989; Memos from the Technical Institutes to the TIDHQ, Various Years; Financial Circulars, Various Years; Computing and Statistics Division Circulars, Various Years). The processes involved could take many months. The rationale for this central function was to control expenditure because bulk buying could be more cost-effective. It also ensured consistency of standards.

With the exception of some centralized controlled votes such as printing and publicity, a principal was authorized to obtain goods and services direct for any single purchase of value not exceeding $5,000, which was termed as minor purchase. However, they were required to adhere to the quotation procedures as stipulated in the Financial Rules of the VTC (Financial Circulars, Various Years). Single purchases exceeding $5,000 could be made only through the Finance and Supplies Division at the VTC headquarters by means of Purchase Service Requisition. In urgent case or other acceptable circumstances, the Executive Director would authorize a principal by means of Direct Purchase Authority to obtain stores or services costing over $5,000 but not exceeding $100,000 direct, with or without tender, in accordance with the Financial Rules. Besides, a principal had no discretion over any requests for machinery,
equipment and furniture for non-teaching purposes. Such requests had to be submitted to the Finance and Supplies Division for approval.

**Preparation of the Estimates**

The budget was based on the approved triennial course plans. Primarily, the zero-based budgeting technique was adopted to produce the technical institute budget, i.e., the estimated requirements should always be supported by detailed justifications as to how the figures were arrived at. The following described the main steps of the budgetary process in a technical institute:

1. Each head of department had to propose to the principal a draft budget for his/her teaching department in accordance with the course plans endorsed by the respective Departmental Boards. On top of the estimates for teaching and instructing staff, heads of department would also present the estimates for repair and maintenance of machinery and equipment, consumable materials, tools, furniture and equipment.

2. The principal, after consulting the various heads of department, arrived at his proposed priorities for the acquisition of furniture and equipment. Then, a draft master budget for the technical institute (Institute Summary) was compiled based on the Departmental Summaries.

3. The principal would then convene an Executive Committee meeting to consider the draft master budget and the proposed institute priority for furniture and equipment.

4. The principal then finalized the draft master budget for submission to the TIDHQ.

5. If the TIDHQ agreed to the budget, it would forward the budget to the VTC's Finance Committee for approval. The budget would then be incorporated in the VTC's Programme of Proposed Activities for submission to the government.

6. When the budget was approved, the principal would be notified of the allocations for each subhead item. He then decided the allocations to each department. In recognition of the dynamic nature of the current operation, some facility of flexible budget management was allowed through virement, which means the transfer of finances from one subhead to another within the budget as
a whole. The principal was allowed to vire funds up to 5% between designated subheads. However, virement of funds had to be supported by the TIDHQ, and approved by the Finance and Supplies Division and/or the Executive Director.

(Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years; Financial Circulars, Various Years)

The current subvention from the government was made up of 12 block grants. There was no virement of funds between the blocks. With the exception of capital projects, block grants were on an annual basis and surplus and underspends were returned to the government at the end of the year. Neither the technical institutes nor the VTC were permitted to transfer any surpluses to development or sinking funds to anticipate future liabilities. Besides, the Finance and Supplies Division had a well-developed financial administrative system. Policies and administrative manuals had been prepared to cover all aspects of the work of the technical institutes. Regular financial reports were produced to enable income and expenditure to be monitored.

Staff Matters

As discussed above (see pp. 90-91), technical institute teaching staff were broadly classified into graduate and non-graduate teaching staff. Besides post-qualification experience requirements, graduate teaching staff should obtain degrees or professional qualifications whereas non-graduate staff should possess a Higher Certificate or a Diploma. The academic qualification and post-qualification experience requirements were prescribed by the Council Administration Division at the VTC headquarters (VTC Appointments Circulars, Various Years). Recruitment was processed by the Council Administration Division, and the selection board was decided by the TIDHQ. Likewise, promotion of staff was processed by the Council Administration Division, and members on the promotion board were recommended by the TIDHQ.

A principal was requested to prepare the proposed leave arrangements for teaching staff of his technical institute in accordance with the Guidelines on Making Leave Arrangement Proposal (VTC Postings Circulars, Various Years; Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years). The proposal was then
submitted to the TIDHQ for approval. The principal could adjust staff leave to suit the operational need of his institute. However, full justifications should be given to facilitate support.

A principal would propose acting appointments for senior staff on approved leave in order to facilitate smooth running of the technical institute. Acting appointments for ranks below heads of department would need to be forwarded to the TIDHQ for approval (Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years). The proposed acting appointments for heads of department or above had to be supported by the TIDHQ for onward submission to the Executive Director for approval.

A principal was given authority to issue only verbal warnings to his staff. Written warning, however, would be issued by the Council Administration Division (VTC Circulars, 1997).

Staff Development

Each Departmental Board would make proposals of overseas training programmes for their teaching staff every year to the VTC Staff Training Committee for consideration. For local training, each technical institute was allocated a training vote of some $30,000 each year under the control of the principal. A principal could approve training courses of unit cost not exceeding $3,000, but he had to submit a report detailing all training courses undertaken by the respective staff to the VTC Staff Training Committee (Memos from the TIDHQ to the Technical Institutes, Various Years; Memos from the Technical Institutes to the TIDHQ, Various Years). For courses of unit cost over $3,000, an application had to be submitted to the TIDHQ for approval.

Miscellaneous Matters

The following findings were also revealed from the documents consulted.

When a technical institute was unable to recruit sufficient number of students into certain courses, the principal had to seek the approval of the TIDHQ to run small-sized classes.

It is usual for external bodies to hire accommodation in a technical institute such as classrooms, conference rooms and gymnasium. The rate of hire was
determined by the VTC, and all requests for the hire of accommodation had to be forwarded to the TIDHQ for approval.

When a principal wanted to expel students for whatever reasons during the academic year, he had to submit his recommendations to the Executive Director for approval.

A principal was authorized to accept donations from outside organizations up to $50,000. Donations in excess of $50,000 needed to be approved by the headquarters.

The limitation of responsibility of members of the technical institutes was reinforced by the arrangements within the VTC for administrative and secretarial support. It was provided, at a distance, from the VTC headquarters. Staff in the technical institutes had to refer minor decisions to junior staff at the VTC headquarters over whom they had no line management control.

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF DECENTRALIZATION

The government appointed a consultant Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited in March 1996 to conduct a strategic and organizational review of the VTC. One of the recommendations is the need to devolve authority and responsibility from the central level to the operational units. The recommendation was adopted by the VTC, and was formally promulgated in mid-1997 (VTC Strategic Plan: 1997-2001, 1997). It is now in the process of being implemented.

Terminology

As discussed in Chapter 2 (see pp. 19-20), efforts to increase the autonomy in schools have differed in scope and nomenclature in different countries. The terms devolution, delegation and decentralization were used interchangeably by the VTC, but devolution was the most commonly used one (Proposed VTC Vision, Mission, Goals and Strategies, 1997; Resource Review on HQ Administration Units, 1998). No definition for devolution was formally given. Whether its emphasis was on school autonomy, participatory decision-making, or decentralized resource allocation was not spelled out. However, some of the following elements were implied:
1. Certain decision-making power and responsibility were decentralized to the technical institutes;

2. The management domains over which decentralized power could be exercised included resources of finance and staff;

3. There were regulations controlling what the technical institutes had discretion over and how they were held to account for their decisions and actions.

**Objectives for Devolution**

The VTC senior management developed a document entitled ‘Proposed VTC Vision, Mission, Goals and Strategies’ in November 1997 for staff consultation. One of the main goals was to manage all human, financial and physical resources effectively and efficiently. Some of the proposed strategies to achieve the goal were stated as follows:

To devolve to the operating units greater authority and responsibility on administrative and financial matters subject to adequate control measures, and to conduct regular audit and resources reviews of operating units. (Proposed VTC Vision, Mission, Goals and Strategies, 1997, p. 7)

The framework for a devolved structure in the technical institutes attempted to achieve the following objectives (Resource Review on HQ Administration Units, 1998):

1. Efficiency and cost-effectiveness of the technical institutes is enhanced through improved communication, access to information and shorter work flow.

2. Quality of decisions is improved through greater participation of the technical institutes in decision-making process.

3. Technical institutes’ competencies are enhanced in monitoring performance against the planning parameters and their responsiveness to market demands.

4. A coherent and integrated organization is maintained through the implementation of the centralized planning and control system at the headquarters.
The framework aimed to allow the constituent institutions to operate under a coherent structure with a great degree of autonomy and participation in decision-making.

**Framework for a Devolved Structure**

The VTC intended to introduce a holistic approach to change, aiming to produce a coherent and flat structure, which would be transparent yet provide a sufficient degree of accountability. Such an approach was elaborated as follows:

A flat structure will be introduced by devolving, wherever possible, the authority of making decisions to the operating units, who are responsible for their implementation. To enable the flat structure of devolved authority, responsibility and accountability to be implemented, new roles and responsibilities involving both the individual technical institutes and across the technical institutes will need to be developed. Unnecessary procedures which do not support the flat structure and devolved management authority will be removed, and revised procedures which maximize efficiency, cost effectiveness and simplicity will be introduced in their place. The management structure and philosophy of the VTC will be changed greatly to reduce the existing hierarchical decision-making processes to a much flatter structure. (Resource Review on HQ Administration Units, 1998, p. 1)

The report of the Resource Review on HQ Administration Units proposed that a triangular framework for a devolved structure be established. The technical institutes would be at the centre and operate under the board administrative policy guidelines standardized by the headquarters administration units. Local officers/site agent of the respective headquarters administration units would be set up to deliver services and supports to each technical institute and serve as the communication gateway between the headquarters and constituent institutions. The Executive Information System would be an enabler for reshaping the operational processes and improving each technical
institute’s competencies to monitor its performance, and to respond speedily to the fast-changing environment.

**CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The most drastic changes were the transformation of the TIDHQ into the Academic Secretariat, and the introduction of a matrix organizational structure of the technical institutes in place of the existing management structure (Minutes of Meetings of the TIDHQ Management Committee, 1997, 1998). The Academic Secretariat was established on 1 September 1998. It consists of four sections, namely the Academic Affairs Section, Curriculum Development Section, Planning and Development Section, and Resources and Management Information Section. Its functions and staff establishment are greatly reduced. It is down-graded to a service-supporting office, and has no authority of approval (Organization of the Academic Secretariat, 1998). It plays mainly a co-ordinating and facilitating role, with little, if any, monitoring and controlling role.

**Functions to be Devolved**

There was devolution of both administrative responsibilities and financial authorities to the technical institutes. However, it was unlikely that most of the financial authorities proposed to be devolved would be actualized due to government funding arrangements. It was also surprising to note that some very trivial items such as printing of name cards had to be centrally coordinated at the headquarters in the past. The main functions to be devolved were highlighted as follows (Resource Review on HQ Administration Units, 1998, Financial Circulars, 1997; VTC Circulars, 1997, 1998):

1. Increase in the financial limits of existing authorities, together with the authority to set fees and charges where appropriate.
2. One-line budget for operating expenses.
3. One-line budget for staff expenses, subject to the approval of the government.
4. One-line budget for operating recurrent expenditure based on the proposed new funding methodology under a student-based approach, subject to the approval of the government.

5. Autonomy in human resources management in the following aspects:
   (a) Recruitment of academic staff up to the rank of Senior Lectureship.
   (b) Training and development of academic staff.
   (c) Deployment of academic staff.
   (d) Staff appraisal and performance.
   (e) Leave administration.

6. Delegation of authorities in the following aspects:
   (a) Endorsement of standard furniture and equipment items.
   (b) Printing of name cards.
   (c) Telephone installations.
   (d) Hiring out of campus accommodation to outsiders.
   (e) Car running expenses.
   (f) Approval for outside work.
   (g) Issue of visa letters.
   (h) Approval for granting overtime allowance and local subsistence allowance.
   (i) Approval for local training costing not exceeding $5,000.
   (j) Approval for vacation leave.
   (k) Employment of temporary supporting staff.
   (l) Approval for acting appointments.

**Functions not to be Devolved**

The VTC tried to maintain coherence across all technical institutes through the implementation of the centralized planning and control system at the headquarters. With regard to the need for adequate control, the following functions were retained in the headquarters (Resource Review on HQ Administration Units, 1998):

1. Terms and conditions of service.
2. Approval of recruitment board reports for teaching ranks at principal lecturer and above.
3. Offer of appointment in respect of all posts.
4. Post-recruitment audit.
5. Promotion exercises.
7. Staff establishment including salary and career structure reviews.
8. Maintenance of staff appraisal reports, personnel related records and statistics.
9. Deployment of general grade staff.
10. Staff relations matters.

**PROCESS OF DECENTRALIZATION**

According to the report of the consultant Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited (1996), some institutions of the VTC, namely the technical colleges, should be developed as functioning units first, and then become autonomous bodies within the VTC as soon as practicable. A comparable approach should then be developed for the technical institutes. The report recommended

Due partly to history and to their functions the organization of the Technical Institutes and their relationship to the VTC headquarters is very different to that of the Technical Colleges. Establishing the Technical Institutes … on a more autonomous basis would involve more structural changes throughout the VTC. Therefore we believe that a phased pilot approach is appropriate. We envisage that this will involve one Technical Institute initially. In the light of experience other Technical Institutes would develop as more autonomous units. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996, p. 114)

The aim should be to establish each technical institute as a unit operating within the Corporate Plan approved by the VTC. The implementation process suggested by the consultant was as follows:

**Year 1**

1. Prepare detailed delegation plans for the technical colleges.
2. Prepare information technology and management information strategies for the devolved organizations.

Year 2
1. Grant the technical colleges autonomy.
2. Launch pilot programme with one or two technical institutes.

Year 3
1. Review experience of pilot programme.
2. Implement delegation programme to the other technical institutes.

However, the VTC management would like to implement the devolution policy for all its technical institutes concurrently. The policy was promulgated in June 1997. The new management structure of the technical institutes was introduced in the beginning of the 1998 academic year, i.e., September 1998, and would formally be implemented in September 1999. They hoped that by the beginning of the new millennium, all aspects of the restructuring/reengineering would be apparent and fully functional (VTC Strategic Plan: 1997-2001, 1997).

STAFF PERSPECTIVES OF DECENTRALIZATION

It was a practice for the VTC to record only the decisions made in the meetings. Hence, staff perspectives expressed during the meetings were usually not recorded. Some scanty information about staff perspectives of decentralization was, however, available in the documents (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996; Minutes of Meetings of the TIDHQ Management Committee, 1997, 1998; Minutes of Meetings of the Executive Committees of the Technical Institutes, 1997, 1998). They are categorized as follows:

1. Lack of Flexibility and Responsiveness

There had been a lack of responsiveness by the headquarters to issues raised and ideas put forward. (Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of a Technical Institute, 1997)
The failure to devolve responsibility, particularly as the organization has grown far beyond the early days, has made the VTC lack flexibility and responsiveness. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996)

The over-centralization of decision-making and the imposition of systems that are decided to control what people do were not responsive to the changing needs of the economy. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996)

2. **Growing Complexity of the Organization**

   The activities and functions of the VTC are complex and have grown in scale and range in a relatively short time. The management and administrative arrangements have not developed and been adapted at a comparable pace. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996)

   In a large and complex organization, management should devolve day-to-day responsibility down the hierarchy as far as, but not beyond, the safe limits of managerial competence. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996)

3. **Low Staff Morale**

   Many of the VTC staff were demoralized and demotivated because of the lack of opportunity to manage and be responsible for their own part of the organization. They had to refer decisions about the most minor of items to higher authority. This had had a highly negative effect on the very individuals who are some of VTC’s key assets. (Minutes of Meeting of the TIDHQ Management Committee, 1998)

4. **Top-down Communication Channel**

   Much internal communication was one way, from the unit to top management. Highly detailed estimates, position papers and memoranda were prepared to meet regular requests from the headquarters. (Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of a Technical Institute, 1997)
5. **Recommendations on Decentralization**

Current controls on the purchase of books and software should be devolved. (Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of a Technical Institute, 1997)

The technical institutes should assume increasing responsibilities, subject to a sensible but robust system of checks and balances and clear lines of accountability. (Minutes of Meeting of the TIDHQ Management Committee, 1997)

The VTC should be funded on the basis on a single block grant. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996)

Staff in the technical institutes have to refer minor decisions to junior staff at the VTC headquarters over whom they have no line management control. The central control of administrative and clerical staff should be ended. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996)

6. **Recommendation on Staff Development**

Decentralization must be accompanied by adequate staff development so that staff could be prepared for the new roles. (Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee of a Technical Institute, 1998)

7. **Recommendation on Communication Channel**

The keepers of information are in a better position to make decisions. It is therefore not surprising that decision-making has been highly centralized and at the level of top management. Dissemination of information to staff should therefore be a critical issue in the implementation of the devolution programme. (Segal Quence Wicksteed (Asia) Limited, 1996)
CONCLUSION

Though the available evidence from documentary analysis did not adequately represent the range of information required for all the research questions, particularly the experiences and perspectives of the VTC staff on centralization and decentralization, the findings did provide valuable information about the background of this research. The historical distribution of authority and responsibilities between the headquarters and the technical institutes, the background and purpose of decentralization, the implementation process, the structural changes of the technical institutes, as well as some documented staff perspectives of decentralization provided very solid ground for subsequent work of this research. They gave the writer ideas about important questions to pursue through observations and interviewing, and helped refine research questions.
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: OBSERVATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The meetings observed in this study included one executive committee meeting of each technical institute, and three management committee meetings of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters (TIDHQ). The writer was an observer-as-participant in each of the executive committee meetings of the seven technical institutes, while he was a participant-as-observer in the three management committee meetings of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters (see p. 70). The seven executive committee meetings of the technical institutes were observed between May and November 1998, and the three management committee meetings of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters in November 1997, March and July 1998. Each of these 10 meetings lasted for three to four hours.

The Executive Committee of the technical institutes, which normally met once a week, coordinated all activities in a technical institute. It was a forum for the principal to explain policies derived from the VTC headquarters, and to obtain feedback from staff. On the other hand, the Management Committee of the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters met once every two months. It formulated strategies to facilitate efficient and effective management of the technical institutes, and to ensure good coordination among different sections in the TIDHQ in carrying out their work.

Both the process and content issues of the meetings were observed. However, details of the content would not be given here, unless they were different from those found from, or not revealed in, documentary analysis. The findings from observations thus focused on staff concerns and comments. Besides, it was not possible here to give an example of every concern and comment. The selection of responses was indicative, and anonymity was preserved throughout. Code numbers for the members of the TIDHQ (such as TID1 and TID2 standing for the first and second members of the TIDHQ Management Committee respectively), and of the technical institutes (such as
A1 representing the first member of the A Technical Institute and G4 the fourth member of the G Technical Institute) were used to identify the sources of the quotes.

**PROCESS ISSUES**

The relative contributions of individuals and the decision-making process were particularly observed. The processes of the meetings were predicated on the degree of dominance of the chairman. In two of these 10 meetings the chairman was perceived by the writer as domineering and self-righteous. Members were not deeply involved, and they expressed their views rarely, unless asked. In the other eight meetings the writer felt that it had such a liberal ambience that members could express their views openly and freely. Usually the chairmen of these eight meetings spoke half the time, and most members participated actively in the discussion and decision-making process. The study of the process issues proved useful in highlighting the extent to which certain members tended to dominate the meeting, and indicating how decisions were made. It also served as an indication of the relationship between the chairman (the Division Head or the principal) and his staff.

**CONTENT ISSUES**

The ten meetings were mainly concerned with the exchange of information, seeking of opinions and tackling problems. The focus of the content issues observed was as follows:

1. Who spoke on the issue?
2. What information was given?
3. What opinions were given?
4. What did members contribute to the discussion?
5. How acceptable was the policy?
6. How were alternative courses of action, if any, determined?

As discussed above, details of the content would not be given here in order to avoid repetition. Only staff concerns and comments on devolution were reported.
They were considered in terms of the following themes relating directly to the research questions:

1. Background and Purpose of Decentralization
2. Changes in Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities
3. Process of Decentralization
4. Perspectives of the Staff in the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters on Decentralization

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF DECENTRALIZATION

Members in all the meetings observed were, in general, familiar with the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report, its major recommendations and the structural changes in the VTC. They generally welcomed release from the management and control by the TIDHQ, but queried the objectives of devolution, which seemed to place their emphasis on efficiency, cost-effectiveness, responsiveness to market demands, as well as a coherent and integrated organization structure. They asked why the effect on student learning outcomes was not mentioned at all. There was a remarkable degree of concurrence among members in perceiving student learning outcomes as the key to any reforms. The pattern of the responses from staff of the technical institutes attending the respective executive committee meetings is as follows:

'It seems that the focus of the reformation is essentially administrative and not curricular per se.' (B2)

'We welcome the changes, but it seems that the changes are more related to management structure than academic matters.' (C4)

'The current drive of more for less will inevitably result in a lowering of the quality of the education provision, leading to an emphasis on financial efficiency rather than educational outcomes.' (D3)
‘This fundamental upheaval in the history of the VTC has not been perceived by staff and students as having had any effect on the quality of education.’ (E2)

‘Would teachers need to divert much of their energies away from teaching? This is what we don’t want to happen.’ (F9)

‘I doubt who will benefit from these drastic changes. Is there any self-interest or even conspiracy behind the changes? I hope that they will not sacrifice students’ interests to their own ideals.’ (G6)

There was also a great deal of genuine concern about the student learning outcomes and the quality of education from staff of the Technical Institutes Division attending the management committee meetings:

‘I don’t know what the predominant objective for devolution is in the mind of the senior management. I can’t find any objectives related to student learning outcomes from the documents. I believe student learning outcomes are foremost.’ (TID1)

‘Quality of education should be emphasized in place of any other objectives such as efficiency and effectiveness. Will the proposed changes enhance the quality of education?’ (TID8)

In general, devolution and the associated changes were welcomed. But there appeared to be an underlying worry on the part of some members that the changes were introduced for the sake of efficiency rather than enhancing the quality of education. The sentiments about the genuine and foremost objective for devolution caused concern and worry.

**CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Members of the executive committee meetings expressed a variety of concerns and comments relating to aspects of resources and scope of devolution. The overriding
concern was about the increase in workload and coordination. They expected that changes in the distribution of authority between the TIDHQ and the technical institutes would be accompanied by an increase in resources for the technical institutes. Concerns about who would coordinate the work among the technical institutes were also expressed. The following are indicative:

'What additional resources will be provided to the technical institutes when work is devolved from the headquarters?' (A7)

'I am afraid that teachers will be overwhelmed by the much increased administrative work.' (C1)

'As a result of devolution, involvement in administrative work which was previously performed by the TIDHQ will take up an increasing amount of teacher time.' (D5)

'Without the TIDHQ, I really don't know who will be responsible for coordinating the work among the different campuses.' (F4)

'The TIDHQ has been responsible for a lot of coordination and liaison work for the technical institutes. I worry about the lack of coordination and liaison following devolution. A possible result is that no one is willing to initiate the action, resulting in chaotic situations.' (G2)

Consequent to devolution and their diminishing, yet uncertain, future roles and responsibilities, staff of the TIDHQ were more concerned with their deployment and prospects. Some also commented that certain functions which had been devolved to the technical institutes should not be devolved.

'Diminution in the functions of the TIDHQ will certainly imply a cut in our staff establishment. The imminent task is to discuss with us on our deployment.' (TID3)
‘A plan to deploy five professional officers to the various campuses will be worked out for members’ consideration. How to choose these five officers will be determined at a later stage.’ (TID4)

‘What will be our posts, roles and responsibilities when we are deployed to the campuses?’ (TID7)

‘Functions should not be devolved for the sake of devolution. They have to consider what should be devolved, and what shouldn’t. I think some tasks which cut across most of the technical institutes should not be devolved, otherwise the coordination work undertaken by each technical institute will be tremendous, for example, the appointment of external examiners. Now, if a course is offered in all the seven technical institutes, then one external examiner will be appointed. After devolution, it may be difficult to get a compromise as which technical institute is responsible for appointing, and paying honorarium to, the external examiner.’ (TID10)

It seems that staff in the technical institutes are eager to know whether devolution will be accompanied by an increase in resources, as they do not want to be involved in the heavy administrative work following devolution. Staff in the TIDHQ, on the other hand, have entirely different concerns. The great uneasiness about their future roles, responsibilities and deployment is widespread, but is understandable. These show that staff are not well informed of the changes, or details of implementation are not communicated effectively.

**PROCESS OF DECENTRALIZATION**

Following the promulgation of the VTC strategic plan in mid-1997, the devolution policy was immediately implemented. The old structures exist together with the new structures, resulting in confusion and sometimes chaotic situations. Members expressed their concerns in two broad ways. First is the necessity of having a widely consulted and well thought out implementation plan, and second is the importance of the proper pace of change. Even though wide consultation occurs, it is typically the most
senior staff who effectively have the greatest influence on decision-making, and whose opinions will hold sway in the event of disagreement. The extent of internal democratization is at the discretion of the senior management of the VTC, and this is itself a feature of hierarchy. There is an avalanche of policies and implementation plans, with which members were largely not happy. Both the policies and implementation plans are considered by staff as ill-advised. The following comments reflect the underlying source of, and illustrate the extent of, staff dissatisfaction with the implementation plan:

'The Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report recommended that a phased pilot approach to establish the Technical Institutes on a more autonomous basis be more appropriate as more structural changes throughout the VTC are required. I don't think that it is appropriate to introduce changes across all the Technical Institutes concurrently.' (A4)

'The consultant knew the operation of the technical institutes even better than our helmsman of the changes. The consultant is aware that the technical institutes require more time for structural changes.' (B4)

'Although the consultation appears to be open, the central imperatives remain.' (B7)

'In a participatory democracy the general public would be intimately involved in the reform process. But it seems to me that this is not the case for the devolution reform in the VTC.' (D1)

'It seems that we do not have a coherent implementation plan. The current situation is all in a mess!' (D2)

'The new roles and responsibilities are ill-defined. We want clearer direction.' (E7)
Many staff were also dissatisfied with the pace of change. They considered that changes were inevitable, but should not be introduced in such a rush. Some even provided sarcastic remarks. The following selection of members' comments is indicative:

‘Even I, as a Head of Department, cannot keep pace with the changes. How can you expect my staff to be well informed of all these changes?’ (A1)

‘There have been sporadic changes, and there are lots of rumours everyday. We do not know whether or not the rumours are true.’ (C6)

‘Things change so rapidly that we are only certain that it is true up to this moment.’ (E3)

‘Hold it a moment, I am not sure whether this is the final version.’ (E6)

‘Previous decisions are more often than not superseded by new decisions.’ (F7)

‘The direction of change is correct, but the pace is too fast.’ (G9)

The devolution policy is implemented by the technical institutes, and therefore they were more concerned with the implementation plan and the pace of change. The TIDHQ, unlike the technical institutes, was less active in discussing these two aspects. The following comments are indicative:

‘I do not subscribe entirely to the view that we need to implement the devolution policy so drastically.’ (TID6)

‘This is a time of immense change. It is timely to change but its pace should be considered more carefully.’ (TID9)
It seems that staff in both the technical institutes and the TIDHQ are not psychologically prepared for the changes, and that the pace of change is sporadic and unexpected. Staff also prefer a phased approach to a radical change. As a result, many of the members feel frustrated.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE STAFF IN THE TECHNICAL INSTITUTES
DIVISION HEADQUARTERS ON DECENTRALIZATION

This section presents the views of staff in the TIDHQ on decentralization expressed during the management committee meetings. Perspectives of staff in the TIDHQ warrant a section here because many views and comments were expressed about the transformation of the TIDHQ into the Academic Secretariat. Perspectives of staff in the technical institutes have been integrated into the previous three sections. Staff in the TIDHQ commented that prior to formulation of the policy, they were not consulted at all. The transformation of the TIDHQ into the Academic Secretariat, and the downsizing of its establishment were not discussed between the senior management of the VTC and the TIDHQ staff. This has been the root of a lot of dissatisfaction. They felt aggrieved and demoralised. Besides, staff’s perception with the contributions of the TIDHQ illustrated the range of knowledge and experience they had. Their repercussions on the senior management appeared to have been largely negative. The general concerns and comments of staff were articulated at a variety of levels of sophistication. The following selection of responses is indicative and illustrates the range of ideas offered by members:

‘The kingdom of the TIDHQ will be totally destroyed with effect from September 1998.’ (TID1)

‘They have destroyed the TIDHQ without consulting us.’ (TID5)

‘No one has tried to convince us that the reform is necessary.’ (TID7)
‘Why has the TIDHQ until very recently been living in a climate of neglect and denigration?’ (TID8)

‘The TIDHQ has been shorn of all its authority by the senior management of the VTC.’ (TID10)

Members also reminisced about the achievements and contributions of the TIDHQ in the past years. Such contributions were entirely neglected by the senior management who are regarded by staff as having little knowledge of the operation of the technical institutes.

‘The Technical Institutes Division Headquarters (and its predecessor the Technical Education Division Headquarters) has been making significant contributions to the development of technical education during the past 28 years. It is not fair for them, who do not understand the operation of the technical institutes, to disestablish the Division and restructure the technical institutes.’ (TID2)

‘They know very little about the TIDHQ and pay scant regard to our massive achievements over the previous 28 years.’ (TID7)

For staff of the TIDHQ, the last twelve months were very frustrating and difficult as power and influence have drained away from them to the technical institutes. This is so sudden. It is not a long, slow process of evolution, but is simply speeded up by recent events. Staff are also unclear of their new roles and responsibilities in relation to the functions of the TIDHQ. The sentiments about traditional authority, uncertainty of new functions and worry about the future reflect their dissatisfaction and concerns. The widespread concerns of staff also reflect a deep sense of unease and disappointment.

‘The revolution has severely reduced our functions and eliminated our strategic role.’ (TID1)

‘Why is there a downsizing of the TIDHQ?’ (TID2)
‘The education functions of the TIDHQ have been seriously
reduced. I really don’t know whether the new structure in place of
the TIDHQ will be providing educational or executive services.’
(TID3)

‘There were schedules of detailed decisions on all major matters,
with every dollar accounted for and duly authorised. But the new
culture is different.’ (TID5)

‘For us, most of the last twelve months have been rather
demoralising as our wealth of knowledge and experience has been
shrugged off.’ (TID7)

‘The role of the TIDHQ has become so attenuated and unclear that it
is merely a matter of time before it vanishes.’ (TID9)

‘The TIDHQ has now been used as the scapegoats.’ (TID10)

Staff’s unease and frustration in the disestablishment of the TIDHQ is
widespread. The majority of staff thought that it would be desirable to hold a meeting
with the senior management so that they could express their views and wishes to the
senior management. Some of them even had the illusion that the senior management
could be persuaded to change their mind of disestablishing the Division.

‘What can we do to persuade the senior management not to
disestablish the Division?’ (TID1)

‘A thorough review of the work of the TIDHQ should be carried out
before disestablishing it.’ (TID5)

‘We want to have a meeting with the senior management to discuss
the future of the Division.’ (TID9)
‘What strategy should be adopted when meeting the senior management?’ (TID10)

Members also expressed the view that the newly created boards, committees and working parties consumed a lot of time unnecessarily:

‘The first and most apparent disadvantage of devolution is the time it soaked up from the daily schedule. Now we have to attend meetings, many of which are in fact unproductive and unnecessary.’ (TID2)

‘Many committee chairmen are not decisive.’ (TID9)

Some other concerns and comments are also expressed. They are largely concerned with the handover arrangements and the proposed flattened management structure, as follows:

‘Theory and practice are different. I don’t see any change in the corporate ethics, particularly the boastful ideal of flattening out the management structure.’ (TID1)

‘We should propose an action plan for devolving functions to the technical institutes for consideration.’ (TID4)

‘Much improvement can be achieved by better administration, by enhancing teaching skills, and by visionary management. This seems to be easier said than done.’ (TID8)

It seems that staff in the TIDHQ are largely dissatisfied with the implementation and the results of the devolution policy, particularly the transformation of the TIDHQ into the Academic Secretariat.
CONCLUSION

The responses obtained in observations were remarkably enlightening, and were an enormous encouragement to the writer for exploring the perspectives of staff in depth through interviewing. Observations also allowed the writer to check information provided by documentary analysis and the participants in the interviews in a more natural setting, and to discern situations described in documents and interviews. Consequently, the writer was able to detect possible distortions, if any. The findings from observations, together with those from documentary analysis and interviewing, allowed for individual perceptions to be revealed, leading to some tentative conclusions.
CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: INTERVIEWS

INTRODUCTION

Findings from documentary analysis and observations formed a context for the interviews with the participants. Interviews were used as the principal means of gathering information having direct bearing on the objectives of this research. They were particularly valuable compared with documentary analysis and observations because the nature of this qualitative research emphasized the goal of better understanding human behaviour, and the use of participants' perspectives to this end. The writer was able to capture participants' personal perspectives and experiences, and measure their knowledge, information, values, preferences, attitudes and beliefs. At the heart of these interviews was not only an interest in understanding the perspectives and experiences of participants, but also the meaning they made of those perspectives and experiences within the process. The writer adopted the semi-structured interviews, which gave him freedom within the interview situation to explore, probe, and ask questions to elucidate and illuminate points made by the participants. Such empathic interviews were found useful in surfacing intensely personal issues, allowing the narrative accounts to be presented in the participants' own words. Participants' quotes were used as far as possible to enrich and validate the writer's findings.

Three different types of staff perspectives (see pp. 73-76) were gained from the interviews conducted between March and May 1999: the perspectives of the senior management in the technical institutes (represented in the findings as M1 to M7 where M stands for Management), the perspectives of the managed, i.e. the lecturers (represented as L1 to L16 where L stands for Lecturer), and the perspectives of the headquarters staff (represented as H1 to H5 for the four professional officers and an elite where H stands for Headquarters). The stratified purposeful sampling strategy resulted in a good spread of participant characteristics. The writer believes that interviewing a range of individuals with different positions can widen the scope of the study, and elicit different empathic perspectives.
The interviews yielded data, which include much criticism, some quite scathing, of the senior management of the VTC. It is important to emphasise that the data relating to staff's attitudes to the senior management of the VTC emerged incidentally in the course of pursuing the main aim of the research. The study was not intended to focus on such staff's attitudes, and this particular angle was not included in the original research design. Such findings were therefore omitted.

This chapter focuses on the findings of the 28 semi-structured interviews. The selected participants, the majority of whom were in the front line, were interviewed on their views and perceptions. The following classification of the findings generated through the interviews is based on the research questions set out in Chapter 1:

1. Historical Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities
2. Reasons Prompting the VTC to Adopt the Decentralization Policy
3. Purpose of Decentralization
4. Staff Say over the Changes
5. Changes in Distribution of Authority and Responsibilities
6. Perspectives of the Staff in the Technical Institutes on Decentralization
7. Perspectives of the Staff in the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters on Decentralization
8. Process of Decentralization
9. New Role of the Principal and Staff in the Technical Institutes
10. Role of the Academic Secretariat (the former Technical Institutes Division Headquarters)

HISTORICAL DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The TIDHQ performed four major roles: monitoring, controlling, co-ordinating and facilitating. Many of the staff in the TIDHQ were transferred or seconded to the VTC from the Education Department, from whom most practices and procedures were inherited. The majority of these officers have hung onto the old values and ways of doing things. The TIDHQ thus exhibited a strong controlling tendency. All participants were familiar with the historical distribution of authority and responsibilities between the technical institutes and the TIDHQ; and the excessive controls imposed by the TIDHQ, who acted largely as educational controller.
Interestingly, there was not a remarkable degree of concurrence in relation to the functions of the TIDHQ among the participants. On the one hand, the TIDHQ’s efforts in managing the technical institutes were considered less effective than they might be as a result of an emphasis on detailed controls. All funds were centrally controlled by the TIDHQ, and the technical institutes were funded, staffed and equipped according to standard patterns and procedures. Hence, the resources given to them were not linked in any way to their effective management. Besides, some 85% of the recurrent budget for each technical institute was consumed by staff salaries. Effective management cannot be encouraged when the technical institutes are not responsible for, and have no discretion over the use of, the majority of their resources. The following comments are illustrative:

‘The TIDHQ has a prominent image in its monitoring and controlling roles and a low profile in co-ordinating and facilitating roles. The words "for TIDHQ approval" were frequently used even when technical institutes requested the TIDHQ to perform some facilitating or co-ordinating roles. They carried a connotation of a top-down relationship just like that carried by the monitoring and controlling roles. In this regard, even if the TIDHQ facilitated technical institutes to obtain what they asked for, the situation was "Your request has been checked, found to be in order and is now approved". The monitoring and controlling roles still exist alongside the co-ordinating and facilitating roles.’ (H2)

‘Excessive controls of the TIDHQ were pursued without considering the real needs of the technical institutes.’ (M1)

‘The technical institutes were constrained by the financial and administrative rules formulated by the VTC headquarters. For example, each type of expenditure has a tightly defined subhead. Virement of funds is usually not allowed, and any amounts underspent are clawed back.’ (M4)
‘The technical institutes have little role in financial management. About 85% of the recurrent budget for a technical institute is budgeted for by the headquarters.’ (M7)

‘The TIDHQ was in full control of the operations of the technical institutes. It didn’t encourage a climate of effective management in the technical institutes, who had to seek approvals from the TIDHQ nearly in all respects, such as staffing and estimates.’ (L9)

On the other hand, some participants pointed out that, in view of the accountability of the VTC to the public and the number of the technical institutes, a centralized body was needed. The TIDHQ was set up to control both resources and academic matters of the technical institutes. It exercised proper scrutiny and control over the use of public funds, and ensured equity among the seven technical institutes.

‘There is a major concern to act with probity, and to exercise an appropriate control over publicly funded resources.’ (H4)

‘The centralized function of the TIDHQ tried to ensure uniformity and equity among the seven technical institutes. We need to be fair to all staff and students.’ (L1)

Some of the participants also pointed out that the TIDHQ merely carried out the decisions of the boards and committees responsible for the operation of the technical institutes. Such boards and committees were well-represented by different levels of staff.

‘There was a well-established committee structure whereby collective decisions were made. The TIDHQ then took all the necessary follow-up action arising from decisions of these boards and committees.’ (H1)
The TIDHQ was a central coordination body. Many major decisions were collectively made by committees and boards, not by the TIDHQ.’ (M1)

The system under the TIDHQ was well established. It encouraged participative decision-making by including different levels of staff on various committees and boards.’ (L11)

Some staff expressed their dissatisfaction with the devolved system, which has resulted in chaos. They commented that the system under the TIDHQ was well established compared with the current one, and made the following negative comments about the devolution policy being implemented:

'It was a stable, established state under the TIDHQ. Decentralization in the VTC involves a complete overhaul of the old system and creates chaos. Decentralization based on the old system will be much smoother than it is now.’ (H1)

'The current changes result in chaotic situations. We really reminisce about the good old days when all things were sorted out for us by the TIDHQ.’ (L5)

REASONS PROMPTING THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING COUNCIL TO ADOPT THE DECENTRALIZATION POLICY

The VTC, a public-funded body, has been operating for more than 15 years. Participants considered it timely for the consultant to undertake a review of the VTC. All the participants were familiar with the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report, and its major recommendations. The majority of the participants understood that the VTC has adopted the devolution policy as a result of the recommendation of the Report. Some of them were aware that it was the initiative of the government to review the operation of the VTC, and that the Report acted as a catalyst for change. Some also pointed out that devolution has been practised elsewhere throughout the world, and that change is inevitable. The following comments are illustrative:
‘It is the intention of the government to review the VTC to enable the VTC to keep in pace with the developments in the public sector in Hong Kong.’ (H2)

‘Devolution is a worldwide trend and is an inevitable development.’ (H3)

‘The Consultant Report acts as a catalyst to set off the change. It is influential in shaping the future of the VTC.’ (M1)

‘The VTC headquarters advocated centralization. They could not see such a need for change. Without the initiation of the government, I am sure the VTC will remain the status quo.’ (L12)

Some of the participants put forward comments, which, even though unsubstantiated, are worthy of attention because such comments imply that they are dissatisfied with the devolution policy being implemented by the senior management of the VTC. These comments are concerned with a change in the senior management.

‘Coincidentally, a new Executive Director was appointed following the release of the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report. That is why structural changes are introduced.’ (M6)

‘Reforms are introduced because the new senior management are eager to demonstrate their contributions and leadership qualities.’ (L16)

PURPOSE OF DECENTRALIZATION

There are a number of reforms being carried out at the same time in the VTC. Devolution is only one of them. The objectives of devolution are not made explicit to staff, but it seems that the most important ones are efficiency and effectiveness. They were particularly concerned with the genuine objectives of initiating the devolution
policy. The majority of them commented that it is efficiency and effectiveness that are stressed by the senior management of the VTC, while others queried whether the change can achieve such objectives. Some also spoke candidly that they did not know why there is an urgent need to implement the devolution policy as the prevailing system has served the students and the economy well. The following comments are illustrative:

‘The main thrust of the devolution initiative is to achieve effectiveness and efficiency.’ (H4)

‘Devolution means rationalization and delayering.’ (L4)

‘Whether the change can result in effectiveness and efficiency is questionable.’ (H3)

‘The change may enable the VTC to achieve efficiency through rationalization, but there is much doubt about achieving effectiveness.’ (M2)

‘Decentralization may not be a change for the better. It is simply power struggles among the principals and the senior management of the VTC.’ (L3)

‘Most of us do not know the importance and imminence of devolution.’ (L13)

Nevertheless, participants were largely concerned with the objective of bringing benefits to the students, arguing that educational reforms must be linked to teaching and learning effectiveness. They considered making a difference in students' performance and lives as their primary objective of entering the profession. They have therefore not much bothered with the other objectives which they considered only secondary to the main objectives of teaching, and pointed out that they would support changes that are directly related to teaching and learning. It was, however, argued that the senior management have not paid much attention to issues of curriculum and pedagogical
issues, and student concerns are low on the list; instead, there is too much emphasis on structures rather than educational outcomes.

‘Changes must bring real benefits to students and industry.’ (H2)

‘Educational standards, not structures, should be our major focus.’ (M6)

‘The senior management are not focusing on the right things – the core of curriculum, instruction and improved student performance.’ (L6)

‘For teachers and schools to be effective, we must create the working conditions that will be most effective in helping all students learn.’ (L9)

‘The students and their needs come first; others should be secondary.’ (L16)

**STAFF SAY OVER THE CHANGES**

Staff were very active in discussing this issue, and were highly critical of what they identified as the low level of staff participation in such a traumatic organizational change during the adoption, initiation and implementation stages. Since the release of the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report, they have not been consulted about the devolution policy, which is largely determined by the senior management of the VTC. The senior management did organize some forums, but such forums were organized only after they had formulated their plan. They were not receptive to staff’s views, nor did they allow any dissenting views. There is thus not only a lack of staff consultation, but also a neglect of staff’s views about this far-reaching change by the senior management. Staff pointed out that top-down reform strategies have very little chance of gaining support and rapport from them due to a lack of ownership. The predominant, critical view of the majority of staff is illustrated by the following comments:
‘There is little discussion about the appropriate distribution of power between the centre and the localities.’ (H2)

‘Decentralization should be a strategic move. Task teams involving all levels of stakeholders should be set up. But in the VTC, only the senior management are involved.’ (M2)

‘The forums organized in the technical institutes were just for the senior management to sell their plan. Whether you buy it or not doesn’t matter. They toured the technical institutes just to make a gesture.’ (M5)

‘Changes should be fully understood and have the support of all staff. Otherwise, it has little chance of success.’ (L5)

‘Many things are still top-down, and imposed by the senior management.’ (L10)

‘Pseudo-consultation only! No one can affect the strategic plan formulated by the senior management, and you must act in accordance with the strategic plan. The plans are immutable.’ (L16)

Some specific examples, particularly issues relating to introduction of new courses, design of curricula and delivery of a curriculum, were quoted to demonstrate that staff have little say over important issues directly affecting their work, which are imposed by the senior management. Staff were dissatisfied that their academic and professional liberty is being restricted.

‘The senior management have decided to introduce a new course. They decide the curriculum, and impose on us. The imposed curriculum is not accepted by us, but we were told that it cannot be changed.’ (M2)
'The curricula of some new courses are centrally decided by the senior management themselves, and their decision is mandatory. We cannot propose any changes; we are just instructed to prepare the syllabuses. Our academic freedom and professionalism is really at stake.' (L2)

'Many curriculum matters are centrally designed. For example, common year-one curriculum for similar courses is introduced without input from teaching staff who are going to deliver it.' (L7)

**CHANGES IN DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The handover arrangements were considered by staff as smooth and harmonious, and they appeared not to be accompanied by a worsening of relationships between the TIDHQ and technical institutes. Staff of the TIDHQ were helpful in handing over work to the technical institutes.

'The TIDHQ did not impede progress towards devolution. Rather, they were very helpful in handing over authority and responsibilities to the technical institutes.' (M1)

'Staff of the TIDHQ were easily accessible. They were very helpful in sorting out problems with us during the handover arrangements.' (M4)

In relation to the new power structure, different types of staff have rather different views. Staff in the TIDHQ pointed out that the devolution initiative has not been implemented systematically. They argued that some work which has been devolved should not be devolved, and that there is still a lot of remaining work needed to be performed by the TIDHQ.

'Some areas of work should not be devolved to the technical institutes. The senior management of the VTC should at the very beginning consider what to be devolved and what not to be
devolved. The centre and the technical institutes need each other. What is required is a different two-way relationship of support and negotiation.’ (H1)

‘In the period after devolution there is a variety of residual relationships between the TIDHQ and the technical institutes. Such residual relationships will continue for two to three years.’ (H4)

On the other hand, the senior management of the technical institutes welcome the change due to an increase in authority and greater freedom, and regard it as a liberating experience in comparison with their past relationships with the TIDHQ.

‘It seems that severance from the TIDHQ has provided the technical institutes with greater freedom of authority and responsibility.’ (M2)

‘It has been a liberating experience. We are no longer required to seek approval from the TIDHQ.’ (M5)

Teaching staff, however, do not feel that there is any impact on them as authority is devolved to the level of the principals only. It is at the discretion of the individual principals to decide whether authority will be devolved to the staff level.

‘It is devolution to the level of the principals only, not to staff in general. Principals are now building their own empire.’ (L3)

‘It is only a scramble for power among the principals. It is nothing to do with us.’ (L12)

The initial reaction of most staff to having been cut free from the often stifling culture of the TIDHQ was usually one of relief. Nevertheless, this soon turned to a feeling of concern when it becomes apparent that the senior management of the VTC take control of all major issues affecting the operation of the technical institutes, and that decisions and authorities devolved are largely minor administrative matters. For
example, whether the technical institutes should conduct an open day annually or biannually, and a proposal to change the name of a teaching department, has to be decided by the VTC senior management. They are also developing systems for monitoring and control which are tighter than those practised by the TIDHQ. The following comments are illustrative:

'Many major decisions are reverted to, or held back, by the VTC senior management.' (H1)

'It seems funny that even a change of names of teaching departments proposed by the campuses, which is a very trivial matter, has to be referred to the senior management for approval. The matter has dragged on for nearly half a year, but it has not yet been approved. I doubt whether this contravenes the devolution policy.' (H2)

'The interference with the technical institutes by the senior management of the VTC far exceeds anything we experienced under the TIDHQ.' (M7)

'The senior management decided that teaching notes and all forms of assessment need to be standardized. Does this really mean devolution?' (L4)

'Now very minor issues such as academic terms and key dates for the campuses have to be submitted to the senior management for approval. Do they implement a centralization or decentralization policy?' (L11)

Accordingly, some staff reminisced about the contributions of the TIDHQ. Some even argued that they would like to work under the TIDHQ where the procedures were much more organised and systematic, and the policies more equitable. Staff were also concerned about the loss of the TIDHQ's support role. They pointed out that the amount of work that has been generated for the technical institutes is astonishing as a
result of devolution from the TIDHQ. Besides, the disadvantage of moving from the TIDHQ was less clarity about purpose and work. There was an expressed wish to return to the previous system.

‘There are much more complaints about unfairness and discrepancies among different campuses than the past. This is the result of devolution because principals can now make their own decisions.’ (H1)

‘We can ask the TIDHQ for advice in the past, but now we don’t know who to ask.’ (M3)

‘The cost-effectiveness of devolution proposals is questioned. There are many examples showing that as a result of devolution cost increases and effectiveness is reduced compared with that under the TIDHQ.’ (L4)

‘Following devolution it is difficult for staff to appeal against measures they are not comfortable with. Different principals may adopt different approaches in handling matters. Staff are bound to make comparisons among campuses. In the past, the TIDHQ was able to achieve consistency and equity.’ (L11)

PERSPECTIVES OF THE STAFF IN THE TECHNICAL INSTITUTES ON DECENTRALIZATION

The majority of staff argued that the devolution initiative is a major cultural change in the VTC, but it seems that the senior management of the VTC have paid little attention to the organizational culture of the VTC and its technical institutes. Staff admitted that the technical institutes have been in a steady state for a long time such that they have tended to rest on their laurels and are unwilling to make changes under the existing culture. Since they have not been consulted, most of them are indifferent to, and have no ownership of, this far-reaching change. Worse still, staff are not regarded
by the senior management as an important asset of the organization. The predominant views of the majority of staff are illustrated by the following comments:

‘It is a radical structural change. Such a change should involve a change in organizational culture first.’ (H4)

‘The contents of the changes are largely modelled on those of the Hong Kong Polytechnics in the 1970s, which may not be equally applicable to the technical institutes. They need to consider and understand the different organizational cultures.’ (M5)

‘Staff have a feeling of inertia and resistance. We are complacent about the current situation, and can’t be bothered to make changes.’ (L7)

‘Staff loyalty and staff as an asset to the organization are largely neglected.’ (L10)

Many adverse comments on the part of the senior management of the VTC in regard to the implementation of the devolution initiative were voiced. The recommendations of the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report with respect to a phased approach of decentralization to the technical institutes were not taken by the VTC. Instead, the senior management have tried to destroy all existing practices of the technical institutes. During research interviews, staff were in most cases highly critical of the senior management. The fundamental source of dissatisfaction with the senior management was their management style and the general lack of professional respect for their staff. They were perceived as practising managerial autocracy. Although changes are semi-unpredictable and volatile in nature, the senior management are not open and self-conscious about the nature of change and the change process. There is a strong sense of balkanization exhibited by the senior management of the VTC. According to Fullan (1993, p. 83), balkanization occurs ‘when strong loyalties form within a group with a resultant indifference or even hostility to other group’, which may limit access to, and due consideration of, other ideas in the environment. The senior management of the VTC have been accused of practising balkanization in that only those practices adopted
in their former employment are used, with their hostility to the practices used in the technical institutes. The source of dissatisfaction seems to be that decisions and policy were interpreted as having little evidently rational basis, but as reflecting the wishes of the senior management. It was suggested by some participants that the main underlying consideration was not how the technical institutes and students might benefit, but that dominant members of the senior management of the VTC be upset as little as possible. As a result, staff have tended not to be proactive. Real and deep concern was also expressed at the increasing bureaucratisation of the system. Comments concerning lack of leadership were prevalent.

'I am much less proactive now. I work according to my duty list. Other than that, I won't bother.' (H1)

'The senior management do not have an overall plan at all. Many things are done on an ad hoc basis. Sometimes, they want to centralize, and sometimes they want to decentralize.' (M2)

'There is no overall planning at all. The senior management first destroy the TIDHQ, then fix and patch whatever problems arise. They ignore entirely the change process, and have behaved recklessly.' (M3)

'The control in the past was simply efficiency and equity – whereas under the new system it seems to be political.' (M5)

'Proactivity will be condemned. This is why I am very pro-passive now.' (M7)

'We are now serving a more complex bureaucracy, and the instructions given by the senior management are vague.' (L7)

'The implementation just alters the power structure within the headquarters. It results in the senior management getting hold of most of the authority.' (L12)
Staff were concerned with the risks involved in implementing the devolution initiative. The reforms create traumatic experiences for them. There is not only anxiety and uncertainty, but also resistance among staff. Anxieties and resistance are widespread among staff as they do not know what will happen next. Besides, the implementation imposes considerable administrative demands on them. There are apprehensions among staff about an increase in workload as a result of devolution. They regularly complain of increasingly being asked to attend unnecessary meetings, and undertake paperwork related to administration whilst not having time to deliver quality. As a result, they found it difficult to make great contributions in the meetings and deliver quality teaching at the same time.

'There is resistance from a lot of staff, but they have to be submissive in view of the current economic downturn and high unemployment rate of over 6.0% in Hong Kong. They have to follow the changes, and to accept and adapt to the changes. The senior management don't bother about high staff turnover rate.' (H1)

'Anxiety about devolution is on an increase because of the lack of clarity and the risks involved. Up to now, we still don't know what will go ahead.' (M2)

'There are so many meetings now. Last week, I had to attend seven meetings, some of which were really unnecessary and unproductive. Then I had to rush back to my office to do my routine work after the meetings. This week I have to attend five meetings. Now I really can't find time to clear the large backlog of work during office hours.' (M5)

'The reform may languish as staff resistance is prevalent.' (L4)

'So far we haven't seen or envisaged any benefits to our students and us. The only immediate result is an increase in our workload, and it seems that it is never-ending.' (L7)
'The macro changes in the organization have affected our own micro world. We are afraid that the senior management are only concerned with the result of the macro world, but not that of the micro world.' (L15)

Devolution is not effective if there is only devolution of authority but not resources. The flexibility to apply resources should be in accordance with the particular needs of each technical institute. Although all institutes perform a broadly similar task, the circumstances of each individual institute are so different that the principal can apply the resources more effectively. But the problem is that the technical institutes can do very little in the area of financial management. Funds are still allocated to them by the headquarters. During the interviews, participants were much concerned with the scope of decentralization, particularly the inflexibility of the funding arrangements and limitations in using the resources. Some also argued that the current devolution initiative is not school-based management, as they do not really have great discretion and control over resources. Terms such as devolution in disguise and quasi-decentralization were used to describe the devolution initiative being implemented. The following comments are illustrative:

'Devolution is not implemented in its complete sense. There are major changes in the authority and functions of the TIDHQ only.' (H3)

'All that is delivered is administrative devolution, rather than a real transfer of power to make policy decisions.' (M1)

'We are willing to undertake greater responsibility in cost control and budgeting, but the VTC is not in a position to adopt the system of a one-line budget.' (M5)

'Devolution in the VTC is not actual decentralization in the sense of school-based management. It is not a real and complete exercise. It is quasi-decentralization at best.' (L10)
‘It is not a comprehensive move. There are no major changes in personnel and finance autonomy.’ (L13)

‘VTC’s decentralization is not really school-based management. It is devolution in disguise.’ (L14)

Decentralization must be within a framework that allows for people to be trained and prepared for new roles. Staff development is essential for staff to contribute to, and cope with, change. It must, however, be put into a meaningful resource context. The budget for staff development should be adequate to allow most, if not all, staff to put their energy or time into the process. In the participants’ view, there is a need to undertake certain staff development programmes to cope with change. They opined that the staff development programme, which is inadequate and ineffective at present, had to be enhanced. The lack of funding for staff development and the complicated procedures for application are common complaints.

‘Devolution is welcomed but only when the operating units have developed the necessary skills to manage new tasks.’ (H5)

‘Indoctrination of both management and staff is essential for change.’ (M4)

‘Change will require staff development and this is a key factor if implementation is to be successful.’ (M7)

‘Adequate levels of staff development time and funding, especially in the early stages, must be provided before we can contribute to the change.’ (L11)

‘The importance, responsibility and best approach for effective staff development need to be explored.’ (L12)

From the participants’ perspectives there are two crucial aspects to devolution: responsibility and accountability. Staff commented that they are given responsibilities
without any associated authority, and that they are not clear about accountability. No
guidelines, particularly those in relation to accountability, have been given by the
senior management. The following comments are illustrative:

‘The extent the technical institutes are accountable for undertaking
their responsibilities is not spelled out.’ (H2)

‘The majority of staff are not aware of the associated responsibilities
and accountability. Staff are not clear about accountability and to
whom they should be accountable.’ (M3)

‘There is only devolution of responsibility, but not authority.’ (M7)

‘Effective accountability requires clarity.’ (L2)

PERSPECTIVES OF THE STAFF IN THE TECHNICAL INSTITUTES
DIVISION HEADQUARTERS ON DECENTRALIZATION

Staff of the TIDHQ have been demoralised and frustrated since the release of
the consultant's report. They were inundated with frustration and disappointment with
the lack of consultation and discussion with the senior management during the process
of restructuring the TIDHQ. They were deeply affronted by the abrupt decision of the
senior management to disestablish their Division, and considered the disestablishment
as a devilish action since the objectives for disestablishing the TIDHQ have not been
explained by the senior management. They also demonstrated that the senior
management have only a smattering of knowledge of the work of the TIDHQ. There is
thus a smouldering resentment against the senior management among staff.

‘The reform has destroyed the TIDHQ, and its educational functions
have been seriously reduced. … The senior management pay no
regard to our achievements.’ (H1)

‘The essential need for checks and balances performed by the
TIDHQ seems to have been totally neglected and forgotten. … The
TIDHQ has been distrusted since the appointment of the senior management.’ (H2)

‘Our professional officers have been replaced by executive officers as a result of devolution. We really do not know whether the senior management want us to provide educational services or general administrative services.’ (H3)

‘We don’t understand why the senior management want to ostracize and get rid of the TIDHQ, and why the TIDHQ bears the brunt? … The role and prestige of the TIDHQ has diminished, and the process of diminution has been a sporadic one.’ (H4)

**PROCESS OF DECENTRALIZATION**

Staff in the VTC have been complacent about the current situation for a long time. In the participants’ view, the change is too radical and hasty. They are not only unprepared for the change, but also find it difficult to adapt to the sporadic and drastic change being implemented. Some of them commented that the change has no direction and that policies change very frequently and unexpectedly. A participant, who is familiar with process re-engineering, criticised that throughout the initiation and implementation stages no process re-engineering has been undertaken, and argued that the devolution initiative is introduced in an intuitive way.

‘Staff have depended very much on the TIDHQ for a long time. They are not prepared for such radical changes.’ (H3)

‘It is surprising to learn that this big exercise has been undertaken without conducting any process re-engineering, which is a practice for all tertiary educational institutions in Hong Kong. If processes are not identified and analysed, how do the senior management decide what ought to be devolved, and what ought not to be devolved?’ (M3)
'Things change overnight. Nothing can be expected.' (M7)

'The rate of changes is incredibly fast. Changes require sufficient time for implementation and for changing the organizational culture.' (L13)

'Things are happening too fast. It is extremely difficult for us to keep pace with the change.' (L16)

**NEW ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL AND STAFF IN THE TECHNICAL INSTITUTES**

In general, devolution is welcomed by the senior management of the technical institutes as a result of an increase in authority, notwithstanding their unpreparedness for such a change in their roles. Principals are given more delegated authority following decentralization. They need not seek approval from the Academic Secretariat (i.e. the former TIDHQ) any more. Their opinions on the increase in responsibility and accountability in the technical institutes are, however, by no means uniform. Some welcome the increase in authority while others query the actual change in authority. As authority is devolved to the level of the principals and, at best, their heads of department, most participants argued that there are changes in the roles of the senior management of the technical institutes only. Hence, staff do not envisage any major change in their roles.

'The authority of the principals in administration/housekeeping has increased, but their authority in academic matters has been reduced.' (H2)

'We can manage the technical institute more effectively and efficiently now. For example, we can have much greater discretion over the use of staffing resources from September 1999 onwards as a result of the adoption of the students-teacher ratio (STR) in place of the X-level and Y-level system.' (M1)
'With more authority and discretion over the use of staffing and financial resources, we have a growing awareness of the true dimensions of the operation of the technical institutes. Thus, we need more background support and knowledge to manage our technical institute. You know, in the past all specialised services and support were provided by the TIDHQ. Now, we have to learn them ourselves.' (M3)

'The role of the principals has changed only modestly. They have some discretion over the use of resources now. Nevertheless, the scope of planning the work of the individual technical institutes is still rather limited and constrained. We are constrained by the government’s funding arrangements and the directives from the senior management of the VTC.' (M4)

'Only a minority of people, i.e. principals, have experienced the benefits of devolution. They have more authority than before in the management of the technical institutes.' (L3)

'There is little change in the role of the principals and staff, particularly the latter. I will, as before, focus my work on teaching and learning.' (L6)

**ROLE OF THE ACADEMIC SECRETARIAT**

The TIDHQ was transformed into the Academic Secretariat with effect from 1 September 1998. The functions and roles of the Academic Secretariat are drastically different from those of the TIDHQ. Many aspects of the TIDHQ's role have disappeared. The devolution policy makes provision for the technical institutes to be removed from the control of the TIDHQ. This change has resulted in the former system of the TIDHQ as educational controller being replaced by a system in which the management of the institutes is vested in the senior management of the technical institute. The role of the Academic Secretariat is largely coordination in nature. It
provides campuses with all necessary services such as preparation of the graduation ceremony and prospectuses. It does not perform any controlling role now.

‘The Academic Secretariat acts as an enabler and monitor rather than as an educational controller.’ (H2)

‘The TIDHQ has been deprived of all its traditional authority. It becomes a Secretariat without any vested authority. It coordinates work among different campuses, and provides all necessary services.’ (H3)

‘The TIDHQ’s role as a controller and guardian of standards is taken over by the individual technical institutes.’ (M4)

‘The new Academic Secretariat has been stripped of many of TIDHQ’s powers and responsibilities.’ (L16)

Nevertheless, the functions and chances of survival of the new Academic Secretariat are dubious. Some participants candidly pointed out that the establishment of the Academic Secretariat is a temporary measure because the senior management do not know how to deploy the staff working in the TIDHQ. Others also reflected its uncertain future and latent problems.

‘The Academic Secretariat will reach its centenary sooner or later.’ (H5)

‘Despite the erosion of power and resources, the Academic Secretariat has continued its uncertain existence.’ (M1)

‘The role of the Academic Secretariat has become unclear and redundant.’ (M3)

‘The Academic Secretariat is regarded by the senior management as a temporary resettlement area.’ (L4)
CONCLUSION

The intention of this chapter is to allow for individual perspectives to be revealed. The research design focused largely on the views and perceptions of a range of participants from both the technical institutes and the headquarters. The interviews provided participants with excellent opportunities to reflect on and discuss their experiences and ideas from their own perspectives, having the writer use probing questions, where appropriate, to help elucidate and clarify their ideas. The evidence gained from the 28 interviews was illuminating.

Prior to the implementation of the devolution initiative in the VTC, the TIDHQ was the supervisor of the technical institutes. It exhibited a prominent image in its monitoring and controlling roles but kept a low profile in coordinating and facilitating roles. Excessive controls of the TIDHQ were pursued without considering the real needs of each technical institute. The Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report acted as a catalyst to set off the change, and is influential in prompting the future direction of the VTC. It appears that the main thrust of the devolution initiative is to achieve effectiveness and efficiency. The findings suggest that there is a disjuncture between the responses of senior management on the one hand, and teachers on the other. Whereas senior management welcome the increase in authority and the apparent greater freedom of action as a result of devolution, most staff are quite indifferent or resistant to change due to a lack of staff consultation and empowerment. There are positive views that most participants recognize the inevitability of implementing the devolution initiative. There are less positive views about the way this is being undertaken, and there is widespread concern regarding staff resistance to change, the scope of devolution, the rate of change and the problem of equity.

The implementation of the policy has been accompanied by a lot of problems. There is a neglect of the organizational culture of the technical institutes and the TIDHQ by the senior management, a lack of effective staff consultation and empowerment, a lack of clarity of its objectives, as well as an increase in administrative complexity within a policy environment perceived to be ill-thought out and unclear in its effect on the quality of education. Many major decisions are also held back by the senior management who are considered by staff as ineffective change agents lacking skills to manage change. The majority of staff, who are directly
affected by the change, are not provided with training and development to cope with the change. It also appears that for students and teachers, who are most directly affected by the work, devolution seems at present to have made no impact. A change in the organizational culture, provision of adequate and effective staff development, and focus on quality education will, with good management, teacher empowerment and adequate autonomous funding, be crucial to the success of the change.
CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Bringing together the different strands of evidence from documents, observations and interviews presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 respectively has enabled the writer to gain a detailed and comprehensive picture of the background and staff perspectives of devolution. The analysis of these findings comprises the following principal elements:

1. Classification: The data are aggregated and presented as an entity.
2. Comparison and Interpretation: The findings are compared among different sources of data obtained from documents, observations and interviews; with the research findings reported in the literature; and with the main concepts derived from the literature.

The findings of this research have been classified and presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. This chapter therefore focuses on comparison and interpretation of the findings. It compares and analyses the findings with reference to the research questions presented in Chapter 1, and the review of the literature in Chapter 2 using the thematic approach. The emphasis of the research was on description rather than conceptualisation. Description uses themes where data are analysed, and research results are summaries which do not attempt a conceptual scheme. Data analysis was qualitative. Similar responses were identified to form clusters and categories of responses with similar themes. Such an approach was aimed at elucidating the emerging patterns, differences and emphases in terms of the following themes:

1. Rationale for Decentralization
2. Scope of Decentralization
3. Devolution and Culture
4. Change and Resistance
5. Participation and Empowerment
6. Educational Outcomes
7. Staff Development
8. Management of Change
9. New Dimensions of Leadership
10. Future Development of the Academic Secretariat
11. Evolution of the Devolution Initiative

The findings from the different sources of data obtained from documents, observations and interviews had a high degree of consistency and provided cross-data validity checks, thus achieving the purposes of methodological triangulation discussed in Chapter 3 (see p. 65). Methodological triangulation increased the validity and reliability of the findings, and allowed mutually supportive data to emerge from different sources. Although there were some discrepancies among the findings, they were mainly due to time lags in data collection during documentary analysis, observations and interviews. Such discrepancies were rectified after thorough investigations.

RATIONALE FOR DECENTRALIZATION

The findings from documentary analysis show that the implementation of the devolution policy was perceived by staff as a result of the recommendations proposed in the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report. This is rather different from the findings obtained in the in-depth interviews. The majority of the participants in the interviews pointed out that the recommendation in the consultant report acted only as a catalyst to set off the change. This latter view was accepted by the writer as the genuine reason for the VTC to initiate decentralization because it was the intention of the government to introduce change within the VTC so as to be in line with the Public Sector Reform in the public sector and the School Management Initiative being implemented in the school sector.

The theme of devolution of responsibility to the technical institutes has been identified to be a call for efficient management, a need for the establishment of clear and simple lines of control, and lean head-office management. It aims to achieve
effectiveness and efficiency. According to Lauglo (1994), four types of decentralization rationale relating to effectiveness and efficiency can be identified, namely pedagogic professionalism, management by objectives, market mechanism, and deconcentration (see p. 22). The rationale for devolution advocated by the VTC appears to be based on deconcentration, but not on pedagogic professionalism, management by objectives or market mechanism. Deconcentration of a system that previously has been organized along lines of bureaucratic centralism in the VTC headquarters means more authority to the technical institutes who have responsibility for education at the local level. It seeks to offload central offices of routine matters, and achieves more planning at the technical institute level. It seems that the term deconcentration is used rather loosely by Lauglo. Bray (1984, 1991a) and Caldwell (1994) point out the differences between deconcentration and delegation. They argue that deconcentration is the process through which a central authority establishes field units, staffing them with its own officers; while delegation implies a stronger degree of decision-making at a local level, but the authority must be exercised within a policy framework established by the centre. They also define the term devolution as the strongest form of decentralization, meaning that the authority is formally held by local bodies, who do not need to seek approval for their actions. In the light of this understanding, it seems that delegation is the more appropriate term for the policy adopted by the VTC than deconcentration and devolution.

The rationale for pedagogic professionalism accords great autonomy to teachers. However, the findings show that teachers have little say over the changes, and are largely not involved and empowered in the initiation and implementation processes. It is the senior management of the VTC who make all the important decisions. The devolution initiative is not one that emphasizes specific, participatively set goals; a clear time period to achieve them; and performance feedback, as suggested in management by objectives (Peters et al., 1997; Robbins, 1998). The goals in management by objectives are set by a participative process that includes all affected parties, from senior managers to junior staff. This ensures that all concerns are heard and incorporated into the formulation of realistic objectives stated as explicitly as possible. The plans must be expressed as tangible goals that can be easily measured. Each goal must have a clear time period in which it is to be accomplished. The final component of management by objectives is performance feedback at every level. These characteristics are not features of the VTC's devolution initiative, as there is not
only a lack of staff consultation, but also a neglect of staff views. Use of the market mechanism to finance its activities entirely by fees paid by private customers; improve its effectiveness and efficiency; and ensure efficient production of quality services for survival is certainly not one of the objectives of the VTC. The operation of the technical institutes is funded by the government, and there is a strong commitment from the government to continue to fund vocational education and training in the foreseeable future.

Similar to the assumptions of the SMI, under the traditional framework of controls technical institutes were neither managed effectively and efficiently, nor were conducive to quality reforms. Staff pointed out that the emphasis in the TIDHQ's relations with the technical institutes exhibited a strong controlling tendency, and that mistakes or problems could be made good or sorted out by the TIDHQ in the past. They argued that centralized systems provided uniform solutions, which failed to take account of the particular needs of the technical institutes. They believed that decentralized systems are more responsive to demands and interests in today's complex and contingent environment, and that decentralized personnel are better able to make choices to maximize professionalism and effectiveness. These views are in line with the findings presented in the review of the literature in Chapter 2 (Beavis, 1995; Blackmore, 1990; Bray, 1984, 1991a; Caldwell and Spinks, 1988; Cheng, 1994; Davies and Hentschke, 1994; Hargreaves, 1994; Johnes, 1995; Lyons, 1985; Sackney and Dibski, 1994; Wong et al., 1998).

Nevertheless, staff worried that greater diversity may imply less equity. When decisions are delegated to the technical institute level, differences in goals and programmes among campuses will increase at the expense of uniformity and equity. Teachers are not sure whether such uniformity and equity will be achieved after September 1999, as the decision will be made by the respective principals. One example often cited by staff is the provision of language staff. At present, a class of 40 students is provided with two language teachers in all the technical institutes. Whether or not principals continue this practice stipulated by the former TIDHQ is dubious. Some principals may assign only one teacher while others two teachers for a class of 40 students. Their worries are not unjustified, and are consistent with the findings in the review of the literature. The findings in the review of the literature show that greater diversity may imply less equity in terms of access to resources (Bray, 1984, 1991a; Brown, 1990; Caldwell, 1994; Ho et al., 1998; McGinn, 1990; Sackney and Dibski,
Hence, with the implementation of the devolution initiative the issue of ensuring equity among the technical institutes must be monitored. It may be necessary and appropriate for the senior management of the VTC to issue some guidelines to the technical institutes for reference.

**SCOPE OF DECENTRALIZATION**

As discussed in the review of the literature, countries adopting school-based management have different emphases on the scope of decentralization. Some emphasize school autonomy plus participatory decision-making, whilst others stress decentralized resource allocation in the areas of finance, curriculum, personnel and facilities. The findings show that the devolution initiative being implemented by the VTC is a mandated form of school-based management, and covers to some extent both participative decision-making in the form of setting up various boards and committees, and decentralized resource allocation in the areas of finance, curriculum and personnel. Nevertheless, staff are not at all satisfied with the scope of devolution, particularly participative decision-making and financial management. The majority of staff were not involved and empowered during the adoption, initiation and implementation of the devolution initiative: 'Many things are still top-down. Involvement is limited to the senior management' (L9).

Following the devolution initiative, there are still many aspects of technical institute administration and financial controls such as staff development budgets and curriculum development that remain under a strong central policy or require central sanction. There are a number of curriculum guidelines and policies which all teaching departments have to abide by. The year-1 common curriculum for similar courses and the common assessment strategies for such courses are often mentioned by staff as infringing their academic and professional freedom and integrity. Personnel matters such as staff recruitment and promotion are largely a centralized function. The following are illustrative:

> 'Many important policies such as those relating to student admission, student progression and curriculum design are determined by the senior management. I think there is devolution in the most trivial matters.' (M5)
‘Decentralized control doesn’t mean more autonomy to the technical institutes. This is especially true when we refer to the use of financial resources.’ (L3)

‘Procedural inflexibility stills exists in most operational areas such as personnel matters.’ (L13)

The majority of staff commented that the existing funding system in the VTC is not conducive to quality education, as it does not provide adequate flexibility or incentive for improving educational outcomes. Although most funds for education come from the government, the centralized allocation of resources provides little money for discretionary use by the technical institutes. Even with the introduction of the devolution initiative, the VTC does not give greater control to the technical institutes over the allocation and management of resources, nor shift most resources from the centre to the technical institutes. The technical institutes are still funded, staffed and equipped according to standard patterns and procedures. Staff costs consume about 85% of the budget. As governed by the government funding methodologies, under no circumstances may provision be transferred by a technical institute principal from, say, a staff expenses subhead to any other non-staff expenses subhead and vice versa. Hence, staff hope that financial flexibility should be increased.

‘Budget flexibility must be increased to enable the technical institutes to function effectively.’ (M6)

‘Flexible and autonomous funding must be established.’ (L7)

The situation can be compared to that in Hungary where the financial management remained in the hands of the county council following the legalization and decentralization in 1985 (Howell, 1988). Both Kaufman (1997) and Ash (1990) therefore comment that it is the residual veil of ideology that hampers change in a situation where decentralization is legalized but unactualized.

Knight (1983) argues that if a school's budget is to be a planning instrument, it has to reflect the functions and purposes of the school. Delegated budgeting becomes
integrated with all the other aspects of managing a school. Although the principals are the budget managers in their technical institute, the preparation of the estimates is not seen by them as an enormous task. More often than not the principals add a certain percentage over the allocations of the previous year to each subhead in the budget, and propose their priorities for furniture and equipment. The 85% of the recurrent budget for a technical institute consumed by staff salaries is budgeted for by the VTC headquarters. The technical institutes have minimal discretion over spending, and thus they are relieved of any responsibilities for considering staff costs. Besides, each type of expenditure has a tightly defined subhead. Virement is usually not allowed, and any amounts underspent are clawed back. Thus, the functions of financial management are not considered imperative in a technical institute, nor do they produce any meaningful feedback on the performance of a technical institute. The situation will not be solved in the near future as a block grant is unlikely to be approved by the government.

The exemption from any responsibility to consider the funding implications in the technical institutes is quite in contrast to the recent developments in many other countries as well as in the aided school sector in Hong Kong. In England and Wales, there are major moves to introduce a single block grant funding into the school system (Davies and Hentschke, 1992). Devolution of financial control and human resource management has begun in Australia while the operational grants to educational institutions are bulk funded in New Zealand (Gamage, 1992; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993; Sharpe, 1994). In the aided school sector in Hong Kong, funds for aided schools are provided in the form of a block grant to allow them more flexibility. Each school has authority to decide its own spending pattern in the light of central education policies and its own defined needs (Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991; Education Commission, 1997). Financial management in the technical institutes has thus lagged behind.

As mentioned above, the resources given are not linked in any way to its effective performance. All resources provided are based on the approved course plan in accordance with the stipulated guidelines formulated by the TIDHQ or the VTC headquarters. For example, the provision of teaching staff and temporary teachers are rigidly determined by the TIDHQ through the designation of class-contact periods into X-level and Y-level. This explains why Helmore (1983) considered the allocation of the full-time teaching staff establishment as determined in a rather inflexible manner. The situation will be improved as a new students-teacher ratio (STR) is to be
introduced in September 1999, giving principals greater discretion over the use of teaching resources.

In light of the constraints imposed on finance, curriculum, personnel matters and resources, it is not surprising that some of the staff even regard the change either as disguised decentralization or quasi-decentralization meaning that the devolution initiative is not a comprehensive move or the type of decentralization they want.

DEVOLUTION AND CULTURE

The findings reveal that the current change in the VTC stresses on structures rather than culture; that technical institutes do not have a development culture to initiate change; and that they are still not prepared for change. The senior management of the VTC realize the importance of organizational culture. They believe that the most important aspect of an organization is its management structure, management style and culture, which will determine its corporate ethics. This aspect has been documented (see p. 98). Nevertheless, the main thrust of the devolution initiative has been placed on management structures. They do not appear to commit themselves to the development of an across-roles culture, which is more important than any blueprint for implementing changes. The following represent participants’ views:

'It is a complete overhaul of the existing system. It takes time to change the organizational culture, but the senior management are reluctant to understand our culture before implementing change.' (M2)

'The senior management of the VTC are highly in favour of restructuring, but do not make connections between change and culture.' (L15).

By organizational culture is meant the norms that inform people what is acceptable and what is not, the dominant values that the organization cherishes above others, the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of the organizations (Owens, 1987, Robbins, 1998; Schein, 1985). The organizational culture shapes and moulds assumptions and perceptions that are basic to understanding their
roles. It appears that the senior management disregard the assumption that the prospect of successful implementation is enhanced when they adopt policies consonant with the characteristics of the prevailing organizational culture: ‘The existing organizational culture has been entirely ignored. It has great effects on the change being implemented’ (M1). Neither do they attempt to change the organizational culture prior to initiating change.

As no society is completely static, there is a need to examine the context of any one case at a particular time in the light of its culture. The review of the literature shows that the cultures of different countries such as Australian and France made their management of schools very different in justification, operation, and concept from one another. Dimmock (1998) contends that education is culture-bound and that policy makers need to be mindful of societal and organizational cultural characteristics when formulating, adopting and implementing policies. He argues that the blueprint for decentralization has been exported from the West, and imported into the Asian culture of Hong Kong. The phenomenon of policy cloning enables the process of policy formulation to be hastily completed, with the consequence that minimal attention is paid to the receptivity of the host culture to the imported policy. Similarly, Bray (1992) points out that the development of education in Hong Kong has been heavily influenced by the West and the source of ideas for educational innovation has been principally Western. The examination of the appropriateness and technical soundness of the policy at the local level may therefore have a bearing on its implementation and its development. The findings of this research are consistent with their comments, as illustrated in the following views stressed by participants:

‘The organizational culture of the technical institutes is highly different from those of the previous employment of the senior management.’ (M4)

‘Models cannot just be imported and applied directly to our organization’. (M6)

Culture therefore has an impact on schools at the institutional level, on the community context, on the beliefs and experiences of administrators, on administrative practice, and on a school’s particular culture. This is what Cuban (1988) calls second-
order changes. First-order changes are specific changes and second-order changes are modifications in the culture of the community to make change and innovation an embedded part of the operation. Fullan (1991) points out that first-order changes will be short-lived at best unless second-order changes are brought about simultaneously. He argues

The challenge of the 1990s will be to deal with more second-order changes – changes that affect the culture and structure of schools, restructuring roles and reorganizing responsibilities … (p. 29)

A climate for a change in culture therefore needs to be developed prior to introducing the innovation. Fullan (1993, p. 67) points out that ‘focusing on restructuring prior to working on reculturing puts the cart before the horse’. Similarly, Beer et al. (1990, quoted in Fullan, 1991), in studying the critical path to corporate renewal in 26 companies, conclude that formal organizational structure and systems are the last things an organization should change – not the first, as many managers assume. They found that changes reflecting new behaviours and relationships led to new thinking, which in turn spread and led to changes in structure. This, according to them, is a more productive sequence than the reverse when rapidly implemented new structures create confusion, ambiguity, and conflict ultimately leading to resistance and resentment. Similarly, Heckman (1987) points out the importance of culture when initiating change. He argues that schools have cultures and this is heuristically important in seeking change. These arguments and findings are in line with the comments of participants, as follows:

‘It is a great cultural change. It is essential to change the organizational culture first.’ (H3)

‘The technical institutes are a cultural backwater. A change in organizational culture is necessary prior to change.’ (L3)

The culture of the technical institutes tends to maintain the status quo, as reflected in the following comments:
'It is a great cultural change. The technical institutes have been in a steady state for a long time.'  (H1)

'We would like to remain the status quo. We are satisfied with the current situation.'  (L8)

Effort should not only be directed to the culture of the individual school so as to allow room to accommodate changes but also towards the creation of a different culture of educators who understand change and how to collaborate to bring about it. Joyce and Calhoun (1991) say

To do this represents a debureaucratization of relations among role groups and agencies. Protection of role status and working conditions will have to take a back seat to collective interest in excellence and equity. A dissolution of the norms of autonomy is required, with a shift toward collaborative, open, and information-based decision-making. Continuous study, acquisition of new skills, and experimentation will have to replace the norms of the present workplace, which are both conservative, self-protective, and divisive. (p. 339)

There is therefore an imminent need for the VTC to create a culture that is congenial to change. The senior management of the VTC should be open to different views and perspectives by creating a collaborative culture. A thorough collaborative culture means that senior management and teachers collaborate in goal-setting activities, foster collegial involvement, emphasize that improvement in teacher is a collective rather than an individual enterprise, that analysis, evaluation, and experimentation in concert with colleagues are conditions under which teachers improve (Fullan, 1993). It is the teachers as interacting professionals who should also be in a position to decide whether the change is for them. The mental health and attitudes of teachers are absolutely crucial to success.

Building a culture for change means not only the initial stages of sensitizing and creating an internal environment for change but the final reinforcements of change which create the mechanisms which will sustain and embed the change over the long
term (Fullan, 1993; Owens, 1987; Robbins, 1998). The senior management of the VTC should be alert that the essence of sustainable change is to understand the culture of the organization. They should not ignore the importance of organizational culture, as commented by one participant: 'It's a major cultural change, but the senior management of the VTC are reluctant to understand and gradually change the organizational culture before implementing the policy' (H2). Quick fixes, or changes based on a one-dimensional recipe – typically restructuring – may look easy for them but does not produce sustainable change.

Similarly, Clarke (1994) argues that those who create change by trying to change the formal structure alone can get nasty shocks because they have unwittingly disrupted informal networks and politics. He points out that without understanding and mobilizing the energies of individuals, no change, however brilliant, will be sustainable. Understanding people, both as a source of inertia and a source of leverage for change, means understanding the culture of the organization. Changing culture is therefore a key driver for change. This view is also shared by participants, and was indicated by one participant as: 'It is of paramount importance for the senior management to change the organizational culture if they want to make the reform a success' (M7). The senior management of the VTC must therefore take into account the culture of the organization in order to produce sustainable change.

**CHANGE AND RESISTANCE**

The evidence presented in the review of the literature demonstrates that principals strongly favour decentralization while teachers support school-based management less positively (Arnott et al., 1992; Bullock and Thomas, 1992; Chapman, 1990; Davies and Hentschke, 1992; Dimmock, 1998; Evans, 1998; Ma, 1993; Marren and Levacic, 1994; Thompson, 1991; Wong, 1997; Wong et al., 1998). The studies reveal that while greater autonomy of schools from the central authority and enhanced responsibility for making their own decisions over a wide area are welcomed by senior management, classroom teachers are largely indifferent or resistant to change owing to an increase in workload and/or a lack of empowerment.

Following the release of the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report, the VTC adopted the recommendation of decentralization without consulting staff as to how and when it should be implemented. There was little staff consultation about the
adoption and the content of devolution at the initiation and implementation stages. Even though some forums were organized, they were considered not useful at all by participants:

‘Although the senior management organised some forums to meet with staff, the views of staff were largely ignored.’ (H4)

‘Many decisions have already been made by the senior management prior to the forums.’ (M1)

It is not surprising that at the early stage of implementation, there was resistance among staff in the technical institutes, particularly teachers. Although conflict and disagreement plague the change process, the senior management insist on carrying out the plan as originally scheduled. Dissatisfaction with the senior management is widespread. The following are illustrative:

‘The senior management should take account of comments from academic colleagues when implementing the devolution initiative. Unfortunately, this is not the case.’ (L3)

‘The current situation can be compared to staff jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.’ (L5)

‘Those in charge of the implementation of the devolution policy are hegemonic and not receptive to ideas proposed by others.’ (L12)

The findings also reveal that devolution was adopted by the VTC without considering the appropriateness of the change – who benefits from the change and how sound and feasible the approach is. There are also questions about what is genuinely being devolved. The majority of the staff in the technical institutes expressed that devolution is just in the form of an increase in workload and responsibilities rather than authority. They did not know whether devolution is for reasons of educational improvement, for effectiveness and efficiency, or for political or personal reasons. The alleged shift in the power structure following decentralization was regarded with
scepticism by teachers, primarily because of the unclear objectives of devolution. There is thus a lack of strong staff advocacy, and the result is compliance, not commitment: 'The majority of staff are not consulted and empowered. We have no ownership of the change' (L7).

Most staff also exhibited some or all of the following resistance or behaviours: fear of the unknown, threats to established skills, loss of control of own destiny, and high anxiety and stress. It seems that the senior management of the VTC have neither anticipated resistance, nor do they welcome resistance and give themselves the chance to convert objections into the energy for change. The following are illustrative:

'The senior management can tolerate no dissent. They are quite oppressive.' (M3)

'Our frank criticisms of the decisions made by the senior management annoy and irritate them.' (L8)

Most people naturally resist change (Clarke, 1994; Fullan, 1993; Robbins, 1998). Any significant change involves a period of personal and organizational learning and problem solving as can be seen from the fact that change in itself is threatening and risk-taking. Change always involves loss – loss of the past, loss of routine, loss of comfort, and loss of relationships. People need predictability, routine, familiar patterns to survive, and strive to preserve the status quo. Change therefore threatens people in the head, heart and guts, and always raises anxiety levels and encourages avoidance behaviour, particularly when the new change runs against all the accumulation of prior learning based on prior success (Clarke, 1994). Although resistance to change is the natural reaction and is unavoidable, it can be harnessed as part of the momentum for change. Fullan (1991) argues that resistance must not be misunderstood.

It is usually unproductive to label an attitude or action resistance. It diverts attention from the real problems of implementation such as diffuse objectives, lack of technical skill, or insufficient resources for change ... Change does involve individual attitudes and
behaviours, but they need to be framed as natural responses to transition, not misunderstood as resistance. (p. 748)

Fullan (1991) points out that neglect of the phenomenology of change – that is, how people actually experience change as distinct from how it might have been intended – is at the heart of the spectacular lack of success of most social reforms. A better understanding of staff perspective of change is a precondition for engaging staff in any change effort. However, the findings of this research reveal that this seems to be lacking in the VTC, as reflected in this illustrative comment: ‘The perspectives and receptivity of staff have not been considered at all’ (L14).

Lortie (1975) argues that the ethos of staff is conservative, individualistic, and focused on the present. Staff, particularly teachers, are often more concerned about how change will affect them personally, in terms of their in-classroom and extra-classroom work, than about a description of the goals and supposed benefits of the programme. Such an ethos is often reflected in the participants’ responses. The following are some illustrative ones:

‘Educational reforms must be linked to teaching and learning.’ (H3)

‘We need to focus on making a difference with individual students.’ (M5)

‘I just want to make a difference in my students’ performance and lives. That’s why I am here for. I don’t much bother with the other objectives, which I consider only secondary to my main objectives of teaching. I will support changes that are directly related to teaching and learning.’ (L7)

In brief, change has not been introduced in a way that takes into account the concern of staff, which is a powerful constraint to change, or protection against undesirable or thoughtless change. Fullan (1993) argues that without a shift of mind the insurmountable basic problem is the juxtaposition of a continuous change theme with a continuous conservative system. The technical institutes now have the ever-expanding presence of educational innovation and reform. It is no exaggeration to say that dealing
with change is endemic. However, the technical institutes have been in a steady state for a long time and can be described as a cultural backwater (see pp. 153-154). They have an educational system which is fundamentally conservative. The way that teachers in the technical institutes are trained, the way that technical institutes are organized, and the way that the educational hierarchy operates, result in a system that is more likely to retain the status quo than to change. The following comments are prevalent among the participants:

'So far so good. I don't see there is a need for change.' (M3)

'Staff have a feeling of inertia. We would like to remain the status quo. We can't see there is an imminent need for change.' (L4)

People are likely to adhere to their old behaviours. When change has been attempted under such circumstances it results in defensiveness, superficiality, or aggravation. Fullan (1993) argues that the answer does not lie in designing better reform strategies, as no amount of sophistication in strategizing for particular innovations or policies will ever work without a new mindset for change. As a participant commented, 'How the senior management solve staff’s complacency of remaining the status quo is crucial to the success of change' (L8). Hence, developing a new mindset for change is essential to alleviate staff resistance to change.

The senior management of the VTC have to understand that there are great risks in ignoring the resistance which will be an intrinsic part of the change process. Resistance can be functional or dysfunctional (Fullan, 1993; Robbins, 1998). It can actually be the powerhouse, which provides the energy for change. The senior management should listen to sources of resistance to harness the power of resistance. Resistance to change can, if properly handled, increase the commitment to buy into the change. By viewing resistance in their proper perspective, the VTC may turn it into a valuable management tool which can usually act as a barometer to measure against staff reaction to the policies and procedures being implemented, attract attention to possible failures within the systems, and prompt solutions to problems which may otherwise take time to surface. Ignoring or neglecting resistance will generate hard feelings and create greater problems and even obstacles to change. It is commitment, not compliance that should be sought from staff.
PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT

The VTC has adopted a committee system to manage the technical institutes since its establishment in 1982. Staff were in general satisfied with the committee structure: ‘The well-established committee structure has ensured collective decisions to be made effectively’ (L13). As discussed in the review of the literature, decentralization is supported as a means to achieve popular participation in the process of decision-making. In the USA school-based management draws on the experience of participative decision-making so that stakeholders in each school can pursue much more effective education strategies. According to Cooke and Slack (1984), the creation of a group to make decisions does not in itself mean that the decisions it takes will be successful. The group setting may, for example, merely provide the forum for a powerful individual decision maker to dominate the proceedings, the other group members acquiescing with the decision. Conversely, the group setting may be one in which all group members participate genuinely in the decision-making process. The traditional committee structure of the VTC ensured participative decision-making, and responsibilities for decisions were shared, rather than borne by a single person, as can be seen in this illustrative comment: ‘Under the TIDHQ, it was management by committees and participative decision-making. Decisions were made collectively by the committees, which were well represented by different levels of staff’ (L2).

During the initiation and implementation of the devolution policy in the VTC, there was little say for staff. Though some forums were organized for the interchange of information and ideas, they were largely management-led, and had no repercussions on the plan originally formulated by the senior management. Staff in general criticized the new system where hegemony of the senior management becomes the norm and practices in the meetings, and where there is little participative decision-making. The group setting merely provides the forum for a powerful individual decision-maker to dominate the proceedings. Staff also felt that work is imposed without giving reasons. There is not only a lack of staff consultation, but also a neglect of staff views by the senior management. The following are illustrative:

‘Someone is hegemonic and is not receptive to ideas put forward by others.’ (H2)
'Many things are top-down. They don’t bother to give reasons.'
(L10)

The situation is likened to that in England and Wales whereby teachers themselves are implementing the reform, but there is little teacher empowerment (see p. 29). In the United States the empowerment of teachers in schools to ensure more commitment and contribute at a higher level of performance is enhanced as they are treated as involved professionals rather than excluded employees (see p. 31). This is in line with the rationale for pedagogic professionalism, which accords great autonomy to teachers. Studies in Hong Kong (Cheng, 1992; Wong, 1997) reveal that, while greater autonomy of schools was welcomed by senior management, classroom teachers are largely indifferent or wary. According to the subsidiarity argument discussed in Chapter 2 (see p. 23), decisions are best taken at that level in the organization where the knowledge most relevant to the decision is located and where the actions of the organization’s members have most effect. Similarly, Glatter (1999) also stresses that some recent research suggests that staff commitment and satisfaction are the key factors in producing results. Increased teacher involvement and empowerment has thus been associated with greater commitment to educational changes through a feeling of ownership among the participants. Such views are also reflected by participants of this research. An illustrative example is: ‘The little say over the change contributes to a lack of ownership and the reactive behaviour of the majority of the staff’ (L13).

Fullan (1993, p. 6) argues that ‘teachers as change agents is the sine qua non of getting anywhere’. Teachers should be empowered in a variety of ways to contribute to curriculum design, planning and decision-making. Early participation of staff, especially those in the front line, is therefore believed to be an important factor in determining whether the introduction of a reform is a success or not. Meaningful change can only come about by involved individuals taking action to alter the environment – change is too important to be left solely to the leaders (Fullan, 1993). By the same token, using devolution to manage change in the technical institutes should involve staff if change is to be meaningful.

The findings also show that staff in the VTC expressed their concerns about the time wasted in attending the many unproductive meetings. The following are illustrative:
‘Simply providing time to meet is no guarantee that teachers would know how to work in ways likely to result in more engaging curriculum and improved student performance. A lot of our time has been wasted.’ (L1)

‘There are so many meetings to attend, and I have to teach more than 15 hours each week. I find it difficult to take care of both. I admit that I have made few, if any, contributions in the meetings. Besides, some of the meetings I attended are not useful at all.’ (L14)

Bray (1984) and Evans (1998) argue that teachers vary considerably in relation to their desire for decisional participation. It is highly probable that decisions are difficult to arrive at because of different opinions. As a result, more time and energy may be expanded on argument and debate than on accomplishing something worthwhile. A great deal of people's time may also be spent attending meetings, much of which is wasted because of their disinterest in every agenda item, thus resulting in ineffective participation. Effective participation therefore requires a lot of participants' time and sometimes considerable skill in analysis of specific types of information. From the above discussion, it seems that staff participation and empowerment is either absent or ineffective in the VTC at present. Therefore a balance has to be struck between teacher empowerment and effective participation.

EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

The findings reveal that staff in the VTC are worried about the emphasis the senior management have placed on financial efficiency, and were unwilling to see that the policy formulated is pursued at the expense of educational outcomes. The following comments are representative of the concerns of the majority of the participants:

‘It seems that the devolution initiative will not produce promising changes in the substantive content that students learn.’ (L5)
'We fear that the current exercise would lead to an emphasis on fiscal efficiency rather than educational outcomes. ... We, teachers, want to effect positive change in students' lives.' (L8)

With this scepticism about the objectives of implementing the devolution initiative and the emphasis on structures by the senior management, it is not surprising that there is a lack of strong staff advocacy. Staff considered that changes must be clear and practical, and must reach the classroom producing desirable educational outcomes. The following comments illustrate that teachers resent spending time on activities that bear little relationship to learning:

'We only support changes that are directly related to teaching and learning.' (M1)

'The current change does put us under a stress that detracts from the energy we would have for teaching. We want to teach – not bother with bits of paper.' (L11)

The review of the literature shows that there is a paucity of evidence that in handing budgeting, management and marketing to schools, teaching and learning improves as a consequence (Amott et al., 1992; Brown, 1990; Bullock and Thomas, 1997; Caldwell, 1993, 1997; Cheng, 1992; Cheng and Cheung, 1997; Cheung and Cheng, 1996; Elmore, 1995; Fullan, 1995; Gaziel, 1998; Karsten, 1998; Knight, 1993; Levacic, 1995; Malen et al., 1990; Sackney and Debski, 1994; Smyth, 1995; Taylor and Teddlie, 1992; Weiss, 1992; Wong, 1995, 1997). Research evidence also shows that school-based management may not generate any substantial changes in pedagogy and in the ways teachers work together on instructional matters, and that the increased time demand of involvement in decision-making has contributed to increased tiredness and stress which in turn has affected classroom practice and attendance.

Even though school-based management has been regarded as one of the most robust educational reforms, the review of the literature shows that educationists such as Elmore (1995), Fullan (1995), and Sackney and Debski (1994) question the desirability of making school-based management a high reform priority. They comment that school-based management does not necessarily have an impact on classroom teaching.
of teachers, and argue for putting more time and energies into instructional improvement before the creation of organizational structures. This tallies with the above discussion about a change in culture (see pp. 151-155). The purpose of these new patterns of management must therefore be expressed in terms of their contribution to quality of education, rather than simply as a means of ensuring greater efficiency in the utilization of resources. Connections must be made between the new governance structures and the teaching-learning process. All concerned must be assured that due consideration will be given to ensure reflection of the change in the school’s work and in students’ learning (Caldwell and Spinks, 1998). As one participant commented: ‘Change must be linked to teaching and learning to bring benefits to students and thus the society’ (H5).

Fullan (1993) argues that education has a moral purpose. The moral purpose is to make a difference in the lives of students regardless of background, and to help produce citizens who can live and work productively in increasingly dynamically complex societies. According to him, moral purpose without change agents is so much wishful valuing; change agents without moral purpose are change for the sake of change. In Hong Kong Wong (1997), in his study of 21 schools implementing the SMI scheme, finds that teachers were less enthusiastic and did not find the changes brought about by the School Management Initiative useful. He argues that unless teachers feel that the SMI addresses their needs, many of them will see it as unnecessarily increasing their workload without any worthwhile results. The Education Commission Report No 7 (Education Commission, 1997) points out that schools should be encouraged to develop school-based management and their own curriculum to meet their needs and the goals of quality education.

In the VTC, staff regard improving the educational outcomes as first and foremost the major objective of all educational reforms. Some participants further elaborated that they entered the profession, which they considered not having a high societal status, simply because they want to help improve students’ lives. Typical comments, which are often reinforced by participants, are:

‘The students and their needs should surpass all other objectives.’

(L6).
‘I enter the profession because I want to make a contribution to students’ achievements.’ (L14)

To obtain strong staff advocacy, devolution should therefore be directly linked with quality education. The initiative and commitment of teachers in discharging their daily duties is of prime importance in bringing about effectiveness and quality.

**STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

As revealed in the review of the literature, pressures for a return to centralization can be observed today in countries such as Sweden and Eastern and Central Europe that have started decentralizing their educational systems. School-based management is also seen by many people as a kind of negative policy (Duignan, 1990; Halasz, 1997). This is because uncertainty caused by increased autonomy and lack of well-defined rules makes people feel the desire to go back to well-known patterns of order and central control. Such uncertainty and the feeling of being left without support is especially strong where the enlargement of school autonomy has not been accompanied by the development of appropriate management programmes to prepare the leaders of the autonomous schools for the new role.

In Canada, the goals for decentralization intend to enable schools to be more effective, responsive, accountable and to link planning with resources. Nevertheless, Brown (1990) points out that such goals appear to imply that school personnel are sufficiently knowledgeable about local conditions to make appropriate decisions. In other words, staff development must be provided to enable them to cope with change. Cheng (1992), in his study of school management in Hong Kong, suggests that principals and supervisors be provided with professional training in the management of organizational change and the implementation of school-based management. Similarly, Clarke (1994) states

> Proactive change means gradual evolution, continuous change, and this starts with the mindsets of key managers, using education rather than power structures to achieve change. (p. 137)
According to Clarke, education should be used as the prime lever for creating willingness for change because its payoff is enormous. It plays a vital part in changing attitudes and cultures. Therefore, professional education for management and teachers needs to be strengthened to equip them with the knowledge and skills to cope with change. Such views are echoed by the participants, as follows:

‘Devolution must be within a framework that allows for both the management and staff to be trained and prepared for the new roles.’ (H3)

‘Staff should be given the necessary training and development before they can contribute to change.’ (M1)

Education builds on and extends existing momentum. People, however, learn new patterns of behaviour primarily through interactions with others. Implementation is a learning process and the foundation of learning is interaction. Learning by doing, concrete role models, and meetings with fellow implementers help people see the meaning of change. Even when staff development is carefully planned, it appears that it is when people actually try to implement new approaches and reforms that they have the most specific concerns and doubts (Glatter, 1999; Mumford, 1993, 1994; Peters et al., 1997; Simkins, 1999). Specific skills are necessary but what is essential for lasting change is the learning of the conceptual underpinnings (Fullan, 1991). Therefore, both education and learning through interactions are essential for sustainable change.

In the VTC each technical institute is allocated a budget of some $30,000 for staff development under the control of the principal. The principal can approve training courses of unit cost not exceeding $10,000. Courses over $10,000 and staff undertaking part-time day-release courses need to be approved by the Deputy Executive Director of the VTC. The limited allocation of funds for, and the principal's constrained discretion over, staff development have resulted in the technical institutes adopting the peripheral approach in which programmes of staff development are regarded as fringe activities. The approach is characterized by ad hoc provision for individuals to attend courses, conferences, etc. according to ‘here and now’ interests and needs. Besides, staff development focuses on long programmes such as master's degree courses, which are regarded by staff as of little relevance to cope with change.
Such courses are considered too long and may not enable them to cope with the impending needs required to deal with change. A comment was vividly made by one participant: 'The distant water cannot extinguish the nearby fire' (L10).

The support provided to the technical institutes therefore does not adequately promote a development culture. As a result, staff do not possess the knowledge and skills necessary to lead a faculty to create a change-oriented culture even though they would like to undertake sufficient training and development. The following are illustrative of their intention to support the cultural change and cater for the new roles:

‘We must be provided with sufficient training and development to implement the devolution initiative.’ (M6)

‘Training and development must be enhanced to enable us to cope with, and contribute to, change.’ (L6)

Also, staff development is not merely the responsibility of teachers and officers. There is an increasing recognition of the need of staff development for the senior management. No longer are the senior management appointed for purely academic leadership, they have to demonstrate managerial skills. Staff development should therefore play a more significant role to help both the senior management and staff manage and cope with change. The following comments illustrate such a recognition:

‘Staff development for the senior management is essential for change. The senior management should be head learners and catalysts assisting staff growth.’ (M4)

‘The study of change is for the senior management also.’ (L15)

MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

In the review of the literature, Santos Filho (1993) comments on the Brazilian experience that decentralization could assume an authoritarian and technocratic character, in which what could or should be decentralized was decided by the top, it being left to the lower agencies to implement the higher decision. He regards this as
authoritarian and technocratic decentralization or pseudo-decentralization. He further comments that the idea of decentralization applied to state and municipal school systems will be limited if it does not extend to the school units, as the states and the municipalities can easily manage their school systems in a very centralized way. Similarly, in New Zealand the Tomorrow's Schools reforms call for a virtual transfer of decision-making from the system to the school level.

In the VTC changes are over-sold or rationally advocated from the point of view of what is rational to the senior management, not the staff. The conditions for the new paradigm of change were seen by staff as established by the senior management working by themselves, and seen as a vision of their own. What is much criticized by staff is that they are not open to different views and perspectives, and that the majority of staff have not been involved in helping to create an organization capable of individual and collective inquiry and continuous renewal. The following comments are prevalent among the participants:

'It is a traumatic organizational change, with little consultation.' (L4)

'The senior management won't allow any discussion other than their own to take place.' (L15)

Although it is true that change never proceeds as planned, staff consider the change sporadic and unexpected. The following comments indicate that staff find it difficult to adapt to the change:

'Don’t be proactive, or you will be condemned.' (M6)

'Changes have been too sudden and drastic.' (L8)

'Is it a rumour? It is extremely difficult for us to keep pace with the change.' (L11)

The implementation stage is also not adapted to improve the fit between the change and the conditions of the technical institutes: 'They understand neither the
operation of the technical institutes nor our organizational culture’ (M1). There is not a strategic approach to planning, which is essential for managing change. Phenomena such as overcontrol and chaos are at present prevalent. Staff are therefore disappointed and frustrated with the change. The following are illustrative:

‘The disadvantage of moving from the TIDHQ was less clarity about purpose and work.’ (H5)

‘The senior management are quite autocratic. They make nearly all major decisions.’ (M3)

‘Do the senior management implement a centralization or decentralization policy.’ (L11)

The senior management of the VTC have thus been accused of lacking skills in managing change, as shown in the following comments:

‘The senior management should learn how to plan and manage change.’ (L2)

‘The senior management should strive to be an effective change agent.’ (L4)

It is the senior management who are of central importance in the management of change. Some basic lessons are instrumental in managing change (Fullan, 1993). First, conflict and problems must be seen as sources of creative resolution, and must not be interpreted as resistance or dissent. Second, both the individual and the group are valued. Productive educational change is a process of overcoming isolation while not succumbing to groupthink. Third, neither centralization nor decentralization works. Both top-down and bottom-up strategies are necessary. Fourth, every person is a change agent. Change is too important to leave to the experts. Personal mind set and mastery is the ultimate protection. Learning these lessons and recognizing their dynamic interdependency may be essential for managing such a complex change in the VTC. The senior management must fight against overcontrol on the one hand, and
chaos on the other hand (see pp. 123, 127 and 128). They need to engage in change productively, bearing in mind that change is too important to be left solely to them.

NEW DIMENSIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Leaders and managers are different. An individual can be appointed a manager but he/she is not a leader until his/her personality, character, knowledge and skills in doing the functions of leadership are accepted by the others involved (Adair, 1990). Peyton (1991) points out that a boss is the type of manager who thinks only of himself/herself, with no regard for what other people want or believe. Effective organization depends upon effective leadership (Murgatroyd and Gray, 1989). Leadership is also about being responsive to the organization's culture while shaping that culture for sustainable success. It is the leadership within an organization which creates and provides a vision and clarity of direction. As Simkins (1999, p. 276) points out, 'leaders clearly play an important part in orchestrating many of those organizational variables which influence individual and group values and provide frameworks for action'. Successful leaders anticipate change, vigorously exploit opportunities, motivate staff, convert poor performance and lead the organization towards its objectives (Bush, 1995, 1999; Fullan, 1993). Leadership has a crucial role in building an organization which embraces change and values learning. It thus becomes far more important for an organization to develop leaders (those who do the right things) than managers (those who do things right).

The development of school-based management has provoked a sharpened focus on the importance of both leadership and management and, within the context of rapid and unpredictable change, people have seen a growing consciousness of the imperative for institutions to become learning organizations which are capable of encouraging learning in their people. Learning organizations know how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in the organization. The leader becomes, in effect, a head learner, a catalyst assisting staff growth. The trend highlights the need to maximize professional development at institutional, group and individual levels, facilitated by an appropriate learning or development culture (Fullan, 1993; Schein, 1985). Culture is created by its participants, it inevitably changes as participants change. It should be the major concern of leaders since the things of real importance
that leaders do is to create and manage culture, as has been discussed above (see pp. 151-155).

The findings show that there are many adverse comments on the senior management of the VTC (see pp. 133-135). They are hegemonic and are not receptive to staff's views. They are not regarded as distinguished by their capacity to be responsive to the organization's culture, and to shape an organization by providing a shared sense of purpose and clarity of direction towards the achievement of goals through their behaviours and actions. Neither do they contribute towards integrating various job activities, securing staff advocacy and commitment, and harnessing resistance. They do not strive to maintain staff morale. As a result, many of the staff are demoralised and demotivated. The following comments are illustrative:

'The senior management don’t bother about high staff turnover rate.' (H1)

'The senior management ignore entirely the change process, and have behaved recklessly.' (M3)

'Staff loyalty and staff as an asset are not valued at all.' (L1)

The senior management are too hasty to make quick changes and demonstrate visible leadership qualities in a way that offers little opportunity to understand and appreciate the existing organizational culture (Hong Kong Professional Teachers' Union, 1999). As the personalities, characters and skills of the senior management in doing the functions of leadership are not accepted by the majority of staff, they are not considered as effective leaders. The following are illustrative:

'Staff don’t want to be proactive. The senior management can ensure staff compliance, but not commitments.' (M7)

'It appears that worsening relationships is less to do with devolution than with the personalities of the senior management.' (L9)
The culture of the VTC tends to maintain the status quo. The senior management of the VTC must devise ways for surfacing the struggles of new and old concepts. Ways to confront and resolve these conflicts must evolve. The leadership is crucial here. The senior management of the VTC should have the ability to conceptualize their strategic insights so that they become public knowledge, open to challenge and further improvement. Besides, there is an increasing recognition that leadership is not merely the prerogative of the senior management of an organization (Blase and Blase, 1994; Fullan, 1993; Law, 1999). The senior management of the VTC must understand that leadership is necessary at all levels in the organization, and that every staff member can become a leader.

The review of the literature demonstrates that an organization is both centralized and decentralized. It also shows that it is likely that at any one time an organization will be in the process of moving towards more self-management in relation to one variable and remaining static or even moving in the opposite direction in another (see p. 50). A notable example is the SMI and the medium of instruction guidance imposed by the Education Department in Hong Kong (see p. 46). The senior management of the VTC should provide effective leadership in striking a balance of power between the centre and local levels, which depends to a large extent on the specific contextual conditions. They should also note that the swings of the pendulum from centralization to decentralization or vice versa may fail to take hold in the long term if the decentralized system does not deliver improved student achievement with which participants are largely concerned (see pp. 162-165).

**FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC SECRETARIAT**

The VTC established a way of efficiently monitoring and co-ordinating all the work of the technical institutes by setting up the TIDHQ. The authority of TIDHQ officers was legally legitimated over all technical institute matters such as academic planning and resource allocation. The majority of the officers have, however, hung onto the old values and ways of doing things, thus exhibiting a strong controlling tendency. As pointed out by Sackney and Dennis (1994), it is difficult to change old values, beliefs, norms and assumptions based on the old paradigm.

In England and Wales, the main thrust of decentralizing the education system is to push decision-making outwards and downwards away from the centre and nearer to
the point of delivery of their service. The national legislation established is seen as a radical restructuring device to reduce the power of bureaucratic local education authorities, and give greater autonomy to schools and enhanced responsibility from the local education authorities for making their own decisions over a wide area, with the exception of curriculum matters (Davies and Hentschke, 1992; Marren and Levacic, 1994). In Canada, many planning and decision functions made at the district level are delegated to the schools (Brown, 1990). In New Zealand, through the Education Act 1989 there is a significant devolution of authority and responsibilities to principals and a corresponding diminution of authority from district control within the Ministry of Education (Caldwell, 1994; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993). In Hong Kong, the SMI and the associated reports (Education and Manpower Branch and Education Department, 1991; Education and Manpower Bureau, 1998) suggest that the strong controlling tendency of the Education Department over schools is not the most appropriate or effective way to ensure good management in schools, and recommend that the Education Department should change from detailed control to support and advice.

In the VTC the senior management turned the TIDHQ into the Academic Secretariat in September 1998, giving it only the co-ordinating and facilitating roles. Consequent to this, there is a corresponding change in the responsibilities and accountability for the principals. However, such a change has not yet been elaborated by the senior management of the VTC. This results in widespread uncertainty and worries among staff in both the Academic Secretariat and the technical institutes, particularly the former. The Academic Secretariat is regarded as a temporary resettlement area: ‘The Academic Secretariat is pro tem in nature’ (H2). Staff in the Academic Secretariat are not only worried about their destiny, but also uncertain about their roles. Some even consider that the Secretariat will reach its centenary sooner or later. Worse still, their professional expertise has not been recognized by the senior management: ‘The Academic Secretariat has been relegated to providing general administrative work rather than professional services’ (H5). They are asked to coordinate matters such as preparation of the graduation ceremony and prospectuses.

The situation of the Academic Secretariat is quite similar to that of the local education authorities in England and Wales. As pointed out by Glatter (1999, p. 255), ‘the position of the education authorities ... appears entirely conditional on the government’s assessment of their performance ... ’. The Academic Secretariat is now
at the mercy of the senior management of the VTC. In view of staff uncertainty and low morale, it is imminent to review the role and position of the Academic Secretariat. Otherwise, the degree of staff demoralization and demotivation will be intensified.

**EVOLUTION OF THE DEVOLUTION INITIATIVE**

The findings show that there is tight control from the headquarters with regard to both policy formulation and administrative arrangements. The senior management of the VTC decide nearly all major policies, devolving largely minor administrative matters to the technical institutes. The following comments are echoed by most participants:

‘Technical institutes becomes more autonomous, and the senior management of the VTC more directive simultaneously.’ (M6)

‘The authority is just changing hands: from the TIDHQ to the senior management of the VTC.’ (L2)

‘Devolution is accompanied with a lot of shackles imposed by the senior management of the VTC.’ (L10)

This fits into the concept of hyperrationality put forward by Wise (1983) that policy makers appear to share authority without, in fact, surrendering authority (see pp. 46-47). This also complies with findings in the review of the literature that the developments of decentralization in education have occurred at the same time as there has been a significant assumption of power at the system level (see p. 46). Notable examples are England and Wales, Sweden and most of the Eastern and Central European countries. Also, uncertainty caused by increased autonomy and lack of well-defined rules makes staff in the VTC feel the desire to go back to well-known patterns of order and central control previously performed by the TIDHQ. The following comments reflect the views of most staff:

‘I prefer working under the system of the TIDHQ. The procedures and time scales were clear.’ (M7)
We really reminisce about the good old days when all things were well defined and established by the TIDHQ. (L5)

Decentralization to a particular level may imply centralization from that level downwards such that if school districts are decentralized down to the principals, schools themselves can remain highly centralized. Davies and Hentschke (1992) observe that in England and Wales delegation of power from the local education authority to the school has resulted in more centralization at that level. Likewise, decentralization to the technical institutes was perceived by staff as an increase in the authority of the principals, without any corresponding changes in the authority of the majority of staff. The following comments are predominant among the participants:

'Authority is devolved to the level of the principals only. It is at the discretion of the individual principals to decide whether authority will be devolved to the staff level.' (L2)

'Principals are given more delegated authority following devolution. We, however, are not affected at all.' (L15)

Cheung and Cheng (1996) point out that mere decentralization to the school-site level is not sufficient to ensure education quality, and suggest that the implementation of school-based management should be based on a multi-level system including school-site level, group level and individual level (see p. 47). Structural changes do not always lead to increased autonomy for those in the lower levels of organization; nor does devolution of management responsibility necessarily empower others. Similarly, Caldwell (1997), in analyzing his 3-track model (see p. 48), argues that it is necessary but not sufficient to just create systems of school-based management if there is to be the lasting reform that will yield a consistently high quality of education. In the VTC, reform on this school-site level or Track 1 has not yet brought with it any impact on the quality of education. Nevertheless, staff are keen to see that educational reforms are linked to teaching and learning, as illustrated in the following comments:

'Change must benefit and give maximum opportunity to students.' (M4)
‘It seems that there is too much emphasis on structures rather than educational outcomes.’ (L14)

Despite the fact that the VTC is only at the school-site level, or on Track 1 of Caldwell’s model, what is imminent is the endeavour of the senior management of the VTC to secure the commitment of staff to bring about enduring educational effectiveness and quality. The core problem of enhancing quality education is the main concern of staff.

CONCLUSION

Formulation and implementation of a successful organizational change like decentralization requires understanding about how staff respond to the planned change and what potential difficulties and resistance are. Staff attitudes towards devolution (affective responses), to what extent do staff understand the rationale for the change (cognitive responses), what forms of consultation about implementation of devolution have been used and what preparations have been done (action responses) should be useful information for implementing change. However, it seems that the importance of this information has not been noted by the senior management of the VTC as staff were not consulted and empowered during the adoption, initiation and implementation stages of the devolution policy (see pp. 126-128). A development culture, which is conducive to change and supported by staff in adopting and implementing change effectively, is at present non-existent.

The changes being implemented by the VTC are likened to revolutions rather than evolution. Revolutions have the advantage of speed. They take the form of abrupt reorganizations. These drastic shifts are traumatic. Evolutionary or gradual change, planned as a sequence of small steps, is likely to be much more effective and productive in the long run – a sequence of changes rather than a sudden reorganization. People need time to progress through the stages of the change process. The shorter the timeline for the implementation, the more problems entail. The devolution initiative is inherently and dynamically complex. The process of implementation is much more formidable than is anticipated. Nevertheless, it was decided only by the senior management of the VTC. As a result, it is fraught with unpredictable problems.
The strategies that are used also fail to address fundamental instructional reform and associated development of new collaborative cultures among staff. The worth of particular policies cannot be taken for granted because staff cannot be sure about the purposes, possibilities of implementation, or actual outcomes of proposed changes. Educational changes are not ends in themselves. Staff strive to find meaning in assessing specific changes. Teachers' involvement and empowerment in the planning process is essential for enhancing their commitment and reducing their scepticism.

A combination of relevance, readiness and resources would ensure a greater chance of success for change (Fullan, 1991). Relevance includes the interaction of needs, clarity of the change, or what it has to offer to teachers and students. Readiness involves the practical and conceptual capacity of the technical institutes to initiate, develop or adopt a given innovation and it may be approached from the individual level as well as the organizational level. Resources concern the accumulation of and provision of support as a part of the change process. There are no hard and fast rules for success for change. The uniqueness of the individual setting is a critical factor. Changing the organizational culture, flattening out the hierarchy, opening up real opportunities for teachers to contribute meaningfully to the decision-making process, and fostering greater professional development, together with good management and adequate autonomous funding, are certainly very promising strategies to change the VTC towards a more entrepreneurial one.

The themes discussed in this chapter shed light on key factors related to decentralization being implemented in the VTC. They allow the writer to obtain clear glimpses of the emerging patterns. Even though the findings cannot pretend to be exhaustive, they are representative. There are also sufficient common indicators to allow some conclusions to be drawn. They will be discussed in Chapter 8.
CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

This research was designed to explore and analyse a major change being undertaken in the VTC. It attempted to examine the background prompting the VTC to adopt the devolution policy, and to gain an insight into the experiences and perspectives of staff on devolution. The research framework was developed from the conceptual framework of centralization and decentralization. The research was conducted as a phenomenological inquiry using a qualitative case-study approach to inductively understand human experience in context-specific settings. The data collection techniques consisted of documentary analysis, observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Such a methodological triangulation was used to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. Data analysis was qualitative using a thematic approach to elucidate emerging patterns from the findings.

The main findings given in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are recapitulated below:

1. Prior to the introduction of the devolution initiative, the TIDHQ was the supervisor of the technical institutes performing monitoring, controlling, coordinating and facilitating roles. The centralized function of the TIDHQ tried to ensure uniformity and equity among the seven technical institutes, but was considered to stifle the initiatives and incentives of the technical institutes because of its strong controlling gesture.
2. The Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report acted as a catalyst to set off the change.
3. The main thrust of the devolution initiative fully implemented in September 1999 is to achieve effectiveness and efficiency.
4. The scope of decentralization with respect to the use of resources, participative decision-making and curriculum development is limited.
Staff in general welcome release from the management and control by the headquarters, and regard the devolution initiative as a correct direction to change. There is a remarkable degree of concurrence among staff in focusing on student learning outcomes as the key to any reforms.

Since the release of the Segal Quence Wicksteed Consultant Report, staff have not been consulted about the adoption, initiation and implementation of the devolution initiative, which is largely determined by the senior management of the VTC. There is also a neglect of staff's views by the senior management. As a result, most staff are indifferent to, and have no ownership of, this far-reaching change.

The devolution initiative is a major cultural change in the VTC, but the senior management have paid little attention to the organizational culture of both the VTC and the technical institutes.

Staff are highly critical of the senior management. Comments on lack of leadership were prevalent.

The importance of the proper pace of change was not considered by the senior management. Staff are not psychologically prepared for change, the pace of which is sporadic and unexpected.

Staff are concerned with the risks involved in implementing the devolution initiative. There is not only anxiety and uncertainty, but also resistance among staff. Besides, staff regularly complain of an increase in workload as a result of devolution.

Staff development has not played a vital part in changing attitudes and cultures. It needs to be strengthened to equip both management and staff with the knowledge and skills to cope with change.

Some authority has been devolved to the level of the principals though the senior management take control of most major issues. This change has resulted in the former system of the TIDHQ as educational controller being replaced by a system in which the management of the technical institutes is vested in the principals of the technical institutes.

The transformation of the TIDHQ into the Academic Secretariat, and the downsizing of its establishment were not discussed between the senior management of the VTC and the TIDHQ staff. The TIDHQ staff felt aggrieved
and demoralised. They are also unclear of the roles of the Academic Secretariat.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The limitations of this research are as follows:

1. This research used the case-study approach. The main problem with using the VTC as a unique case to illustrate and highlight issues is the limited generalisability of its findings. As discussed in Chapter 3 (see p. 64), this is an inevitable feature of all case studies. Nevertheless, they are valuable research methods not only because of their propensity for uncovering and drawing attention to situations and circumstances which might otherwise go unnoticed, but because they make available such information for application elsewhere. The writer understands that the case-study findings have no wider applicability as a matter of course, but only in relation to situations which are in some way parallel.

2. Devolution is one of the major reforms being implemented by the VTC. Such reforms include the creation of the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) in place of the Vocational Training Council (VTC); the creation of the Institute of Vocational Education, a single academic institution to integrate all technical institutes and technical colleges; and the resource review. Staff sentiments on the changes may therefore not be solely attributed to devolution, though they were repeatedly advised that the focus of this research was devolution.

3. The research adopted personal interviews as its principal method of investigation, supplemented by documentary analysis and observations. Data analysis was qualitative using a thematic approach to elucidate emerging patterns from the findings. The findings of this qualitative research could be enhanced by the quantitative method. In-depth personal interviews could be used in the first instance, followed by questionnaires. Qualitative methods contribute to the depth and openness of the inquiry. Quantitative methods use standardized measures so that the varying perspectives and experiences of staff can be fitted into a limited number of predetermined response categories to
which numbers are assigned, thus facilitating comparison and statistical aggregation of the data. This would have given a broad, generalizable set of findings presented succinctly and parsimoniously to supplement the qualitative findings.

4. The interviews yielded data, which include much criticism, some quite scathing, of the senior management of the VTC. This puts the writer on the horns of a dilemma. On the one hand, the writer is fully aware of the purpose of any research, which is aimed at searching for truth. On the other hand, he has to abide by professional ethics for avoiding criticising a person while presenting the findings. As a result, some very vivid quotes have been deliberately omitted from the findings even though they are relevant to this research.

5. As the devolution policy is formally implemented in September 1999, a longitudinal study of the policy from its initiation through implementation to institutionalization is not possible for this study for the time being. Nevertheless, it is desirable to conduct such a longitudinal study with reference to the findings of this research.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

As discussed in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research was to explore staff perspectives and experiences of decentralization in the VTC. Data analysis was qualitative. The emphasis throughout the study was therefore on description and explanation, rather than on validation and prediction. There was no intention to generalize the findings, however, there are certain implications for the senior management of the VTC and the technical institutes to be drawn from the findings.

There are important questions that should be asked before initiating change. Do the technical institutes differ greatly in their culture? What preparatory work should be done before initiating change? To what extent are staff willing to be involved and empowered? Have the senior management an understanding of how principals view their role? On which areas of work do the principals spend most of their time? Is there adequate professional development for the principals so that they can cope with change and are ready to accept their role of a change agent? There is a need for a systematic understanding of these and similar questions. It would suggest strategies appropriate for initiating and implementing change.
Even the grandest and most brilliant initiatives or policies will not be supported or well received by staff if there are problems in the initiation or implementation stages. Therefore each stage, i.e., from initiation through implementation to institutionalization, should be well taken care of if the plan is to be carried out effectively. Besides, the plan should not be too ambitious, otherwise the expected objectives may not be attained.

Many factors that are important in the process of initiation and implementation of the devolution initiative have been discussed, but the most crucial one appears to be the actors or the change agents. The devolution initiative aims at the system, but prior to changing the system, the policy makers need change agents that are committed to the change. The findings show that staff consider the change as the appropriate direction. This is a good start. The senior management should manage to change staff’s perception and attitudes towards change. Besides, the objectives of raising the quality of education should be emphasized. Accordingly, the technical institutes would be able to accommodate change more readily, and the devolution initiative could gradually become part of the local vision of education excellence.

As discussed in Chapter 2, decentralization is a very complex phenomenon. The centre and local units need each other. What is required is an appropriate two-way relationship. The senior management have to consider the location of the swing of the pendulum, and adjust it whenever and wherever appropriate to suit the needs of the technical institutes.

As for the technical institutes, the following need to be addressed:

1. Does the devolution initiative help the technical institutes to be effective?
2. Can the problems of adoption and implementation be easily overcome when the initiative is formally implemented in September 1999?
3. Are the principals and staff capable of implementing the devolution initiative?
4. Are the principals aware of the multi-level system of school-based management? Will they base school-based management on a school-site level, group level, or individual level?

It may take a long time to see whether the devolution initiative will have any impact on students’ learning. To overcome the problems of adoption and implementation, there are no hard and fast rules but the change agents in the technical
institutes need a proper perspective of change and should develop a collaborative and improvement culture. There should also be adequate staff development for both the principals and staff so that they can cope with change and are ready to accept their new role.

In relation to the multi-level system of school-based management, it is entirely at the discretion of the principals to decide whether they would like to adopt devolution of authority at the school-site level, or group level, or individual level. Here, the personality and capability of the principals is a crucial factor. If they base school-based management on a group level or individual level, then the issue of staff development becomes imminent. In the technical institutes, there is a staff appraisal exercise covering the performance of staff in both teaching and administrative duties. This is carried out by the principal or the respective heads of department. Teachers can only improve their practice and therefore the quality of learning if they are aware of the level and consistency of their performance. Appropriate staff development activities should therefore be designed to achieve the goals negotiated as a result of the appraisal. Berridge (1986) and West-Burnham (1992) point out that appraisal which is not linked to staff development is likely to be only partially effective, and that equally to try and manage staff development without an appraisal process will produce random, partial and peripheral outcomes. Properly managed appraisal provides the focus for staff development. Thus, the development of staff appraisal should be considered in the context of staff development. When appraisal has become an institutionalized activity in the technical institutes, it must be put into a meaningful resource context. If the budget for staff development is so low that the appraisal dialogue and target setting have little meaning, then the appraisal process will fall into disrepute long before it becomes institutionalized, and teachers will increasingly decline to put any professional energy or time into the process.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The main research findings in the literature of centralization and decentralization in education are summarised below:

1. Centralization and decentralization are highly complex phenomena.
2. Principals strongly favour decentralization while teachers support it less positively.

3. Schools under decentralization are more responsive than when they were under centralized management.

4. There are potential difficulties in decentralization with regard to both equity and standard.

5. School-based management does not necessarily have an impact on education quality.

6. Trends of centralization and decentralization have occurred simultaneously.

7. Decentralization has resulted in more centralization at the school level.

This research makes a significant contribution as it reinforces practically everything that has been said so far in the literature.

1. Decentralization is a more complex phenomenon than the VTC first realizes. It involves issues such as rationale for change, scope of decentralization, organizational culture, staff resistance, participation and empowerment, educational outcome, staff development, management of change and new dimensions of leadership.

2. Principals of the technical institutes in general welcome decentralization, while teachers are largely indifferent or resistant to it.

3. Technical institutes claim that they are more responsive under decentralization than when they were under centralized management.

4. There are potential difficulties with regard to both equity and standard because principals can now make their own decisions as a result of decentralization.

5. School-based management does not necessarily have an impact on education quality, particularly as its focus is restructuring.

6. Trends of centralization and decentralization have occurred simultaneously, as many important decisions are reverted to the headquarters.

7. Decentralization has resulted in more centralization at the level of the principals.

There are, however, some findings which are not reflected in the existing literature but are in some way unique to the VTC.
1. Although the existing literature reflects that decentralization can be authoritarian and technocratic in character, for example in Brazil (Santos Filho, 1993), there is no mention of the effect of the hierarchy of an organization on the devolution process. Given the especially hierarchical and centralized nature of the VTC in Hong Kong, the decentralization process is more than usually problematic.

2. The existing literature mentions the Hungarian reform of educational administration as a measure to abolish the existing structures of control rather than to establish new ones, but it does not outline to what extent the existing structures of control have been destroyed and what has happened during the decentralization process. The literature also says that when Labour was elected in England and Wales in 1997, the major features of the Conservative reforms remained intact. However, decentralization in the VTC of Hong Kong involves a complete destruction of the old system as a result of the appointment of the new senior management. How this affects the devolution process is well worth more empirical studies.

The writer believes that this research is appropriate for those working in a similar situation to relate their decision-making to that described in the study. He also feels that, after taking into account cultural differences, this research will provide valuable insights into important aspects of decentralization, and also enable them to find better solutions and avoid problems as far as possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Based on the analysis of the findings presented in Chapter 7 and the discussion in the foregoing paragraphs, the following are recommended for further development:

Firstly, the technical institutes are at present not given funding and resource flexibility as incentives to practise devolution. Delegating more financial authority to the technical institutes is a formidable task requiring a multi-staged process which moves the technical institutes from being passive recipients of funds to a decision-making body inventing more productive educational programmes. Unlike the existing situation whereby the resources given are not linked in any way to its effective
performance, the preparation of the budget should become a planning device. It should impose a duty upon members of the department to quantify their targets and performance levels objectively. Individual departmental plans are then consolidated into a comprehensive plan for the whole institute. Through the budgetary process communication and co-ordination can be promoted, as a departmental budget helps staff broaden their outlooks to include those of others and provides a framework for feedback. Thus, the use of a budget should serve as a device for planning as well as an instrument for communication and co-ordination. In due course, the technical institutes should also be delegated that greater part of the finance used to cover the cost of staffing. In the longer term, a block grant should be provided to the technical institutes to give them greater flexibility in the use of resources. To enable the VTC to achieve best value for money in the implementation of its programme of activities, it is essential that the technical institutes are given appropriate delegated authority in controlling financial resources in respect of activities for which they are responsible and be held accountable for the effective use of these resources. The government funding arrangements should therefore be changed to a single block grant covering all salary and non-salary costs as soon as possible. As a result, the resources given to each technical institute can be linked to its effective performance, and the cost effectiveness of the technical institutes can then be assessed.

Secondly, the senior management of the VTC have delegated certain responsibility for resource and staff management to the technical institutes, provided increased management freedoms to allow them to use funds flexibly, and assisted staff to develop the necessary management and leadership skills. However, they should stop performing functions relating to the vetting and approval of management decision in the technical institutes. They should facilitate the technical institutes to develop their own objectives and to make their own strategic plans in relation to policy objectives.

Thirdly, the VTC, which has responsibility for the size of the staff development budget and the approval authority of staff development programmes, should delegate such authority to the technical institute principals while continuing to play a supportive and responsive role. The delegation will enable the principals to develop their human resource, enhance the performance of individual teachers and translate the rhetoric of technical institutes' aims into practical activities. The principals can, for example, design appropriate staff development activities to achieve the goals negotiated as a result of the staff appraisal.
Fourthly, though the appropriate role for class teachers in decision-making and its relationship with effective schooling is much less clear, the evidence of this research suggests that teachers need to be involved in management decisions and to have a degree of empowerment if they are to respond favourably to devolution. Two crucial but unanswered questions are posed by the evidence presented in this research:

1. To what extent is class teacher involvement in decision-making required in order for devolution to result in the improvements to teaching and learning expected of it?
2. How best can such involvement be achieved?

The senior management of the VTC need to strike a balance between teacher involvement in management decisions and empowerment on the one hand, and effectiveness in terms of improvements to teaching and learning on the other so as to avoid ineffective participation and empowerment.

Fifthly, the pace of changes proposed by the Education Department is too slow while that proposed by the VTC is too sporadic. The VTC should adjust the pace to adapt to the degree of readiness of the staff.

Sixthly, decentralization means extra work for the principals. The principals have to attend to a larger set of managerial tasks tied to the delivery of educational services. In addition, they may be burdened by the increased time committed to decision-making. Reports on implementation of school-based management in Britain, Canada and New Zealand reveal overload among principals (Brown, 1990; Caldwell, 1994). The extent of the acceptance by technical institute principals of their enhanced authority, responsibility and accountability should be explored.

Seventhly, recent decentralization of management in other parts of the world has accompanied or been triggered by a major down-sizing of central and regional structures (Caldwell, 1994; Davies and Hentschke, 1992; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1993). It is, however, clear that the technical institutes require substantial support services such as the development of student-centred teaching approach and the development of teaching and learning packages. Research has shown that efforts to decentralize the planning of support services have proceeded slowly (Caldwell, 1994; Davies and Hentschke, 1992). The present role of the Academic Secretariat of the VTC should be reviewed and its future role examined. Perhaps, the Academic Secretariat
should enhance its scope and scale of work by providing more support services to the technical institutes, and helping them to achieve quality education.

Eighthly, decentralization, as discussed in Chapter 2, is not an aim in itself but a means to achieving other aims. It should not be assumed that decentralization is good and centralization is bad. It is not justified to move towards decentralization if such aims can better be achieved by other means. The crucial issue is whether or not the strategies adopted will meet the needs of the business, or have a significant impact on the teaching and learning process, leading to measurable improvements in outcomes. As such, the VTC should put its focus on raising educational outcomes rather than on restructuring, and the position of the swing of the pendulum should be adjusted wherever and whenever appropriate to cater to the needs of the technical institutes.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has provided an exploratory account of the insight into the experiences and perspectives of the staff of the VTC on devolution. The experience of the writer in doing this research has put him in a good position for judging the important research questions that can be pursued next. Both the distribution of authority between the senior management of the VTC and the technical institute level, and the management structure of the VTC as a result of devolution, can be interesting topics for further research. The following are recommended:

1. To what extent do technical institute principals accept the enhanced authority, responsibility and accountability as a result of decentralization of authority from the Vocational Training Council?
2. One person's decentralization is another person's centralization. Has delegation of authority from the Vocational Training Council to the technical institutes resulted in more centralization in the hand of the principals?
3. What is the technical institute principals' perceived authority over the operation of the technical institutes?
4. To what extent has principals' leadership in the technical institutes changed as a result of decentralization?
5. Has decentralization of authority from the Vocational Training Council to the technical institutes resulted in improvement of organizational performance
and/or student achievement?

6. What accountability mechanisms have been implemented along with decentralization? To what extent do they enhance or stifle technical institute principal and teacher initiatives?

7. What are the differences between school-based management in the spirit of School Management Initiative and that being implemented in the technical institutes?

8. What are the changes in the roles of the Academic Secretariat as a result of decentralization of authority to the technical institutes?

9. Will the Vocational Training Council decentralize the management of the technical institutes further? Will the technical institutes become autonomous?

10. How does the hierarchical structure of the Vocational Training Council affect devolution?

It is hoped, as discussed in Chapter 1, that this study would prompt more research on the operation of technical institutes in Hong Kong, which have received scant attention compared to that undertaken in the school sector. Researchers can refer to the findings of this research with their own judgement to design studies with the best likelihood of yielding important new knowledge, and improving technical and vocational education in Hong Kong.

**CONCLUSION**

In view of the complexity of the issues, and the different degree of acceptance of the devolution policy by staff, the senior management of the VTC should adjust the pace of the changes so as to suit the readiness of the staff. The present funding arrangements, generally criticized by staff, do not allow sufficient flexibility for school-based management and do not relate to financial management. The funding system should facilitate strategic planning in the technical institutes which should be given flexibility in the use of resources under a clear management and accountability system. Staff development should be enhanced to assist both principals and staff to cope with change and develop the necessary management and leadership skills. The strategies adopted should also aim to lead to measurable improvements in educational outcomes which are regarded by staff as the key to the devolution initiative.
This research chose case study as a way of gathering detailed qualitative data from staff, from which key patterns emerged. Although recognizing the potential limitations of case study as a method, the writer realizes that many of the findings endorse and expand recent research on problems associated with the adoption and implementation of the decentralization policy. This qualitative research can serve the important function of highlighting key issues and areas where there are needs for more comprehensive and quantitative studies. Recurring statements and ideas to be noteworthy from the qualitative data can be used to construct questionnaires for quantitative studies. Besides, a longitudinal study can be conducted to see how important issues may be changed. The longitudinal study can extend over a number of years beginning from the point when the policy was initiated through its implementation to its institutionalization. Through such a study, it is expected that changes in organizational culture, staff perspectives and students’ outcomes can be traced.
Appendix 1

Recommendations for the School Management Initiative

1. The emphasis in the Education Department's relations with the aided sector should change from detailed control to support and advice, within a framework defining responsibilities and accountability at all levels in the education system.

2. The Education Department should remain as a government department.

3. The Education Department should obtain expert help to define the information needs of the schools education programme and develop appropriate management information systems. Particular attention should be given to:
   - the management information needs of schools arising out of the new approach proposed in Recommendations 4 to 10 below;
   - the management information needs of the Department arising from the new framework proposed in Recommendation 1 above.

4. The roles of those responsible for delivering education in schools should be defined more clearly.

5. Every School Management Committee should be required, under Education Regulation 75, to prepare a constitution setting out the aims and objectives of the school and the procedures and practices by which it will be managed.

6. The role and the legal/contractual position of the sponsor in respect of school management should be clarified.

7. The role and duties of the Supervisor in relation to the School Management Committee and Principal should be reviewed.

8. The roles and responsibilities of the principal should be set out in a Principal's Manual.

9. Formal staff reporting procedures should be required in all aided schools.

10. School management frameworks should allow for participation in decision-making, according to formal procedures, by all parties concerned including: all teaching staff; the principal; the School Management Committee; and (to an appropriate degree) parents and students.

11. Funds for aided schools should be provided as far as possible in the form of a block grant. Each school should have authority to decide its own spending pattern in the light of central education policies and its own defined needs.
12. As a first step in encouraging more awareness among school managers of all their resources, schools should have discretion to use savings from up to 5% vacancies for any staff or non-staff purpose.

13. While government grants should be sufficient for a school to provide an acceptable standard of education, schools should have more flexibility to tap sources of non-government funding for above standard items. In particular, they should be permitted to charge Tong Fai to all pupils, up to reasonable amount.

14. The government should ensure that the sponsor's contribution continues to represent a reasonable proportion of the cost of setting up a school.

15. In the longer term, serious consideration should be given to the merging of salary and non-salary grants.

16. In order to test Recommendations 4 to 13 above and 17 and 18 below in as short a time as possible, a pilot scheme should be defined, and implemented from September 1991 in a cross section of schools of different types, catering for students of different ability ranges, and operated by various sponsoring bodies.

17. Each school in the public sector should produce an annual School Plan to guide its activities during the year.

18. Each school should prepare an annual School Profile covering its activities in the previous year and detailing school performance in a number of key areas.

Appendix 2

Guiding Questions for the Semi-Structured Interviews

The following set of questions contained in the interview guide was the core guiding framework for the semi-structured interviews adopted for this research. It should be stressed that each conversation was different – according to the knowledge, experience and interests of the participants. The exact manner in which the questions were asked and their sequence were determined in the course of the interview itself. The interview guide was used to make sure that all of the issues of concern would receive attention during the course of the encounter but the interview itself remained semi-structured.

1. What was the distribution of authority between the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters and the technical institutes prior to the implementation of the decentralization policy? What were their respective roles?

2. What prompted the Vocational Training Council to adopt the decentralization policy?

3. How do you view decentralization of authority to the technical institutes?

4. What specific concerns (interests) do you have?

5. How much say do the staff have over these changes?

6. How do the staff in the technical institutes view decentralization?

7. How do the staff in the Technical Institutes Division Headquarters view decentralization?

8. How do they react to decentralization?

9. How is authority decentralized and implemented?

10. What do the management think of the outcome?

11. What do the staff think of the outcome?

12. What do you think about the new role of the principal and staff in the technical institutes?

13. What do you think about the new role of the Academic Secretariat (the former Technical Institutes Division Headquarters)?
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