Distributed Leadership in University Quality Management: An Exploration in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative University in China

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Abstract

Distributed Leadership in University Quality Management: An Exploration in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative University in China

Along with the rapid development of Transnational Higher Education (TNE) in China, the quality of TNE has become one of the most concerning problems in academia. Most current studies only emphasise how to meet the minimum quality standards required by the home and host quality assurance accreditation bodies rather than continuously improving educational quality. This leaves a significant research gap to fill. This thesis views quality management (QM) as having two folds meaning quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE). It needs both institutional and individual efforts from formal and informal leaders through their active participation in QM through leadership activities. This thesis aims to explore this issue in China's TNE by integrating Distributed Leadership (DL) and Professional Agency (PA) to address the knowledge gap in the literature.

This study employs a single case study and selects a Sino-British University as the research site. Seven formal leaders and seven faculty were interviewed. Three types of data were collected: their lived experiences in their actions, collaborations, and change activities related to QA and QE; their individual characteristics and factors about their competence and readiness; and socio-cultural factors of the university, such as policies, power relations, and culture and values. This study explores their interplays and how they shape leadership activities at individual and organisational levels. Thematic analysis is applied to analyse the collected data in order to generate themes.

The results confirm the proposed theoretical framework, which illustrates a prospective QM model in TNE through the lens of DL and PA. Both QA and QE exist at the University, but the leadership agency shows QE is central, which is exercised through formal and informal leaders' PA in developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education, fostering a

change culture, and building trust. Nevertheless, the PA between the two groups of participants shows divergent characteristics regarding their identity, agentic actions and competence and readiness. Formal leaders' PA focuses on building a favourable climate for educational quality at the university by setting up working procedures, policies, and mechanisms to facilitate the improvement of work practices, professional learning, collaborations, and bottom-up changes. In contrast, the faculty's PA focused on leading pedagogical changes related to learning, teaching, and research. DL demonstrates multiple formats of DL in the processes of QM. The findings highlight a bi-directional flow of influence between formal leaders and informal leaders, which is mediated by trust. Based on the results, a model is developed to illustrate the leadership distribution manifested in managing the quality at the university. Four practical recommendations are made for the university to promote DL. It needs to: focus on organisational culture and value building, support formal leaders and faculty's identity and orientations, motivate faculty's competence and engagement, and provide a supportive structure.

This study has enriched the existing knowledge about educational quality in the TNE context. It bridges a knowledge gap by examining how to engage staff members, particularly faculty, by fulfilling their personal and social development needs through DL and PA. Practically, this research is insightful for the existing and potential transnational projects worldwide by offering a reference on improving the quality of their education to sustain long-term organisational development.

Key words: transnational education, educational quality, distributed leadership, professional agency, quality management

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for any other award or credit at this or any institution of higher education. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis is wholly original, and all material or writing published or written by others and contained herein has been duly referenced and credited.

Signature: Jiaqi Fu

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

CoP——Communities of Practice

DL——Distributed Leadership

DoE——Department of Education

EUSHA——The European Union School Head Association

ENQA——The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

HEIs——Higher Education Institutions

HE——Higher Education

MoE——Ministry of Education

OKR——Objectives and Key Results

PA——Professional Agency

QA ——Quality Assurance

QE——Quality Enhancement

QF—— Quality Feasibility

QM —— Quality Management

SCSC——Subject-Centred Socio-Cultural

TNE ——Transnational Higher Education

1. Chapter One Introduction

This chapter briefly introduces the whole thesis, consisting of four main sections: research background, research problem, purpose and significance of the research, theoretical framework, and thesis structure. The detailed discussions of each section are presented below.

1.1 Research Background

The trend of internationalisation has become a worldwide phenomenon, bringing opportunities and challenges to many nations by reshaping the global landscape of HE (Rumbley & Albatch, 2016). The Chinese government has been actively promoting the development of TNE since 2001 when China joined World Trade Organisation. The emergence of TNE institutions has been burgeoning with increasingly more student enrolments (Wang, 2019).

In light of the legal status of TNE institutions, Han (2015) notes there are currently three major TNE types in China: Sino-foreign cooperative programmes, Sino-foreign cooperative second-tier colleges, and Sino-foreign cooperative universities. The first two types of TNE enjoy minimal autonomy in finance, student enrolment, and staff recruitment, all of which are closely monitored by the two parenting HEIs according to the partnership agreements (Mok & Han, 2016). On the other hand, Sino-foreign cooperative universities, as legally independent organisations, are entitled to more powers and voices in making their own decisions. This indicates that independent universities are different from the other types of TNE in practice.

TNE has been defined in different ways. This study employs the definition of TNE by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (2001), which is referred to *as "all types of higher education study where the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based"*. This definition suggests that TNE is about establishing academic programmes and the

movements of higher education institutions (HEIs) across borders. TNE offers opportunities and options for local students to choose international learning experiences without leaving their home countries. Compared with student mobility, TNE is a more inclusive concept in scope and scale, which captures a social movement process through the integration of different educational systems among host and home countries (Knight, 2014).

Some studies note the indicators for educational quality at TNE institutions in China are developed from the QA standards required by the QA accreditation bodies in the home countries. For the Chinese part, the designated educational authorities perform the primary duty of controlling the quality of HEIs (Zhang & Wang, 2015), which are the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Department of Education (DoE) at the provincial level. Chinese universities have to strictly follow the QA framework and regimes if they intend to establish a new HEI, receive degree awarding power, or apply for new programme validations. These accreditation bodies play the central government's role in managing education-related affairs, so they are coercive power holders to judge whether an HEI meets the quality standards or not based on a comprehensive evaluation system as the benchmark for quality assessment.

Even though the regulatory framework and regimes for China's TNE have been established to monitor the quality of education delivered at the TNE institutions, there are still high possibilities that a slip in academic standards might happen because the local campuses are located far away from the home campuses, and the TNE institutions might encounter tensions between academic and commercial priorities (McBurnie, 2008). This thesis suggests the effective implementation of QM at TNE institutions is crucial and needs institutional and individual efforts to make it happen (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Bordogna, 2020; Hu et al., 2019; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021; Smith, 2010; Zhong, 2016).

Educational quality is defined as 'value for money' and 'fitness of purpose' (Harvey & Green, 1993) in the context of new managerialism and neo-liberalism. 'Value for money' represents the accountability and the retrospective approach to managing quality at HE (Biggs, 2001; Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hills,

2021), which is the most prevalent QM model adopted in practice. 'Fitness for purpose' is associated with education quality as satisfying various stakeholders' needs and transforming learning and teaching quality (Biggs, 2001). According to the author, this notion relates to a prospective approach to managing quality in HE. Because of the prevalence of 'value for money' and accountability in HE and TNE, QA dominates the QM practices in HEIs. This situation also earns researchers' attention to an ontological shift in educational quality from QA to QE (Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2003; Sallis, 1994), who claim this trend is inevitable in both theory and practice.

This thesis proposes that QM has two purposes: quality assurance (QA) and quality enhancement (QE) (Biggs, 2001; Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994). By critically reviewing the existing literature on QM conducted in the TNE context in China and beyond, it is evident to see these studies conclude that a retrospective model is currently applied in TNE by resembling the practices of international home institutions (Biggs, 2001; Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994; Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021), which is in contradiction of the changing notion that QE is central in QM. This thesis investigates QM practice at a transnational higher education (TNE) institution in China. It aims to examine how to ensure QA and QE in TNE by considering local characteristics and stakeholders' interests. Such investigation responds to the current discourse of QM in TNE that developing a context-specific QM model for TNE is vital to transform the accountability model to a prospective model which emphasises QE (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Bordogna, 2020; Hu et al., 2019; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021; Smith, 2010; Zhong, 2016).

1.2 Research Problem

This thesis is conducted from an insider researcher's perspective. I purposively selected a Sino-foreign cooperative university, a China-UK joint venture university, as the case for investigation. It is an independent Sino-foreign cooperative university which was founded in 2006. The university has its own degree awarding power accredited by the Chinese MoE so that it can offer Chinese undergraduate degrees

to students. Furthermore, the university is accredited by the international parent university and the QAA in the UK to award international degrees in China, including undergraduate, postgraduate, and PhD degrees. So far, four joint-venture universities in China are entitled to offer double undergraduate degrees. Amongst all, the university under investigation was the first independent university to offer dual undergraduate degrees.

In the past 16 years, the university has experienced rapid development and fast expansion. The student enrolment increased from 164 intakes in 2006 to over 4,000 in 2022. Currently, ten academic schools and academies are established at the university, offering forty-eight undergraduate degrees, forty-four postgraduate degrees, and PhD degrees in the fields of science, management, engineering, business, architecture, education, humanities and social science. So far, over 20,000 enrolments have been registered on the two campuses.

The university under investigation has been endeavouring to impact the reform of the HE sector in China and beyond by employing innovative educational philosophy and practices. Centred on student-centredness, the university has developed its educational model and upgraded it according to the emerging local market demands. So far, the university's educational model has experienced several upgrades, from Model 1.0 in 2006 to Model 3.0 in 2021. At the same time, the foci of the models shifted three times, including preparing professional elites for Model 1.0, nurturing future industry leaders for Model 2.0, and creating an ecosystem of innovation for Model 3.0. To implement the new educational concepts, the university also established the Academy of Future Education to deliver degree programmes and disseminate the impacts to China and the world. To encourage the continuous professional development of the faculty staff, a unit called the Education Development Unit has been established, primarily committed to delivering training programmes to faculty to improve their teaching and pedagogical innovation.

The university has developed a well-established committee structure to make academic decisions

related to QA and QE. In order to monitor and control the delivery of equivalent degrees, the university has set up QA guidelines at multiple levels. These guidelines cover a wide array of quality-related issues, such as module and programme amendments, annual programme reviews, student feedback, periodic review of the school every four years, institutional accreditation visits by the international partner every five years, and accreditation visits of QAA every five years.

I started my career at the university in January 2010 and have been working here for over twelve years. As a critical member of the professional support team during the initial set-up, I contributed extensively to several major external accreditation projects from both Chinese and international QA agencies. During 2010 and 2018, I supported the successful applications of undergraduate degree awarding powers for the university and ten undergraduate programmes from the MoE, new degree programme application and validation from the international partnering university, and accreditation visits from the QA agencies in China and abroad. I was the project lead in drafting reports and preparing documentation for the review panels. Furthermore, I also worked closely with several academic schools and supported several degrees to successfully received accreditations from external professional accreditation agencies in the UK. I am also an active internal participant in several university committees. I attended University Learning and Teaching Committee, Student-Staff Liaison Committee, Student Experience Committee, University Research Committee, University Research Ethics Committee, etc., in which I shared my ideas and contributed to the university's development. These experiences have gradually developed my interest in the studies of QA in the global TNE context. After reading relevant literature, I have become aware of some critical knowledge gaps in the existing research, which grasped my immediate attention and motivated me to look for solutions. I believe these experiences can positively contribute to examining the current study.

This research aims to address the existing research gaps by investigating the QM practices in TNE. I am particularly interested in uncovering the characteristics of QM in China's TNE and how DL is

demonstrated in the QM processes. I also intend to make proposals on how to improve the leadership capacities of individual staff and the university, which can contribute to the QA and QE. The research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the processes of quality management at a Sino-foreign cooperative university?

2. How is leadership distributed in the processes of quality management at the research site?

3. How can the University promote the development of effective leadership distribution and maximise its benefits of quality management?

1.3 Theoretical Framework for This Study

This research employs an integrated theoretical framework to address the issue, which builds on the relevant studies of educational quality, quality management, the Distributed Leadership (DL) theory and the Professional Agency (PA) theory as the theoretical lenses. This research was carried out from an insider researcher's perspective at a China-UK joint venture university.

The literature on educational quality and quality management sets the background for this study. The knowledge of how to develop a prospective QM model in Chinese TNE is limited. There is also a dearth of investigation which addresses this issue from the perspective of educational leadership, even though leadership, teamwork, culture, empowerment, and staff engagement have been pointed out as the crucial factors for QE in the literature on QM (Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994).

This research approaches this issue from the perspective of DL. DL is conceptualised based on the agency-structure dualism model proposed by Archer (2000), who believes the two aspects are relational and can affect each other. More specifically, this framework indicates that structural factors can promote or inhibit the execution of formal and informal leaders' agency; at the same time, their agency can shape or alter the environment. When I employed this analytical structure to review the literature on DL from a critical lens, I found a dearth of relevant research conducted in Chinese TNE(Zhu & Caliskan, 2021).

Furthermore, the agency aspect of DL has not been systematically investigated because most research overlooked an essential component of agency: identity. It echoes the current discourse on DL in academia, which proposes further research to pay more attention to the effects of DL on leadership actors' social and personal needs (Tian et al., 2016; Woods & Woods, 2013). A further investigation of the agency aspect can enrich our understanding of DL from a psychological perspective. Another criticism of the existing research relates to the isolation of the two aspects in most literature, which contradicts the conceptualisation of DL as a relational phenomenon (Woods et al., 2004). Thus, viewing QM from the single lens of DL is problematic.

In response to the research gaps in the conceptualisation of DL, this study further employed the PA theory (Eteläpelto et al., 2013) as the theoretical lens to interpret DL. A Subject-Centred Socio-Cultural (SCSC) framework of PA was adopted in this research, which views the PA as a two factor-construct: individual characteristics and socio-cultural conditions. In this framework, the two factors are interactive and interdependent in shaping the social world. The SCSC framework explains why some individuals are more active than others in pursuing their goals in professional contexts (Kauppinen et al., 2020, p.387). Compared with DL, it offers a better interpretation of leadership actors' identities. When I conducted the literature review for PA, I found most existing investigations emphasised individual identity. The notion of DL emphasises sharing power, collaboration, and collective identity (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2014b). Thus, the thesis should include individual and collective agency for investigation. Furthermore, PA has not been systematically examined as a recently developed theory in the TNE context.

The results of the recent literature review indicate that either DL or PA can provide an insufficient understanding of QM in the TNE context. Thus, this research built "A Theoretical Framework for Leadership Distribution in QM" by synthesising the critical research findings derived from the recent and pertinent literature on DL and PA. The framework's application addresses several essential knowledge gaps in the two fields of study, which prohibit investigating the research aim and questions.   The

application of this framework is expected to contribute to the knowledge generation for QM,   DL and PA in China's TNE context and beyond.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This research is organised in the following structure. Chapter 1 introduced the background of the research, the research problem and purpose of the study, and the theoretical framework applied in the thesis, together with potential theoretical and practical contributions. Chapter 2 details the key points of discussion in the existing literature on QM, DL and PA. It further explains how the theoretical framework is developed and the potential contributions of using it in the thesis. Chapter 3 depicts the research methodology for the study. Chapter 4 presents the key research findings from the data analysis. Chapter 5 discusses the key findings by comparing them with the existing literature. Chapter 6 summarises the research, provides implications, discusses research limitations, and makes recommendations for future research.

2. Chapter Two Literature Review

2.1 Chapter Introduction

To address the research gaps in the existing literature on QM in TNE, this thesis analyses relevant research and organises the literature review into four parts. The first part of the analysis draws on the conceptualisation of QM and the movement of the concept in HE. The literature review in this part provides a background introduction to the research topic. It helps identify the research aims of the thesis, which explores how to manage quality at TNE to achieve QA and QE effectively. The second part of the chapter introduces the discourses of DL in academia, which sets the theoretical lens to analyse the issue in the given context, ''. It helps to address Research Question #2. Since DL has been criticised for an absence of emphasis on Chinese HE (Lu & Smith, 2021; Lu & Smith, 2022; Zhu & Caliskan, 2021), leaders' agency (Bouwmans et al., 2019), social needs, interests and personal demands (Tian et al., 2016; Woods & Woods, 2013), the study employs the PA theory to address the scarcity of knowledge. The third part explains why PA is needed and how it is integrated into the study to address the research gaps. Based on a systematic review of literature about DL which is supplemented by a review of research on PA, a theoretical framework is developed by combining the essential elements of the two theories. The literature review of DL takes up most of the work because it is one of the core concepts this research aims to explore. The literature on DL has been reviewed comprehensively to generate a thorough and systematic understanding of the concept. This section detailed the methodology used to explain how I conducted the literature search and review for DL.

The search for relevant studies started from the most recent meta-analysis of DL by Tian et al. (2016), who reviewed the literature on DL in the school context. Since this research is situated in HE, only the methodology of the authors' article was applied. It should be noted that the methodology was designed

differently in the present research due to varied research periods, foci, and contexts. Tian et al.'s study (2016) reviewed studies conducted between 2002 and 2013 with particular attention to the conceptualisation of DL and its application in school improvement in primary and secondary education. Nevertheless, this research intended to examine studies published between 2002 and 2021, which explored DL's conceptualisations, models, and antecedents to explore how DL can affect QM in higher education.

In the initial stage, I preliminary searched peer-reviewed academic journal articles on DL published between 2002 and 2021 via the University of Liverpool online Library. I mainly searched articles in English from the following databases: Elton Bryson Stephens Company (EBSCO) and Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC). Then, the Population-Exposure-Outcome (PEO) model was adopted to identify the key concepts for searching by breaking down the thesis title (Watson, 2020). In addition, I also took advice from Watson (2020) to use alternative terms to aid the literature search. Eventually, the employed keywords for literature searching were "distributed leadership", AND "colleges" OR "higher education institutions" OR "universities" in the title, abstract, or specified keywords, AND "quality management" OR "quality assurance" OR "innovations" OR"quality enhancement" OR "quality improvement" in anywhere of an article. This search process identified 2,287 articles published during the given period.

Second, when I examined these articles, I found a large body of them discussed QM in the HE context without discussing DL. Thus, I examined the articles' titles and abstracts to eliminate those without focusing on DL.

Thirdly, a screening process was adopted to examine the remaining articles and to determine the number of articles for further analysis. There were some applied inclusion criteria at this stage to guide the examination: 1) both theoretical and empirical research was considered; 2) research is conducted in HE; 3) research investigates the conceptualisation of DL, modelling DL, and factors of DL in QM. These inclusion criteria assure the focus of the selected papers is aligned with the current research. I examined

the articles' titles, abstracts, and keywords to identify the most representative ones and eliminated irrelevant research. In order to develop a thorough understanding of the theoretical development of DL, a few school-based studies are included for analysis and comparison.

Fourth, when examining the selection of articles, I noticed that some journal articles, books, or book chapters had very high citations, even though they emphasised school contexts. Furthermore, I manually searched ABI/INFORM Collection (ProQuest) to find doctoral theses that also discussed DL and factors of DL in higher education contexts or school contexts with the intention of QM. The current research included these studies because they have laid a solid theoretical foundation for the present research, which can be insightful and applicable in HE.

This selection process yielded 50 academic journal articles, two books, and four doctoral theses for analysis. In order to avoid personal biases, a review protocol in a tabular format was established to record research contexts, topics, titles, methodology, and key findings. The protocol was concurred by the Thesis Supervisor, who also reviewed the results during the regular meetings.

2.2 Quality Management in Higher Education

This section explores the literature related to several key terms: educational quality and QM to provide essential background information for the thesis. It also highlights the critical knowledge gaps in theory and practice by reviewing relevant studies of the current QM models adopted in TNE in China and globally. Further, it explains how the research can address these issues to reinforce the significance of this research.

2.2.1 Quality Management in Higher Education

Quality has been recognised as an essential issue in HE and business sectors. In the context of globalisation, the new managerialism and neo-liberalism represent the overarching social and economic

trends, which have significantly reshaped and reconceptualised the roles of students and HEIs. In this context, students have been increasingly seen as the consumers of HE, and the primary function of HEIs is to provide services and meet students' desires and satisfaction (Biggs, 2001; Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994; Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021). This circumstance suggests that HEIs and students tend to adopt a business mindset to view HE and educational quality. Consequently, a paradigmatic shift is emerging and leading the movement in ideas, principles, and measures for QM (Brown, 2013) in the contemporary world, orienting to defining quality from customers' perspectives. The section discusses the conceptualisation of QM and its movement in the given context to delineate a comprehensive understanding of educational quality and QM.

2.2.1.1 Educational quality

Tsiligiris' (2015) doctoral thesis and later his research paper with Hills (2021) set good starting points for this thesis. Tsiligiris and Hill (2021) propose two critical conceptualisations of quality in HE and TNE: 'value for money' and 'fitness for purpose', defined by Harvey and Green (1993), as the two overarching definitions of quality in the context of new managerialism and neo-liberalism. Harvey and Green (2003) discussed three models of quality in HE: quality as 'value for money', quality as 'fitness for purposes', and quality as transformation. Accountability is at the heart of 'value for money'. HEIs use predefined performance indicators by government and external accreditation bodies to monitor and evaluate HEIs. HEIs, as service providers, are expected to be accountable to customers, central authoritative bodies, and the economic worth of the universities to the economy (Jarvis, 2014). For customers, quality is expected to be worth the money they spend.

Quality as 'fitness for purpose' encapsulates two folds of meaning. On the one hand, it highlights the extent to which the product of a service provider can meet customers' expectations (Harvey & Green, 1993). On the other hand, quality is perceived as fitness for institutional missions, which are defined

depending on how institutions view the market and customers' demands (Harvey & Green, 1993). Woodhouse (2012) claims 'fitness for purpose' reflects a common view of quality by various internal and external stakeholders. Nevertheless, Biggs (2001) questions this view because it may only enable institutions to meet public standards of quality rather than truly help students learn effectively. The author addressed this issue by integrating transformation into this concept.

Quality as transformation suggests a negotiated change process of HE participants – students, which is iterative, non-linear, and dialectical towards a negotiated outcome (Harvey & Green, 1993). At the core of transformation, as suggested by the authors, quality is expected to improve the participants' competencies by adding value to their knowledge, abilities and skills and empowering them to influence their own transformation. Biggs (2001) extends this view and suggests the shift includes students' perceptions of knowledge, practices in applying the new knowledge in change actions, and the transformation of roles in teachers and organisational cultures.

Biggs (2001) argues 'value for money' serves the purpose of accountability, and the other two aim to enhance students' learning and teaching. Biggs' research (2001) employs the dualism model to view quality, which includes 'value for money' and 'fitness for purpose', in which the latter also incorporates the meaning of transformation.

In the contemporary world, there is a debate on the positions of HEIs in society as public service organisations versus profit-driven organisations. The first view posits the leading role of HEIs is learning and teaching, so academic freedom, independent thoughts, and other factors that can push the knowledge boundaries need to be respected. Nevertheless, HEIs manage performance indicators as profit-driven organisations to fulfil the nation's demands and economic development (Rosa et al., 2007). The latter represents the notion of 'value for money' and the accountability model. The researchers criticise this model because it suggests applying a business model to manage public services institutions (Tsiligiris, 2015). Jarvis (2014) further claims that QA regimes have become an instrument to reinforce

state control and direct oversight. Even though there are extensive critiques over the notion of 'value for money' and accountability, they remain the prevailing QM model in HE and TNE, which can not be ignored.

2.2.1.2 The movement in the conceptualisation of quality management in higher education

Biggs (2001) develops two approaches to managing quality in HE: retrospect and prospective. The retrospect approach is compatible with 'value for money' to evaluate the end results by measuring the performance indicators. The prospective approach highlights 'fitness for purpose' and transformation, which is forward-looking and suggests best practices of teaching can facilitate achieving the desired educational outcomes. Furthermore, the author points out that the prospective approach emphasises quality enhancement (QE)-improving learning and teaching and quality feasibility (QF)–- attempting to remove barriers to quality teaching. Despite managerialism and 'value for money' dominating QM in HE and TNE (Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021), the claims made by Biggs (2021), Tsiligiris (2015), and Tsiligiris and Hill (2021) together with the criticism of the current accountability model (Jarvis, 2014) imply a shift of quality discourse in HE, which emphasises more on QE.

This trend of quality movement happens to stakeholders' perceptions, principles, and practices in managing quality in both business and HE sectors. Maguad (2006) claims the concept of continuous improvement of output lies as the central motive for teachings in the 20th century, which requires a guru's collective wisdom. This trend pushes companies to institutionalise QM to succeed in the global marketplace (Maguad, 2006).

Echoing Maguad's points of view (2006), Brown's idea (2013) indicates quality is continuous throughout organisational life. He believes quality is a set of principles with soft and hard aspects. The soft aspect suggests QM becomes the norm and organisational culture embedded in policies, procedures, practices and everyday activities so that every staff member can embrace and operationalise it in daily work. The hard aspect is associated with the technical tools applied by an organisation to manage the

process. In QM, the soft aspect has greater power than the other.

Sallis' QM model (1994) incorporates the critical elements of accountability and QE. The model includes four factors: leadership, teamwork, customer requirements, and systems and procedures. The leadership element highlights the senior leaders's role in empowering, assuring autonomy, promoting experiments, and offering support for failure. The team factor suggests the team is the engine of quality improvement because they can adequately handle the conflicts of direction and policies in QM. Systems and procedures imply QA is the cement of QM, ensuring the functionality of QA with procedural elements as the instruments. Compared with Maguad (2006) and Brown (2013), Sallis' framework covers both QA and QE.

The three authors propose that organisational leaders' empowerment, staff engagement in QE, commitment to improving knowledge, problem-solving skills, and teamwork are the driving forces of QE. Thus, organisations need to identify and meet employees' expectations and create structures (training, hiring, rewarding systems) to nurture competencies development.

Overall, the discussions in 2.2.1 reflect QA and QE are the two overarching purposes of QM in the concepts of educational quality and QM. QA embraces the notion of 'value for money' and accountability under the impacts of managerialism and neo-liberalism, which is also the prevailing QM models in HE and TNE (Biggs, 2001; Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021). The quality discourse encapsulates within it QE that gives more emphasis on learning and teaching improvement (Biggs, 2001) and the increasingly important role of organisational culture, leadership, empowerment, and structural support that encourages staff's collective contribution to QE (Biggs, 2001; Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994). Thus, this thesis proposes QM entails two folds of meanings: QA and QE.

2.2.2 Quality Management of Transnational Higher Education

Even though TNE has been experiencing rapid development and expansion in the past decade, the

critiques regarding the quality of TNE provision have aroused many researchers, policymakers, and educational practitioners' attention. Nhan and Nguyen (2018) claim that importing institutions of TNE might lower the quality of education by pursuing high profits and low costs. McBurnie (2008) suggests TNE HEIs may not strictly follow the QA standards, so the demand for a robust QA framework is great. The QA guidelines have been established at international, national, and institutional levels to guide TNE to safeguard the quality of offshore degree programmes.

Several guidelines have been established at the international level offering collaborative frameworks for transnational collaboration. For example, the "Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education" was issued by UNESCO in 2005 to protect students and HE stakeholders from host countries and to encourage high-quality TNE that meets various social, cultural, and economic needs (UNESCO, 2005). The report issued by The European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) states TNE programmes should apply the same quality standards as the home institutions, irrespective of where the TNE programmes are delivered (ENQA, 2010). In addition, the ENQA also recommends respecting and considering host countries' cultural contexts. The two guidelines reveal a call to contextualise the QA standards and practices (Tsiligiris, 2015).

The results of the previous research suggest home countries' QA guidelines dominate the prevailing QM models employed in TNE. Smith (2010) analyses the roles and responsibilities of exporting institutions presented in the codes of practices for TNE in the USA, UK, and Australia. He suggests the codes reveal the powerful position of the awarding institutions from the three countries. The author concludes that exporting countries need to develop collaborative approaches to QM with partners and move away from rigid models, which can generate synergy to improve both partners' competitive advantages and market positions (Smith, 2010). Nevertheless, the author does not suggest how to collaborate between partners.

The national guidelines of the QA framework in exporting countries set the fundamental principles for institutional-level QA frameworks in host institutions (Tsiligiris, 2015). This has been acknowledged in

studies conducted in different socio-cultural backgrounds. Pyvis (2011) investigates the QM of an Australian TNE programme delivered in China. The author finds that the Australian university's quality measurement is applied as the single point of reference for the joint programmes, indicating a phenomenon of educational imperialism. Even though it is still not the typical practice in TNE, it is vital that QM must address the various needs and interests of diverse higher education stakeholders and reflect cultural and contextual awareness in local QM (Pyvis, 2011). Such practices respect local education traditions and ensure the preservation of education's diversity rather than treating education as the same tradable commodity.

Several researchers have offered suggestions to develop a context-specific approach to the QM of TNE in theory and practice. Bolton and Nie (2010) point out that TNE can create the social capital of staff members in host countries, such as the understanding of stakeholders, potential users of the education, and the local contexts. The authors believe it can facilitate shared understanding, trust, and healthy partnership relations by enhancing stakeholders' perceived values for collaboration in the turbulent environment. This research highlights that the dynamic nature of QM relies on the external environment.

Using structural equation modelling, Hefferman et al.'s investigation (2018) suggests TNE institutions must incorporate trust-building-related activities in student relationship management and explore students' perceptions of the partners' reputation when establishing the partnership. Furthermore, the authors recommend that all the staff involved in service delivery must provide students with positive learning experiences.

Tsiligiris and Hill (2021) propose a prospective model for managing quality in TNE, which specifies a bottom-up approach to managing quality by minimising the gap between students' expectations and perceptions of the received services from HE. The model suggests it is essential to redesign the teaching and learning context based on students' previous knowledge, expectations and perceptions. It further confirms establishing a context-based QM approach by considering students' presage factors is

paramount in QM. Building such a conducive learning environment extends the efforts from institutions to individual staff.

2.2.3 Quality Management of Transnational Higher Education in China

The quality of TNE has been recognised as the key to reaching stable growth in TNE and receiving continuous benefits (Lin, 2016). Lin (2016) proposes that the enhanced social awareness of quality pushes the increasing high-quality TNE provision from reputable Chinese universities, gradually perfecting the QA systems and mechanisms, and high student satisfaction. Nevertheless, quality issues still remain prominent in TNE in China.

At the national level, the QA framework for TNE is underdeveloped. Yang (2008) collects data from the literature on TNE institutions worldwide and Chinese government documentation. The result shows that it lacks a continuous monitoring mechanism to oversee to what extent the standards have been implemented at the institutional and individual levels in China. Bordogna's study (2020) confirms Yang's argument (2008) by examining two joint-venture universities in China. The author states having QA codes of practice can not sufficiently ensure the codes of practice have been successfully implemented at the operational level.

At the institutional level, the QM in TNE is subject to operational difficulties. Mok and Xu (2008) explore the quality control practices of several TNE institutions in Zhejiang Province, and they find individual institutions take the primary responsibilities after they receive government approval. The MoE or DoE's inspection is occasional for exceptional cases. In examining university autonomy in selecting QA practices, Han (2015) classifies TNE institutions into Sino-foreign cooperative programmes, Sino-foreign cooperative second-tier colleges, and Sino-foreign cooperative universities. By examining teachers' and students' perceptions of autonomy for different TNE institutions, Mok and Han's finding (2016) suggests that for Sino-foreign cooperative universities, the universities themselves take the primary responsibility.

Still, they rigidly follow the same evaluation process of international partners in teaching and research, which is stricter than that of China. This result implies the deficiency of a missing continuous evaluation mechanism in China's QA regulations remains (Yang, 2008). Furthermore, Chinese TNE also falls into the same fallacy of QM using a retrospective approach while risking losing the Chinese characteristics.

The call to improve current norms and practices for QM in China is urgent. Lin and Liu's research (2016) raises awareness for enhancing national quality mechanisms. They propose the core of international talent training must be grounded on "students' experiences and must attend to students' individual growth and development" (p. 236). Nevertheless, the existing national QA outline is not aligned with this principle. Bordogna (2020) further states that senior managers at home and host institutions should consider whether their structures and policies can encourage academic staff members to implement QM. A possible solution is to have staff presence in open dialogue and encourage them to question the QA processes. These two studies correspond to the call for developing contextualised QA outlines globally and imply the significance of promoting staff's social capital in TNE institutions (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Smith, 2010; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2015). Nevertheless, the existing research into Chinese TNE shows a lack of institutional QM mechanisms at TNE institutions (Hu et al., 2019). Hu et al. (2019) find improving institutional regulations of QA in the quality control of teachers' qualification and their teaching, student enrolment, and revenue management represent the most critical quality problems. Zhong (2016) suggests improving the quality of new Chinese universities by using the quantitative evaluation results of 41 new universities. Furthermore, Zhong (2016) highlights exploring innovative evaluation methods and building improving mechanisms are vital to address it. Even though Zhong (2016) does not specifically focus on TNE, the research is still insightful because of the short history of TNE in China. Both studies note enhancing team building is central to addressing the low quality, which gives rise to morality, academic standards and dedication.

The above research discussed in Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 indicates home countries and institutions'

dominance in managing quality offshore, representing a retrospective approach for QM that ensures accountability and QA. As suggested by the literature, this situation requires revisiting the purposes of QM in TNE and exploring how to integrate both QA and QE in QM (Biggs, 2001; Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994; Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021). Researchers have proposed developing a context-specific approach to QM in TNE is paramount, which should be built at the institutional level and supported by staff engagement at partner institutions (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Bordogna, 2020; Hu et al., 2019; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021; Smith, 2010; Zhong, 2016). Nevertheless, such in-depth investigations are still limited in both sets of literature with the support of empirical evidence, particularly for the Chinese TNE. This has left a crucial research gap that this thesis aims to address. Previous studies suggest senior leaders' empowerment, staff engagement in decision-making, staff capacity enhancement, and flat organisations are essential to transform the existing accountability model (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Bordogna, 2020; Brown, 2013; Hefferman, 2018; Hu et al., 2019; Lin & Liu, 2010; Maguad, 2006; Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021; Sallis, 1994; Zhong, 2016). These factors are closely related to DL, implying that DL can be insightful for addressing these gaps. This thesis further explores how DL can contribute to effective QM that aims for QA and QE at TNE HEIs using a prospective approach.

2.3 Distributed Leadership

Studies of DL can be divided into two schools: the "descriptive-analytical paradigm" and the "prescriptive-normative paradigm" (Tian et al., 2016, p. 149). The former paradigm intends to provide an understanding of DL and use it as an analytical tool to interpret leadership activities. The latter paradigm aims to discuss prescriptive suggestions and best practices to improve the effectiveness of DL. The current study adopts both paradigms to explain the conceptualisation of DL, its demonstrations in diverse educational contexts and how it contributes to QM in HE.

2.3.1 Descriptive-Analytical Paradigm

Researchers of the descriptive-analytical paradigm aim to conceptualise DL and deepen audiences' understanding of the concept in different social contexts. In this paradigm, leadership activity is the unit of analysis, and leadership is regarded as a naturally distributed phenomenon (Tian et al., 2016). The relevant studies decode DL to examine constituent dimensions and model DL practices.

2.3.1.1   The conceptualisation of distributed leadership

Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) develop a "leader-follower-situation" construct to define DL. The authors propose understanding DL as social interactions and practices that are "*distributed over leaders, followers and their situations*" (2004, p.32). This framework implies DL had a practice aspect. The authors note that leaders and followers might switch roles in leadership processes depending on social, cultural, and material contexts. Situational differences either enable or constrain certain groups of people to perform leadership activities, thus, mediating the changing roles among multiple leaders (Spillane & Harvey, 2010).

Gronn (2002) recognises DL as the flow of activities involving the "*circulation of the initiative*" (Bennett et al., 2003, p. 16). When one person initiates change activities, others follow, and their actions impact the contexts by altering conditions, rules, and relationships. Gronn (2002) suggests DL is understood as conjoint activities, including the numerical and concertive views. The numerical view argues that DL is additive by aggregating the leadership work of all actors. The concertive view believes DL is more than the sum of leadership work. There are spontaneous collaborations, shared roles between multiple people, and an organisation's institutionalisation of working structures. Later, Gronn (2009) configured DL by suggesting a hybridised typology of DL. In the article, the author points out that individual and collective leadership co-exist in an organisation and are equally significant in shaping individual and organisational practices. The new typology is detached from the individual-collective and formal-informal

leadership continuums and can be seen as an evolvement of the DL theories.

Early studies have summarised several primary characteristics of DL by drawing on the sources of DL. Bolden and his colleagues (2009) interviewed over 80 department heads and faculty at several British universities. The authors suggest leadership does not necessarily adhere to hierarchical structures or professional positions, but it is emergent from social interactions of multiple leadership actors and individual agency. Although the conceptualisations of DL in prior studies show more divergences than similarities, the researchers agree that DL is dynamic, relational, inclusive, and contextually situated (Bolden et al., 2009;).

Nevertheless, some researchers indicate DL is more rhetorical than reality in UK universities because the budget holders tend to exert more influence over others, which questions the normative account of DL as power-sharing (Bolden et al., 2009). Davison et al. (2013) remark that DL distributes responsibilities, but the authoritative power stays with the formal leaders. Jones (2014) points out that DL enhances participation and involvement but doesn't change the power structure at HEIs. She also remains sceptical about the normative account of DL in school systems, the translation of which into HE is challenged due to institutional characteristics and cultural differences.

These different voices promote the ontological shift of DL, so several researchers propose new approaches to addressing the issues. van Ameijde's research (2009) uncovers the reason for such change and argues that quality control and accountability reinforce the bureaucracy of control in HEIs. Youngs (2017) further states the audit culture generates a leadership configuration: leadership-follower-goals, which is incompatible with academic autonomy and collegiality because it implies a direct translation of business models of private sectors to HE contexts (van Ameijde, 2009). Youngs (2017) proposes viewing DL as leadership-as-practice can diminish the negative impacts of new managerialism, which suggests researchers start with the collective practices that support learning, teaching and research and then investigate how to support and nurture staff's actions.

Youngs (2017) argues that leadership-as-practice accentuates that DL has an agential aspect. Understanding formal and informal leaders' sources of the initiative is critical for organisations to provide adequate support for leadership actors to work collaboratively towards the same goal. Bouwmans et al. (2019) respond to this notion by conducting empirical research. They find the existing research on DL still leaves a loophole to illustrate formal and informal leaders' actions and interactions in both school and HE contexts. Thus, taking an agency perspective suggested by Tian et al. (2016), the authors examine the interplays between team leaders and teachers participating in five teacher design teams of a teaching innovation project at a vocational school.

Viewing DL from the agency perspective is not new in the literature. Several researchers raised this point two decades ago and proposed the agency-structure dualism model to conceptualise DL. Woods et al.'s systematic review of DL in the educational context note (2004) that both the agency and structural aspects are constituencies for DL. The agency perspective covers the lead agency of individual leaders, the capacities of individual leaders, and their leadership practices. The structural aspect includes cultural ideas, values, social relations from hierarchies, and trust. The two aspects can interplay and shape leadership distribution; in turn, leadership actors' agency can also impact the environment. This finding implies DL is a relational phenomenon. However, the authors did not specify how the two aspects shaped DL practices at different educational institutions.

The current study assumes that DL entails both agency and structure aspects. They interact to shape leadership activities, and the sources of influence derive from both formal and informal leaders. This attempt can extend our understanding of leadership-as-practice (Youngs, 2017) with empirical evidence. It also enriches the limited knowledge of the leadership actions shaping DL towards shared goals (Bouwmans et al., 2019) by explaining how formal and informal leaders can exercise their leadership agency in collectively contributing to QM at the TNE in China.

Driven by globalisation and internationalisation, the traditional hierarchical academic leadership in

Chinese HE is inadequate to underpin the HE transformation by placing pressure on formal leaders. To address this issue, some researchers propose employing a western leadership framework, such as DL, because it advocates collegiality and academic autonomy as a viable approach (Lu & Smith, 2022; Zhu & Caliskan, 2021).

By synthesising the results from twelve interviews with Chinese faculty members from eight Chinese universities, Cheng and Zhu (2021) define effective educational leadership of Chinese academic members as "*a significant impact, based on experience and power, on learners, researchers and other academic members in the ways of mentoring, disseminating scholarship, sharing knowledge, building active social support networks, promoting innovation in education and providing social services*" (p. 183). Jiang and Xue (2021) define faculty leadership in the governance structure of Chinese universities based on empirical evidence. They state "*faculty leadership refers to faculty's positive interaction and purposeful interpersonal influence on others, which emphasizes the responsibility and sharing of faculty, the development of teamwork ability*" (p. 208). The authors investigate Chinese faculty's perceptions of faculty leadership in university governance. They suggest faculty have very limited influence in university governance and only take the principal responsibilities in curricular decisions and student evaluation. Liu et al. (2021) explore the academic leadership of university teachers in the Chinese Xin Wen Ke Construction Project. By critically reviewing the existing literature on academic leadership, the authors summarise academic leadership refers to the influences of leadership actors in both teaching and research activities to promote academic values and performance and boost achieving goals.

Even though these studies employ different terms, such as educational leadership, faculty leadership, or academic leadership, the essence of these concepts resembles the notion of DL. Nevertheless, the researchers argue DL is incompatible with Chinese culture's high-power distance and collectivism (Zhu and Caliskan, 2021), so eliciting participants' emergent leadership could be difficult. This situation makes DL much under-researched in China's HE. On the contrary, the reviewed research above indicates DL can

coexist with the hierarchical structure of Chinese universities, which can enlighten Chinese HE to revisit their leadership practices and leadership capacities development programmes to improve the quality of teaching and student experiences. The following section introduces the modelling of DL in HE.

2.3.1.2   Modelling distributed leadership

Early studies have developed several DL taxonomies to articulate how DL is exercised in educational contexts. When reviewing the literature, I found some concepts were quite similar, which have been noted by several researchers as well (Chapman, 2017; Harris, 2008; Rothenberg, 2015). In this thesis, the existing taxonomies of leadership distribution were further combined into a new framework that better articulated the models of DL. According to the connotations of each taxonomy, DL practices with the same meaning were integrated to form a new category. The new category was then renamed. After analysis of these existing taxonomies, a synthesised framework of DL was developed and illustrated in Table 1, A Synthesised Framework of Leadership Distribution. It includes four types of DL: formal distribution, pragmatic distribution, organic distribution, and chaotic distribution. When I reviewed the literature, I found that Chapman (2017) employed the same approach, so these names of DL models were directly employed from Chapman's study (2017).

- Organic Distribution. Gronn's spontaneous collaboration and intuitive working relations (2002), together with Leithwood et al.'s spontaneous alignment (2006) and MacBeath et al.'s cultural distribution (2004), all highlight the emergent nature of DL. They regard DL as intuitive and spontaneous activities at individual and collective levels. This type of DL recognises the blurred boundaries between leaders and followers. The outcome of organic distribution is conceived positively by the researchers, providing leadership actors have common goals and beliefs (Spillane & Healey, 2010).

- Formal distribution is embedded in the formal delegation of tasks through organisational roles

and responsibilities (MacBeath et al., 2004). It is understood as staff performing their roles related to positions in the organisation's hierarchy. It represents institutionalised practices supported by specific organisational arrangements and structures that facilitate individual collaborations (Gronn, 2002). It can be pre-planned and designated to formal and informal roles without early negotiations or consultations. MacBeath et al.'s (2004) strategic distribution is also considered here. The authors note the importance of fulfilling an organisation's long-term development by appointing new leaders. This distribution is facilitated through a formal delegation mechanism.

- Pragmatic distribution is intentionally arranged based on an ad-hoc and temporary basis. The emergence of DL is seen as a reaction to sudden changes in the external environment. Leaders ask staff to spread workload or solve problems individually or collectively. In this sense, there is a negotiation process involved. As shown in Table 1, pragmatic distribution includes the previous Spillane's collective distribution, coordinated distribution, and coordinated distribution (2006), MacBeath et al.'s pragmatic and incremental distribution (2004).

- Chaotic distribution. Leithwood et al. (2006) note anarchic misalignment draws on goal conflicts between leadership actors. When individual actors pursue their own goals rather than common goals, conflicting goals might cause rejection. Spontaneous misalignment is included in this category. When actual personal activities are not aligned with leadership activities, the desired outcomes are less fortuitous (Leithwood, et al., 2006).

Table 1 A Synthesised Framework of Leadership Distribution

Formalised distribution	Pragmatic distribution	organic distribution	chaotic distribution
Planful alignment (Leithwood et al., (2006).	Collective distribution (Spillane, 2006).	Intuitive working Relations (Gronn, 2002, p.429).	Anarchic misalignment (Leithwood et al., 2006, p.344).
Formal Distribution (MacBeath et al., 2004).	Co-ordinated and Collaborated (Spillane et al., 2007).	Opportunistic Distribution (MacBeath et al., 2004).	Spontaneous Misalignment (Leithwoodet al., 2006).
Institutionalised Practice (Gronn, 2002).	Incremental Distribution (MacBeath et al., 2004).	Cultural distribution (MacBeath et al., 2004).	
Strategic Distribution (MacBeath et al., 2004).	Pragmatic Distribution (MacBeath et al., (2004).	Spontaneous Collaboration (Gronn, 2002).	
		Spontaneous Alignment (Harris, 2007, p.344).	

The existing DL practices from early studies are mainly derived from school contexts, but we can still consider their applicability across contexts (Bolden, 2011). For example, Chapman (2017) used the same framework to explore the demonstrations of DL in extended school activities in England; Leithwood et al. (2006) and MacBeath et al.'s frameworks (2004) were employed in British universities (Bolden et al., 2009; Rothenberg, 2015) and Chinese universities (Lu & Smith, 2021) to unveil the mechanisms of DL.

The researchers argue there is a dearth of responses to the question of "why" leadership is distributed (Chapman, 2017). The descriptive-analytical paradigm cannot answer it adequately because it has a different research focus. The prescriptive-normative paradigm can address this question (Tian et al., 2016). The following section introduces this paradigm in-depth, and at the same time, it details the relationships between DL and educational quality.

2.3.2 Prescriptive-Normative Paradigm

The prescriptive-normative paradigm interprets DL from a utilitarian perspective and examines the relationships between DL and various indicators for organisational performance (Tian et al., 2016). Overall, the research attributed to this paradigm can be categorised into two primary types: the effects of DL on educational quality and the antecedents of DL. This section details the core discussions of this paradigm in the context of HE.

2.3.2.1   The relationship between distributed leadership and quality management

Woods and Woods (2013) summarise four factors strongly associated with the positive effects of DL on students' learning outcomes: coordination and planning, a cohesive culture to embrace shared goals, a strong focus on students' learning, and reinforced leadership capacity development. Even if these factors are derived from school-based investigations, the positive links between DL and QM have been proved in HE, which is discussed in the rest of the section.

Research shows DL is positively related to student's academic performance. Badenhorst and Radile (2018) evaluate the impacts of distributed instructional leadership on students' performance at four vocational colleges in Africa as a national teaching innovation project. By interviewing 186 participants, the results show the new approach enhances students' performance by strengthening stakeholders' collaborative work towards shared goals. It promotes staff's continuous professional development, ensures adequate student support services by engaging in QM offices, industries and communities, and creates a conducive culture of learning and teaching to encourage collaborations and networking.

DL is an efficient tool which enables university teachers to innovate curriculum change. Davison and his colleagues' empirical research (2013) examines the outcomes of a national teaching innovation project using DL as the methodology at four Australian universities. The findings suggest DL can transform the climate change curriculum, empowering teachers' interdisciplinary pedagogical development through

peer mechanisms, nurturing change agents, and enabling inter-community collaborations across institutions. Furthermore, the authors also argue DL is the mechanism to achieve shared goals.

DL is a relevant form of leadership to improve the quality of online learning environments. Based on the results of empirical investigation, Palmer et al. (2013) conclude vertical (formal reporting) and horizontal (peers' interactions) actions are more effective and significant than formal (appointment) and informal (emergent) in implementing the QM framework of online programmes at the Australian university.

DL can facilitate organisational leadership transformation to enhance the QM at HEIs. Jones et al. (2012) develop an Action Self Enabling Reflective Tool (ASERT) to help Australian universities transform from single leadership to collective leadership to enhance their educational quality. This tool draws attention to four dimensions of DL: context, culture, change and collaborative relationship. It includes four common features connected to learning and teaching: people's involvement, supportive policies and processes, professional development, and resources. This tool has been adopted to evaluate leadership capacity development through a DL approach in the Australian HE context. Carbone et al.'s finding (2016) confirm that this ASERT is highly aligned with teaching and learning quality. Jones et al. (2012, 2014a) then developed a 6E framework of DL, evolving from ASERT descriptors, aiming to improve Australian universities' learning, teaching and research outcomes via an inquiry-based action learning approach. The framework includes six tenets: emergent, engage, enable, evaluate, enact, and encourage. The authors further propose a three-step model to underpin the paradigm transformation in Australian HE, which connects enabling DL through ASERT, evaluating DL through benchmarks, and consolidating DL through critical reflections (Jones & Harvey, 2017).

In Chinese HE, the evidence also affirms the positive relationship between DL and QM. Two researchers' examination suggests college presidents' leadership distribution positively affects teachers' organisational commitment and motivates their citizenship behaviours to take on additional leadership

positions, in which teachers' commitment plays a mediating role (Chi & Huang, 2019). Liu et al. (2021) propose that academic leadership can promote the development and construction of liberal arts reform in Chinese universities because it encourages team cooperation, enhances teaching leadership capacities, and cultivates university teachers' philosophy and social science talents in research and services.

From a normative point of view, the reviewed studies above assume DL is inherently positive for institutional performance in HEIs. However, we should be mindful of saying DL per se is more effective than other leadership models or it is a replacement for heroic leadership (Bolden, 2011, p.256). It is better to view it as a supplement to other leadership styles (Jones et al., 2014a). DL is a context-specific phenomenon (Spillane et al., 2004), and the factors affecting DL are complex and multiple, which might cause inconsistent results. The next section details the antecedents of DL from an agency-structure perspective.

2.3.2.2 Antecedents of distributed leadership

This section summarises several vital variables of DL from the lens of the agency-structure dualism model developed by Archer (2000). Archer (2000) claims agency and structure have distinctive effects but continuously interact to shape the social world. Since this study also employs the agency-structural model to conceptualise DL (Bennett et al., 2003), the discussion of this section classifies the antecedents of DL into structural factors and agency factors.

Structural factors

Several researchers have discussed why examining structural variables is essential in predicting DL. Hargreaves and Fink (2008) argue true DL is devised by structural means, such as roles, commitments, working procedures and operational practices, relationships and how people interact. Without them, DL can become deregulated. Three essential structural factors are identified from the prior literature: power relations, culture and values, and institutional artefacts.

Power relations

Some relevant researchers believe that power can significantly influence decision-making processes (Bolden, 2011; Youngs, 2009). They argue power can maximise human capital's capacity and transform its strength into organisational resources to benefit organisational development fully.

Power and authority relations are indispensable components of DL, which have been well documented in early studies. Gordon (2010) applies a communicative framework to represent the antecedents of imbalanced power relations and to examine how they shape the dispersed leadership activities at several police offices. The author finds that organisational discourses gradually legitimise the superior power of particular groups of people by affecting organisational norms and discourses, but superiority undermines the effectiveness of DL.

Several researchers discuss positions as another source of power. Rothenberg (2015) classifies leadership activities into five categories based on hierarchy levels in several business schools at British universities. He finds that positions are more potent in high levels of structural hierarchy and formally distributed teams. Nevertheless, staff's personality substantially impacts low hierarchical and informally distributed teams. This result suggests organisational structures have different effects on DL based on the organisational features. Position as a variable for DL tends to play more roles in hierarchical academic schools. Lizier et al.'s empirical research (2022) notes that hierarchical positions can impact leaders' perceptions of DL in a large Australian university. Faculty-level leaders tend to believe distributing information is central for DL, but school-level leaders conceive DL as the incumbent responsibility rather than empowerment, indicating inconsistent understandings of DL can coexist at different hierarchical levels in an organisation.

On the contrary, drawing on the literature on social authority, Woods' study (2016) concludes that everyone involved in DL has the power to influence.   For informal leaders, Woods (2016) indicates power

can be bottom-up, manifested in how employees lead themselves, take responsibilities, and set directions for themselves and organisations. This claim is supported by Bolden and Petrov (2014), who conclude that even though strong formal leadership devolved from senior leaders play a critical role in moving the industry-university collaboration, emergent and informal leaders make it happen on the ground by finding the directions, seeking alignment, and making commitment across boundaries.

Culture and values

The concept of DL overlaps with other notions, such as collegiality (Gosling et al., 2009), democracy (Oduro, 2004), and openness for everyone to participate (Bennett et al., 2003). Thus, this term is value-laden and can be used to promote democracy, equity, trust, and empowerment for staff development in schools and other educational contexts. The European Union School Head Association (EUSHA, 2013) recognises values as a constituency of DL, which include trust, high expectations and "can do" attitudes.

Trust has been considered one of the most favourable factors to impact DL in HE. Lizier et al. (2022) propose that trust ensures the attainment of DL in practice because it can bridge the divergent perceptions of DL between school leaders and faculty leaders at Australian universities. van Ameijde's research (2009) suggests trust contributes to boundary management by inviting external decision-makers to participate in change projects and integrate dispersed expertise in the collaborative leadership process in an HEI. Jones et al. (2012) conduct empirical research and collect qualitative data on conceptualising DL in HE from interviews and focus groups. The authors claim that building a context of trust in universities is essential to encourage collaboration for learning and teaching improvement because it has a more significant impact on involving people to share expertise than regulations do.

Early studies indicate openness, risk-taking, and mutual respect are positive variables for DL (Woods et al., 2004). Jones et al. (2017) believe a culture of respect, a recognition of change from hierarchical decision-making to a mixed approach (integrating top-down, middle-out and bottom-up), and

collaborative relationships are essential to successfully transform the Australian HE sector. This finding implies DL is efficient in encouraging educational reformation via culture and value building.

Artefacts

The prior research suggests that changing organisational structure and governance systems can effectively provoke leadership distribution in HEIs. This claim earns attention from Chinese researchers in particular. For example, Zhu and Caliskan (2021) propose that a shared governance model, which involves all stakeholders in governing the universities, presents an ideal model to transform traditional Chinese universities into modern universities. They believe such a governance structure is underpinned by policies that advocate transparency, collaboration, and autonomy as the pervasive characteristics of DL. Echoing the authors' argument, Jiang and Xue's empirical research (2021) also implies a shared governance structure can devolve authority to faculty and create a culture of respect to promote the pervasiveness of faculty leadership in governing Chinese universities.

Jones and her colleagues (2017) draw on the dimensions of DL, which can promote education innovation in Australian universities. They highlight that establishing supportive processes, providing professional development programmes, having critical friends, networking opportunities, and communities of practice are crucial in transforming practices and perceptions of education innovation. Nevertheless, the authors do not specify how to implement it at HEIs.

Cheng and Zhu (2021) explore the characteristics of effective educational leadership from the faculty's perspectives in Chinese HEIs. By interviewing twelve participants, they propose four essential leadership capacities that leadership development programmes should deliver for Chinese faculty: academic capacity, leadership capacity, personal and interpersonal capacity, and teaching capacity. Furthermore, the authors also point out capacity building should be coupled with the evaluation mechanism for Chinese faculty's career development. This finding suggests that leadership development

programmes and policies can impact leadership distribution.

As a step forward, Chinese researchers Liu et al. (2021) explore how to build systematic leadership development and training programmes to improve Chinese university teachers' academic leadership in teaching innovation. As the first step, the authors suggest that a cultivation plan for teachers at different levels should be in place, with explicit training objectives supported by the government, universities, schools and faculties. Secondly, implementing the training plan can employ various methods, such as case analysis, participatory training, and action research, which can cultivate their abilities in goal locating, persistence, and cooperation. The third step is self-development to provoke internal motivation and cultivation for research responsibilities, proper targeting orientation, behaviour characteristics for scientific research, and persistence. Compared with Jones et al. (2017) and Cheng and Zhu (2021), Liu et al. (2021) offer a more systematic and holistic leadership development plan.

The researchers note nurturing spaces for CoPs and networking is conducive to promoting DL. Jones et al.'s research (2017) suggests that CoP and action learning projects can facilitate DL by enhancing leadership actors' relationships and collaboration and improving their understanding of change. By investigating the effects of DL on interdisciplinary climate change curriculum teaching, Davison et al.'s study (2013) indicate that well-developed CoP can nurture voluntary participation, relationship building, reaching consensus, confidence, and leadership skills. It can also motivate leadership agency to extend project members' influence and advance their career development through engaging in sustainability education initiatives.

This section introduces three structural factors deemed crucial in promoting DL: power relations, culture and values, and institutional artefacts. The next section discusses how various agency factors could impact DL.

Agency

The conceptualisation of DL informs both formal leaders' and informal leaders' agency can shape the socio-context environment (Bennett et al., 2003). These two sources of effects interact with each and exert co-effects in leadership distribution.

Woods et al. (2004) recognise agency has three aspects: lead agency, capacities for participating in leadership, and leadership actions. The lead agency is concerned with the initiatives of project leads. Capacities for participating refer to the agency's confidence, capabilities, and readiness to act as informal leaders who are encouraged to express their abilities and to play a part. The leadership actions represent various incidents of DL initiated by members.

Prior studies note formal leaders and informal leaders exercise different agency in promoting DL. Tian's investigation (2016) points out that formal leaders' primary role in DL is to establish a favourable climate to nurture DL, and informal leaders' agency concentrates on leading pedagogical changes. Tian's study is based on several Shanghai Schools and Finish Schools. This argument corroborates Rothenberg's findings (2015), whose research was situated in British universities. The two studies suggest this result is a cross-cultural phenomenon. Contractor et al. (2012) summarise three roles of formal leaders in collective leadership studies by conducting a systematic literature review: as navigators to establish vision and purpose; as engineers to facilitate the understanding of shared vision and changed personal roles; as social integrators to support and mobilise various resources. Researchers have marked them as 'gatekeepers' (Tian et al., 2016). In addition, Bouwmans et al. (2019) state that certain boundaries constrain formal leaders' empowerment because they have to decide the scope of distribution. This result implies this empowerment is not evenly distributed to everyone.

Davison et al.'s research (2013) argues that formal and informal DL show divergent agency in teaching innovation. Early career academics can initiate DL by taking on leadership roles in innovating

interdisciplinary teaching at HEIs. Their agency, supported by senior staff's 'gatekeeping', can effectively provoke interdisciplinarity across academic, administrative, and student roles. The result further indicates that informal leadership is critical in building the foundation for interdisciplinary collaboration. Nevertheless, the authors do not specify how informal leaders can promote it. Bouwmans et al. 's research (2019) explains this situation, which unveils HE teachers can contribute to DL via collaborative dialogue and team learning in the format of information sharing, co-construction, constructive conflict, and information processing.

Several researchers note that formal and informal leaders' traits and personal characteristics can affect DL. Paunova (2015) summarises formal leaders' traits shown in the leadership processes by critically reviewing the existing literature on collective leadership. She argues collective leadership is processed by two mechanisms: achievement and ascription. In the first mechanism, joint orientations, personalities, and interdependence are evident. In the second mechanism, demographic variables, such as gender, ethnicity, and team size, can have more substantial effects.

By viewing academic leadership as academic leaders' influences on team members and colleagues in teaching and research activities, Liu et al. (2021) argue university teachers' personalities and personal characteristics can affect their influences in the processes of leadership distribution. They identify several characteristics of academic leadership in Chinese university teachers: values and perspective orienting, achievement refining, continuous motiving and goal locating. The authors note three personal identities of academic leaders: academic morality, honesty, and justice because they are role models in leading team members. Ireen Akhter and Haque (2012) conclude academic leaders demonstrate vision, confidence, patience, dedication, and accessibility. Jones and her colleagues' framework of DL (2014b) highlight DL has a dimension of collective identity. Collective identity is related to the extent to which a member identifies their connectedness with the team and the organisation (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016). The stronger the level is, the more they are engaged in collaboration and supporting shared values.

Nevertheless, the effects of identity on DL are not a research focus in the existing literature.

Section 2.3.2.2 suggests that the effectiveness of DL can be affected by three structural factors power relations, artefacts, and culture and values and leadership actors' agency. However, it remains unknown how the agency aspect interacts with structure in leadership distribution with the support of empirical evidence. Furthermore, there is also a lack of research that can explain how formal and informal leaders' agency can affect DL in the existing literature (Bouwmans et al., 2019; Tian et al., 2016). In addition to noting DL is much under-researched in Chinese HE (Lu & Smith, 2021; Lu & Smith, 2022; Zhu & Caliskan, 2021), this thesis also recognises that DL should meet staff's social needs and the development of "whole person" (Tian et al., 2016; Woods & Woods, 2013). The existing research has failed to solve these issues. This study aims to approach these concerns from the theoretical lens of PA. The next section discusses the application of PA in the current research by explaining how it bridges the knowledge gaps in the literature on DL.

2.4 Professional Agency

Several researchers have noted that PA is closely connected with creativity (Glăveanu, 2010), motivation, human well-being, and happiness (Welzel & Inglehart, 2010) because it enables working individuals to pursue their goals and interests. This study employs the PA theory to examine how leadership actors exercise their agency in DL activities to achieve their pursuits of development and social needs (Tian et al., 2016). This attempt addresses Research Question #3 and unveils how to build a favourable working environment to promote DL through a much more thorough investigation. Since DL is also viewed from the agency-structure model, theoretically, the two theories are compatible. This section reviews relevant literature on PA. It introduces how PA is conceptualised in the current study and explains why it can enrich our understanding of DL in the following sections.

2.4.1 The Conceptualisation of Professional Agency

The conceptualisation of PA is derived from the structure-agency dualism model developed by Archer (2000), but it focuses on educational contexts (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). It explores the interactions of structural conditions and agentic powers of individual staff members in shaping organisational environments. The PA theory explains why some in-service working professionals perform more proactively than others in intentionally pursuing personal goals or interests. It is often believed as their "intentional actions, exercising control, making decisions and have an effect on one's work, professional identity, and work environment". PA has been widely emphasised in adult and adult education contexts in educational contexts, especially in professional development at workplaces and lifelong learning (Ci, 2011).

In terms of how PA is defined, a recent literature review shows PA has multiple definitions, indicating it is a complex and multifaceted concept (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). The multidimensional nature of PA has been holistically captured by an SCSC framework developed by Eteläpelto et al. (2013). This framework seems the most powerful and has been widely applied in a body of recent studies conducted in different work settings and social contexts(Kauppinen et al., 2020; Ruan & Zheng, 2019; Vähäsantanen et al., 2020). This research also adopts the SCSC framework to understand PA.

The SCSC framework draws on two essential components: socio-cultural conditions of the workplaces and professional subjects' individual characteristics. The socio-cultural conditions are related to material circumstances, artefacts, power relations, cultures, discourses, and subjects' social positions. Subjects' individual characteristics included their professional identities (commitments, ideals, motivations, interests, goals), knowledge and competencies, and work experience. Scholars note that "PA occurs over time and is manifested in the relations between actors and the environment in and through which they act" (Kauppinen et al., 2020, p.385). This implies PA is both individual and a relational phenomenon, and the analysis emphasises the interplays of the two components.

A summarised list of characteristics of PA as informed by the SCSC framework is provided (Eteläpelto et al., 2013):

- It involves agentic actions when professionals or communities make decisions or take stances that affect their professional identities.
- It is exercised for specific purposes in situated contexts and circumstances, such as active involvement in improving working practices, maintaining current practices, or resisting suggested changes.
- It intertwines with professionals' work-related identities relating to their ethical commitment, motivations, ideals, goals, and interests.
- It is resourced by individual professionals' unique experiences, knowledge, and competencies.
- The investigations of the concept analytically treat individuals and entities separately and constitutive of each other.
- The discursive practice and embodied relations constructed by working professionals to their work are temporal.
- PA has to develop working professionals' capacity and commitment to the work, promote professional learning, and renegotiate professional identities in changing practices.

PA has a "self" aspect (Ruan & Zheng, 2019). It is closely linked to identity. As an innate capability, identity highlights PA is self-motivated by internal variables. Furthermore, an empirical investigation also considers people's perceptions of their roles as part of their identity because of how their perceptions as such can shape how they behave in the real world (Pantić, 2015). This study incorporates formal and informal leaders' perceptions of their roles in educational quality into the analysis. Kauppinen et al. (2020) conducted a longitudinal study to investigate the features of Finnish teachers' PA engaged in in-service teacher education programmes. Lai et al. (2016) compare Chinese teachers versus foreign expats' PA in professional learning at international schools in Hong Kong. The findings of both studies suggest PA is a dynamic process shaped by constantly renegotiating identities with the changing social environments. Leadership actors' internal variables and perceptions draw on the identity at an individual level.

As discussed above in the antecedents of DL, collective identity also affects staff collaboration and

shared understanding of goals (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016; Cruz-González et al., 2021). This study also explores whether collective identity affects their PA, if so, how. From this perspective, the literature on DL might offer new insights into understanding PA.

The SCSC framework lays a solid theoretical foundation for my research on how to view PA. Researchers in different contexts have widely applied this framework to build context-based understandings of PA. The next section introduces the main points of it in detail.

2.4.2 The Applications of the SCSC Framework in Educational Contexts

Researchers interested in PA attempt to investigate how PA has been applied in different educational contexts. Most research in this area has reached a consensus on PA's positive connections with the learning of students, teacher development, organisational performance, professional's well-being, and commitments (Vähäsantanen et al., 2020). Thus, they tend to assume PA, mainly teachers' PA is central to promoting school development. From these context-based explorations of PA, several new characteristics of PA are identified, which enrich our understanding of the concept.

Ruan and Zheng (2019) develop a nuanced three-dimension framework to conceptualise the schoolteacher's agency. The authors conclude a three-factor construct: agency belief, agency practices, and agency inclination. Agency belief is the primary intention to take specific actions or exert influences. Agency competencies delineate different types of intentional activities teachers undertake to make meaning-making efforts to bridge the gap between rhetoric and reality. Agency inclination deals with the attitudes and emotional factors mediating driving forces between belief and practices. Compared with the early studies, Ruan and Zheng's investigation (2019) confirms agency has an emotional aspect. Positive attitudes, such as joy, satisfaction, happiness, or confidence, motivate the exercise of agency. The existing literature on PA did not empirically examine the effects of emotions and attitudes on PA, which left space for the current study to explore it further.

Pantić (2015) applies the SCSC framework to investigate teachers' PA in promoting social justice. He finds PA has four dimensions: purpose, competencies, autonomy, and reflexivity. Compared with the early studies, reflexivity is a new finding, and it highlights leadership actors' ability to access and analyse practices and social environment is a pivotal part of PA. The literature suggests transformative agency plays a significant role in transforming teaching practices. It reveals teachers, as the designers of curricula and pedagogies, are willing to accept new ideas or be open to new change initiatives, so it expands the individual effects to professional communities (Haapasaari et al., 2016). This finding suggests the concept of transformation has two folds meanings: personal transformation and community transformation, so the effect of PA surpasses the individual level to institutional or community groups. The authors also note critical reflection facilitates the transformations across multiple levels.

The literature discussed above notes agency taking place at the individual level. Early studies have recognised another type of agency at the team level. The collective nature of agency is pointed out by Bandura (2006), who raises the concept of collective agency, which emerges when people work together. Based on this notion, Fu and Clarke (2017) examine the relationships between individual agency and collective agency in a group of physics teachers who are engaged in curriculum reform in China. Their findings suggest collective agency creates a mechanism that enhances the interactions of individual agency with the social environment. In turn, their interactions provoke individual agency through reflections.

The literature has informed some favourable conditions for promoting PA. Kauppinen et al.'s examination (2020) reveals that organisations' pedagogical hands-on practices training and experienced colleagues' sharing facilitate the emergence of teachers' PA. Lu and Smith (2021) concluded that school management, leadership support, collegiality, and trust are conducive to teacher agency. Collegiality and collaboration are other factors positively related to teachers' PA (Insulander et al., 2019). These factors also capture the artefacts and cultural factors as the antecedents of DL.

This section summarises the conceptualisation of PA. PA is viewed as a concept with an individual aspect related to individual identity (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Pantić, 2015) and collective identity as informed by the DL literature (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016; Cruz-González et al., 2021). Furthermore, PA is a phenomenon constituted by individual characteristics (Eteläpelto et al., 2013) and emotional aspects (Ruan & Zheng, 2019). PA also has an aspect of "doing", so it is manifested in people's actions and behaviours (Kauppinen et al., 2020; Pyhältö et al., 2012; Ruan & Zheng, 2019), which also includes leadership actors' critical reflections (Haapasaari et al., 2016; Pantić, 2015). Furthermore, PA is deemed a relational phenomenon, meaning individual characteristics can interact with the environments (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Kauppinen et al., 2020).

The examinations mentioned above are based on one assumption: PA is positively related to teachers' learning and professional development, and PA indirectly impacts students' learning via its effects on teachers. The existing literature mainly focuses on teachers as the source of the agency. This situation has caused an absence of focus on formal leaders, who also play crucial roles in improving educational quality. Furthermore, these studies are primarily conducted in schools or European HE contexts rather than in China's TNE sector. Nevertheless, these culturally diverse investigations discussed in this section can shed light on any empirical research conducted in a new context. According to the literature reviews for DL and PA, this research has developed a theoretical framework to investigate the research questions, which is introduced in the next section.

2.5 The Development of a Theoretical Framework

Sections 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 reviewed the key concepts of educational quality, quality management,   DL and PA, which this thesis emphasises. The critical discussion points in the literature are synthesised into "A Theoretical Framework for Leadership Distribution in QA Quality Management" as seen in Figure 1. The framework summarises the key themes from the literature review and justifies the research aims and

research questions.

This thesis reviews the literature on educational quality and QM in the context of students as customers. The concepts of quality as "value for money" and "fitness for purpose" have emerged (Harvey & Green, 1993) as the two overarching definitions to serve divergent purposes. Biggs (2001) summarises two opposing approaches to managing quality in HE: the retrospective and prospective models. Even though the retrospective model dominates the QM practices in TNE and HE, a shift of focus from QA to QE has been proposed by researchers (Biggs, 2001; Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994). This situation gives rise to an urgent call to develop a new approach to managing quality at TNE, which should be prospective in nature and entail both QA and QE.

The key elements of QM that are positively related to QE demonstrate the same characteristics of DL by promoting a participative decision-making process. This suggests the theoretical lens of DL can be applied in this research to explore how TNE HEIs can accomplish QA and QE through a leadership distribution approach. As discussed in Section 2.3.1, the four models of leadership distribution are summarised from the existing research, which includes formal distribution, organic distribution, pragmatic distribution, and chaotic distribution (Chapman, 2015; Gronn, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2006; MacBeath et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006).

This research employs the agency-structural dualism framework (Archer, 2000) to view the four DL models. In this framework, the researchers believe DL is shaped by the interplays between leadership actors' agency and structural factors. Since the agency aspect of DL is under-researched (Bouwmans et al., 2019), and the "self" of leadership actors to achieve personal goals and social needs remains unknown (Tian et al., 2016; Woods, 2013), this thesis adopts PA as the second theoretical lens. As noted in 2.4, an SCSC framework is employed to conceptualise PA. Based on the current findings in the literature, this study proposes a three-dimension construct of PA: a "self" aspect (Lai et al., 2016; Pantić, 2015; Ruan & Zheng, 2019), a "doing" aspect (Haapasaari et al., 2016; Kauppinen et al., 2020; Pantić, 2015; Pyhältö et

al., 2012; Ruan & Zheng, 2019), and socio-cultural conditions (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Insulander, Brehmer & Ryve, 2019; Kauppinen et al., 2020;). This three-dimension construct of PA is applied to analyse DL.

The current research of DL sheds light on three structural factors: power relationships, culture and values, and institutional artefacts. A review of literature depicting how PA is applied in different social contexts in Section 2.4.2 suggests these conditional factors can also influence PA. Thus, these factors are included in the framework for further investigation.

The integration of DL and PA in the thesis suggests a new perspective to examining QM in TNE, which can potentially develop a prospective model for managing quality in the given context by considering local cultural characteristics. This knowledge gap still needs in-depth empirical investigations in Chinese HE and beyond. The next chapter introduces the methodology applied in the thesis, which explains how the theoretical framework guides the data collection and analysis.
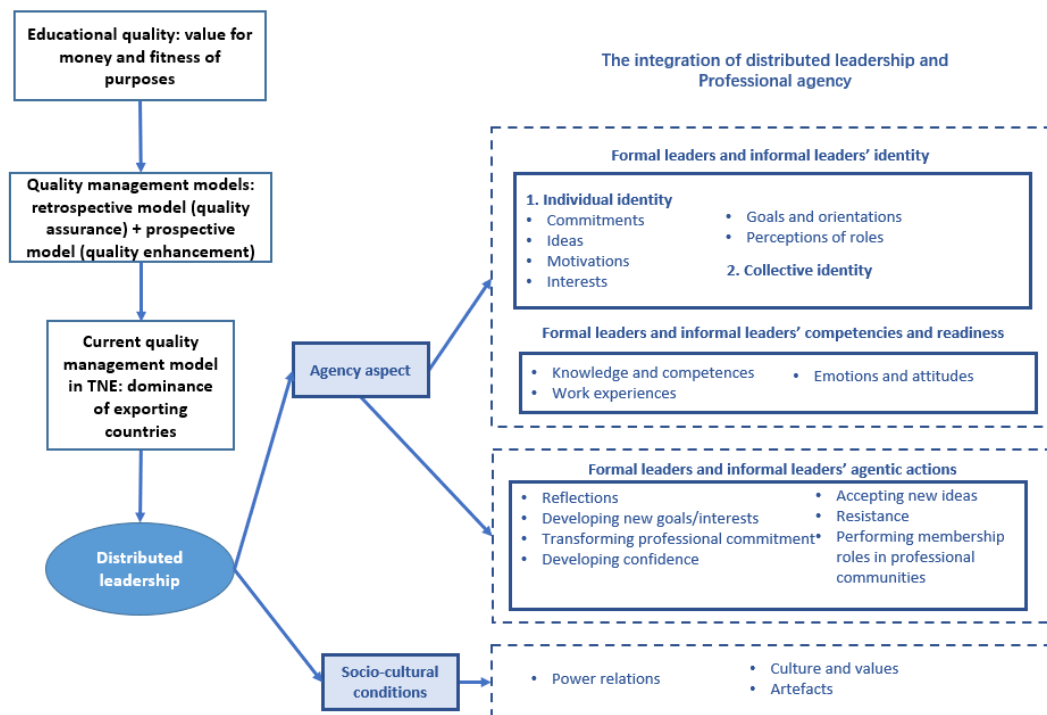
Figure 1: A Theoretical Framework for Leadership Distribution in Quality Management

3.   Chapter Three Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter explains the methodology for this study. It presents the research aim and the research questions of the study, which are supported by a qualitative research design using a case-study research approach. The Chapter discusses the research paradigm, research design, data collection, and data analysis. It further details the ethical considerations of the research. An overview of how the theoretical framework, introduced in Chapter 2-Literature Review, was employed has been given. This framework was developed by integrating the results of a literature review on two strands of studies in DL and PA. This Chapter explains how this theoretical framework offers a structure for data collection and data analysis. In addition, the section also introduces the conduct of a pilot study and ethical considerations of the research.

3.2 Research Aims and Research Questions

This research project aimed to understand how to improve educational quality at the institutional and individual levels at a Sino-foreign cooperative university. The investigation of this research aim was built on the postulation of three research questions, which were:

1.   What are the processes of quality management at a Sino-foreign cooperative university?

2.   How is leadership distributed in the processes of quality management at the research site?

3.   How can the University promote the development of effective leadership distribution and maximise its benefits of quality management?

3.3 Research Paradigm

This section introduces the research paradigm that I make for this study. A research paradigm is the researchers' worldviews and beliefs that guide the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This project is rooted in the constructivist paradigm. The selection of this paradigm is grounded on my view that there are multiple ways to view the world, and new knowledge can be generated by research from varied perspectives.

The constructivist paradigm views learning as a meaning-making process from people's past experiences. This study adopts the social constructivism paradigm. Proponents of social constructivism argue that knowledge is not discovered but is socially constructed through people's active interactions (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Based on this notion, social constructivism has created chances for researchers to initiate open dialogues and conversations with research participants. This research process is socially interactive in nature by connecting with various members of the university, in which the researcher and the research participants work together to build up knowledge as a response to the research questions. On a cultural dimension, these participants come from different cultural backgrounds so they can express alternative opinions on a shared concern. This creates an opportunity for the researcher to understand the phenomenon thoroughly. On a theoretical dimension, early researchers have noted ADM, DL, and PA are relational social phenomena which are embedded in human interactions in the social world (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Leithwood et al., 2009; Sadiya Iqbal et al., 2020). Leadership actors' interactivities impact the perceptions of DL and PA. Therefore, social constructivism is suitable for this study.

Social constructivism stresses the bonding between the researchers and their knowledge, so social constructivists claim researchers' understanding and interpretations are context-specific (Cohen et al., 2011). The constructivist paradigm also emphasises the multiple, sometimes contradictory interpretations of Researchers in this paradigm are regarded as the "instruments" of the research for making sense of the social world (Eisner, 1991). Their leading role is to generate knowledge rather than test hypotheses. These

features of constructivism are helpful to address the research aim of this study to make true claims on complex interactive behaviours in improving educational quality.

Based on the social constructivist stance that the research takes, this study is interpretative in nature (Merriam et al., 2009). An interpretivist researcher attempts to make true claims in the context by examining how individuals conceptualise their interactive experiences with others in the social world. This process entails the investigation of their interactions, people's perceptions, beliefs, and views (Merriam, 2009). It suggests that interpretivism research is interactive and flexible, which differs from quantitative research, in which the research process is standardised and quantitative researchers tend to see knowledge as objective and independent from the context and researchers (Moses & Knutsen, 2007). Interpretivist researchers advocate that research is a collaborative process in which researchers look for participants' perspectives and perceptions by situating themselves in their societies (Jacobson et al., 2007). This approach is compatible with the research because DL is immersed in leadership actors' agentic actions, values, and perceptions of the context, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Social constructivism posits that knowledge is generated in the process of social collaborations. One of the research questions asks how leadership is distributed in the academic decision-making processes at the university. I believe leadership is naturally distributed across different hierarchical levels in the entire organisation according to the descriptive-analytical paradigm (Tian et al., 2016), as discussed in Chapter 2-Literature Review. However, as a social constructivist, I realise there should not be a definite answer set before the research starts because any true claim of the research question is gained only after empirical investigations through data collection and data analysis.

3.4 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to achieve the research aim and address the research questions. In particular, a single case study was selected for the investigation. This section

explains why qualitative research and a single case-study research design are appropriate for the examination.

In line with the research paradigm, this study adopted a qualitative research design to make meanings from experiences on participants' terms. Several authors who attempt to define qualitative research argue that it is more likely to feature concerns with "what", "why", and "how" questions rather than "how many" (Ritchie et al., 2014). Since my research questions have the same focus, a qualitative research design perfectly matches the research questions.

The discussions on the roles of social investigations in providing understanding are broad and complex in nature. Ritchie and her colleagues (2014) classify qualitative research into four types based on their functions: contextual research, explanatory research, evaluative research, and generative research. The so-called contextual research is "*concerned with identifying what exists in the social world and the way it manifests itself*" (Ritchie et al., 2014, p.31). More specifically, this statement argues that qualitative research methods "unpack" the social phenomenon in question by describing it and uncovering what lies behind it from participants' perspectives. As discussed by the authors, this evidence is helpful to

> *"map the range of elements, dimensions, classes or positions within a social phenomenon; Display the nature or features of a phenomenon; Describe the meaning that people attach to an experience, event, circumstance or other phenomena; Identify and define typologies, models and groups."*

Ritchie et al. (2014, p.31-32)

This function is coherent with the leading research aim of this study to explore contextualised understandings of DL and how to implement it to improve educational quality in the given context.

As evaluative research, qualitative research contributes to understanding how well things work, how things are operated, and how the outcomes emerge from it. Therefore, qualitative research can unveil many factors which cannot be investigated through quantitative analysis. Since my research aims to examine the merits and best practices in promoting DL for educational quality, it explores in-depth the

factors and practices positively associated with DL, which directly or indirectly enhance educational quality. From this point of view, a qualitative research design fulfils this demand.

As generative research, qualitative research offers insights to generate new ideas and develop theories. Qualitative research has a high potential to produce new concepts, views, or creative thoughts through investigating a social phenomenon. This generative nature of qualitative research aids the development of new knowledge regarding effectively improving educational quality through organisational efforts and members' efforts in the TNE context. As noted in Chapter 2-Literature Review, the investigations of ADM and DL are scarce in the TNE context. Qualitative research thus is helpful to bridge this knowledge gap and create insightful implications for educators, researchers, and educational practitioners interested in the same topic.

When designing this qualitative research, I acknowledge that quantitative researchers challenge qualitative studies in their generalisability across contexts (Creswell et al., 2018). The primary purpose of qualitative research is not to generalise results but more likely to form nuanced and comprehensive understandings of a phenomenon in a particular context (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thus, I believe the power of qualitative research is not undermined from this point of view.

The research design is guided by the notion of "fitness for purpose" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.78). Yet, the research design should have strong feasibility considering the required quality of EdD and the given limited timeline. As Wallace and Poulson (2003) noted:

"In research, it is crucial to have considered at the design stage what you could feasibility do, and what compromises you should make to ensure that a project was practicable but also rigorous."

Wallace and Poulson (2003, p.52)

This research applied a single case-study approach to investigate the research questions. Thomas (2011) claims that a case study explained: "*from which your experience, your phronesis enables you to gather insights or understand a problem*" (p.170). He defines phronesis as practical knowledge derived

from individual experiences that facilitate sense-making of the context. A case study is "*a detailed investigation, often with data collected over a period of time, of phenomena, within their context. The aim is to provide an analysis of the context and processes which illuminate the theoretical issues being studied… A case study is particularly suited to research questions which require a detailed understanding of social or organisational processes because of the rich data collected in context*" (Hartley, 2004, p. 323). Thus, a case study is suitable for this research in response to the research aim and the research questions.

This research approached the research questions using a theoretical framework for leadership distribution by integrating the existing research findings of DL and PA. China's TNE was set as the research context. As noted by the researcher, selecting an appropriate case for the research is a significant concern for the case study approach (Yin, 2018). At this research stage, finding the case for investigation was the initial task to consider. Mok and Han (2016) classify China's TNE institutions into Sino-foreign programmes, second-tier colleges, and Sino-foreign cooperative universities. The authors argue that the first two types of TNE are highly dependent on their Chinese home universities and are governed in the same way as other traditional Chinese universities.

In contrast, Sino-foreign cooperative universities enjoy the highest autonomy in determining their own QA systems. This leaves nine Sino-foreign cooperative universities to consider for the research. Because of the data accessibility, which significantly impacts the progress and feasibility of the thesis, a Sino-foreign cooperative university established based on China-UK collaboration was selected for investigation.

In summary, a single case study was applied in the study to explore the research questions. It is worth noting that a case study is not an ideal research approach despite its purpose being coherent with my expectations to do this research. A case study is challenged for being weak in the generalizability of research results, which is the weakness of qualitative research (Cohen et al., 2011). Nevertheless, it does not mean that the generated results are meaningless or useless for practitioners and HE institutions. This

research still holds a strong belief in the power of a case study in producing an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.5 Data Collection

As guided by the research paradigm and research design, this study employed semi-structured interviews as the approach for data collection. This section introduces how relevant data were collected in detail.

Choosing the best research methods depends on the postulated research questions to address a specific problem identified from the context. The principle of "fitness for purposes" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.78) underlines the critical coherence between research design and data collection. Silverman's claim echoes this principle, who notes selecting a research method requires "*everything depends upon your research topic. Methods in themselves have no intrinsic values*" (2011, p.166). Therefore, the qualitative case study research design has been implemented in this research, which was supported by appropriate data collection methods to gather valuable and informative data and respond to the research aim and the research questions.

This study applied in-depth semi-structured interviews as the strategy for data collection. An in-depth interview is a powerful instrument to generate personal accounts and descriptions of the social world through the interactions and exchanges between researchers and participants. Rubin and Rubin (2012, p.3) emphasised:

"When using in-depth qualitative interviewing… researchers talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest. Through such interviews, researchers explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to see the world from perspectives other than their own."

Rubin & Rubin (2012, p. 3)

The in-depth interview approach was employed for three reasons in this study. In the first instance, semi-structured interviews aim to gain knowledge about participants' lived experiences and understand their perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a given concern (Creswell et al., 2018). The researchers of DL have agreed that DL is embedded in social activities (Gronn, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2009; Spillane et al., 2004), and exploring formal and informal leaders' interactive activities is a must. As informed by the new theoretical framework, this research also examines individual characteristics, perceptions, attitudes, and emotions. This study also takes advice from Patton (2002). Interviews are facilitated with open-ended questions, which effectively elicit organisational members' underlying assumptions, perceptions, values, attitudes, and feelings central to exploring DL from the theoretical lens of PA. Therefore, semi-structured interviews are deemed instrumental in examining the enactment of DL.

Secondly, in-depth interviews allow the researchers to explore complex issues from multiple perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As noted in the early Chapter, DL is a complex concept because it involves multiple formal and informal leaders in the research process, whose behaviours and perceptions are significantly affected by various structural and agency factors as the antecedents of DL. This situation has lent itself to specific research approaches that enable researchers to examine a phenomenon's complexity. Semi-structured interviews are compelling because they explore multiple perspectives on a shared issue from people in different organisational positions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It allows researchers to see participants' lived experiences from all aspects, including contending sides of a debate, so they can hear alternative voices and opinions of an incident to develop thoughtful and nuanced understandings.

Thirdly, in-depth semi-structured interviews can portray ongoing and past processes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As discussed in the early Chapter, the conceptualisation of DL draws on process-based leadership activities (Bolden, 2011), so the investigation is grounded on knowing how leadership actors can influence each other and how they work individually and collectively to improve educational quality through DL.

There are also other interview techniques, such as structured interviews and unstructured interviews.

However, these two types of methods do not suit this study well. Structured interviews are too rigid in the question design (Ritchie et al., 2014). Unstructured interviews are less systematic and perhaps less effective in seeking useful information (Ritchie et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews combine structures with flexibility. In other words, it assures of responding to the critical questions postulated during data collection, while sufficient flexibility can be given to interviewees to raise new issues for consideration. This interactive process enables interviewers to obtain additional information and develop the content with more probes and explorations (Ritchie et al., 2014). This study believes the semi-structured interview approach can effectively elicit their "stories" or narratives about participants' experiences in DL by interacting with interviewers. This interactive dialogue helps both to construct knowledge and make sense of their experiences together (Cassell, 2009). Superficially, it seems a focused group could have yielded insights from different perspectives because it also helps the researchers hear different opinions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Nevertheless, a focused group is usually used to generate creative thinking and debates, focusing on discussing how things were different in groups (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Thus, the purpose of a focused group approach is not compatible with the research aim of this study.

Every method has limitations that must be considered when selecting the research method. Denscombe (2007) highlights interviewers' effects on interviewees, saying, "*in particular, the sex, the age, and the ethnic origins of the interviewer have a bearing on the amount of information people are willing to divulge and their honesty about what they reveal*" (p.184). This quote suggests another bias that the interviewees' perceptions of the situations potentially affect their decisions on whether to share true thoughts or feelings or not (Gomm, 2004). To reduce the adverse effects of such risks, I explained the purposes of the research and my expectations before any interviews, which helped to ease the interviewees' concerns. Another possible weakness of semi-structured interviews relates to the potential reduction of comparability of data across the whole data set due to different sequencing and wording of

questions asked to various interviewees (Patton, 2002). Therefore, semi-structured interviews need researchers to develop interview coherence and better aid analysis at a later stage. Interviews as a research method, in general, faces tensions from interviewees who wants to retract their data which is essential and credible in providing values and evidence to the research. Silverman (1997) critiques interviews because he believes they can not cover the authentic realities of participants' lives. Although these claims could make semi-structured interviews somewhat dubious as a research method, its strengths in knowledge construction, interactive nature, and exploring the depth and breadth of the phenomenon in question make this technique a good fit for the objective of this research.

3.5.1 Interview Question Design

Taking account of the depth and breadth of an investigation is one of the critical strengths of semi-structured interviews. In this study, I used some basic principles noted by Ritchie et al. (2014) to formulate interview questions to make the interviews more effective. Firstly, most of the time, the participants were encouraged to provide more content of the answer to open-ended questions. Closed questions were only asked when I wanted confirmation of the participants' account. Thus, I used "what", "how", and "why" questions to elicit as much information as possible. Secondly, the authors note no leading questions should be asked in semi-structured interviews (Ritchie et al., 2014), so I tried to deliver non-leading and non-judgmental questions. I also paid close attention to my reactions to participants' responses, which helped minimise the influence of my reply on the way that the questions were delivered. Thirdly, the authors suggest that semi-structured interviews need to use mapping questions as a helpful interview technique to gain participants' insights, views, feelings, attitudes, and perceptions (Ritchie et al., 2014), which were essential to answer research questions. Thus, I developed the interview questions based on the research questions of this research. Open and broad questions can help interviewees outline a "map" for the issue discussed during interviews. Then, as the interviewer, I should determine the follow-up

questions to gain more details, reasons, mechanisms, etc. Fourthly, for other essential aspects missed in participants' responses, prompts are helpful to direct their response to other parts of the discussions, which are unable to investigate through open-ended questions. Nevertheless, caution was given when using prompts, so I paid close attention to participants' reactions in delivering their accounts to see whether they were spontaneous or forced. This strategy helped ensure the authenticity of the data. Finally, when preparing interview questions, special consideration was given to addressing some key themes and questions that were salient to answer the research questions.

As discussed in the Literature Review, the participants of leadership distribution entail formal and informal leaders who work together to shape organisational behaviours and the environment (Bennett et al., 2003; Bolden, 2011). Thus, this research needed to invite both formal and informal leaders for interviews. Accordingly, I designed two sets of interview questions for each group of participants. Each group of participants were asked the same initial questions so that I could receive responses from different perspectives. Nevertheless, there were slight differences in the interview questions to avoid confusion and ensure accuracy due to the role differences. The framed interview questions can be seen in Appendix F.

3.5.2 Participant Selection

This study adopted a purposive sampling approach to select research participants. According to Creswell et al. (2018), the underlying assumption deeply rooted in qualitative studies is to purposefully select research participants so that the researchers can understand the research questions, concerns, and context from their sharing. This suggests that the random sampling strategy widely applied in quantitative research does not apply to most qualitative research. The purposive sampling strategy allows researchers to compare for categorisation, connections and, ultimately, theory building (Cohen et al., 2011; Corbin & Strauss, 2015), which significantly impacts the data analysis process later. Furthermore, Merriam (2009)

indicates that purposive sampling identifies knowledgeable participants about the phenomenon and the context under investigation so that researchers can dig out truths and authentic accounts. This study also selected several knowledgeable participants who had rich experiences acting as formal and informal leaders at the university. The inclusion criteria of the research require they must have at least one year of experience in their current roles. With accumulated knowledge about their work and the university, they can provide insightful opinions and illuminating accounts of their social realities. Those staff who have left the university but served the university for a minimum of one year are considered potential participants, which was the backup plan for participant recruitment. However, the study preferred to recruit several current members.

Qualitative data in nature contain extremely rich and thick information. Compared with quantitative research, the execution of qualitative studies usually deals with a relatively small sample size to keep the analysis manageable. This study initially planned to interview around eighteen staff members from different units at the university. Potential research participants were academic staff taking on essential roles in QM to varying levels as formal leaders. These participants could be Heads of academic departments (HoD), School Deans, Programme Directors (PD), Associated Deans, School Committee Chairs, *etc*. Alternatively, they were appointed as the Committee Chairs or Committee representatives for one of the following committees: Academic Board, Learning and Teaching Committee, Academic Quality Sub-Committee and Academic Practice Sub-Committee, because these committees are closely related to QM at the university. Faculty participants were invited for interviews as informal leaders. This study also considered inviting administrative leaders who had rich experiences in QM. These selection criteria ensured this research could collect data from formal and informal leaders, so their accounts could provide a nuanced understanding of the research questions.

Data saturation is the key to judging whether enough participants have been invited for interviews or not. According to Creswell et al. (2018), when the data cannot elicit new knowledge and understanding,

then saturation is achieved, and the interviews should stop. Based on this principle, eventually, fourteen participants were invited for interviews. In order to maintain an even distribution of participants across the entire data set in terms of their positions, nationalities, and genders, all the participants for each group were carefully selected. This approach ensured the diversity of participant groups so that the data could reveal views from multiple perspectives. Appendix E provides an overview of the demographic information of the fourteen research participants.

The data set included seven office heads (HoDs) and seven faculty members working at the university for at least one year. This research interviewed seven international participants and seven Chinese participants. Six academic leaders and one administrative leader were interviewed for the formal leaders' group. The research also paid attention to their gender differences; the sample consisted of nine female and five male participants. These participants came from different schools and departments at the university. To protect research participants' privacy, a list of pseudonyms was self-created and used throughout data analyses and thesis writing.

3.5.3 Access to Participants

This study is considered insider research because it was carried out at the researcher's current institution. When data collection was planned, I attempted to use the publicly shared information within the university to minimise the risk of misusing the organisational information. Before collecting data, two rounds of research ethics applications were submitted to the Research Ethics Committee at the university and the university of Liverpool to receive approvals for the ethical use of data. Both institutions authorised me to access potential research participants and permitted me to use the office space and facilities during non-office hours to conduct interviews. Staff contacts were found in the staff directory which was publicly shared on the university intranet.

In summary, this research employs in-depth semi-structured interviews for data collection. This

method can develop nuanced and comprehensive understandings of various DL practices for educational quality from multiple perspectives at the university. I selected seven formal leaders and seven faculty for interviews who have been in their roles for at least one year. Before accessing the interviewees, ethical approvals were obtained from the researcher's university and the university of Liverpool. A detailed description of ethical considerations for this research is offered in Section 3.8.

3.6 Data Analysis

This research followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach to make sense of the data. This study, in total, analysed fourteen interview scripts conducted with the participants engaged in leadership activities to improve the quality of learning and teaching at the university.

Based on participants' agreements, all the interviews were audio recorded during the interviews. Then, they were transcribed by Xunfei Smart Recording Pen. This auto-transcribing device is widely used by researchers in China, turning recordings into texts automatically. Afterwards, I checked all the auto-transcribed texts against the audio recordings and the interview notes I took during the interviews to ensure the accuracy of the transcriptions. This process was also helpful in improving the reliability of the research (Azevedo et al., 2017).

In this research, thematic analysis was employed to process the analysis of the collected data. Thematic analysis "is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). It is a fundamental research instrument widely applied in most kinds of qualitative inquiries conducted in the educational context. Thematic analysis is comparatively easy to operate because it does not have rigorous requirements for theoretical knowledge or technical skills compared with other methods, such as discourse analysis or grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Nevertheless, thematic analysis shares a general feature with advanced techniques for pattern and theme analyses, and it is regarded as an essential part of those methods. Thus, thematic analysis is a powerful

and more flexible instrument for qualitative data analysis. Thus, it is a more accessible form of analysis for early career researchers, including myself.

This research aims to explore how ADM is made, the models of leadership distribution, and the best practices to improve the practices of DL from the perspective of PA, which all converges on one goal: improving educational quality. The thematic analysis approach allows this study to identify recurring patterns and characteristics related to formal and faculty collaborations and interactions in leadership activities, improving pedagogical practices, changing university policies and structures, project leading, environment building, *etc.* This instrument assisted the investigation of the research aims and the research questions of this study.

Some researchers have recognised the disadvantages of thematic analysis as an instrument for qualitative data analysis. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), the flexibility of this method is a double-edged sword. It allows thematic analysis to be applicable to any qualitative research, but it also leads to a broad interpretation of the data, which might interpret the data superficially. The validity of thematic analysis is questioned, so the researcher suggests assessing the results of pilot coding (Schreier, 2012). These pitfalls have been recognised in the early research, but the study believes thematic analysis has more benefits than pitfalls. The main strength of the thematic analysis is that it can generate sound results to respond to the research aim.

Braun and Clarke (2006) propose a six-step procedure to conduct thematic analysis for analysing qualitative data. I followed these steps in this research to probe into the characteristics of the data set.

In the first step, I got myself familiar with the whole data set by checking transcriptions, listening to the recordings, and reading and rereading the transcriptions, through which I developed my initial ideas. I prepared memos to note them down, which facilitated the recall of ideas and further reflections on the data analysis process.

The second step was to generate initial codes. Codes signal an interesting feature of the data, earning

researchers' attention in the analysis. Since this study focuses on the participants' leadership activities in assuring the quality of education and improving the quality of learning and teaching at the same time, I intentionally made notes of the activities or expressions related to their leadership experiences for each group of participants. The two groups of participants were coded separately at this stage. As informed by the theoretical framework of this study as discussed in Chapter 2-Literature Review, the coding explored three types of data: individual data (identity, competencies and readiness), agentic actions, and socio-cultural conditions. The codes were grouped according to individual identity, collective identity, agentic actions, competencies and readiness of the agency aspect, power relations, culture and values and artefacts of the socio-cultural conditions. According to the literature, the effects of DL on educational quality are mediated by the agency of formal and informal leaders (Tian et al., 2016). The analysis focuses on studying their leadership activities associated with educational quality. When the first round of coding was complete, all the codes were sorted and reviewed separately for each group of participants. I compared the generated codes within each group to deduct duplications and irrelevant codes. Consistency is crucial throughout data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, I constantly reflected on how the coding criteria were applied when reviewing the generated codes to secure consistency. This process was repeated several times until all concerns or errors were sorted out.

Thirdly, when all the data were coded, sorted, and collated, I searched for themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), themes are broader than codes in their meanings. The central strategy used to address the research questions is to explore the relationships between codes and compare the codes across the two groups of participants so that I can identify their similarities and differences. As the analysis proceeded, this process enabled me to generate several initial themes. This step was facilitated by using a thematic map which drew on the relationships between themes and sub-themes and ensured the themes could capture the overall characteristics of the whole data set.

The fourth step was to review themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a two-level review process

to review the initial themes, which was also employed in this research. In level one, I checked all the themes and excerpts to ensure a coherent pattern was applied. In level two, I checked the themes against the whole data set to see whether they accurately reflected the meanings of the data set and whether anything was missing that needed additional data to support it. Afterwards, I followed the authors' suggestion to rename the themes after refining and polishing them. Finally, the finding report was drafted based on the results of the data analysis, which was presented in the next chapter.

3.7 Trustworthiness

This thesis is an insider research project carried out at the University where I am currently working. Insider research can have both strengths and weaknesses at the same time (Hellawell, 2006). On the one hand, according to the author, it enables the researchers to easily overcome potential culture shock and build rapport with interviewees, for which the interviewees are more likely to reveal more information. On the other hand, the researchers' prior knowledge and understanding of the investigated organisations can significantly affect the interviewees' interactions and data interpretation accuracy (Hellawell, 2006; Radnor, 2001). To address this issue, Hellawell (2006) proposes that insider researchers can adopt reflexivity and critically reflect on their changing roles as both insiders and outsiders of the research during the investigation. This section discusses how reflexivity has been employed in this research in detail.

Sikes and Potts (2008) indicate that insider researchers need to keep a critical distance as it can help generate legitimate knowledge. I am not working in the university's division responsible for quality assurance management. This ensures a critical distance has been kept in the research. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) suggest that insider researchers have to separate their roles as researchers from organisational roles and acknowledge the impacts of politics at the research site. Following the researchers' advice, I always stayed alert to critical thinking and reflection during the literature review, data collection, data analysis, and report writing to reduce the possibility of injecting any of my previous

experience and knowledge into the research. For example, Hellawell's study (2006) suggests that using assumed common knowledge to interview colleagues is problematic because this knowledge may not be shared between the two parties. This acknowledgement encouraged me to intentionally minimise using taken-for-granted knowledge when I interviewed my colleagues. I also performed self-scrutiny by constantly checking my understanding against the interviewees' interpretation during data collection. This process has also helped update my knowledge and views as the study progressed.

In addition to constant critical reflection, I adopted member checking, proposed by Creswell et al. (2018), to minimise insider research's pitfalls and improve the findings' accuracy. The authors note that member checking involves more than sending back the raw transcripts, which also includes the review of the researcher's understanding of the content. According to this principle, I took the revised transcripts and parts of the coding back to each interviewee so both the content and my understanding could be scrutinised from the interviewee's perspective. Costa and Kallick (1993) proposed the critiques of critical friends help identify neglected biases because of their knowledge of the research aim and the given research context. Due to the ethical requirement of the doctoral thesis, which doesn't allow data release to a third party, the supervisors played the role of critical friends, who offered constructive suggestions and opinions on the whole research process from a critical lens.

To overcome the challenge of insider research by enhancing its reliability, this research conducted a pilot test to prepare for the actual investigation so that I could safeguard the plan for the research method to be effective in generating legitimate knowledge. A pilot study refers to small-scale research conducted in advance to evaluate whether the applied methods or ideas can create results that can answer research questions (Jariath et al., 2000). Watson et al. (2007) clarify the roles of a pilot study. They claim that its primary purpose isn't to inform the main study or produce results for publications because a pilot study is usually underreported.

The conduct of the pilot study is intentional and before the empirical investigation starts (Perry,

2001). Typically, a pilot study helps researchers examine a research tool for data collection and participant recruitment and the feasibility of a planned research process (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002) so that researchers can make adjustments based on the results of it. A pilot study was employed to assess the interview protocol in this research. Before the interviews started, I invited one of my colleagues, a faculty member at the university, to participate in a mock interview. After the interview, we both reflected on the interview process to identify necessary adjustments to the interview questions. She also offered some constructive suggestions on the ways to ask follow-up questions, which helped me improve my skills in conducting interviews. Based on this reflective process, I revised the interview questions to avoid directive questions so that participants could share more personal beliefs and perceptions of the social world. I also modified those ambiguous or leading questions to ensure the interview questions were easy to understand and value-neutral. In this sense, pilot studies help me prepare my readiness for the main study, which is a helpful tool for novice researchers (Beebe, 2007).

Several researchers question the benefits of pilot studies for qualitative inquiries because of the dynamic research process. Qualitative research follows an emergent research design, so interviews, questions, data collection, and data analysis can evolve during research processes (Creswell et al., 2018). In addition, the interviews conducted early can also improve the quality of the subsequent ones. Nevertheless, this doesn't undermine the positive effects of pilot studies because it can significantly help researchers to solve many practical problems in advance (Kim, 2010).

In addition to the pilot interview, I checked the transcripts line by line against the recording to ensure no apparent mistakes were made during transcription. Furthermore, I paid particular attention to the coherence of the coding process to avoid any shift in the meaning of the codes. These two techniques have been recognized as helpful in improving the reliability of insider research (Creswell et al., 2018).

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics is an essential concern for qualitative inquiries involving human research participants. Thus, it is of significant interest for the researchers to mind all possible negative impacts, repercussions, or retaliations the research might cause to the participants. This consideration should go through the whole research process, including before, during, and after the research completion (Cohen et al., 2011).

Before the interviews, some essential steps were taken according to the ethical conduct of research involving human beings as required by the University of Liverpool and my institution. Following the ethical application standards, the research ethics application was first submitted to the Ethics Review Committee at my university for approval. After receiving the official approval letter, another application was filed to the International Ethics Committee at the University of Liverpool to seek final approval.

After receiving two official approval letters, the interviews were arranged accordingly. In the first place, potential participants were reached via individual invitation emails, which briefly introduced the background, research topic, the research aims, research questions, the purpose of the interview, and the researcher's expectations of participants' responses.

Secondly, once the participants accepted the interview invitation and agreed to participate, the Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, and Interview Protocol were shared with the participants, which also indicated the expected length of each interview. The participants were given time to view the documents, ask for clarifications on questions, and sign off the informed consent forms.

Interviewees' agreements on the finalised informed consents were received, and participants signed all required documents before any interviews started. I also ensured not to ask any sensitive questions. Detailed information as to how ethical concerns would be addressed if any unexpected risk happened was also shared with participants in the Participant Information Sheet via email, so they were aware of the expectations of the interviews. The Informed Consent Form was formulated based on several principles (Cohen et al., 2011). These principles shed light on some ethical considerations that I have considered

during the research process:

(1) The research's purposes, contents, and procedures are informed to participants, including reporting the findings and how they are disseminated and published.

(2) The participants' confidentiality and anonymity of personal data are addressed in the consent form. Staff names, email addresses, positions, departments, or other information that might disclose those affected are coded to avoid the risk of being identified.

(3) Ideally, all interviews are to be audio recorded. Field notes are also untaken as an alternative option for data recording to assist in data analysis if any participant doesn't agree.

(4) Participation in this project is voluntary, so everyone receiving the invitation has the right to reject participation.

(5) The participants have the right to refuse to answer any interview questions they feel uncomfortable answering during interviews. They might choose to withdraw from the project during the interview or at a later stage to require taking back their interview data before a specific date. Participants might also decide to rejoin the project before the completion of data collection.

(6) The interview data is only used for analysis to generate outcomes for this project other than other purposes.

(7) Participants have the right to ask questions about any aspect of the research before and after the interviews. The recordings are transcribed into text and sent to the participants for confirmation before data analysis.

(8) This research seeks consent for all participants.

Thirdly, a quiet meeting room at the workplace was reserved for the interview sessions after the schedules were confirmed. The interviews were arranged during lunch or other non-office hours To ensure minimum intrusions. Finally, participants were given oral gratitude at the end of the interviews on-

site. After the interviews, the transcriptions and a short summary of the interviews were sent to each individual participant to inform them how the data were interpreted. This was to check the accuracy of the data collection and interpretation and to ensure the data's ethical use.

The impacts of power relations between interviewers and interviewees need to be considered by researchers (Kvale, 2006). Imbalanced power relations can bring stress to the side with less power. Furthermore, a considerable gap in role differences within the hierarchical structure at the university also affects the authenticity of data because interviewees have control over what they want to say after they evaluate the situation, the relationships, and the topics. To avoid this situation, I only selected participants with whom I did not have line managing relationships. When I did the interviews, I explicitly stated that the data collection was only used for the research and would not be used anywhere else to serve other purposes.

3.9 Summary

Using the theoretical framework for leadership distribution proposed in Chapter 2, this investigation collects qualitative data within a social constructivism paradigm to consider various leadership activities at a Sino-foreign cooperative university. It pays particular attention to the participants' interactions, collaborations, and coordination for analysis in the context. The analysis can reveal how they are engaged in the QA and QE related work from a "doing" perspective. This study investigates several individual characteristics of the leadership actors involved. Thus, analysing their feelings, attitudes, views, readiness and competencies, and perceptions on doing the job are conducted to uncover the "self" aspect of agency (Ruan & Zheng, 2019). Furthermore, how leadership actors' activities are enabled or constrained by the environment are also examined to disclose the structural aspect of agency and its interactions with the doing and the "self" aspects of PA. In order to understand the lived experiences of the research participants, this study employs a qualitative case-study research design because it has a solid power to

tell in-depth and nuanced stories about leadership distribution in China's TNE, which is an unexplored area for the topic.

This research adopts semi-structured interviews for data collection. Eventually, it interviewed fourteen research participants, including seven formal leaders, academic heads and administrative heads, and seven faculty members. It applies a six-step analytical procedure of the thematic analysis approach to analyse the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The two groups of participants are analysed separately based on the theoretical framework. Then the results are compared. The development of themes draws on the relationships between codes and the comparisons between formal leader participants' agency and faculty participants' agency in leadership distribution. This is helpful to describe and discuss how leadership is distributed and why it is distributed in specific formats from the perspective of PA. As an insider researcher, the researcher faces several challenges, such as power relations and conflicts of identities between the researcher and organisational member roles, with potential risks to bringing previous knowledge to the analysis. The challenges cannot be avoided, but measures have been taken to minimise the effects as much as possible. Eventually, the study generates several vital themes to represent the patterns and characteristics of the whole data set. This is reported in the next chapter.

4. Chapter Four Findings

4.1 Introduction

This Chapter reports the key findings derived from the thematic analyses (Braun& Clarke, 2006) of the fourteen interview transcripts, which include seven formal leaders and seven faculty members at the university under investigation. The formal leader participants' PA in the processes of QM were compared with faculty participants' PA to draw on differences and similarities for theme generation. The overall findings conclude that the participants' PA in QM is primarily manifested in four main areas: developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education, fostering a changing culture, and building trust, which also captures the four overarching themes emerging from the data. The analyses suggest formal leader participants' PA diverge from faculty participants in the first three themes. At the same time, the demonstration of their PA in building trust tends to be convergent. The first three themes are presented: first formal leaders' PA, and then the faculty's PA. For building trust, the presentation of the results focuses on convergent results. According to the new theoretical framework this research developed, the participants' identity, agentic actions, competencies and readiness, and the characteristics of socio-cultural conditions are reported. Detailed descriptions for each theme are provided in the rest of the chapter.

4.2 Professional Agency in Developing Leadership Capacity

The first theme reports that both formal leaders and faculty participants demonstrated strong endeavours to develop leadership capacity, which was perceived as an effective approach to QA and QE. The findings are presented below in the two sub-themes: formal leaders' empowering agency and faculty's agency in pursuing career development. The following sections detail these two sub-themes.

4.2.1 Formal Leaders' Empowering Agency

Formal leaders tended to show empowering leadership to motivate individual personnel's career development. Empowering leadership aims to reach synergy and develop self-directed teams (Tang et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the data show their empowerment was conditioned on the faculty's leadership competencies, which were regarded as the key to maintaining a department's sustainable development and enabling faculty to offer better support to students. Thus, some formal leader participants paid close attention to developing the faculty's leadership capacity.

4.2.1.1   Formal leaders' identity

Formal leaders aim to promote the faculty's career progression because formal leadership positions are temporal, and they have to nurture future leaders intentionally. The data showed formal leaders had two identities in terms of how they perceived their roles in leadership capacity development as empowering leaders: enhancing the overall management of offices and enhancing the capacity development of individual faculty.

Some formal leader interviewees shared their perceptions of office management. Some participants believed their roles encompassed managing faculty turnover. They believed a low turnover rate ensured their offices' regular functions and sustainability in delivering high-quality services. When those key persons decided to leave, such an arrangement secured the services provided by the office to students, faculty, and other stakeholders that were not negatively affected. This can ensure the quality standards of education provision remain as usual and student learning is not undermined by staff shortages and radical changes that might happen, implying formal leaders' identity in office management reflects the purpose of QA.

INT3 (formal leader) said,

"I think it's really unsustainable to rely on a small number of key faculty.… You always need to train

your team members with different skills to share different responsibilities and make sure that whoever

in this position leaves the office would not compromise any work in the department."

The participants pointed out they were responsible for supporting and encouraging individual faculty capacity development. They intended to develop the faculty's whole picture to link what they did with the university's visions, missions, and strategies. Having the whole picture requires faculty to interpret the university leadership agenda and integrate it into the operational procedures (INT5, formal leader). In addition, the data unveiled that faculty should possess critical thinking capabilities, so they should be able to criticise current practices and adjust them to achieve more efficiency. In a department, critical thinking and critical reflection were essential skills for junior and senior faculty because it was closely related to junior faculty's career development and represented a crucial leadership capacity for junior faculty to improve their leadership competencies.

"Whereas young junior academic faculty should be trained on operational work, so they can develop

the whole picture of how school is going to develop and how its strategic position will be linked to the

university vision and mission. At the same time, they can become more critical in terms of discussing

departmental issues and provide constructive suggestions for innovation…." (INT6, formal leader)

It was evident in the data that formal leaders aimed to build the faculty's confidence. A lack of confidence is caused by a fear of taking risks, such as " *I think the fundamental problem or an issue with these academics is the lack of confidence basically…. Basically, they are afraid of the risk associated with it*" (INT6, formal leader). A scarcity of confidence led to the faculty's reluctance to engage in learning new knowledge and skills.

Developing and enhancing faculty's leadership capacity, as understood by the formal leader participants, suggest the objective of formal leaders' role is to constantly improve the quality of service provision in students' services and the delivery of teaching. These efforts aim to enhance educational quality and offer better learning experiences that can facilitate student learning through reinforced

teaching capacity and leadership capacity, demonstrating the purpose of QE.

4.2.1.2   Formal leaders' agentic actions

The data showed empowering leaders attempted to develop mentoring schemes to expand the positive effects of role models and support faculty development. The participants noted the significance of learning by doing as working professionals, so they believed mentorship was a more appropriate mechanism than the training itself. It was reported in the excerpt,

"*I think mentorship would be more useful than the training itself. For example, when we have a debate, I can talk to David. I appreciate that he has a monthly meeting with all Hods if I have a problem and then talk to him directly*" (INT1, formal leader).

The data uncovered specific actions undertaken by empowering leaders to implement the mentoring scheme. Firstly, it was necessary to train both mentors and mentees in terms of the whole picture and their ability to interpret university strategies because of the recent rapid development of the University. Secondly, the mentoring scheme was tailor-made to meet the faculty's demands for professional learning at different levels of development. It was supported by INT3 (formal leader)

"*the mentoring should cover the target audiences at different levels. At the school level, we need people with more strategic vision, let's say at department or technical level with more on the operational side.*"

Thirdly, the participants noted they optimised using existing resources to institutionalise the mentoring scheme at the school or departmental level. Most formal leaders found the university provided sufficient resources for faculty's leadership development, but the main concern was that it hadn't been fully utilised (INT4-formal leader and INT2-faculty). These examples suggested formal leaders need to consider how to use the available resources and enhance their capability in maximising resource identification and usage to expand its positive effects on faculty. It was reflected in the excerpt, such as

"Mentoring is a routine issue, or like a model within the school…. The resources are already there. It

is about how you utilise them efficiently." (INT7, faculty).

Finally, Mentors were mindful of crossing boundaries. Otherwise, it was likely to result in the

disempowerment of the mentees. This was related to the autonomy given to mentees. INT12 said, "*In*

fact, you can play the role of a mentor, but I think the role of a mentor is to support you to do such a thing….

It's not the mentor's job to do it for you".

The actions of empowering leaders corroborate the concept of empowering leadership noted by

early researchers. Based on a systematic literature review of empowering leadership, empowering

leadership includes several vital dimensions: participative decision-making, coaching, autonomy support,

and reinforcing the meaningfulness of work (Cheong et al., 2019). Empowering leadership is viewed as an

effective team leadership format because it can nurture the development of self-directed teams (Tang et

al., 2020). The quantitative research results indicate that empowering leadership doesn't constitute a

dimension of DL agency in the Danish central hospital setting (Jønsson et al., 2016). Nevertheless, this

research finds it is a significant component of DL in China's TNE context.

The data reviewed formal leader participants who took action to protect faculty in an attempt to

build a supportive environment. The interviewees raised how they covered staff, but their protection was

limited to a certain level. As suggested by INT4 (formal leader),

"Although I can protect, I'm not kind of a spoon-feeding them. I'm not kind of protecting them from

everything. But they should take responsibility for their own choices as professionals, and I should be

able to let them bring in their potential to the team."

Early studies have noted the importance of formal leaders' support in creating a supportive climate for DL

(Sallis, 1994). The research finding shows protection is the support received by faculty members, which

needs to be maintained at a certain level, as over-support can result in disempowerment.

The analyses discovered effective communication was a significant agentic action which essentially

motivated or demotivated faculty's engagement in capacity development. Effective communications, such as explaining, conveyed explicit information to faculty members, facilitated their mutual understanding of formal leaders' rationales for engaging them in a particular work arrangement, and raised their awareness of its significance. For example,

> *"You have to explain to them because it is important to let them know the benefits of doing it. When they don't see the benefits, they don't want to do it."* (INT6, formal leader).

4.2.1.3 Formal leaders' competencies and readiness in empowering agency

In terms of professional knowledge, the data unveiled an excellent cross-cultural understanding that affected the extent to which empowering leaders authorised faculty. Faculty tended to have more autonomy in western universities than in Chinese universities. Thus, acknowledging this difference could ensure their leadership was less likely to cause resistance. As a Sino-foreign cooperative university, "*it is a hybrid-university, and it is a joint venture university with Chinese and international inputs*" (INT5, formal leader). The leadership approach was a combination of Chinese and international cultures. Formal leaders from one culture should be mindful to apply their taken-for-granted leadership styles and push people from different cultural backgrounds to do what they were asked. Thus, formal leaders and faculty interactions need to be adjusted, compatible, and culturally sensitive.INT5 (formal leader) said,

> "*Maybe when we talk about the west, you mean Anglo-Saxon universities. Power often rests at the school level of the faculty level…. Here it rests at the top senior management level. If they lead wrong, faculty resist.*"

Most research on DL emphasises the impact of school culture or organisational culture on leadership activities (Feng et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2017; Rothenberg, 2015), but this research claims national cultural differences also affect DL at the university.

Professional knowledge also included formal leaders' thorough understanding of the role

requirements. It was considered when interviewing future leaders because they had to find the right

persons with compatible abilities to lead the teams and the offices. For example,

> *"The main focus for those interviewees is basically what kind of plan someone has to develop, to*
>
> *organise and coordinate certain activities of strategic importance to the school and the student body."*
>
> (INT6, formal leader).

The data revealed several favourable professional attitudes toward formal leaders, which enabled

the faculty's participation in professional development, including appreciating leaders and democratic

leaders. Appreciating leaders demonstrated several characteristics, including encouraging challenges

from underneath, valuing faculty's different opinions, recognising individual advantages, and having faith

in the faculty's ability. Several participants believed that appreciating leaders could build faculty's

confidence and facilitate trust between leaders and faculty.

> *"When they see that their ideas are valued and so on, then they feel confident, and they become*
>
> *more relaxed in the process."* (INT6, formal leader)

It was evidenced that empowering leaders were democratic leaders who respected the role

boundaries. They knew when they should step out to leave space for faculty to engage and nurture their

interests. This was discussed in the example to have clarified roles between mentors and mentees in

formal leaders' agentic action to empower others in 4.2.1.2.

The data showed that empowering leaders were highly committed to work because it encouraged

other faculty to perform their roles well. Faculty would be happy if they worked with any leader who

was *"passionate"* about work (INT9, faculty). Empowering leaders also encouraged other faculty's

engagement to take on additional leadership tasks. INT10 (faculty) said,

> *"From the sense of responsibility to the moral level, we still need to have a spirit of altruism and*
>
> *service to the organisation, which is such a spirit of dedication. We can set a role model to faculty*
>
> *in the department, show them how we work and motivate them to think beyond and take on*

additional work they never thought of before."

This quote indicates that empowering leaders are role models who lead by example to encourage staff members to engage in developing self-directed teams (Cheong et al., 2019).

4.2.2 Faculty's Professional Agency in Pursuing Career Development

The faculty's PA in developing leadership capacity was primarily demonstrated in pursuing career development to apply for formal leadership positions. Most interviewed faculty participants shared their experiences in applying for membership positions in various professional communities at the university. They also applied for formal leadership positions and performed roles like Programme Directors, Directors of Research, Directors of Learning and Teaching, *etc.*

4.2.2.1   Faculty's identity

The faculty interviewed shared the motivational factors why they applied for formal leadership positions. Most of them noted such actions derived from their internal motivations to achieve their own goals and self-interests. As indicated by INT12 (faculty),

"I want to pursue self-actualization and ambition, or self-development. You know it is important for everyone. Getting a higher position or promotion gives you more power to do what you want to do."

This quote suggested faculty participants believed applying for formal leadership positions was an effective approach to achieving their personal goals because it empowered them to do what they aspired for and realise their deeply rooted desires. This finding is consistent with Eteläpelto et al.'s claim that leadership actors intend to pursue meaningful careers by initiating PA (2013).

Furthermore, from formal leader participants' perspective, they would like to see faculty leaders show ethical commitment. As noted by INT5 (formal leader), he said

"I care for faculty's working ethics, and I care for it a lot. As a professional or as a researcher, ethics

counts most, and it delivers the message if a person can be trusted or not…. I try to appoint those with

high integrity, and I want to give them more opportunities to those I can trust."

This commitment was regarded as a powerful source of influence on formal leaders through gaining their

trust. This quote suggests in the TNE context, trust is earned through personal influence rather than

imposed by power (Jones et al., 2014a). The trust emerging from mutual influences is regarded as the

most significant predictor of collaborations (Leithwood et al., 2009).

4.2.2.2 Faculty's agentic actions

From formal leaders' perspective, some participants reported gaining formal leaders' confidence and

trust in the faculty's leadership capability was essential for promotion. Demonstrating efficient

communication skills was one of the most effective ways for faculty to gain a formal leader's trust. Formal

leaders could see their capacities embedded in their intentional communications at public occasions. As

expressed by INT6 (formal leader),

> *"It's typically through the initiatives in the proposals presented at the committee which will make*
>
> *people believe I can trust this guy. I can put him there."*

On the other hand, as faculty leaders holding service roles in schools or the university, several

participants reported they provided instructions and guidance to colleagues. INT10 (faculty), who was the

Director of Learning and Teaching at a School, noted that

> *"I advise and guide so that other colleagues are very clear about what to do next. I gave them four*
>
> *steps in terms of what we should do…. Doing this job was a valuable experience for me …. This is what*
>
> *I wanted…, actually, almost everyone here wants it."*

This quote suggested that faculty leaders demonstrate PA similar to formal leaders. Hulpia and Devos

(2010) point out the teachers' supervisory leadership, in which direct communication with teachers is

their priority. This argument implies that communication is also a crucial responsibility for faculty leaders

in HE, and the two results corroborate

Faculty's PA in leadership capacity development suggests provoking career development for university teachers is vital in QM. Strengthening training work for teachers and management leaders is associated with different foci in training programmes. As for faculty who pursue managerial positions, continually improving education management and student administration and human resources support is crucial for enhancing educational quality and student development (Zhong, 2016).

4.2.2.3   Faculty's competencies and readiness in pursuing career development

The data uncovered that (potential) faculty leaders possess specific knowledge to get promoted. The interview panels evaluated their subject knowledge and prior experiences in HE (INT3, formal leader). In addition, faculty leaders were required to efficiently manage time and risks to meet "*deadlines*" (INT7, faculty). Furthermore, INT5 (formal leader) expressed, "*They cannot just work alone. They should have good interpersonal skills to work with others".* These quotes implied knowing how to collaborate with others is essential for faculty leaders to impact other colleagues. This finding corroborates Leithwood et al.'s research in which the authors found that effective informal leaders' characteristics and behaviours mirrored that of formal leaders (2007).

Formal leaders favoured working with spontaneous faculty members, so they would like to see spontaneous activities from faculty to contribute to the development of the office. It was noted that "*making contributions should not be a top-down instruction, but an activity initiated by oneself*" (INT13, formal leader).

This section discussed faculty participants' tendency to pursue formal leadership positions to achieve their personal goals and self-actualization. In doing so, their communication skills were essential to earn formal leaders' trust. Services role holders performed similar roles as formal leaders in supporting other colleagues. The most significant factors impacting formal leaders were their subject knowledge, prior

experience in HE, knowing how to collaborate with others, working ethics, and spontaneity.

4.2.3 Social Characteristics for Developing Leadership Capacity

There were several social structural characteristics associated with the promotion of capacity development. Amongst all, establishing a culture was considered a foremost factor because an organisational culture created the norms and working procedures, shaping faculty's behaviours and significantly influencing their actions. As said by INT3 (formal leader),

"I think, first of all, we should have this belief and cultivate this culture. Then put it into practice in the

context of real work in real life. You have to have soil, and then you have a mechanism to make you,

as an organisation, constantly create and constantly optimise your system, process and time."

This quote suggests that building organisational culture was the first step and guided the follow-up establishment of working mechanisms and processes as the 2nd step. As discussed in 4.2.1.2, formal leaders should protect faculty to a certain level. Thus, a protective climate could nurture the faculty's agency in leadership development.

The data evidenced that a mechanism, such as new informal leadership positions, shared positions, and role rotations, expanded faculty's skillsets, motivated their engagement in continuous professional development and avoided job burnout. INT3 (formal leader) expressed: "*these opportunities give faculty members more opportunities to practice their leadership skills, a*nd also *can avoid faculty's work burnout"*. This finding suggests that DL is facilitated by a specific organisational structure, which can empower those without formal leadership positions to share power and autonomy (Harris, 2010).

Furthermore, the data noted the university should have a systematic training or mentoring mechanism in place, as discussed in empowering leaders' agentic actions in 4.2.1.2, which was tailor-made and could support faculty to transform from novice workers to experts and from faculty to leaders.

It was evidenced that faculty leaders attempted to take additional leadership positions and

performed more service roles to the Department and the University. Nevertheless, it was challenging because there was a lack of "*a balancing system*" (INT14, faculty) at the university to strike a balance between being a faculty and being a leader, but INT14 (faculty) believed this situation could be compensated by acknowledging their additional contributions in the annual performance review. INT3 (formal leader) suggests building a well-established career ladder to engage faculty members better. Lumby (2013) points out that DL has been questioned in its function to share power or to devolve workload. The finding of this research indicates that this concern can be avoided by the institution's strong coordination and planning (Woods & Woods, 2013).

Well-established informal communication channels and activities had to be well-organised to ensure effective communication. Participants suggested several proper communication channels, such as professional development training (INT3, formal leader), conferences" (INT14, faculty), peer observation" (INT9, faculty), CoP (INT8, formal leader), etc. These activities offered platforms to facilitate cross-unit communications and provided opportunities for colleagues to learn from each other, so it could help them improve their leadership capacity.

The data showed the participants took different actions when they faced different types of tasks. When the issue was related to health and safety, students' urgency or other problems requiring fast response, formal leaders tended to troubleshoot the issues immediately and made decisions directly.

> *"We usually need a long time to discuss the strategic planning at the school strategic committees…. I prefer to give immediate response for module level, student level issues or any other requests that need fast response." (INT6,* formal leader*)*

This reported case indicates that DL can be affected by time limits and the characteristics of tasks. This point is consistent with Feng et al.'s claim that task complexity can affect the configuration of DL (2017).

4.2.4 Summary of the Theme

This section indicated most interviewees recognised that continuously improving professional practices, individual competencies and skill sets as working professionals were essential for educational quality. Most formal leaders exercised empowering agency to expand professional learning opportunities to staff members. Some faculty participants intended to reinforce individual competencies by pursuing career progression, applying for formal leadership positions, and playing formal leadership roles as faculty leaders.

It was evident that formal leaders' PA distinguished from faculties' PA in terms of their identities and agentic actions in developing leadership capacities. Formal leaders' PA was more evident than the faculty group, suggesting formal leaders could exert more influence in nurturing the faculty's development.

In order to support both groups of participants to implement their agency for capacity development, the data indicated some support systems could motivate PA. Notably, a protective organisational culture, clear career ladders for faculty, a work-balancing system and informal and formal communication channels for learning were identified as the positive predictors. Some intentional organisational arrangements, such as role rotations, shared positions, and informal leadership positions, were positively related to faculty motivation. Time and the characteristics of tasks influenced the way leadership actors acted.

The DL literature has noted that distributive power and authority did not always lead to desirable outcomes (Bolden, 2011). The current study investigated the issue and found that forming a shared understanding could essentially prohibit the negative impacts of DL on organisational performance. This was introduced in the next theme.

4.3 Forming a Shared Understanding of Goals in Enhancing the Quality of Education

The data revealed DL for educational quality was impacted by whether shared goals were formed at the university and whether the goals were acknowledged and implemented by the organisational members across the hierarchical structure. The result shows divergent agency shown from the two groups of participants. The formal leaders interpreted the university vision and linked that with the faculty's daily operational work; the faculty exercised their agency to initiate cross-department activities, which were closely related to the implementation of the vision and mission of the university.

4.3.1 Formal Leaders' Professional Agency in Vision Implementation

The interviewed formal leaders and faculty participants agreed that acknowledging shared goals and pursuing the same goals together was the premise for effective DL. INT2 (faculty) noted why shared understandings and goals were essential in DL. He said, "*it was my observation sometimes you share the leadership, but in the end, no decision-making. That is because you don't have shared goals when you do things together*". This quote suggested that a shared goal could ensure decisions were made for future direction and address the negative effect of DL associated with a dispersed power distribution leading to no decisions (Bolden, 2011).

4.3.1.1 Formal leaders' identity

The analyses captured formal leaders' internal orientations to form shared understandings within the relevant units they led. This was reflected in the excerpts such as *"I realised what I do should be aligned with the vision and mission of the university"* (INT6, formal leader). Some formal leader participants said they wanted to turn the shared goals into the faculty's daily work. They called this role as mediator (INT6, formal leader). As a mediator, they mobilised all the resources at the school or the departmental level.

INT13 (formal leader) notes:

> "*The most critical task for me to do this as the executive dean is to make each of us or each unit more clearly aware of our common pursuit of the vision of future education. We work together through cross-team collaborations to pursue our goals. The collaboration unites us to turn vision into our actual work so that each of us can do a better job….*"

From formal leaders' perspective, collaborations assisted them in disseminating a culture of vision in the team by raising faculty awareness. It acted as the mechanism to connect abstract vision with individual work. It created cohesiveness within the team and encouraged colleagues to unite and collectively pursue the achievement of goals. For the given research context, the mediating role performed by middle managers differs from what university leaders do.   Middle managers turn into leaders who champion quality through translating and facilitating the shared understanding and implementing the designated goals. Ensuring the whole team understands the vision and missions of an organisation are paramount for QA and QE in an educational context because it offers an opportunity to promote a 180-degree turn for an organisation by overwriting its traditional model, leading to improved practices in QA and QE (Sallis, 1994).

4.3.1.2   Formal leaders' agentic actions

The formal leader participants adopted a strategy to "buy in" other faculty's support. Buy-in requires leaders to earn others' recognition for their leadership and ideas, as said by INT11 (faculty)

> "*Buy-in is more about recognition, and the practice of mission based on recognition, so we need to let everyone recognise you as the leaders…. This recognition should also come from senior leaders. With their support, we can have resources to do what we want".*

Buy-in represents one of the characteristics of decision-making processes, which has been acknowledged as a governance factor positively related to DL in several business schools in the UK (Rothenberg, 2015),

Formal leaders have to cope effectively with challenges from small groups of interests to secure shared goals. People of small groups of interests prioritised their personal goals over shared goals. When their personal goals conflicted with the common goals, they protected their benefits at the cost of the common good. INT13 (formal leader) suggested

"When small groups of interests appear, we have to make sure their goals should be aligned with the visions. We pursue common goals, so we must go back to the goal when any problem occurs."

This example indicated it was compelling that an individual's goals serve the common goals, which set the precondition for effective collaboration. Common goals needed to be protected when there was any conflict of interest.

The data showed formal leader participants promoted a participative decision-making process because it offered a solution to addressing potential risks of goal misalignment. This process involved various participants in collectively defining the common goals and strategies. The shared goals should be reasonable, so they should be supported by a mechanism to link the common goals with the faculty's individual pursuits. INT13 (formal leader) expressed,

"Your vision itself must be reasonable, it can attract people, and it must be closely linked with many of our individual pursuits….We need to develop goals with staff members to let them participate, share their ideas and voice for themselves to contribute to the goal development".

Therefore, a goal developed in such a way could arouse faculty's engagement in defining the vision and the follow-up vision implementation.

Several participants pointed out they had to handle disagreements within their department in order to receive staff's shared understanding. Some participants shared that prioritizing the benefits of their units was the fundamental principle in handling disputes. Faculty were invited to share different opinions and views, but their discussions needed to focus on maintaining and maximising common interests. INT6 (formal leader) said, "*we invite different opinions, but as along as the final decisions should be highly*

beneficial to the school, and I will support them." This quote implies that formal leaders examined

disagreements in-depth and ensured the commonly agreed goals were secured when people had different

ideas.

Two communication strategies were identified from the data, which could facilitate reaching a

shared understanding. The first strategy was listening. When different opinions appeared during their

communications, most research participants tended to hear different voices, understand varied points of

view, and address their concerns.

> *"The conflict happens when you feel that you are not being listened to, not that you are not being*
>
> *agreed .... Communication isn't about talking is about listening. It's about what isn't being said and*
>
> *how it isn't being said."* (INT7, faculty)

The participants raised this point tended to believe listening helped remove disagreements because

listening signalled respect. When they felt respected and listened to, they were less likely to think

offended in disputes. This finding echoes Jones et al.'s research (2014b), in which the authors recognise

the encouragement of autonomy and trust are the critical inputs to enable DL.

Secondly, explaining not only solved the disagreements but also facilitated the acceptance of new

ideas because most participants perceived a positive link between understanding and willingness to

engage. For example, INT6 (formal leader) said, "I think the clearer they understand how things come, the

more willing people are to participate." An explanation was also recognised as an effective communication

strategy for capacity development which was discussed in empowering leaders' agentic actions (4.2.1.2).

In developing leadership capacity, explaining as an effective communication strategy emphasises

conveying the benefits of doing things. In this theme, explaining highlighted communicating the rationales

for taking specific action to other decision-makers. Thus, the foci of explanations diverged when formal

leader participants' PA diverged.

4.3.1.3   Formal leaders' competencies and readiness in vision implementation

Formal leaders more likely to evoke shared understanding could demonstrate several individual traits in their professional knowledge and professional attitudes.

Regarding professional knowledge, cultural awareness was noted as a significant element of formal leaders' competencies. Some participants expressed that respecting personnel's individualisation was effective in earning faculty's support because the University had a collegiate-dominant culture.

"At our university, the looseness of the organisation and the individualisation of academic faculty, or the prominent position of the individual, are respected. This is because our university is a collegial place which is less likely to go with top-down decision making as it does in other Chinese universities."

(INT13, formal leader)

This quote implied that formal leaders' cultural awareness of organisational culture impacted the participants' response to shared understanding. This finding corroborates Rothenberg (2015), Jones et al. (2017), and Feng et al. (2017), who acknowledge the effects of organisational culture on DL. Cultural awareness was recognised as a characteristic of empowering leaders in 4.2.1.3. Nevertheless, the meanings of cultural awareness differed between the themes.

Formal leaders' agency in vision implementation stressed that formal leaders need to know how to bridge the gap between the university vision and the individual work at the operational level. This case suggested they were visionary leaders who understood the vision thoroughly, knew how to implement it at a personal level, and evoked it effectively.

In terms of professional attitude, formal leaders were viewed as democratic leaders. Democratic leaders demonstrated certain leadership activities to "*engage people in conversation*" (INT6, formal leader). They advocated an open climate to invite faculty to share and participate in defining the visions. Several formal leader participants also raised democratic leaders were open-minded to accept different opinions if they were constructive and helpful. For example, INT3 (formal leader) shared that "*they should*

welcome suggestions"; "*Listen to others*" (INT12, faculty).

Compared with empowering leaders' competencies discussed in 4.2.1.3, which stressed giving autonomy and respecting role boundaries as the demonstration of democratic leaders, the finding here focused more on formal leaders' open-mindedness. Still, both sections shared the characteristics of embracing participative decision-making.

Another critical professional attitude related to a leader's value for common interests rather than individual interests, as the vision management was a pervasive action distributed to all faculty members and embedded in organisational cultures:

"*It is not an interest-based operation, and it's a vision-based, right? It has formed an intuitive platform and system. In this platform system, we discuss topics of common interest to each of us, especially regarding future education and education innovation.*" (INT13, formal leader)

This section discussed the demonstration of formal leaders' agency in nurturing shared understanding. The formal leader participants' PA in vision implementation manifested in their identities to reach shared goals, form joint forces, and develop a participative culture. At the operational level, they had to earn staff's support, build organisational cultures, handle disagreements, and communicate with faculty through explaining and listening to motivate faculty engagement. Formal leaders believed they were vision implementors with cultural awareness and good knowledge of implementing the visions. They were also democratic leaders who were open-minded to new ideas and valued common interests. In the next section, the presentation of findings concentrated on the faculty's PA in vision implementation.

4.3.2 Faculty's Professional Agency in Vision Implementation

The data confirmed that the faculty participants could contribute to promoting shared understanding through self-initiated activities. Their PA in this regard could lead to changes at the organisational level. This agency was manifested in the bottom-up initiatives to lead ad-hoc projects with the collaboration of

different departments. They believed they had the responsibility and ownership to do so, so they thought such cross-team collaborations were salient to the university's vision of improving the quality of education.

4.3.2.1   Faculty's identity

The faculty's perceptions in the shared understanding of goals related to their experiences in leading large-scale activities exceeded their regular working scope as faculty members. For instance, a faculty interviewee shared her experience in proposing a summer school to enrich the curriculum design for Chinese teaching modules,

> "*In the second half of 2013, I found that this school had too little Chinese teaching content and did not have a program of its own, so I then proposed a summer school to bring in more content and fresh ideas to the development of Chinese curricular…. I was just a new teacher joining the university at that time. Nobody asked me to do it, and I supposed it wasn't my responsibility to do such a thing as a faculty member. Nevertheless, when I read the university's internationalisation strategy, I found they were quite aligned …. As a member of the School, I thought what I did should be able to contribute to the school's curriculum development, in which I should be part of….*" (INT10, faculty)

An internal sense of ownership caused faculty participants' internal motivation. Their agentic actions started to show when they saw the attachment between university strategies and their ownership. Nevertheless, it was interesting to note formal leaders understood vision implementation differently from faculty participants. Formal leaders tended to see their roles as bridging the gap between the university vision and the faculty's daily operational work. Nevertheless, faculty participants were more likely to understand their roles in large-scale projects. The contributions of faculty members in establishing organisational vision have been documented in the literature in the Chinese HE context. In provoking the transformation of heroic leadership styles in governing Chinese universities to shared governance, effective faculty leaders are entrusted with the responsibility of developing a shared vision (Liu et al., 2021;

97

Lu & Smith, 2021), and are suggested to use institutional visions to improve students, members, and societal achievements through capacity building (Cheng & Zhu, 2021; Zhu & Caliskan, 2021). This competency is associated with leadership transformation as an effective approach to QE (Sallis, 1994).

4.3.2.2   Faculty's agentic actions

The primary manifestation of the faculty's agency was in their actions to initiate and lead ad-hoc-based projects. This kind of project was collaborative and usually involved several departments. The participants reported they encountered challenges during the collaboration. Participants' coping with challenges was regarded as their agentic actions to promote vision implementation. The challenges stemmed from project participants' incompatible understanding of authority in the collaboration. This ambiguity and confusion in role boundaries lent itself to an imbalanced power relationship among multiple collaborators.

> "The international admissions office intended to give comments in the curriculum, and even sometimes they wanted to give requirements in terms of how to design it. From the teaching point of view, sometimes it was unnecessary to do so. As an academic support unit, their main responsibility was supporting students' visa applications, arranging accommodation, and being the first point of contact for student inquiries, not curriculum design. So the two sides had different opinions. The responsibility was unclear; the communication was not smooth." (INT10, faculty).

The solution to the difficulty relied on the faculty's action to break the imbalanced power relations. The participant expressed she tried several ways to communicate with the other offices to solve the problem. She intended to persuade the International Office because she believed curriculum design was the faculty's job and expertise. Nevertheless, the International Office held a different opinion. As reported by INT10 (*faculty*),

> "They thought the curriculum design was also the programme's selling point and affected their

marketing strategy. Yeah, true. I also agree with them. But without too much time left for preparation,

we had to find a compromised solution."

Under such circumstances, the participant approached the Business School and persuaded the representative to support her. Their ally empowered them to change the existing power relations, which helped her move the project forward.

Faculty should carry out specific communication strategies from formal leaders' perspective to promote shared understanding. They expected faculty intentionally disseminate the vision within their units by acting as the "*solid vision supporter and communicator*" (INT13, *formal leader*). The faculty's engagement in defining collective visions was crucial to formal leaders. This finding is aligned with the schoolteachers' supervisory leadership in being active decision-makers in formal and informal participative structures (Hulpia & Devos, 2010).

"I need to listen to your ideas and let me then compile them and synthesise them in a way that will

make sense to the university" (INT14, faculty*).*

INT12 (faculty) said, "*I think we still need to do something related to the interests of the university in order to attract the attention and input of those in power".* This quote noted that a faculty's agency was constrained because they had limited access to resources and did not have as much authority as formal leaders to mobilise resources. In this case, the formal leaders' support was crucial because it offered them more possibilities to succeed.

4.3.2.3   Faculty's competencies and readiness in vision implementation

The analysis revealed that several characteristics of faculty participants were considered more influential in vision implementation. In terms of their professional knowledge, cultural awareness was found critical for cross-department collaborations. Collaborative faculty from different departments might bring different working norms and habits into partnerships, creating barriers to efficient

communications.

> "*People tended to believe everyone should know what they know by default and believed everyone*
>
> *should know it, so they did not explicitly convey it in communications. So, when they communicate,*
>
> *they were not on the same page and people seem quite confused. It made the communication quite*
>
> *difficult…."* (INT9, faculty)

Thus, faculty have to carefully convey their opinions to avoid misunderstandings when communicating with faculty from different units. Compared with formal leaders' competencies discussed in 4.3.1.3, the faculty's cultural awareness highlighted cultural differences at the organisational level. In addition, INT13 (formal leader) also noted they hoped faculty know the vision and be "*a visionary leader*". This result indicates having a vision for learning is crucial for faculty members to become effective vision implementers (Daniëls et al., 2019).

In terms of professional attitude, several participants noted faculty needed to have confidence in their knowledge because confidence enabled them to talk and share (INT9, faculty). This finding echoes Ruan and his colleague, who argue self-confidence can motivate teacher agency (2019).

In summary, the faculty's PA in vision implementation was embedded in their actions to initiate cross-department projects, which were big-scale. Compared with formal leaders, they tended to think vision or strategy was far from their reach, making them less likely to link their daily work with the university vision. Influential faculty showed specific personal characteristics and traits, such as cultural awareness and confidence.

4.3.3 Social Characteristics for Vision Implementation

The data showed that forming shared goals was premised on acknowledging university visions and missions by most faculty members, which could be significantly affected by a participative organisational culture. This participative culture was crucial to boosting the faculty's personal willingness to engage as a

vision implementer. It was pointed out by a faculty member, who said

"I think we are more in a culture of being encouraged to say, our express, our views, our opinions. Whether it will be taken into account or not, that's another question. But with the inputs from bottom-up to develop strategies, it is more likely to earn acceptance than from top-down." (INT2, faculty).

Building a favourable culture was necessary to turn the abstract vision into practices, from which the vision started to become concrete. A mechanism for vision implementation can support this turning approach. INT4 (formal leader) expressed,

"We need a working procedure to make it happen, directly related to our previous implementation of objective and key results…. Another dimension was cooperation, especially cross-team collaboration. Why do we need cross-sectoral cooperation? Because many things of innovation need to be intersected, it is difficult to innovate in its small scope."

Forming shared understanding was supported by communication channels in place to facilitate top-down and bottom-up communication. Some participants raised important informal communication channels: "*internal and external communication networks*" (INT1), "*lunch meeting*" (INT2, faculty), "*department dinners*" (INT9, faculty), and some of them were formal: "*committees*", "*away-days*", "*forum*" (INT12, faculty). Furthermore, the participants noted artefacts could facilitate the process. INT7 (faculty) expressed that using digital platforms avoided misinterpretations of university strategies. He also used newsletters for information dissemination.

The data revealed that university policies constrained the faculty's agency. The university needs incentive policies that can motivate faculty's bottom-up actions. It was essential for the university to provide financial incentives, as "*it is a kind of recognition of people's contribution*" (INT3, formal leader). In addition, the data also suggested the significance of institutionalising the recognition of colleagues' extra contribution through performance management which was pointed out as a characteristic positively related to DL by Ritchie et al. (2007). INT1 (formal leader) recommended,

"The university should evaluate faculty's performance in leadership sharing activities in the annual professional development review."

The data unveiled that the faculty participants hoped the university could encourage CoP among faculty who shared the same interests, within which people could collaborate to discuss and reflect on innovation. The CoP should be business-driven rather than personal interest-driven. INT14 (faculty) reported,

"I think it must be harmful if a group is based on the informal personal relationship which is outside the formal organisational relationship and beyond the formal power relationship, and it will disrupt the formal operation of our organisations."

This excerpt also noted a cohesive culture was critical to facilitate the pursuit of the common good and prohibit the adverse effects of small groups of interest. Based on this culture, faculty were more likely to take self-motivated initiatives to contribute to the vision implementation.

4.3.4 Summary of the Theme

In this theme, the discussion focused on analysing formal leader and faculty participants' agency in forming shared visions and vision implementation. In summary, the result indicated that formal leaders played a mediator role in breaking down the university vision into individual work, so a link between higher-level vision and daily operation was built based on their efforts. Nevertheless, the faculty's perceptions of vision implementation were about engaging and leading large-scale projects. This result demonstrated a gap between formal leaders' and faculty's understanding of the vision implementation.

The finding suggested formal leaders and faculty members shared the same traits. For example, both were culturally sensitive to organisational culture and individual differences; both had a good understanding of the university vision. Nevertheless, their professional attitudes were different. Formal leaders who were democratic and open-minded were more likely to engage faculty; highly committed

faculty who wanted to share ideas and contribute to vision discussions were thought more influential.

The analysis indicated some favourable conditions to promote research participants' agency in vision implementation. It included financial incentive policies to encourage faculty to undertake extra responsibilities, organisational culture to recognise the vision and a mechanism to ensure vision implementation, formal and informal communication channels and CoP opportunities. The promotion of DL rendered a culture of embracing risk-taking, so it has been widely applied in early studies as an instrument for educational reform (Jones et al., 2014a). The development of a changing culture underpinned this. The following section detailed how such a culture could be built through exercising formal leaders' PA and faculty's PA.

4.4 Fostering a Change Culture

An organisational culture which embraces and nurtures formal leaders and faculty's change orientations has been recognised by researchers as a push factor for DL (Rothenberg, 2015; Woods & Woods, 2013). The organisational climate shaped how leadership actors behave in the environment (Daniëls et al., 2019), so fostering a change culture was critical to promoting educational quality through faculty's engagement in innovative practices.

The data revealed that both groups of participants acted as change agents and utilised various resources to innovate professional practices at individual and team levels. Faculty's PA was manifested as their individual and collective agency in innovating pedagogies; formal leaders' PA was less prevalent and embedded in their actions in building change climates. All participants reported relevant cases in this theme, but the faculty's PA was more prevalent than formal leaders.

4.4.1 Formal Leaders' Professional Agency in Nurturing Change Agents

Formal leaders' PA in enabling change agents was pervasive in their identity to shape a supportive

climate to facilitate change and their agentic actions in building such a climate. Most interviewed participants reported how they encouraged and motivated faculty to initiate pedagogical changes at the school or unit level.

4.4.1.1 Formal leaders' identity

Formal leader participants' identity was associated with the data on their perceived roles in fostering changes. For example, INT6 (formal leader) said, "*my main role is to encourage innovation through cultures*". Most formal leaders were internally change-oriented and committed to spreading a change-oriented value and culture to the whole department and the university, which involved faculty participation as much as possible.

Several formal leader participants noted that they tried to play a role in changing the faculty's mindset because a scarcity in a change mindset caused resistance to change. INT5 (formal leader) expressed, "*our biggest challenge is changing the faculty's mindset through our environment, and from how they've always done in the traditional way to the innovative and be a bit more for the risk taken way.*" This quote highlighted a change mindset was the most critical element that formal leaders aimed to impact through culture building. They believed an effective climate was influential in challenging taken-for-granted notions and motivating faculty to engage in change activities. The formal leader participants' identity in nurturing a culture of change and risk-taking reflects an essential element for QE. As noted by Maguad (2006) "*Although their approaches differ in technique, emphasis, and application, the objective is the same - continuous improvement of every output, whether it be a product or a service, by removing unwanted variation and by improving the underlying work processes*" (p.191). This suggests the norm of QM has been embedded in organisational culture, and every member of staff operationalises it in daily work (Brown, 2013). Thus, QE becomes self-running and automatic.

4.4.1.2 Formal leaders' agentic actions

The data revealed effective communication helped motivate change actions from the faculty. Some formal leader participants reported that they intentionally shared their insights with faculty, which enlightened those interested in innovation but might not know where to start. Furthermore, formal leaders' transparent communication and sharing offered sufficient information to faculty change agents regarding the resources they could utilise to make a difference and helped them judge the possibility.

"*Some people want this. Some people have a sense of their own importance, which is unrealistic. You have to share with them what possibilities they have, and what they can take from now to make something different for the future. So, a leader's job is to get people to see their vision.*" (INT8, formal leader)

Two opposite opinions emerged from the data regarding whether formal leaders should push other people to change. Some people believed coerciveness caused their worries and pressures, which was associated with some faculty participants' negative experiences. For example, INT11 (faculty) said, "*if you don't agree, he will educate you about how to be a person, so in a word, everyone is exhausted, a lot of psychological pressure, a lot of burdens….*"

On the contrary, some other participants believed pushing was useful to motivate reluctant faculty. Therefore, some formal leader participants shared they evaluated faculty's performances on their change initiatives in the annual performance evaluation (INT1, formal leader). This approach has been recognised as a positive factor for DL in early research (Ritchie et al., 2007).

Some other participants noted protecting people and solving their problems for making changes helped remove faculty's resistance to change, as it created a safe environment for faculty to try new ideas, so they were less likely to fear making mistakes. This action can be interpreted as formal leaders' supportive processes that facilitate staff engagement in leadership distribution across the institution (Jones et al., 2014b).

*"My role is to make some a kind of a playground in the department…. And sometimes they fall, they are not going to be hurt because it's a rubber floor…. They can play, they can do their work and people they are making mistakes, and I should be able to cover up." (*INT4, formal leader*)*

Several formal leaders believed faculty accounted on them, so they had to play the role model for others as experts in their professional areas, which positively affected the faculty's morale and helped them to identify areas for further improvement. This was reflected in INT8's excerpt (formal leader),

"He is a more serious and careful person than me at work. He is my role model and lets me know what a good leader looks like. I want to become a leader like him in the future."

This quote suggests role models motivated faculty to reflect on their practices. Through critical reflection, faculty became critical reflective practitioners and spontaneous team members, which also encouraged staff to change towards a better self through learning from positive role models. Formal leaders' role modelling has been acknowledged as a positive indicator for DL in schools (Ritchie et al., 2007). The finding in this research confirms that role modelling is also a critical leadership characteristic for formal leaders in the TNE context, which was scarcely pointed out in the early literature on DL. In addition, this research further explained the effects of role modelling on the faculty participants by encouraging their critical reflections on their own practices. Rothenberg (2015), in his empirical investigation, claims that effective formal leaders are change agents. It corroborates the research finding of the thesis, which concludes that change-oriented leaders are influential in building a change culture which aims to promote QA and QE.

4.4.1.3 Formal leaders' competencies and readiness in nurturing change agents

The data revealed that formal leaders as change agents demonstrated specific individual characteristics. Evidence shows that imagination and creativity were critical for new leaders to lead a brand-new academic school. INT6 (formal leader) expressed, "*This is what I have realised. It needs a lot of imagination. You need to be quite creative when it comes to that.*" This suggested that creativity was

essential in facilitating identity shift for new leaders.

The faculty participants noted leadership style could affect the faculty's engagement in change. In particular, they reported a positive relationship between visionary and transformational leadership styles and faculty engagement in change activities. Such formal leaders' agency could be transmitted to the community and stimulate collective agency to emerge. INT12 (faculty) raised,

> "*I personally think that he is definitely a visionary leadership style…. I also think he is also a transformational kind of leadership, that is, he will continue to lead or continue to promote reform…. If a leader promotes change and wants to be innovative, his colleagues may be more willing to voluntarily take on informal leadership roles and try to do more….*"

The results indicated that some formal leaders showed a strong change-oriented attitude to support innovative practices and new ideas. In particular, patience as an essential leadership trait was noted by some faculty participants.

> "*Yes, you should be patient, instead of always pushing you to finish something quickly. I think it is vital to give you enough space and time. It is also a manifestation of trust in you.*" (*INT11,* faculty)

Formal leaders' patience reflected their trust in the faculty's capability, creating a sense of confidence to change agents and rendering a safe environment to activate change actions. The positive effect of patience on nurturing change implies that change agents request sufficient time to make changes. A request for space also suggested formal leaders tolerate their mistakes if their initiatives were not as successful as expected. Patience as a leadership trait drew little attention in the literature on DL. It was considered an element of spirituality derived from the concept of empowering leadership (Woods & Woods, 2013). The authors argued that patience suggested care and sensitivity that can nurture organic relationships. This notion explains why patience was critical for formal leaders to change the faculty's mindset.

In fostering a change culture, formal leaders' PA demonstrated a strong focus on learning and

teaching. This result suggested they deemed educational quality as the core of their work, and they encouraged bottom-up change initiatives by earning staff trust and creating a protective change climate. Formal leaders were also visionary and transformative and had imagination and creativity. They also demonstrated a change-oriented and solid attitude supported by patience to allow mistakes.

4.4.2 Faculty's Various Professional Agency

The interview data revealed that the faculty participants demonstrated different types of PA in innovation. Their PA was manifested in their individual and collective agency in continuously improving pedagogical practices and research capacities. The findings noted that individual and collective agency could interplay to impact the formation of a change-oriented culture.

4.4.2.1   Faculty's identity

Evidence shows that faculty change agents demonstrated a sense of belonging as part of the department and a sense of ownership for department or school affairs. Most faculty participants believed they were responsible for organisational changes through developing their own and others' capacity in teaching and research. Some thought they coordinated change processes by acting as the team leader who led a group of people to upgrade the curriculum or develop team members' research skills. In these two areas, they perceived themselves as decision-makers who had the power to influence how the decisions could be made.

"A decision maker, first of all, decides the design of the whole course, including content, teaching materials, and examination and evaluation need to decide by me. Yes, and then the decision-making, and in addition, if there are team members, you have to consider the workload division among the team members. So basically, I can determine how I want to change." (INT14, faculty*)*

Some of the faculty participants perceived their influence was small-scale at an individual level or

team level because they tended to believe they had limited influence over the university culture,

> "*I am a just academic faculty, so I don't think I have much influence over the university culture.... But I do believe my class, my students, and my colleagues in my teaching team take what I said more seriously.*" (INT9, faculty)

These quotes noted faculty were aware of their autonomy in contributing to organisational change, but it was only limited to small-scale influences. Their change agency thus concentrated on changing practices of their own and people in their teams other than organisational practices. This result reflects one aspect of teacher leadership in leading instructional and pedagogical innovations (Schott et al., 2020), indicating the faculty participants in the TNE context also showed the same leadership agency.

Nevertheless, faculty leaders performing service roles in university committees tended to say they believed they had the power to influence university decisions through committees. INT9 (faculty) noted,

> "*I was the Committee Member in a university committee. This is the place we as faculties voice for students, faculty and departments. We were very encouraged to share our opinions. I am sure we are heard because we could alter decisions.*"

This case showed that faculty were also empowered to influence university practices, norms and working procedures by playing committee member roles. The influence of their agency thus could expand to the broader university community and impact a larger group of people. This finding corroborates Schott et al.'s definition of teacher leadership (2020) and argues that faculty leadership could influence decision-making at the TNE institution.

4.4.2.2   Faculty's agentic actions

Through data analysis, the faculty's agentic actions were categorised into two types based on their influence level, namely individual agency and collective agency. Both of them were detailed in this section.

(1) Individual agency

The data showed that some participants applied reflexive activities to transform their practices in teaching and research. It was seen in the participants' actions to articulate their teaching philosophy and use the knowledge to inform teaching practices and justify their change actions. A faculty's synopsis reflected her reflective agency to upgrade the assessment framework for an English language module designed for graduate students,

> *"The first thing I did was to change the assessment because I had always had a little bit of a philosophy*
>
> *that assessment should not be a formative assessment. But it's very applicable to a graduate student's*
>
> *optional speaking course. So, I actually wanted to use this course to implement it, to see if my concept*
>
> *can be used not only in writing but also in practice, and the effect was quite good."* (INT11, faculty)

The data showed some faculty's actions to transform the environment. These participants were active change agents themselves in the first place and acted as role models to other colleagues. To encourage other colleagues to join, they intentionally transmitted their good practices on various occasions, explained the benefits of doing so, showcased the best practices to their colleagues, and instructed and guided those interested in experimenting. INT12 (faculty) expressed,

> *"I give them a showcase. Right, you take some of what you did before to show them how you did it at*
>
> *our group meeting or a CoP. I needed to explain to them why it was good, and the showcase proved*
>
> *that the outcomes of it were positive. Some of them were quite interested and approached me after*
>
> *classes to ask me many questions. I also supported them when they had difficulty in the process."*

This synopsis also revealed that active faculty agents offered support to colleagues who were also keen to change and helped them implement changes in their classes. This result resonates with Tian (2016) and Rothenberg (2015), whose findings indicate that schoolteachers and university teaching staff lead pedagogical and instructional innovations.

It was evident to see their agency was transformative. They created various opportunities to facilitate

team collaborations and collective reflections to transmit their influences to other colleagues or students. When good practices and individual innovations were intentionally shared on multiple occasions, their agency could transform the environment by affecting working norms and procedures within the teams and communities.

"I usually organise group meetings to discuss various issues related to learning and teaching the module. We will hold regular group meetings, and there will be a typical standardization meeting…. Although we have a standardised scoring standard, we must refine it simultaneously to ensure consistency within the group." (INT2, faculty)

Faculty's agency related to how they used various resources to overcome challenges caused by imbalanced power relations. Faculty might encounter resistance when they lead more experienced team members with higher academic rankings. These people were less likely to trust faculty agents with comparatively fewer experiences. Under such circumstances, some participants used their positional power as the project lead to push others to follow their ideas. INT10 (faculty) expressed, "*I compulsorily promoted the reaching of an agreement.*"

There was also evidence that faculty participants sought support from a higher-level authority if the resistance was extreme when involving personal attacks. INT7 (faculty) expressed

"Sometimes, the team members even verbally attacked me privately or publicly at the group meetings, and there was no way for him to listen. After the meeting, I talked to my Line Manager for help."

These cases implied that professional positions as the source of authority and faculty's persistence in opinions could effectively address resistance to the power imbalance to a certain level. For strong resistance, seeking formal leaders' support at a higher hierarchical level was more effective. This finding echo early research that power relation is an essential element of DL (Bolden, 2011; Youngs, 2009).

(2)   Collective agency

People don't live in isolation but have to work with others to achieve goals. This situation lent itself

to the emergence of collective agency (Bandura, 2006). People acted in concert to co-construct their social world and shape their future by pooling their expertise, knowledge, and skills.

There was evidence that some faculty participants performed collective agency in co-designing a module in module delivery, curriculum, assessment, and research projects. For example, several participants reported they had to co-teach or co-mark with colleagues. INT10 (faculty) reported,

"If there are two classes in a module, at this time, there will be two teachers to undertake the class task; as module leader, there will be mutual exchanges between one class and the teachers of another class…."

The collective agency was identified in most faculty participants' attempts to change the current working norms, practices and even policies related to educational quality through collective efforts. The whole process of moderation involved multiple participants, including module leaders, an internal moderator from the department, a moderator from the corresponding department at the partner institution and an external moderator from another international university overseas. They came in at different stages of assessment design and assessment reviews to provide comments for revisions. They discussed how to improve the quality of assessment design and practices to ensure learning outcomes, which might be adopted at the university level. INT 12 (faculty) reported

"The external examiner system can provide recommendations for the university. The Module Leader works with the Internal Moderator, the Moderator from the international partner institution, and another Moderator from the third institution. When they see something good and crucial, they report the best practices to the Chief External Examiner and the university leaders at the Exam Board. After discussion, their practices can be applied to the different departments."

This excerpt indicated even though some participants tended to believe their influence on the university was small-scale, the collective agency could expand their individual effects on the broader university community. These results implied the interactions between collective agency and individual agency. Their

engagement in the moderation process indicates an institutional system and procedure that ensures the quality system's key elements are implemented by following certain steps of quality monitoring and auditing. This action demonstrates the faculty's efforts in contributing to the institution's accountability, suggesting the QA perspective of QM.

The data revealed collective agency could influence individual agency. In the first place, the collective agency could bring professionals together, so in a team, they reflected on their past and present experiences and discussed ways to improve their practices. This opportunity generated a sense of need for faculty to update their taken-for-granted understanding and practices in learning and teaching. This implied collective agency motivated reflective activities, which formed a shared understanding for collaboration.

"That is a process that reflects the assessment processes in the profession where you have architectural competitions and jury decides precisely like that…. After our discussion, some of us may see our early marking criteria weren't appropriate, so they had to change our initial marking and marking standards to ensure everyone is on the same page." (INT2, faculty)

Secondly, collective agency provoked collaborations among faculty members. This was very prevalent in collective decision-making, such as school committees, collaborative learning through communities of professional practices, and their participation in regular departmental meetings to discuss how to change curriculum, assessment, programme structure, *etc.*

"First, it must be collective decision-making. Our Academy's committees and daily decision-making methods must include a senior management team. Right? This is a place where we discuss and decide on major decisions.… This is a collegial process. Even though we frequently disagreed with each other, argued a lot, but we worked together to solve the problem" (INT 13, Dean)

These opportunities always intended to engage faculty's participation as much as possible to reconsider and reconstruct current practices and structure. However, faculty recognised it as "a normal

culture" of these events, in which they felt safe to express their opinions.

> *"I can't really remember how many times we had some serious disagreements…. But we did not take it personally, and we never had any issues with people who disagreed with each other. I think in the team, some people appreciate the opinions of others…. It's just normal, and one also needs to make sure that people could play out the strikes because that is what the department and the program profits from." (INT14,* faculty*)*

This quote implies collaboration constituted the norms of these meetings, and these experiences formed a collaborative culture which provoked collaborations. Furthermore, in the collective agency, faculty noted having a good relationship with colleagues was crucial. Good interpersonal relationships generated trust, and trust, as the norm of collaboration, was more likely to encourage other collaborators to bring in tacit knowledge.

> *"Interpersonal relationships, if you say, were very important in our group work. If you work with someone you have been very familiar with, communication will be more convenient in many cases. He will probably emotionally support you, and then if there are objections, he will respond promptly and will not wait until the last minute." (INT12,* faculty*)*

In collective agency, collaborators generously shared their experiences, knowledge, and expertise, which enlightened others about change strategies and directions. This influence of the professional community was believed to be critical to motivate the faculty's change actions (Kauppinen et al., 2020; Pyhältö et al., 2012).

> "*People are willing to say because the meeting is sometimes very enthusiastic when discussing. I see a point different; you see a point different, and then everyone has their own new ideas on this occasion, similar to brainstorming. People are particularly willing to talk to you, and you talk about this atmosphere. It actually opened their minds, right?"* (INT10, faculty)

The data thus revealed that collective efforts, such as the community of learning, offered opportunities

for collaborative learning, empowering individual faculty to learn from colleagues and upgrade their skill sets through critical reflection.

The faculty participants' individual and collective PA shows their endeavours and efforts in promoting the quality of learning and teaching within classes and beyond at organisational levels, implying the impacts of informal leaders' continuous engagement in quality improvement. This result is consistent with Bigg's notion of QE (2001), giving rise to how to get teachers to teach better through self-initiated development plans and those supported by university structures. The interactions between individual agency and collective agency depict the mechanism that motivates and sustains the self-running QE from faculty members' perspective.

4.4.2.3   Faculty's competencies and readiness in various professional agency

The above discussion on faculty's individual and collective agency suggested that faculty possessed a solid academic understanding of the subject, student needs, and necessary knowledge of innovative pedagogies. This finding was consistent with formal leaders' competencies discussed in formal leaders' personal characteristics, which were more effective in motivating change. It was also evident that both groups of participants showed strong care for learning.

Active faculty change agents demonstrated their enthusiasm, passion, and willingness in innovative changes, so they were internally motivated to do so. These participants had self-belief in their efficacy and ability to change their positions. INT 12 said

"*I have a fantasy about this thing, and I think it is not only in the school field but also in other industries, how to change from the low level to the high level, particularly for some decisions made at the high level.*"

In addition, the participants believed that their demonstration of confidence and persistence was critical to making the change successful, enabling them to gain trust and support from formal leaders.

"But you did not realise it early, so you just simply concluded that I did something adding no values. I

was affected and hurt deeply. Yes, but I can get up fast, so I can recover for a while." (INT12, faculty)

Persistency could help participants to internalise the negative effects of opponents and transform them

into a positive attitude, such as efficacy to continue the innovation.

In summary, this section presented the faculty's PA in fostering a change culture. Their identity in

this regard was strongly related to their commitment to students' learning, teaching and research

development with a robust internal orientation to develop their own knowledge and skills and those of

their colleagues. Some faculty thought their influences were small-scale at the team level, but the other

faculty participants who took service roles believed they impacted the university. Their influences on

change cultures were achieved through the interplay between individual and collective agency.   Active

faculty change agents demonstrated a good understanding of subject knowledge and how to innovate.

They had a strong sense of belonging, willingness and enthusiasm, confidence and persistence as the

internal motivators to pursue changes and overcome challenges.

4.4.3 Social Characteristics for Fostering a Change Culture

The data discovered several variables that consisted of the social characteristics of a change culture.

The organisational culture itself should encourage collaboration to trigger collective agency. Furthermore,

it needed to render an optimistic culture to empower innovations,

"As a new education model and office, we encourage innovation, encourage faculty to try and make

mistakes, make changes rather than stand still; it is not necessary to perceive different roles in the

same way. Thus, we hope sharing and empowering can be promoted in the organisation." (INT10,

faculty)

Working procedures and mechanisms can support this culture. As discussed early in 4.4.2, a

comprehensive CoP system is needed, which is organised centrally and decentralised to each school to

support the faculty's collective agency. The school-level CoP implemented change ideals and actions and spread them within the school. The university CoP can disseminate the results to the whole university or beyond.

Section 4.4.2.2 noted structural support is needed to promote collective agency. The case of university committees was a typical example because it offered a structural possibility to enable and empower faculty participants to influence organisational culture, in which they performed their roles and participated in leadership activities at the university level. Committees rendered partnership relationships between formal leaders and faculties at formal committees or departmental meetings. All participants were encouraged to voice their ideas. Therefore, this decision-making process was collegial with high level of collaborative ethos among participants. This also suggested that the university needs a formal communication channel to engage faculty in decision-making.

4.4.4 Summary of the Theme

This theme discussed formal leaders' and faculty participants' agency in contributing to the development of a change culture, which nurtured the expansion of various innovative practices at the university. Formal leader participants tended to say their central role was to build culture as an approach to motivating the faculty's change-oriented mindset. However, the participants showed different understandings and behaviours in terms of whether to push faculty to change or not. Some participants thought change should be self-initiated, but others believed it should be an institutionalised practice which had to be evaluated. Most formal leader participants felt their role models as active change agents positively influenced faculty members because it activated their self-reflections as a professional learning opportunity. Formal leaders participants' change orientations and attitudes toward change significantly impacted the faculty's engagement in the change initiatives. In particular, the formal leaders' patience was positively related to building trust with faculty change agents.

The interviewed faculty participants concluded they were also responsible for organisational changes. Faculty participants believed their influence was only small-scale at the classroom, team, department, or school level. Nevertheless, the other faculty participants believed they influenced organisational practices by performing service roles as committee members. They demonstrated individual agency and collective agency in innovative changes. The data showed these two types of agency interplayed and motivated each other through reflections on change processes, which acted as the source to promote organisational changes. The active faculty agents demonstrated strong subject knowledge and skills in managing transitions. They were enthusiastic and passionate about change, so they were significantly change-oriented. At the same time, they should also have persistence and confidence in their skills and abilities to make the changes successful.

Successful changes were associated with specific social characteristics. The results confirmed that a positive organisational culture that facilitated collaboration and trust could empower change initiatives from faculty members. Furthermore, a well-established CoP system enabled faculty to develop themselves through collective learning. At the same time, it expanded the individual influences on other faculty across the university by sharing best practices.

4.5 Building Trust

The data analysis found nurturing trust to be a prevalent theme. As discussed above, the evidence spreads over developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education and fostering a change culture. This section paid particular attention to trust and explained why it deserved further investigation by interpreting the results in 4.4.1, 4.4.2 and 4.4.3 and adding other significant supporting data.

Formal leaders believed they led with trust, and trust was an embodiment of organisational culture, which was more likely to arouse engagement and participation,

"trust building is important in the department. So, people have to believe what we do is the right thing. They are motivated to do the work rather than what I said you have to do. Otherwise, I'm going to fire you. So obviously, you need some push and need some kind of punishment. People do need to be motivated. I think it is important as a team leader, I guess." (INT1, formal leader*)*

There were additional data to support the significance of trust in the data. Both formal leaders and faculty expressed their attempts to develop "*interpersonal relationships*" (INT12, faculty; INT4, formal leader), "*guanxi-informal network*" (INT4, formal leader; INT10, faculty), "*personal connection and networks*" (INT1, formal leader; INT9, faculty), "*friendship*" (INT2, faculty) in interacting with people at the university because it made the collaboration more easily and let people access the information or implicit knowledge in advance,

"So, making informal communication and having developed a good relationship with everyone is important to do the work better within the university. So, I can talk to my boss to say we have this problem. I already talked to finance. They suggested I go through this process, so it's already done. I mean, in Chinese terminology, it's Guan Xi. But guan xi sometimes became a negative, but Guanxi is a problem-solving tool." (INT4, formal leader)

Nevertheless, building trust requires formal leaders and faculty to separate professional relationships from personal relationships at the workplace. Thus, some formal leader participants noted they intend to keep a distance from individual faculty. In Chinese, "Guanxi" is the term to represent interpersonal relationships. INT 10 (faculty) noted,

"Guanxi with faculty is a tricky thing for a leader. Distant Guanxi is damaging to trust. Close Guanxi can be bad too because others might challenge your professionalism and equity of your judgement."

Thus, some formal leader participants noted several strategies to maintain the faculty's trust in their professionalism and fairness. INT4 (formal leader) expressed he brought in the 3rd person in the professional development review with very close friends; INT8 (formal leader) noted he treated faculty as

"*professional colleagues*" rather than friends.

Trust was the core of trust as an indicator of the relationship between leadership actors. There was evidence which supported this argument in early sections. For example, explaining the benefits and appreciating leaders triggered the faculty's trust in the values of participating in capacity development (4.3.1.2). The ability to listen particularly listening to different opinions from a variety of faculty members, made them feel they were respected, so they trusted the formal leaders' protection and the safety of the environment (Supovitz, 2019). Formal leaders' intentional support for the faculty's change actions also generated the faculty's trust in their relationship (4.4.1.3). From the faculty's perspective, their intentional communication and performing their roles earned the faculty's trust in their capacity and professionalism in performing leadership roles at a higher-level position (4.2.1.2). To promote a change culture, the ethos of trust and collaboration could avoid defensiveness and conflict (4.4.3). To build a shared understanding of goals (4.4.3), the data suggested that when people strongly believed that their interactions, engagement and collaboration were for their own benefit and the common good, they were more likely to be engaged and less likely to withdraw or reject participation.

This section discussed trust as a crucial indicator for formal leaders and faculty's PA in the given context. It offered a favourable condition to promulgate an organisational value which built a strong connection between formal leaders and faculty members in capacity development, developing shared understanding and a change culture. From this point of view, it represented a feature of the whole organisational culture. On the other hand, trust was a crucial indicator of representing good interpersonal relationships between formal leaders and faculty. It built connections between formal leaders and faculty. Formal leaders need to earn the faculty's trust to enhance their engagement. Faculty had to receive formal leaders' trust for empowerment. The positive effect of trust on QM and DL has been documented in the literature. Compared with the results from Oduro (2004) and Tian and her colleagues' research (2016), which only highlight the impacts of formal leaders' trust on teachers in school contexts, this research

indicates faculty's trust in formal leaders is also a critical factor for effective DL in HE. Trust enables leadership distribution among team members (van Ameijde et al., 2009). It helps attain the shared visions for DL's significance and removes the concerns of power distribution in an organisation (Lizier et al., 2022). Trust promotes vertical and horizontal collaborations among leadership actors in quality management, including formal and informal leaders. This result corroborates Smith's argument (2010), which specifies the QM at TNE should involve local faculty in curriculum development and facilitate experience sharing in learning and teaching. The promoted collaboration via trust indicates the shifting focus of QM from QA to QE signalled by enhanced teamwork (Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994).

4.6 Summary of the Chapter

The findings indicated that both formal leaders and faculty participants participated in leadership distribution to improve education quality. With the attempt to maintain QA practices and QE for learning at both the individual and university levels, their leadership agencies converged into four areas: capacity development, shared understanding, change culture building, and trust, captured in four themes. The key findings in Appendix G illustrate that formal leaders' and faculty's agency were divergent.

In terms of developing leadership capacity, formal leaders' agency was manifested in expanding professional development opportunities for faculty to develop their leadership capacities. Faculty participants showed agency to pursue career advancement by applying for and performing leadership positions.

In forming a shared understanding, formal leaders played a vision interpreter role in implementing visions by linking university vision with individual's work at the operational level. Faculty participants' perception of vision implementation was manifested in leading large-scale projects as they tended to believe vision was far away from them.

In fostering a change culture, the formal leaders' primary agency was to nurture the faculty's

engagement in innovative changes through climate building. Nevertheless, faculty influenced both team and organisational practices through the interplay of individual and collective agency.

For the first three themes discussed above, individual competencies and readiness for formal leaders diverged from faculty members, indicating varied traits and individual characteristics were needed to develop leadership capacity, form shared understanding, and foster a change culture. Furthermore, the data also noted the improvement of DL for educational quality was associated with the structural support of the University. From Appendix G, it was evident that various social structural supports were needed for the first three themes. It was interesting to see that formal leaders' agency dominated in developing leadership capacity and forming a shared understanding, but the faculty's agency was more prevalent in fostering a change culture.

Trust appeared in the first three themes. It rendered a favourable organisational condition to nurture capacity building, shared understanding and a change culture. Furthermore, it was also a predictor for interpersonal relationships that could trigger faculty engagement and formal leaders' empowerment.

5. Chapter Five Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This Chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4. The presentation of this Chapter is in line with the postulation of research questions in order to offer clear arguments for the findings in terms of theoretical contributions and practical implications. The research questions are:

1. What are the processes of quality management at a Sino-foreign cooperative university?

2. How is leadership distributed in the processes of quality management at the research site?

3. How can the University promote the development of effective leadership distribution and maximise its benefits of quality management?

From the theoretical lens of PA, "A Model of Leadership Distribution for Educational Quality" was developed and discussed, based on which a framework was developed to illustrate how to enhance DL in the Sino-foreign cooperative university, which was directly related to educational quality.

5.2 The Characteristics of Quality Management Processes at the Sino-Foreign Cooperative University

The first research question explores the characteristics of QM processes at the Sino-foreign cooperative university under investigation. In particular, the analysis uncovers the positive relationship between DL and QM, which encapsulates QA and QE in its meaning. In addition, the research explores how DL can contribute to QA and QE at the research site from formal leaders' and faculty's perspectives.

The research findings suggest that DL can contribute both QA and QE in the QM processes at the University under investigation. The positive relationships between DL and QM can be explained by formal and informal leaders' PA in four areas, which are also the four overarching themes derived from the data

analysis: developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education, fostering a change culture, and building trust.

Leadership capacity as an indicator for enhancing the quality of learning and teaching has been recognised in early studies (Cheng & Zhu, 2021; Jones et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2021). Leadership capacity development is crucial for accomplishing leadership tasks because it can exert a more decisive influence over a range of leadership actors. The sum of enhanced individual capacity collectively contributes to the collective efficacy of the organisation through improved teaching capacity and faculty's leadership capacity. This research argues that developing leadership capacity is also crucial for university leaders in the TNE context. The formal leader participants' PA in office management indicates the notion of QA by sustaining the office's regular functioning when experiencing staff shortages or radical changes so that the quality of services provided to students will not be undermined. The formal leaders' identity and actions in advocating individual staff's capacity building in nurturing future leaders, developing critical thinking and the capacity in the whole picture represent their endeavours to trigger faculty's career development and leadership capacity through empowerment. Empowerment is viewed by Brown (2013) as the core to fostering aspirational or proactive quality for organisational innovation. Together with the faculty's agency to pursue leadership positions, this result notes both formal and informal leaders demonstrate behaviours and willingness to enhance the quality of learning, teaching and student services (Zhong, 2016).

The role of a shared understanding of goals has been noted in engaging staff members and ensuring the achievement of desired organisational outcomes (Lin & Liu, 2016). Woods and Woods (2013) note mission, vision, and goals are common constructs in DL theories. Maguad (2006) proposes that shared vision can facilitate faculty's engagement because "it provides the basis for subsequent strategies, objectives and decisions" (p.183), so it sets the direction for future actions, representing the common values that staff members to pursue together (ESHA 2013). It further affirms that this sense of collective

commitment mitigates the adverse effects of no decisions made because of dispersed power and authority (Bolden, 2011). A widely accepted and well-implemented vision can promote collaborations across hierarchical organisational structures, which can be found in the cross-team partnership in developing the summer camp project for the Chinese curriculum. The researchers have recognised teamwork and cross-team collaborations as one of the future trends in quality improvement (Maguad, 2006; Sallis, 1994). The formal leaders' PA in reaching shared goals, forming joint forces to achieve goals, and creating opportunities for a participative approach to defining, understanding and implementing the goals indicate the participants' efforts in QA and QE. The faculty participants' storytelling of the summer camp reflects the informal leaders' self-initiated agency in improving the quality of learning, teaching and student experiences. Thus, it unveils the efforts in QE.

The study provides empirical evidence for the role of a change culture in promoting organisational development, which leads to changes in organisational behaviours. Rothenberg's empirical study (2015) indicates that the faculty's change orientation was positively related to DL. Woods and Woods (2013) summarise previous studies and conclude that risk-taking and a change culture can result in better student learning outcomes. The significant role of a change culture is also evident in the TNE context. A culture of innovation is vital for QE through nourishing top-down and bottom-up innovative behaviours, which is fundamental in the inquiry of QE (Brown, 2013). Sallis (1994) notes a culture of change is compatible with the notion of quality as transformation to create a conducive learning environment and offer improved services to students as customers. The formal leaders' PA in transparent communication, using artefacts to motivate change initiatives, and building a supportive environment is associated with QE. The individual faculty's individual agency in improving the curriculum and assessment, the collective agency in teaching innovation and following the moderation procedures, and the interactions of the two types of agency are aligned with the notion of QA and QE.

The identification of trust as an essential element for effective DL has been evidenced in early studies.

Tian and her colleagues' meta-analysis noted that trust was the most frequently mentioned factor for promoting DL in schools (2016). The current research results claim that trust promotes collaborations between formal and informal leaders by reinforcing their relationships. Furthermore, it sets the tone of organisational culture that is conducive to collaboration taking place at a broader level. Teamwork and collaboration are crucial in QA and QE by improving the competence of social capital in TNE (Bolton & Nie, 2010;), which positively impacts capacity development, shared understanding of visions, and fostering a change culture at the University.

Based on the discussion above, it is evident that the QM processes at the University entail two primary purposes: QA and QE, between which QE is prioritised through formal and informal leaders' agency in leadership distribution. This result corroborates Maguad's claim that QE is prospective in future QM research and practices (2006) and affirms Sallis' claim that leadership, teamwork, systems and procedures are critical for QM(1994). Even though Biggs (2001), Brown (2013), Maguad (2006) and Sallis (1994) point out the movement of QM principles in schools and industries towards QE in the future, their research has failed to extend the discussion to HE by offering evidence supported by empirical data. Thus, the current research supplements the extant studies by providing evidence for the argument that QM can shift from QA to QE via the DL approach, which invites the participation of staff members in capacity building, developing and implementing shared goals, fostering a culture of change and building trust in TNE.

This research develops a prospective model to illustrate the QM practices through the lens of DL and PA in the given context by drawing on the literature on educational quality and QM (Biggs, 2001; Brown, 2013; Maguad, 2006; Tsiligiris, 2015; Tsiligiris & Hills, 2021; Sallis, 1994). The existing research shows an absence of effort in using the empirical investigation to approach the inquiry in HE and TNE. Even though Tsiligiris (2015) and later his article with Hills (2021) establish a prospective model to address the issue, the studies are conducted from students' perspectives as the main source of participants by examining

their expectations of quality versus the actual perceived experiences. The current research approaches the issue from the perspective of leadership, particularly DL and leaders' PA. The result suggests the integration of DL and PA offers another effective and practical framework to address improving education quality at HE and TNE. This research, thus, responds to a call in academia that developing a contextualised QM model in TNE is paramount in the extant research and practice, which incorporate local characteristics into consideration (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Bordogna, 2020; Hu et al., 2019; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021; Smith, 2010; Zhong, 2016). Rather than keeping the discussion on the surface to describe the issue, the findings underpinned with empirical data offer insights, guidance, and practical implications for achieving it.

5.3 The Demonstration of Leadership Distribution

Compared with the inquiry of what could be distributed in leadership activities, the concern of how leadership is distributed across varied social contexts is considered a more important inquiry by some researchers (Gronn, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2009; MacBeath et al., 2004; Spillane et al., 2007). This study took the investigation further to discuss "how" DL was embedded in leadership activities aiming to enhance learning and teaching across the university. The formats of DL were categorised into formal distribution, pragmatic distribution, organic distribution, and chaotic distribution, as discussed in Chapter 2.

According to the authors, formal distribution notes DL is mediated by faculty's positions and formal leaders' delegation of tasks and responsibilities (MacBeath et al., 2004). Formal DL can be pre-planned and designated through roles without consultation with people involved so that it can be "planful" (Leithwood et al., 2006). For example, formal DL was identified in the study, and it was related to both formal leaders' and informal leaders' behaviours in performing role-related responsibilities. It was noticeable that participants made decisions based on their perceived roles and responsibilities associated with their professional positions at the university. Many interviewees, including formal leaders and faculty,

revealed they had to fulfil their duties as HoDs, Deans, faculties, and others, which were closely linked to the strategic planning and development of their schools and the University. This also represents a formal strategic distribution raised by MacBeath et al. (2004). Gronn's institutionalised distribution (2002) claims organisational structures are put into place to facilitate cross-team collaborations. The findings of the study echo this claim. The organisation of committees was a general practice of the university to manage QA-related affairs. These committees offered structural support for faculty leaders' collaborations in collective decision makings.

Pragmatic distribution concerns task arrangements made on an ad-hoc basis. Compared with formal distribution, which stresses autocracy, pragmatic distribution involves consultations with faculty members (Chapman, 2017). Incremental distribution specifies people acquire knowledge and skills progressively (MacBeath et al., 2004). In the theme of developing leadership capacity, the career development of faculty members from junior faculty to seniority followed this format of DL. When they were junior faculty, they undertook operational tasks and roles, so they would take more strategic positions in the units after they obtained more experience. Another example of pragmatic distribution could be seen in the arrangement of the moderation process. It follows collective and coordinated distribution as specified by Spillane et al. (2007). In this type of distribution, multiple people worked separately but interdependently in sequence to complete the moderation for assessment, which was noted in change culture building.

Various misalignments can cause chaotic distribution among leadership actors. According to Leithwood et al. (2006), leadership actors' goal misalignment can lead to faculty resistance. This situation raises the significance of shared understanding in aligning people to work towards the same goals. Goal misalignment was evident in small groups of interests who pursued their benefits and goals instead of those of the organisation. This example exemplifies the anarchic misalignment (Leithwood et al., 2006). Spontaneous misalignment notes inconsistent actions set barriers for DL if there is no planning in advance.

This was related to the difficulty encountered by faculty who led a cross-department project to develop the Chinese curriculum at the university discussed in the faculty's PA in vision implementation. When the collaborating departments did not allocate their roles and responsibilities clearly, their role ambiguity adversely affected their further communications and problem-solving.

The discussion of organic distribution focuses on people's willingness and initiation to spontaneously take on leadership tasks on an individual or collective base. According to Hargreaves and Fink, "*emergent Distribution is where school culture enables members of the school community to seize the leadership initiative, with the security of knowing their ideas and actions will be supported*" (2008, p.132). This indicates that organic distribution is embedded in organisational culture, in which leadership tasks are arranged unplanned, and people spontaneously claim tasks. The theme of change culture captures this concept. According to Woods et al. (2004), a risk-taking culture is positively related to the effectiveness of DL. The change culture nurtures change activities and provides a safe climate to promote DL activities, so it renders a tendency for both formal leaders and faculty to form such a culture at the university. This finding also corroborates MacBeath et al.'s cultural distribution (2004). The spontaneous collaboration (Gronn, 2002) happens through the faculty's collective agency, in which the faculty participants work collaboratively to improve teaching pedagogies and upgrade the curriculum. The data also reflected this could be the individual agency related to the faculty's own decision to change or not. This can be explained by opportunistic distribution. An opportunistic allocation drew on the faculty's willingness to take on the extra workload and responsibilities over those required by the jobs (MacBeath et al., 2004). Some participants noted change was advocated but not compulsory, implying it was still reliant on individual initiative.

The above analysis suggests that different formats of DL are identified in developing leadership capacity and building a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education. Some of the DL was individually performed. Nevertheless, there were also examples of the collective format of DL. This

finding reinforces the early discussion that DL is configured and hybrid in an organisation in collective and individual forms (Gronn, 2009). Based on the results, the four DL types involve both individual and collective leadership. Feng and his colleagues (2017) argue that task complexity can affect the modes of a division of labour and the allocation of authority, so a higher level of complexity is associated with shared formats of DL and higher interdependency among actors. This result offers a possible explanation for the finding here. When people collaborate, they tend to solve complex problems. This can be found in the data related to formal distribution and pragmatic distribution. Important decisions were submitted to committees for discussion and approval; the pragmatic distribution took place in the cross-institutional projects, and the leadership processes were complex, involving the coordination between institutions and multiple members.

Most previous studies about DL tend to apply Gronn's concertive model (2009) or Spillane's co-performance (2006), which emphasises the distribution of leadership between leaders and members or a group of members. Nevertheless, the researchers have been less likely to illustrate members' individual leadership, which is identified as a crucial demonstration of DL in the current study. The study's finding is consistent with Rothenberg (2015), who notes examining faculty's participation in DL is the key to enriching the DL theory by investigating several business schools in British universities.

The study uncovers that both organic DL and chaotic DL are emergent in nature and are mediated by self-initiation and self-interests. This finding enriches the current understanding of how leadership is distributed from the perspective of informal leaders, who are under-researched in the DL literature (Bennett et al., 2003; Hulpia & Devos, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2009; Tian et al., 2016). So far, most discussions on the cause of self-initiated DL only focus on formal leaders (Tian et al., 2016). This study, however, affirms individual faculty's self-initiated leadership is an effective form of organic distribution.

The literature on DL was criticised for an absence of discussion on power relations as a dimension of DL (Bolden, 2011; Youngs, 2009). Nevertheless, the present study investigated this issue and discussed

how the authority relationship shaped DL. Building shared understandings of goals significantly impacted formal distribution through committees and departmental meetings. It also affected pragmatic distribution through leading ad-hoc projects by faculty. The acknowledgement of the same goals involved a participative dimension of DL in reaching agreements with all leadership participants. As Woods and Woods (2013) discussed, inclusiveness and sharing responsibilities for decision-making explain how power is shared; transformative dialogue creates freedom to share views, increasing mutual understanding. The current study argues that leadership actors' PA in shared understandings offers a power structure at the university to motivate the emergence of formal DL and pragmatic DL. The theme of forming a shared understanding of goals in educational quality suggests the research participants' efforts in reaching consensus and recognition. This situation implies a collegial culture was applied as a taken-for-granted working norm, and people's professional relationships were built on trust. Hence, people tended to accept differently or even conflicting ideas through negotiations. A previous study noted that taken-for-granted realities and relationships as the antecedents of power could motivate DL (Gordon, 2010). Nevertheless, the author did not link power with any specific DL taxonomies. Thus, the current finding expanded our context-based understanding of power as an enabling factor for different formats of DL.

Rothenberg (2015) raised positions and individual personalities, such as philosophy and working style, enabled or constrained leadership activities. The finding suggests that personality and positions are two crucial sources of power that affect leadership actions in the given context. Positions became the source of formal distribution, which was mediated through playing committee members and incumbent working professional roles. This finding corroborates Harris' (2010) and Rothenberg's investigation (2015). Personality as the source of DL is noted in relation to participants' identities to reflect the participants' personal beliefs. Rothenberg's research (2015) claimed personality predicted informal distribution. Whereas this study argued personality was a pivotal dimension of DL for different types of DL.

The current results indicate several factors that triggered faculty's engagement in DL, including

professional attitude, identity, culture, knowledge, and so on, involving both individual and conditional factors. Previous studies have noted individual effects are compelling in shaping DL activities. Rothenberg's investigation (2015) notes members' interests, passion, and goals support the faculty's engagement in DL. Chapman (2017) concludes that willingness coupling with competencies can trigger organic alignment and prevent anarchic alignment. The present study echoes these studies and further argues that the investigation of DL needs to consider individual characteristics. Nevertheless, these studies failed to determine how individual factors interacted with the environment and agentic actions. Thus, this study enriches our understanding of DL as a relational and context-specific phenomenon.

This section discusses how DL was demonstrated in the academic decision-making processes at the university. The findings suggest the co-existence of multiple DL models in developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing educational quality, and fostering a change culture. Furthermore, these leadership activities happened in both individual and collective manners. Based on the agency-structure dualism framework of DL (Bennett et al., 2003), the results indicate that both individual characteristics and structural conditions could shape or reshape DL in the context. RQ3 intended to address how leadership actors adopted their agency to enhance leadership distribution to reinforce the quality of learning and teaching. Most existing DL literature emphasises the role of DL on organisational efficiency associated with measurable indicators for organisational performance, but most researchers have failed to enlighten how individual member exercises DL activities as their agency to achieve their goals (Tian et al., 2016; Woods & Woods, 2013). This scarcity of knowledge creates a knowledge gap in how to better engage members in leadership distribution as a crucial attempt to enhance educational quality. In light of it, the findings discussed so far could not provide an adequate explanation to address RQ3. Notably, it has not elaborated on how members' engagement in DL could develop them as "whole persons" and meet their social needs. Thus, further analyses need to be conducted to address the issues. As discussed in Chapter 2, it is believed that analysing DL from the

theoretical lens of PA could bridge the knowledge gap. Detailed discussions are provided in the next section.

5.4 The Promotion of Leadership Distribution in Quality Management

In response to the third research question, the study draws on analysing DL from the lens of PA theory. The study suggests DL for educational quality be related to four themes: developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education, fostering a change culture, and building trust.

5.4.1 A Model of Leadership Distribution

Within each theme, it was evident that formal leaders and faculty acted differently in promoting a quality-oriented DL. Prior researchers tend to argue formal leaders show more influence than informal leaders (Tian et al., 2016). This study focuses on the interactive nature of PA and DL to investigate how a quality-oriented DL has been shaped through the exercise of individual agency by both formal leaders and faculty, aiming to offer a more holistic and context-based understanding of DL.

Overall, the findings point out that formal leaders' agency was mainly demonstrated in their roles and actions in the University culture building. In particular, most formal leader participants reported their behaviours in developing mechanisms, setting policies, or improving working procedures to support faculty development, promote collaboration, and encourage bottom-up changes, which were recognised as effective leadership actions (Badenhorst & Radile, 2018; Cheng & Zhu, 2021; Davison et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2021. How they behaved was affected by their perceptions of roles in DL. Contractor et al. (2012) summarise four roles played by influential leaders in collective leadership: navigator, engineer, social integrator, and liaison. The present findings are consistent with these roles identified by the authors and further affirm these are transferrable leadership capacities across different contexts. Culture creates

norms, values, and rituals in a specific context. Formal leaders' attempts in culture building shape people's

behaviours and affect their perceptions of roles in DL. Formal leaders also offer leadership opportunities

and a safe environment to nurture the faculty's leadership capacity. This can be explained by formal

leaders' "gatekeepers" role (Tian et al., 2016), and as the central shapers of organisational culture, they

serve as a resource or a constraint in DL (Bouwman & Runhaar, 2019; Davison et al., 2013; Jones, 2014;

Rothenberg, 2015).

The research findings suggest that the faculty's agency is dominant in leading pedagogical changes

related to learning, teaching, and research development. This finding converges with other research

findings of DL (Bouwman & Runhaar, 2019; Davison et al., 2013; Jones, 2014; Rothenberg, 2015;   Tian

et al., 2016). Faculty participants also demonstrated their initiatives to improve their leadership capacity

by applying for and performing services leadership roles in academic departments and the university. They

committed to relationship building and engendering trust by interacting with colleagues, including peers

and formal leaders (communications, coping with challenges, using resources, etc.) to apply innovative

teaching and upgrade curriculum design.

In fostering a change culture, the faculty's influence was mediated through the interplay between

individual and collective agency. As discussed above, collective agency and individual agency can predict

each other. Faculty intended to transform colleagues' actions by giving showcases of innovative

pedagogies. They also created structures to promote group reflectivity, engaging colleagues to transform

teaching pedagogies or restructure curriculum design collectively. Collective agency motivated individual

faculty to critically reflect on their past experiences, practices, and education philosophy. Compared with

Fu and Clarke (2017), who conducted research in the school context and failed to draw on the impact of

individual agency on collective agency, this study concludes collective agency and individual agency can

both act as mechanisms to motivate the emergence of each other. In their interplays, critical reflection

played a central role in mediating the mutually influential relationship between individual agency and

collective agency. Jones et al. (2012) argue that critical reflection is an essential component of DL of learning and teaching, and a shared purpose can be developed through cycles of reflective change. This explains why individual agency and collective agency are relational. Bouwmans et al.'s research (2019) explains collaborative dialogue and team learning are the tools for university faculty to contribute to DL. However, the research result suggests that individual and collective learning are instrumental for informal leaders. This finding further highlights the crucial role of faculty in DL, which has been noted as a much under-researched area in Chinese HE because of the incompatible of heroic leadership style versus DL (Cheng & Zhu, 2021; Lu & Smith, 2021, 2022; Zhu & Caliskan, 2021). This evidence-based finding can fill this knowledge gap by illustrating how bottom-up faculty initiatives impact the organisational culture in Chinese HE, particularly TNE.

In addition to individual identity, this study also notes collective identity is a critical indicator for effective DL for learning and teaching. The collective identity was reflected in faculty members' sense of belonging as a member of the university, their strong working commitment to focusing on learning, their sense of responsibility to help others develop leadership capacity, etc. Conger and Kanungo (1987) argue collective identity, which focuses on shared values and purposes, is positively related to shared leadership activities. Collective identity predicts leadership actors' joint orientations in engaging in leadership work (Paunova, 2015). Some empirical investigations have offered evidence for this claim, which concludes that members who strongly identify with their organisation are more likely to engage (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016). It suggests that collective identity is a critical predictor for DL that aims to enhance educational quality in the given context. Furthermore, this finding affirms that collective identity is a crucial dimension of PA. This has not been addressed in the conceptualisation of PA in the existing literature.

Formal leaders' PA and faculty's PA differ in developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals to improve education quality, and fostering a change culture. Their differences were identified in the participants' identity, their agentic actions, and individual competencies and

readiness (as shown in Appendix G). When their orientations or identities differed, their perceptions of their roles and DL distinguished, and their agentic actions diverged. From Appendix G, we can also see their differences in PA were associated with the changes in the sociocultural conditions. These findings indicate the improvement of DL depends on participants' considerable PA in renegotiating identity when contexts differ. It corroborates Lai et al.'s argument (2016), which describes that individual beliefs, identities and values mediate the influences of social structures, affecting teachers' critical and balancing agency in learning from western colleagues.

Prior studies offer additional explanations for the context-specific feature of PA. A possible reason why the participants' PA differed might be the intertwining nature of the agents' subjectivity, individual characteristics and social contexts (Kauppinen et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2016). This study indicates several crucial social features that could support agent's PA in DL. The socio-cultural factors include faculty policies, university culture and norms, organisational structures, communication channels, working procedures and mechanisms, *etc.* Furthermore, this research also identified power relations hindered the faculty's PA in forming shared understanding and change culture building. This finding is congruent with our theoretical framework and confirms that socio-cultural conditions are an essential dimension of DL.

The research also proposes specific individual characteristics associated with participants' agency in promoting DL, including their professional knowledge and attitude. Their individual characteristics vary across developing leadership capacity, building a shared understanding of goals to enhance education quality and foster a change culture. This finding indicates DL and PA are evolving in nature. The complexity of PA can explain this result. The strength of the exercise of social suggestions may vary across different contexts, and personal orientation, interests and other subjectivity factors might influence participants' selection for their level of engagement (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). These factors intertwine to generate variations among members and social conditions. It also explains why formal leaders' agency differed from faculty members across the dataset.

The findings reveal professional knowledge is a significant factor that significantly impacts participants' agency in DL.   Liu et al. (2021) argue that successful leadership demonstrate specific cognitive characteristics, such as intelligence, problem-solving, and knowledge about potential challenges. In addition to corroborating these key cognitive traits, the current study also notes other crucial knowledge related to effective DL, including early experience in HE, cultural awareness, leadership actors' knowledge of university vision, and their knowledge about innovation. Past experiences and knowledge have been recognised as crucial factors in activating individual agency in the conceptualisation of PA (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). According to the authors, knowledge composed necessary competencies for agents needed in their professional contexts and functioned as developmental affordance and individual resources to exercise individual agency. The ecological framework of agency offered a possible explanation because past experiences always informed the agency that is executed at present (Lai et al., 2016; Priestley et al., 2015). Friedrich et al.'s investigation (2016) highlighted that formal leaders' cognitive ability was positively related to network development and leader-follower exchange behaviours such as delegation because it provided leaders with problem-solving competencies. From a holistic perspective, the current study emphasised the expertise and knowledge of both groups of participants were valuable sources of agency.

The finding suggests a multi-level cultural awareness is an essential leadership capacity for formal leaders and faculty in TNE. This result is consistent with Cheng and Zhu's argument (2021), which highlights educational leadership should possess culture-related skills. The participants, as the agents, need to understand socio-cultural differences across nations and, at the same time, pay attention to different working norms and values between academics and administrators. Their cultural understanding shapes participants' perceptions and behaviours in interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds and effectively facilitates their problem-solving. This finding responds to a call for attention postulated in the studies about TNE (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Stafford & Taylor, 2016), in which

developing cultural awareness for formal leaders are pointed out as an essential capacity for formal leaders to address challenges in managing intercultural teams. An investigation of transnational partnerships between Australian and Thai universities indicates that managers believe national cultural differences impact the academic and operational management of transnational programmes (Eldridge & Cranston, 2009). Interestingly, these studies mainly drew on formal leaders with less focus on informal leaders who significantly contributed to organisational improvement from a different perspective. In comparison, the current research suggests cultural understanding is vital for both formal and informal leaders in the TNE context.

This study further indicated that effective DL was associated with specific leadership characteristics and traits for both formal and informal leaders. Effective formal leaders in this research demonstrated several features: appreciating leaders, respecting others, being committed to work, role modelling to other people, being transformational and visionary leaders, and being open-minded and imaginative to accept new ideas, based on which they empower faculty to engage in effective leadership distribution. Liu et al.'s study (2021) argue that successful academic leaders show personality and traits in values and perspective orienting, goal loacting, continuous motivating, and achievement refinement. Nevertheless, the authors did not explain how these factors contribute to DL with empirical data. The current thesis extends our understanding and argues that the demonstrated traits and personalities are the catalyst for effective academic leadership.   Compared with Paunova's classification of the two mechanisms for collective leadership (2015), the current finding was more aligned with the achievement mechanism, which gave more recognition to the influences of orientations and personality (open to experience, conscientiousness, cultural intelligence). In terms of informal leaders' characteristics, Leithwood and his colleagues' investigation (2007) claimed that informal leaders mirrored the characteristics of formal leaders in school contexts. A consistent result has been identified in the current study even though it targets on TNE, which recognises faculty's commitment to initiatives, the significance of professional

experiences, risk prediction, and problem-solving were similar to the traits attributed to successful formal leaders.

The data revealed that formal leaders and faculty both express their preference for democracy, which is reflected in the codes such as authorising, supportive, democratic leaders. They aimed to pursue equity in leadership accessibility, leadership support and organisational resources to facilitate their initiatives. Even though some researchers argue DL remains rhetoric and the distribution of power is unequal between distributors and receivers (Bolden et al., 2009), the strong desire for equity and the locus of power is fundamental for effective DL. This result could be explained by the notion that "democratic schooling" supported by "democratic structures and processes" is future-oriented, which paves the way for educational innovation and addresses challenges associated with the increasing marketisation of lifelong learning (Fang & Huang, 2015, p.90).

The findings indicate formal leaders' PA and faculty's PA demonstrated agentic attitudes and emotions, which constituted an indispensable component of their agency in promoting DL for educational quality. Only one article has argued that positive emotions such as joy, satisfaction, and confidence motivate schoolteachers' agency. This was referred to as agency inclination by the authors (Ruan & Zheng, 2019), and they claimed agency inclination mediated teachers' intentions to make choices and their agency practices. This research argues emotions and attitudes are essential constituencies of PA in the TNE context, which has not been addressed in the early research (Kauppinen et al., 2020; Lai et al., 2016; Vähäsantanen et al., 2020).

The present study argues that trust can be disseminated to the organisational level and reshape the essential collaborative and collegial environment for DL. This finding is aligned with other researchers who claim trust is the lynchpin for developing a healthy climate for DL (Jones et al., 2012). Trust as a favourable condition to promote DL has been extensively discussed in early studies (Jones et al., 2012). Rather than viewing trust simply as an indicator of the social environment, the result of this research suggests that

trust can also represent the quality of relationships. In this research, the data showed that formal leaders' trust in faculty motivated formal leaders' empowerment. Reversely, the faculty's trust in formal leaders triggered their engagement. Therefore, the trust could improve DL by engaging both groups of leadership actors in DL. This finding corroborates the early discussion that developing trust improved leadership actors' engagement by enhancing their social bonding between the project team and the organisation in boundary management (van Ameijde, 2009). What earns more attention here is that trust explains why formal leaders and faculty can impact each other, so the result indicates trust's positive role in reinforcing social bonding in formal and informal leaders in the given contextSome early researchers who investigated school contexts noted formal leaders' trust in faculty as the prerequisite for DL (Oduro, 2004; Tian et al., 2016). Compared with the existing literature, the current study adds additional knowledge to DL by pointing out faculty's trust as an additional prerequisite for DL in China's TNE. The current research further implies that formal leaders and faculty's agency are interdependent, collectively, and mutually predicting DL, which draws a more holistic and situated understanding of trust as the antecedents of DL.

Trust plays a central role in mediating the influences between formal leaders and faculty because trust is a significant indicator of interpersonal relationships. This type of trust is referred to as relational trust in the previous literature (Jones et al., 2014b). Lizier and his colleagues (2022) noted that relational trust could be provoked by effective communication. The current finding proves listening and explanation are positive indicators of relational trust in the given context.

This research finding suggests formal leaders' agency in empowerment be transformed into organisational resources which can be utilised to activate faculty's agency in engagement by acting as the enabling structure. In turn, faculty's agency in engagement, reshaped the structural conditions to enable formal leaders' agency in empowerment. It indicates the mediating role of trust to facilitate and spread the positive impacts of DL in leadership actors' interaction. A possible explanation for this result is related to the resource-agency construct of DL proposed by Tian et al. (2016). Through a systematic literature

review of DL situated in school contexts, the authors stress the transformative nature of individual agency. Agency can be transformed into organisational resources and used by organisations in pursuit of organisational goals. The distribution of organisational resources can impact the individual agency. Thus, the individual and organisational dimensions intertwine in leadership practices. Nevertheless, the research did not point out how this transformation could be facilitated. The present research finding can enrich Tian's work (2016), and at the same time, it explains that mutual trust could be the premise for the transformative nature of DL in the TNE context.
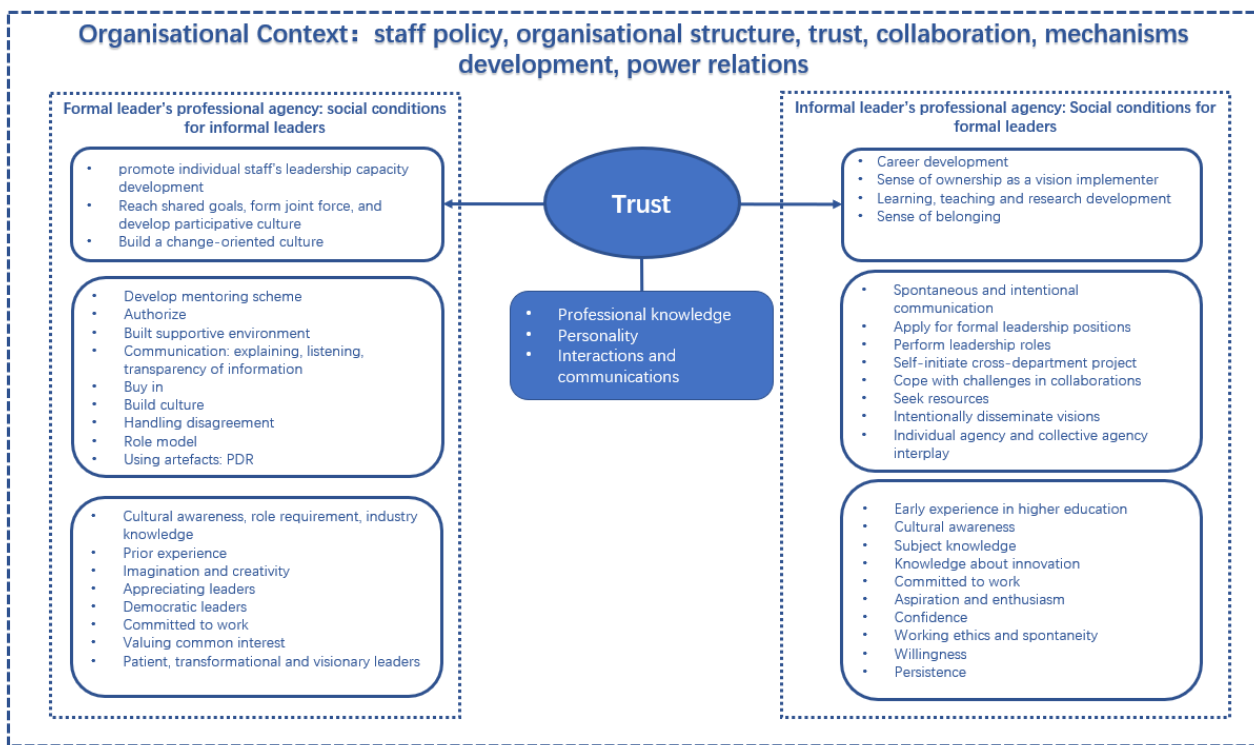
Figure 2: A Model for Leadership Distribution for Quality Management

A more holistic understanding of how to promote DL in QM at the research site has been illustrated in Figure 2, which draws on the mediating role of trust between formal leaders and informal leaders. Based on this framework, several suggestions could be drawn to directly respond to Research Question 3 on promoting leadership distribution in the Sino-foreign cooperative university as the research site. The findings suggest several essential elements be identified based on the results, which are perceived as

effective leadership activities positively related to enhancing the quality of transnational degrees.

From the lens of PA, a new conceptual framework to interpret DL has been developed based on the findings of the study. This framework illustrates the interactions between formal and informal leaders and their mutual influences in shaping their leadership activities aiming to enhance educational quality.

5.4.2 Suggestions for Promoting Leadership Distribution

Based on the discussion above, there are several vital elements emerging from the analysis, which constitute a comprehensive understanding for researchers and practitioners who intend to enhance educational quality from the perspective of leadership distribution. It covers four dimensions: organisational values and culture, identity and orientation supported with coordination, competencies and readiness and supportive structure.

5.4.2.1   Organisational values and culture

A key message about the enhancement of DL transmitted from the dataset informs us that creating a collaborative culture and ethos that can foster participative decision-making is vital for everyone whose work is directly or indirectly related to the quality of learning and teaching. In part, this atmosphere needs to also incorporates mutual respect and reciprocal trust. These variables were seen as favourable factors related to the quality of interpersonal relationships in educational contexts (Feng et al., 2017). They are the soil for shaping favourable social norms in which faculty inspire each other. A collaborative culture can motivate faculty's willingness. It can also support collective goals and the common good more than individual ones for inter-team and intra-team collaborative tasks and projects. As a result, it reinforces interpersonal interdependence and cohesiveness, which are salient to students' learning (Woods & Woods, 2013).

5.4.2.2 Identity and orientations supported with coordination and planning

When participating in leadership activities, leadership actors bring in their own goals, which can significantly impact their behaviour in DL. Diverting or conflicting goals devastate collaboration and mutual trust, which are detrimental to effective DL. The finding suggested that a shared goal which is commonly recognised and accepted can avoid this potential risk to DL. This means DL activities are well coordinated and planned to ensure everyone works towards the same goal. According to Woods and Woods (2013), coordination can be associated with roles, expectations, and modes of collaboration. This coordination mechanism can also involve faculty in developing the shared goal together, so their demands and expectations for personal and professional development can be incorporated. Based on this, they are less likely to resist contributing at their ends to the organisational development.

It is crucial to understand faculty's perceptions of their roles in enhancing the quality of education, their influence on various university decisions, faculty interactions, and the university cultures. These feature their identities as the leadership actors, predicting their effective practices as sources of influence (Cruz-González et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021). Successful leadership identity is flexibly built based on a specific context to adapt to or respond to contextual calls for changes. This signals information to the university on how to adjust the environment to offer support.

5.4.2.3 Competencies and readiness

The third essential dimension of effective DL incorporates preparing faculty's readiness and motivating them to engage in leadership activities which can benefit students' learning. Preparing potential leaders is a crucial leadership development agenda (Cheng & Zhu, 2021; Jones et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2021; Zhong, 2016). Faculty who wish to engage in leadership in the dynamic context need instruments to enhance their competencies in navigating uncertainties. In light of the findings, the university needs to develop its leadership development programmes which have particular foci based on

the university characteristics and faculty demands:

- The emergent property of DL highlighted the changing and ongoing developmental needs of individual faculty, teams and the university, which require faculty to constantly upgrade their skill sets and expertise suitable for the organisation's fast development (Bolden et al., 2008). Therefore, it is critically important that the existing training programmes can be reviewed and updated constantly to ensure the programme itself is developmental.

- It is critical to develop tailor-made and progressive leadership training programmes to facilitate faculty's professional learning at different stages of career development. The audiences of the programmes cover faculty, formal leaders, mentors, and mentees to help them develop skills in leading groups, facilitating collaborations and mentoring (Davison et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2021).

- In addition to developing the faculty's professional knowledge of the university vision, mission, and cross-cultural awareness, readiness development needs to consider how to trigger the faculty's willingness, enthusiasm, and inspiration to be more motivated in leadership activities. Thus, training schemes can take how to develop leaders' emotional intelligence into account through recognising, appreciating and appraising faculty's contribution skills, etc. (Leithwood et al., 2009). Developing professional networks is essential for the university's improvement, so developing good interpersonal skills for participants will be crucial. As discussed in Chapter 4, the formal leader participants viewed the visions connected to individual faculty's operational tasks. Nevertheless, the faculty participants thought they were far-reaching. This result indicates a knowledge gap exists between the two groups of participants. It is vital that the training programme bridge this knowledge gap and facilitate faculty members' understanding of their roles in vision implementation.

- Encouraging faculty's reflexivity and coordinating platform-based activities for faculty to engage in collaborative critical reflections is essential for leadership capacity development. It was

particularly evident in motivating faculty's engagement in innovation to enhance pedagogical practices and improve learning outcomes. It echoed the calls from early studies which argued empirically examining the promulgation of DL can improve the learning and teaching quality (Carbone et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2012)

5.4.2.4 Supportive structure

Bolden et al. (2008) argue that leadership development covers both human and non-human aspects, which is referred to as the organisational development in building a supportive structure. Based on the findings of this study, a list of its characteristics is provided:

- Strong leadership development programmes, including a well-designed mentoring scheme and CoP

- Precise role profiles to help new teacher leaders take on services roles

- A balancing system to balance the workload between learning, teaching, research and additional leadership activities

- Incentive policies for conducting innovative practices or taking the additional workload

- Internal promotion plans are in place to motivate the faculty's continuous professional development

- Transparent communication channels transmit information bi-directionally (top-down and bottom-up).

This section discusses a model that draws on leadership distribution for learning and teaching enhancement. This model highlights the bi-directional flow of influences between formal leaders and informal leaders. It argues that formal leaders' or faculty's agency can be transformed into structural conditions to motivate each other. Thus, rather than only focusing on formal leaders, the study claims that faculty also play salient roles in shaping DL for educational quality. Based on this framework, the

study makes four recommendations to the university to achieve the purposes of QA and QE: organisational culture building, care for faculty's identity and personal orientations, developing leadership capacities and creating a supportive structure.

5.5   Summary of the Chapter

This Chapter discusses how the research findings can respond to the three research questions. It also compares with prior studies to uncover how the findings corroborate, differ from, or contribute to the existing studies.

This research unveils the coexistence of QA and QE in the QM practices at the University. Through the lens of DL, QE becomes central to QM, which is more prevalent than QA in the dataset. The theoretical framework developed in this research illustrates a potential prospective approach to managing educational quality from the perspective of educational leadership in TNE, which is context-based and considers local cultural characteristics and stakeholders' demands.

In order to investigate the demonstration of DL in the processes of QM at the University, the study applied a newly developed framework for analysis, including organic, formal, pragmatic, and chaotic distribution. The four types of DL models were identified for both groups of participants in their actions and interactions, spreading over in capacity development, shared understanding and fostering a change culture. This result indicates a hybrid model of DL by Gronn (2009) features the characteristics of DL for the university. Compared with prior studies, which emphasised formal leaders, the investigation of the analysis provides a more reliable and context-based understanding of DL by incorporating informal leaders into the analysis.

To examine how individual faculty achieves their goals and orientations by participating DL, the study further analysed DL from the lens of PA. In particular, it examined how this new theoretical lens offered new insights for improving DL practices. The findings of the results thus informed a new theoretical

framework to interpret DL practices. It stressed that both formal leaders and informal leaders could affect each other. More specifically, their mutual influences are shaped by the trust between them. Formal leaders' trust in faculty encourages formal leaders' empowerment, and the faculty's trust in leaders motivates their engagement. Therefore, trust reconfigures DL by linking all leadership actors across the hierarchical structure. This framework sheds light on the improvement of DL in four aspects. It encourages researchers and educational practitioners to critically reflect on their current understanding and practices by thinking about how DL facilitated the achievement of faculty's social needs and satisfactions.

6. Chapter Six Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter emphasises four main points of discussion. Section 6.2 summarises the contributions of this research to the theoretical development of the key concepts and practical implications to the research context and beyond. Section 6.3 critically evaluates the research to uncover its limitations. Section 6.4 details the suggestions and recommendations for future research. The chapter ends with concluding remarks, which offer an overview of the research aim and the research questions and indicate the extent to which these have been addressed.

6.2 Significance of the Research

The research contributes to theoretical and practical developments in QM in China's TNE and beyond. As noted in the early chapters, although this issue has been extensively discussed in the literature about TNE, most existing studies focus on establishing QA systems rather than QE. This provokes a need to explore this issue practically and academically. This research enriches the current academic discourses on educational quality in the TNE context from the theoretical lens of DL. Furthermore, it extends our knowledge of DL from PA to understand how leadership identity, leadership traits, and the social environment interplay to shape leadership activities. This research also adds to the literature on PA. With the rapid development and expansion of TNE worldwide, this research offers a point of reference on how to constantly sustain and improve the educational quality of joint-venture projects through individual and institutional efforts in China and beyond.

6.2.1 Significance of the Research to Theory

This research builds connections between DL and QM by developing a theoretical framework that illustrates leadership distribution in QM practices at TNE in China. The model affirms that the perspective of DL, which is analysed based on agency-structure dualism, is an effective approach to establishing a prospective QM model specific for TNE HEIs in China, which incorporates Chinese culture and local staff's demands into consideration. This result enriches the existing research on QM in TNE from the perspective of local leaders and faculty with the support of empirical data. It responds to the urgent call to develop context-specific QM models in the existing literature on TNE in China and beyond (Bolton & Nie, 2010; Bordogna, 2020; Hu et al., 2019; Tsiligiris & Hill, 2021; Smith, 2010; Zhong, 2016) by offering insights for educators, leaders and policymakers. The research results suggest that it is vital to invite local staff members' participation in capacity building, develop and implement shared goals, foster a culture of change and build trust.

This research enriches the literature on leadership distribution from the perspective of agency and structure as informed by Archer's agency-dualism model (2000). In particular, this research draws on the existing knowledge of agency as the antecedents of DL by Bouwmans et al. (2019), Contractor et al. (2012), Davison et al. (2013), Jones et al. (2014a), Liu et al. (2021), Ireen Akhter and Haque (2012), Paunova (2015), Rothenberg (2015), Tian (2016), Woods et al. (2004) and Woods and Woods (2013). It systematically examines how the agency interacts with the organisational structure by considering individual and collective identity. The analysis results indicate leadership activities are processed through participants' constant identity renegotiations when the environment changes. Collective identity shapes the faculty's actions to change organisational culture. This finding extends our understanding of the agency aspect of DL. In particular, it explicitly depicts how the multi-level identity can shape leadership activities related to QA and QE in China's TNE context, which has not been addressed in the existing literature on DL. This finding also addresses a new issue concerning how leadership actors achieve their goals through

exercising DL (Tian et al., 2016; Woods & Woods, 2013).

Some researchers have noted that DL can be affected by leadership traits in HE contexts (Liu et al., 2021; Paunova, 2015; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016). To confirm this argument, the findings draw on the interactions between leaders' identity, traits, actions, and socio-culture conditions in China's TNE context. However, most early studies only point out leadership traits as antecedents but have failed to link them with other factors. Thus, this finding extends our understanding of DL as a relational and situational phenomenon (Woods et al., 2004). It further reinforces our sense that informal leaders' traits are significant sources of influence. This result can alleviate the ambiguity of informal leaders' influence on organisational members and the organisation by providing empirical evidence. At the same time, it fills in the current research gap of a lack of research into informal leaders in the existing literature on DL in Chinese HE (Lu & Smith, 2021, 2022; Zhu & Caliskan, 2021).

This research also makes efforts to generate new knowledge on PA. As illustrated in the SCSC framework, the current understanding of PA mainly emphasises individual identity (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). As informed by the literature on DL, collective identity is positively related to leadership distribution (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2014b). Thus, this research considered the impacts of both individual and collective identities in the empirical investigation. Identifying the faculty's collective identity in promoting cultural change in this research affirms collective identity is another essential element in the construct of PA. This finding expands our current knowledge of PA by adding collective identity as a new factor. The research findings reveal emotion and attitudes are pivotal dimensions of agency, which affect their agency and mutual trust. Ruan and Zheng (2019) even though point out agency inclination as a dimension of PA. But their research was situated in the school context rather than the HE and TNE context. Therefore, this study claims emotional factors and attitudes also constitute a significant part of PA in TNE institutions.

The investigation of DL in this research emphasises the participation of formal leaders and faculty.

According to Woods (2016), every leadership actor has the power to influence others in DL. The findings suggest that mutual trust between formal leaders and faculty facilitates the flow of influences from formal leaders to faculty and vice versa. Even though early research treated trust as an indicator of interpersonal relationships or organisational environment in both school and HE contexts(Jones et al., 2014b; Oduro, 2004; Tian et al., 2016;), they were more likely to emphasise formal leaders. This research argues trust can act as the mechanism and facilitator for the transformative nature of DL, which can transform leadership actors' agency into structural conditions to enable DL activities.

6.2.2 Significance of the Research to Practice

The findings of the research have direct impacts on TNE institutions in China. With the rapid development and expansion of TNE in China, a concern regarding the quality of the international degrees delivered overseas has earned much attention from policymakers, HE practitioners, and researchers (Yang, 2008). The TNE institutions in China face multiple demands from the QA accreditation offices in both host and home countries. In practice, the international home institutions also have more robust controls over the QM at the TNE institutions (Wang, 2014). The multiple sources of stress have driven TNE institutions to improve the quality of education to meet these various demands. According to Tsiligiris and Hill (2021), improving educational quality requires significant organisational members' efforts to attract more students. This issue concerns the case and draws attention from other comparable situations, such as overseas universities seeking collaborations with Chinese universities, existing joint-venture projects demanding to enhance quality, and newly established ones aiming to build their own QA systems. Furthermore, some implications can offer a reference point for traditional Chinese universities. From the perspective of DL and PA, this research can provide significant practical implications to HEIs, and formal and informal leaders of the organisations and help them effectively cope with the challenges encountered in QA and QE.

6.2.2.1 Practical implications for higher education institutions

The research findings suggest that HEIs that aim for QA and QE need to create a climate to foster collaboration, trust, and participative decision-making. Collaboration in a distributed organisation happens at all levels. Collaborative partners have to share expertise, knowledge, resources, and skills to form concertive actions (Gronn, 2002). Collaborations can be coordinated by tools, such as policies, working procedures, guidelines, and organisational norms. It can emerge essentially from faculty initiatives. Collectively, their collaborations can affect an organisation's culture. This finding also gives rise to both formal leaders' and faculty's awareness of collaboration and its significance in promoting organisational changes. Maguad (2006) and Sallis (1994) note organisational members need an understanding that teamwork and collaboration can create more opportunities for innovation than isolation. This suggestion offers some key elements to consider, which can affect the success of partnerships. When an organisation experiences challenges in collaborations, it can carry out self-reflection on these elements to seek solutions. Another recommendation for HEIs to consider is to develop case-study examples that can be delivered to all organisational members as part of their professional development. It can cover interesting topics, such as cross-team collaborations, cross-cultural collaborations, and collaborative pedagogical innovations. This applies not only to TNE institutions and projects but also to traditional Chinese universities in creating coherence and collaborative working environments.

This research suggests that when individual goals are aligned with the organisation's shared goals, organisational members are more likely to engage and commit to organisational development. This finding demonstrates how leadership actors achieve their personal goals through participating in leadership activities (Tian et al., 2016; Woods & Woods, 2013). From the perspective of an organisation, this research suggests that TNE institutions can adopt the Objectives and Key Results (OKR) or other similar management tools to ensure the achievement of shared goals. OKR is a commonly shared instrument in

many global enterprises, which is employed to evaluate individual and organisational performances from a holistic perspective. According to the researchers, OKR also has great power in knowledge generation, which is considered a positive indicator of organisational performance (Klanwaree & Choemprayong, 2019). Building on it, this research concludes that setting goals for institutions is insufficient. More importantly, the institutions need to align the goals and set up an OKR mechanism to manage, monitor, and assure the implementation and achievement of goals.

The research findings imply that establishing a well-planned mentorship system can significantly facilitate leadership capacity development. This is associated with the significance of establishing tailor-made training programmes designed for both mentors and mentees. Such mentorship is dynamic and can meet staff's demands and goals of personal and professional development required at different stages of career development. This finding provides practical insights to improve the current mentor programme at the university under investigation, which tends to emphasise how to train mentees. Mentors need to be prepared to update their knowledge and skills to navigate challenges from the external environment. The applicability of this suggestion can extend beyond TNE institutions to other types of HEIs in the global context.

The research findings can shed light on several critical considerations for leadership development and training programmes. In the first place, the integrated framework of leadership distribution in QM suggests that formal and informal leaders contribute to QA and QE through developing leadership capacities, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education, fostering a change culture, and building trust. These results can be applied in the training programmes to help leadership actors, particularly informal leaders, develop a whole picture by linking their individual behaviours in QA with the improvement of QA practices employed at the university. It can not only raise both formal leaders' and informal leaders' awareness of the crucial impacts they exert on the organisational performance through their agency but also encourage organisations to pay more attention

to informal leaders' leadership development. Secondly, the university under investigation is a fast-developing institution that meets many uncertainties and challenges in the progress of organisational development. There is no universal recipe that can be a once-fit-for-all. Thus, leadership training programmes can evolve in nature, which needs to be upgraded as people update their skills and knowledge and the environment changes.

6.2.2.2   Practical implications for formal leaders

The research findings suggest that identity plays a crucial role in QM. In practice, identity can motivate or demotivate some staff members' decisions on whether to take specific actions or not. It is vital for formal leaders to intentionally learn informal leaders' personal development goals and social needs through regular communications and formal and informal talks. Furthermore, formal leaders could invite informal leaders to participate in critical decision-making related to the university's strategic development. Through this participative decision-making process, individual staff members can link their personal goals with the organisational goals. This can strengthen the shared understanding of goals and vastly improve staff members' engagement.

The research findings imply formal leaders need to pay attention to their emotions and control their negative emotions when they communicate with staff members. The importance of emotional control as a leadership trait has been noted in early studies (Leithwood et al., 2007; Paunova, 2015;). If they can effectively manage their emotions when communicating with each other, it is more likely to arouse others' trust and engagement. One of the possible solutions is that they can seek professional advice from the internal Department of Staff Counselling or external professional institutions in collaboration with the university. Effective control of negative emotions positively relates to effective communication as the next point of discussion.

The research findings uncover formal leaders in the TNE context need to improve their

communication skills. Specific communication skills, such as listening, are essential to facilitate trust and respect among colleagues. Furthermore, when their points of view differ from those of staff members, they need to spend time explaining the reasons and offering rationales so that a mutual understanding can be built. These strategies can help formal leaders reinforce members' social bonding and coherence. This research suggests that formal leaders participate in leadership training programmes to practise active listening and master the techniques to become good listeners. They can also take advantage of the online learning resources to watch training videos and blogs or use the university's library resources to read books on leadership and cross-cultural communications. This will be very helpful in improving their effective communication skills.

The research findings suggest that formal leaders need to pay attention to national cultural differences to lead international teams effectively and engage team members to contribute to collective leadership activities and decision-making in a multicultural context. This research is situated in China. The Confucian cultures respect high power distance, so persons of lower status naturally follow those of higher level as a typical feature of social relations (Thorpe et al., 2011). This notion significantly affects the Chinese staff's behaviours in DL. When a foreign ex-pat leader leads a Chinese team, the leader needs to encourage Chinese team members to express their thoughts and ideas to contribute more ideas and views to the decision-making. Thus, this research proposes that developing cultural awareness for formal leaders is critically important for TNE institutions in China and other countries worldwide. This research suggests foreign ex-pat leaders need to intentionally learn Chinese culture from books, online videos, case-study examples, or other resources that the HEIs have developed to support new staff adapting to the alien environment. My university offers Chinese culture courses to international staff, from which they can learn basic Chinese languages and acknowledge how Chinese culture differs from their cultural backgrounds. This research recommends foreign ex-pats attend these courses as another way to improve their cultural awareness.

6.2.2.3 Practical implications for informal leaders

One of the practical implications of this research is that informal leaders play a crucial role in the development of an organisational culture which fosters collaborations. The research findings indicate that faculty were self-motivated to lead cross-department teams to develop the Chinese language teaching curriculum at the university, and they were also self-initiated to apply innovative pedagogies and assessment strategies in collaboration with other colleagues. These findings suggest that collaboration can emerge primarily from informal leaders' self-initiatives. In a collective manner, their collaboration can contribute to the university's strategic development and organisational changes in quality improvement. Thus, this research suggests informal leaders be aware of the significance of self-initiated collaborations and can actively implement them in practice. This suggestion can be replicable for TNE institutions in China and other countries.

This research indicates a gap between the formal leader participants' understanding of vision implementation and the faculty participants. The former group believed the faculty's individual work was part of the vision implementation. Nevertheless, the latter group viewed vision as large-scale and far from their work. In the HE context, faculty enjoy high levels of autonomy in research and teaching, but they seem to care less about information sharing from the university, such as leadership agenda, strategic planning, new policies, *etc*. Thus, they are more likely to feel isolated from top management. In addition, they tend not to participate in leadership training programmes actively. In order to bridge this gap, this research suggests informal leaders at TNE institutions, including faculty and administrative staff, pay particular attention to this crucial information and actively engage in the relevant activities. Their engagement can develop their whole picture and facilitate their career advancement in the future.

In addition to suggesting formal leaders enhance cultural awareness, this research also recommends improving informal leaders' cultural awareness. Informal leaders' cultural awareness differs from that of formal leaders, and according to the research finding, it focuses on cultural awareness at the

organisational level. Administrative and academic staff have different understandings of shared concerns, and because of role differences, they have varied working styles in dealing with a variety of challenges of work. When disagreements happen, people who lack cultural awareness tend to think from their positions so that they are more likely to believe what they think or do is right. This understanding is biased and prohibits the formation of shared understandings. Thus, this study proposes that informal leaders, including faculty and administrative staff, are strongly recommended to improve their cultural awareness to develop shared understandings and promote cross-team collaborations. There are many occasions in the university that faculty and administrative staff can meet to exchange ideas. There are various university committees at the university level, and within each academic school, there are also school-level committees and regular school meetings. All staff members are encouraged to share their concerns or constructive suggestions to solve a shared problem. It is recommended that faculty and administrative staff actively exchange with each other on these occasions to know each other's expectations and ensure they are on the same level. In addition to these formal occasions, creating open dialogues in informal formats is also vital. For instance, the school or department can organise weekly or monthly gatherings during lunch, in which all staff can sit together to talk with each other casually. These events can create a relaxed environment in which people tend to share more. These practices can be easily replicable across and beyond a single university.

In this research, critical reflections were found to be positively associated with faculty's innovative changes. They also connected the mutual influences between collective and individual agency in promoting cultural change. Thus, it is the source for informal leaders to contribute to the innovative development of the organisation. The findings suggest that some additional activities can be arranged to facilitate and motivate staff members' critical reflections on their taken-for-granted notions, actions, and organisational behaviours. CoPs are viewed as new learning opportunities because it brings people with the same interests together to share best practices and innovative ideas, which can shift educators'

perception of education by promoting identity negotiations (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Thus, faculty staff need to actively participate in these activities to improve their knowledge and skills in innovation and effectively implement it in their workplaces.

6.2.2.4   Practical implications for the researcher

The notion of leadership distribution implies that every staff member can perform leadership roles in the individual working domains or lead other colleagues in inter-department collaborative projects as informal leaders. The contributions made by formal and informal leaders are both viewed as crucial assets to promote organisational development. The successful implementation of leadership distribution requires a paradigmatic shift in every organisational member's perception of leadership and the sources of leadership. As a result, I have become more self-reflective on my past understanding of leadership and my prior experiences as a formal leader in an academic school. This self-scrutiny process has helped me transform my professional practices in the dual roles of both a formal leader and a teaching staff member.

This research suggests that democratic leaders who offer space, protection, and authorisation are more likely to nurture shared understanding and promote staff engagement in professional development and change actions. I revisited my past leadership style and reflected on it against this finding. Then I realised that I previously tended to play a dominant role in decision-making, which might hinder colleagues' intention to share their perceptions or initiate change activities in their own ways. Therefore, I made plans to improve it. Nowadays, I have become more democratic in empowering and nurturing an organic team environment. I always invite colleagues to share their points first, listen to different points of view, and incorporate others' suggestions into consideration when making decisions. When they need assistance, I try to offer advice or ask for resources from the upper level to support their actions. This practice enhances colleagues' trust, making them less hesitant to make changes with additional support.

The research indicates that formal leaders cherish staff members' opinions and are eager to learn

their points of view. Even if staff members' opinions may differ from or contradict that of formal leaders, their collective efforts are still considered critical to improving practices. This finding encourages me to review my role as a subordinate to the senior leader of the school. As discussed above, the Confucian culture's higher power distance might make subordinates inclined to follow the leaders' instructions and less likely to challenge their decisions (Thorpe et al., 2011). This cultural convention can potentially prohibit effective communication with senior leaders with international backgrounds in the given context. Thus, I have encouraged myself to push the boundaries and actively engage in discussions at committees or private meetings with them.

Faculty are crucial sources of innovation and organisational development. They can affect the norms and working cultures through bottom-up change actions. As a teaching staff member, I feel obliged to engage in teaching innovation and constantly improve my professional practice to offer students an enhanced learning experience. I am teaching a module that introduces various research methodologies for educational studies. My past practice in module delivery was a typical lecturing style. This research motivated me to assess its strengths and weaknesses based on the learning outcomes and prior students' feedback. I consulted several senior teaching fellows and the Educational Development Unit to seek advice on alternative pedagogical practices in the delivery. Eventually, I redesigned the module delivery using peer-assisted learning, which intended to offer hands-on research skill learning through enhanced student-student interactions, critical thinking and reflection, and deep learning processes.

6.3 Limitations of the Research

Some limitations of this research have been identified, including discussions on the impacts of national policies on DL, a small sample size, limited access to other types of joint-venture projects in China and my role as the insider researcher.

Prior research has noted the relationship between national context and HE leadership, but the

research did not cover this part of the investigation. Empirical research focusing on the British HE sector notes that the increased focus of "student as customer" has pushed UK faculty to emphasise teaching quality and the delivery of excellence in teaching (Bolden et al., 2013). Mok and Han (2016) point out that national policy changes can impact the level of autonomy at HEIs in determining the QA practices. These findings indicate dramatic changes in the national context can affect educational practitioners' identity renegotiations and institutional practices in QM. A similar case also happens in China's HE sector. The current thirteenth national strategy issued by the State Council of China further highlights China's HEIs must transform from a teacher-centred educational model to a student-centred educational model (The State Council, 2016). All Chinese faculty are affected by this national change, and they are incumbent to act upon it to contribute to the sector's innovative development. A further discussion on how the national context change can impact DL might yield more interesting findings to motivate the theoretical development of DL.

This research interviewed fourteen participants to collect their perceptions, views, and lived experiences in participating in leadership activities at the university. When purposively selecting the participants, this research considered diversity and invited seven formal leaders and seven faculty for interviews. The study also assured an even distribution of gender and nationalities among these participants to collect views on the same concern from different perspectives. Nevertheless, as noted in the methodology chapter, the interviewees can evaluate the situation and may choose what they want to share (Gomm, 2004). This implies their views might not be objective. If more participants can be invited for interviews, more interesting and insightful findings might be yielded to minimise the possible effects of biased views.

This research is limited by accessing a single case in a China-UK joint venture university, although a single case study can generate an in-depth understanding of the context through a thorough investigation of the university. According to the result of the literature review, DL is affected by the interplays of agency

and social-cultural conditions (Archer, 2000), making it a context-specific phenomenon. A comparative study on DL between two different Sino-foreign cooperative universities can help analyse DL from different angles and generate diverse and nuanced understandings of QM in the TNE context. Thus, further comparative studies comparing leadership activities between a China-UK university and a China-US university or other types of joint venture institutions would add new understandings of how to perform QM through DL.

As noted earlier in the thesis, an insider researcher can encounter many challenges. During my research, I recognised developing critical thinking skills was the most challenging because I needed to master them throughout the research process when I read the literature, evaluated and synthesised the current research, collected data analysed data, and wrote the thesis. For example, when I wrote the report, I reflected on how I analysed data, whether I analysed them critically and from different perspectives, whether anything was missing, and whether the current themes could be improved. I understand that critical thinking is not equivalent to criticism (Bell, 2010). It is about seeing things from different perspectives and angles, so alternatives and a more profound understanding can be generated through constantly challenging myself. During the research process, I must stay alert for any taken-for-granted knowledge and practices that might limit my interpretations. I also critically assessed my research process and understanding when exploring the issues and theories, so I could unveil true claims and propose alternative opinions from the data and the current theories. This process has helped me to develop a critical lens for my thesis.

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This research offers insights into the current studies of QM in the TNE context by noting that relevant practices need to focus on two purposes: QA and QE. Based on the critical reflections of the findings, the recommendations for further research are discussed in this section.

In order to obtain a more in-depth understanding of DL in the ADM processes in the given context, further research can adopt a multiple-case-study design. According to Yin (2018), a multiple-case-study design can offer supplemental information to a single case study. Such a design might have more possibilities to comprise stronger arguments than a single case. Vaughan (1992) claims researchers can compare and contrast different cases, which facilitates generating nuanced interpretations of the phenomenon. There are currently nine Sino-foreign cooperative universities in China that offer international degrees to students, four of which award double undergraduate degrees. Further research can be conducted to compare the leadership practices of a China-UK university versus those of a China-US university. US and UK adopt different QA systems and practices, which can lead to varied views, perceptions, and behaviours as to how to effectively implement them at different organisational and individual levels (Wang, 2019). Comparing these differences and similarities between the two cases can produce various demonstrations of DL and PA associated with cultural differences at these institutions.

This research investigated individual agency and institutional practices to respond to the demand for enhanced educational quality with the support of the QA system implemented at the university. As discussed above, the effects of national policy on individuals and universities can be compelling (Bolden et al., 2013; Mok & Han, 2016). The State Council of China has recently released the fourteenth national strategy since 2021 (State Council, 2021), which has a different focus than the thirteenth national strategy (State Council, 2016). For example, the new national strategy highlights China will establish a high-quality education system with the core of building an education system that serves lifelong learning for all. Thus, further research can explore how the new initiatives can affect the QM practices at China's TNE institutions and even traditional Chinese universities from organisational members' perspectives.

The participants of DL can extend beyond a single institution. According to Bolden et al. (2013), the investigation of DL can cover students, industry, and non-teaching staff and organisational members. For Sino-foreign cooperative universities, the Chinese and international parenting partners are also significant

sources of influence in QM processes. This can motivate us to investigate the QM practices by combining arguments made by diverse stakeholders. By comparing their views, perceptions and behaviours, the research findings might be more solid and sound from a holistic perspective. The investigation of multiple sources of data can be facilitated with more advanced research design and data analysis techniques. Thus, further research can employ grounded theory as the research methodology to proceed with the investigation.

This research generated four themes illustrating formal leaders' and faculty's agency in QA and QE. If this research can incorporate more participants into analyses, cross-group comparisons can be made between multiple groups of participants. The findings can unveil what challenges these participants encounter, how they cope with challenges in practice, and what support are needed. The result can yield more knowledge about how stakeholders exercise leadership activities and PA to achieve QA and QE. A further investigation of structural support, such as institutional artefacts, can also provide more practical implications to joint-venture universities, Chinese partners, and international partners.

The CoP is viewed as a facilitator to support organisational members' professional learning (Farnsworth et al., 2016). Nevertheless, from the perspective of an organisation, Campbell and Armstrong (2013) argue that CoP is a crucial constituency of organisational learning because it is the gateway to transform individual knowledge into organisational learning. Further research can examine how CoP can facilitate this transformation in detail. Such investigations enrich our understanding of how individual influences can be transmitted to the organisation at different HEIs. In addition, it can further shed light on current practices of CoP in the TNE context by offering practical guidance to both institutions and CoP facilitators.

6.5 Concluding Remarks

This study aims to develop a thorough understanding of how to ensure the quality of education and,

simultaneously improve it at both the individual and institutional levels in China's TNE context. QM is believed to entail two purposes: meeting the minimum quality standards required by the quality accreditation bodies in the host and home countries (QA) and constantly improving educational quality that can sustain an organisation's long-term development (QE).

In order to fill in the crucial knowledge gaps, this study is approached from a new theoretical framework which integrates the key research findings from the existing literature about DL and PA. DL is conceptualised by following the agency-structure dualism model (Archer, 2000; Woods et al., 2004), so it has two aspects with the involvement of both formal and informal leaders. Most existing literature about DL has failed to conclude the effects of DL on leadership actors from a psychological perspective by examining their social and personal needs, so several researchers suggest PA might offer a solution to address this research gap (Tian et al., 2016; Woods & Woods, 2013). Thus, this study integrated the critical ideas of DL and PA and developed a theoretical framework to guide the investigation. Combining the two theories in the new framework can enrich our existing knowledge about both fields of study. To address the research gaps and the research aim, this research is built on the investigations of three research questions:

1. What are the processes of quality management at a Sino-foreign cooperative university?

2. How is leadership distributed in the processes of quality management at the research site?

3. How can the University promote the development of effective leadership distribution and maximise its benefits of quality management?

This study is positioned on social constructivism and adopts an interpretive approach to explore the research questions from multiple perspectives (Merriam et al., 2009). A social constructivist paradigm guided me to select a qualitative single case study research design to explore the case in depth. This research chose a Sino-foreign university as the case, which is established based on the collaboration between China and UK. In-depth semi-structured interviews were used for data collection from several

organisational members. The three questions served as a guide to developing interview questions. Fourteen research participants were purposively selected, which included seven faculty and seven formal leaders from different departments at the university. A six-step thematic analysis approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was strictly followed to generate patterns and themes from the data.

This research collected data about formal leaders and faculty's identity, agentic actions, competencies and readiness, and preferred institutional support to illustrate formal leaders and faculty's PA concerning QA and QE. It identifies four themes from data analysis: developing leadership capacity, forming a shared understanding of goals in enhancing the quality of education, fostering a change culture, and building trust. It claims that the two groups of participants' leadership activities converge at these four areas to improve educational quality with individual and collective efforts. The results suggest that formal leaders and informal leaders demonstrate different PA in the first three themes, but the PA in building trust appears in the participants' communications, readiness and competencies, and identity relating to the first three themes. Within each theme, we can identify ADM showed different characteristics and the co-existence of the four DL models.

To respond to the first research question on the characteristics of QM manifested at the university, the findings of the study suggest QA and QE are uncovered in the leadership actions at the University, which, however, give more emphasis on QE. The QM model developed from the lens of DL and PA offers new insights to promote the understanding and practices of QM in TNE, which also incorporates within it the local characteristics and stakeholders' demands.

Research Question 2 examines how leadership is distributed in the QM processes at the university. This research examined four DL models that were synthesised from the early studies (Chapman, 2017; Gronn, 2002; Leithwood et al., 2006; MacBeath et al., 2004; Spillane, 2006), namely organic distribution, pragmatic distribution, formal distribution, and chaotic distribution. This analysis result indicates that the four DL models coexist for formal leaders and faculty participants in developing leadership capacities,

forming a shared understanding of goals, and fostering a change culture. Leadership distribution takes place at different levels. Some leadership activities were individually performed, whereas some involved multiple leadership actors' collaborations. Thus, the study concludes a hybrid model of leadership distribution (Gronn, 2009) is identified in QM at the university.

Based on the research findings, a leadership distribution model has been developed by integrating the DL theory and the PA theory. Based on this model, this research makes four recommendations to improve leadership distribution for enhanced educational quality: organisational values and culture, identity and orientation supported with coordination and planning, competencies and readiness, and a supportive structure. Chapter 5 explained in depth why to make such recommendations. This result responds to Research Question #3.

This study adds additional knowledge to the research topic by uncovering how to effectively implement the QA system at both individual and institutional levels from the perspective of DL and PA. The research findings can contribute to generating knowledge for both fields of research. It also offers significant practical implications for China's various types of TNE projects, TNE institutions in the global context, and even traditional Chinese universities. Based on the findings, I expect to publish one or two journal publications in QA, educational leadership, internationalisation of education, and comparative studies. If the papers can be published, the findings and recommendations proposed in the study are expected to generate more impact on researchers, educators, and HE practitioners worldwide. This research discussed several research limitations. Finally, recommendations for future research were made, which can yield knowledge generation on a better understanding of the concerned phenomenon.

(World count: 48,325)

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Appendix A Ethics Approval Form of the University of

Liverpool

Dear Jiaqi Fu	
I am pleased to inform you that the EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC) has approved your application for ethical approval for your study. Details and conditions of the approval can be found below.	
Sub-Committee:	EdD. Virtual Programme Research Ethics Committee (VPREC)
Review type:	Expedited
PI:	Jiaqi Fu
School:	Lifelong Learning
Title:	Leadership Models in University Quality Assurance Management: An Exploration in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative University in China
First Reviewer:	Dr. Viola Manokore
Second Reviewer:	Dr. Pauline Armsby
Other members of the Committee	Chair. Dr. Lucilla Crosta, Dr. Pauline Armsby, Dr. Alla korzh, Dr. Yota Dimitriadi, Dr. Carolina Guzman
July 12, 2018	
The application was APPROVED subject to the following conditions:	

Conditions		
1	Mandatory	M: All serious adverse events must be reported to the VPREC within 24 hours of their occurrence, via the EdD Thesis Primary Supervisor.

This approval applies for the duration of the research.   If it is proposed to extend the duration of the study as specified in the application form, the Sub-Committee should be notified. If it is proposed to make an amendment to the research, you should notify the Sub-Committee by following the Notice of Amendment procedure outlined at http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/researchethics/notice%20of%20amendment.doc.

Where your research includes elements that are not conducted in the UK, approval to proceed is further conditional upon a thorough risk assessment of the site and local permission to carry out the research, including, where such a body exists, local research ethics committee approval. No documentation of local permission is required (a) if the researcher will simply be asking organizations to distribute research invitations on the researcher's behalf, or (b) if the researcher is using only public means to identify/contact participants. When medical, educational, or business records are analysed or used to identify potential research participants, the site needs to explicitly approve access to data for research purposes (even if the researcher normally has access to that data to perform his or her job).

Please note that the approval to proceed depends also on research proposal approval.

HI Jiaqi!

Thanks for having re-submitted your revised ethics paperwork in light of the new COVID-19 requirements.

I can say that your changes comprising the move from face-to-face data collection to the online one can be considered as minor changes. I acknowledge that you have also added senior leaders to your data collection sample, but you put in place some procedures in order to maintain their identity anonymous so not to add additional risks to your study.

Hence you can now continue with your full online data collection since my understanding is that you already stopped your on ground one when COVID Pandemic started. All my best wishes!

Lucilla Crosta
VPREC Chair

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Lucilla Crosta PhD, MSc., BEd
Laureate online Education, University of Liverpool Partnership
EdD Thesis Faculty Manager
EdD Honorary Senior Lecturer
EdD Thesis supervisor

Appendix B Ethics Approval Form of Xi'an Jiaotong-

Liverpool University

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
西交利物浦大学

P156D Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University
111 Ren'ai Road, Dushu Lake Higher Education Town SIP
Suzhou 215123,
P.R. China.

20 February 2019

Dear Jiaqi Fu,

Proposal Number: 18-03-07

Title:

Leadership Models in University Quality Assurance Management: An Exploration in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative University in China

Your application for Research Ethics Subcommittee (RESC) approval has been reviewed and approved via Chair's action. This approval provides permission to begin the activities outlined in the RESC approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to, and approved by, the RESC prior to the implementation of any changes. You are required to report to the RESC as soon as possible (or within 5 working days) any issues regarding the occurrence of adverse events, such as risks or harms, involving study participants.

Sincerely,

Robert Lynch
Chair, Research Ethics Committee

Appendix C Participant Information Sheet

1. **Title of Study**

Leadership Models in University Quality Assurance Management: An Exploration in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative University in China

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask me if you would like more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends or relatives if you wish. We would like to stress that you do not have to accept this invitation and should only agree to take part if you want to.

Thank you for reading this.

2. **What is the purpose of the study?**

This study is to contextualise the leadership models in the QA system and decision-making processes adopted at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University. With particular attention to team-level leadership in the given context, this study will uncover team members' roles and responsibilities as the committee representative engaging in decision-making, how they perform their roles by interacting with each other and the institution, their experience as the leaders for specific occasions, how they perform their leadership, and how the leadership is rotated amongst different members. This research will enable me to fill in the gap existing in current TNE leadership studies by developing a more contextualized understanding on TNE leadership. This study also responds to the call for attention by Zhu et al. (2018), in refining the understanding of team-level leadership, which studies the leadership for all team members and the entire team, instead of individual leaders.

References:

Zhu, J., Yam, K.C., Liao, Z. & Johnson, R.E. (2018). Shared leadership: a state-of-the-art review and future research agenda. *Journal of Organizational Behaviour,* 39 (1), 834-852. DOI: 10.1002/job.2296.

3. **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

In total, I plan to interview 20 participants, including 18 XJTLU participants and 2 UoL participants. The fundamental principle for participant selection is that the selected participants should be knowledgeable about the quality assurance policies and procedures of the University. Both academic staff and administrative staff will be considered as the potential participants and will be invited for interviews.

For XJTLU academic staff as the research participants of this study, they could be:

- Someone sit in one of the following Committees as a member to contribute to the decision-making: Academic Board, Learning and Teaching Committee, Academic Quality Sub-Committee and Academic Practice Sub-Committee.
- The Chairs of the Committees as long as they are not Senior Management Team Members.
- Heads of academic departments

For XJTLU administrative staff as the research participants of this study, they should work at the University for at least three years. During their stay at the University, they need to have been heavily involved in quality assurance management work.

Two research participants will be selected from UoL. One of the UoL research participants should be an Office Head who is closely working with University quality assurance management affairs. The other one should be an academic staff member sitting on the Committee Chair position, who is in charge of QA management of the oversea campuses.

Both XJTLU and UoL participants should be on their current positions or used to work on such positions for at least a year's time. Participants who have resigned will be considered as the backup plan for participant selection.

4. Do I have to take part?

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. If you choose not to participate all the services you receive at this University will continue and nothing will change. The choice that you make will have no bearing on your job or on any work-related evaluations or reports. You can also ask that any data that has been provided so far will not to be included in the study.

5. What will happen if I take part?

This research will adopt a qualitative research design. The main method for data collection is to conduct face-to-face semi-structured interviews with Jiaqi Fu only, which means some questions will be asked in a rather informal way to which you are invited to respond. The interviews might also be conducted online using secured computer/mobile applications.

After receiving your agreement to participate, this form, together with the Interview Protocols that include interview questions and other important information, Participant Consent Form will be shared with you and you will be given a week to read these documents and ask any question. You can suggest changes to interview questions or reject to answer any question, wherever necessary.

The interview will last around an hour or an hour and half. For face-to-face interviews, you will sit down with Jiaqi Fu in a comfortable place on campus (a private meeting room, for instance) of your choice.

The coronavirus pandemic involves high risks in face-to-face human interactions. To ensure a high level of security for both interviewees and the interviewer's health, face-to-face interviews will be called off and replaced with online-interview by using secured online communication tools during the epidemic period. Possible tools to use includes: skype, wechat, zoom, etc. Face-to-face interviews will resume once receiving UoL and XJTLU's official notice and approval.

You will need to answer interview questions on interview protocol shared with you based on your own perception and experience. If you do not wish to answer any of the questions during the interview, you may say so and Jiaqi Fu will move on to the next question. No one else will be present unless you raise such request. With your permission, the entire interview will be audio-recorded, so that discussion can be easily recalled afterwards.

I will give you an opportunity at the end of the interview to review your remarks, and you can ask to modify or remove portions of those, if you do not agree with my notes or if the research does not understand you correctly. In a few days after the interview, I will share with you the transcript of your interview in a password protected email to check whether your opinion is accurately articulated before coding starts, if you wish. You may request to check the analysis of your interview later to avoid misinterpretation of data.

6. **What will happen if I want to stop taking part?**

You may stop participating in the interview at any time that you wish, without explanation. Results up to the period of withdrawal may be used, if you are happy for this to be done. The results will be fully anonymised, so you may only withdraw your participation prior to the anonymisation that will be Dec 31, 2019. You may request that the results are destroyed and no further use is made of them before the date.

If you want to stop taking part, please email your request to jiaqi.fu@online.liverpool.ac.uk, or Jiaqi.fu@xjtlu.edu.cn.

7. **Confidentiality**

Your participation will be kept confidential. I will not disclose to anyone that you have agreed to participate in this study. Your personal information (name, position, professional title) and the name of your institution will remain anonymous throughout my thesis and in any other publication, so to protect you from identification. Recorded interviews and transcripts will be stored in my personal computer that remains password secured until the thesis will be successfully completed and up to ten years. You and your organization will receive pseudonyms or codes and no geographical details will be disclosed that could be used to identify you or your organization. My thesis supervisor from the University of Liverpool and myself will be the only persons that will have access to the collected data and your thesis, or parts of it, and all interview data will be destroyed ten years after data collection.

8. **How will my data be used?**

The University processes personal data as part of its research and teaching activities in accordance with the lawful basis of 'public task', and in accordance with the University's purpose of "advancing education, learning and research for the public benefit".

Under UK data protection legislation, the University acts as the Data Controller for personal data collected as part of the University's research. Jiaqi Fu acts as the Data Processor for this study, and any queries relating to the handling of your personal data can be sent to jiaqi.fu@online.liverpool.ac.uk , or Jiaqi.fu@xjtlu.edu.cn.

Data will be used to discover findings that will be contained in my thesis to fulfil the requirements of the EdD doctoral program. A copy of the thesis can be provided if requested.

9. **Expenses and / or payments**

There will be no compensation, whether in forms of gifts nor monetary reimbursement as you shouldn't incur any expenses by taking part in this study.

10. **Are there any risks in taking part?**

This is a low-risk research project. I will minimize the risk of research participants being identified when the research outcomes are shared publicly in the format of journal publication or conference presentation.   If you feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics, you do not have to answer any of the questions or take part in the interview at all. For your comfort, your Human Resource Office can have access to the interview protocol and to the interview questions, if requested. Moreover, you are assured that you can withdraw from the research at any time without any negative consequences. You have also the possibility to refrain from answering questions you don't feel comfortable with. Furthermore, you will have the occasion to read the interview report before data analysis occurs so that you have the opportunity to ask for amendments, if necessary.

11. **Are there any benefits in taking part?**

There are several benefits that research participants could obtain by participating in this research project. In the first place, this study may help participants to better understand their roles and responsibilities that they undertake in the decision-making. Since the study investigates the leadership models for the teams rather than individual leaders, it may raise participants' awareness that they are also significantly contributing to the important decision-making through their various leadership roles. Secondly, it may help research participants to reflect on how they perform their roles and responsibilities as it will give them a chance to reflect on their own practices and identify any areas for improvement. Thirdly, the team-level study will look into how they interact with each other to contribute to the team-level decision-making process, so it will reinforce participants' sense of teamwork and help them to develop collaborative relationship.

12. **What will happen to the results of the study?**

I intend to publish the results of the study in academic journals or make presentations in important international conferences. There are a few examples for the targeted journals and conferences, such as International Journal of Educational Research, Journal of Leadership Education, Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, or some Chinese journals in educational leadership, Asian Conference on Education, International Conference on Humanities and Educational Research, Regional Conference on Educational Leadership and Management, *etc.* I plan to attend conferences at the end of the thesis stage, which will be around December 2020 and 2021. The application for journal publication should be around 2021 and 2022. The published outcomes will be shared with all participants. Participants will not be identifiable in publications unless you are willing to so.

13. What if I am **unhappy or if there is a problem?**

If you are unhappy, or if there is a problem, please feel free to let us know by contacting jiaqi.fu@online.liverpool.ac.uk, or Jiaqi.fu@xjtlu.edu.cn and we will try to help. If you remain unhappy or have a complaint which you feel you cannot come to us with then you should contact the liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com or the Research Participant Advocate at liverpoolethics@ohecampus.com. When contacting the Research Ethics and Integrity Office, please provide details of the name or description of the study (so that it can be identified), the researcher(s) involved, and the details of the complaint you wish to make.

The University strives to maintain the highest standards of rigour in the processing of your data. However, if you have any concerns about the way in which the University processes your personal data, it is important that you are aware of your right to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office by calling (+44) 0303 123 1113.""

14. Who can I contact if I have further questions?

If you have further questions, please direct them to Jiaqi Fu, whose contact is provided here:

Address: IR811W, IR Building, South Campus, Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University, 8 Chongwen, Suzhou, China
Postal code: 215123
Email: jiaqi.fu@online.liverpool.ac.uk, or Jiaqi.fu@xjtlu.edu.cn
Phone: +86 (0)512 88161770
You may also contact **Dr. Ian Willis** who is the Doctoral Thesis Supervisor of Jiaqi Fu. Dr. Ian Willis' contact is here:

Address: 12 Abercromby Square University of Liverpool, Liverpool
Postal code: L69 7WZ
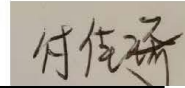**Email:** Ian.Willis@liverpool.ac.uk, or ian.willis@online.liverpool.ac.uk
Phone: 0151 794 2477

This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Committee at both Xian Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU) and at the University of Liverpool (UoL), which are the Committees whose task is to make sure that research participants are protected from

harm. If you wish to find about more about the research ethics committee, please contact: ehthics@xjtlu.edu.cn for XJTLU, or liverpoolethics@liverpool-online.com for UoL

Jiaqi Fu   March 12, 2019

_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature

Appendix D Participant Consent Form

Version number & date: Version 4, April 14, 2020
Title of the research project: Leadership Models in University Quality Assurance Management: An Exploration in a Sino-Foreign Cooperative University in China
Name of researcher(s): Jiaqi Fu

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated [DATE] for the above study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that taking part in the study involves [audio recorded interview and field notes taken by the researcher].

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to stop taking part and can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason and without my rights being affected.   In addition, I understand that I am free to decline to answer any particular question or questions.

4. I understand that I can ask for access to the information I provide and I can request the destruction of that information if I wish at any time prior to [Dec 31, 2020]. I understand that following [Dec 31, 2020] I will no longer be able to request access to or withdrawal of the information I provide.

5. I understand that the information I provide will be held securely and in line with data protection requirements at the University of Liverpool until it is [fully anonymised] [and then deposited in an external password protected hard drive disk of my own for storing].

6. I understand that signed consent forms and [original audio recordings] will be retained in [the external password protected hard drive disk of my own] until [Dec 2025].

7. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____   _____   _____

Participant name   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Researcher Name   Date   Signature

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Appendix E Applied Presentation of Interview Data

Category	Gender	Position Category	Nationality	Code
Formal Leaders	Female	Administrative leader	Chinese	INT1
Faculty	Female	Academic staff	Chinese	INT2
Formal Leaders	Male	Administrative Leader	Chinese	INT3
Formal Leaders	Male	Academic Leader	International	INT4
Formal leaders	Male	Academic Leader	International	INT5
Formal Leaders	Male	Academic Leader	International	INT6
Faculty	Female	Academic staff	International	INT7
Formal Leaders	Female	Academic Leader	Chinese	INT8
Faculty	Female	Academic staff	Chinese	INT9
Faculty	Female	Academic staff	Chinese	INT10
Faculty	Female	Academic staff	Chinese	INT11
Faculty	Female	Academic staff	International	INT12
Formal Leaders	Male	Academic Leader	International	INT13
Faculty	Female	Academic staff	International	INT14

Appendix F Interview Questions

Formal leaders	Informal leaders
1. Would you please begin with a brief introduction of yourself within the School/department?	1. Would you please begin with a brief introduction of yourself within the organisation?
2. How are the leadership tasks arranged within your school/department?	2. In your department or School, what do you have to do to accomplish various tasks related to academic decision making for educational quality?
3. What responsibilities do the school and the UoL take in making academic decisions?	3. How do people interact with each other in making academic decisions within and beyond the school?
4. What is your opinion of sharing responsibilities/authority/power with other staff?	4. From your own point of view to what extent can an individual staff or a group of staff influence the way in which decisions are made?
5. From your own point of view to what extent can an individual staff or a group of staff can influence the way in which decisions are made?	5. How can their influence be transmitted to others within the department and beyond?
6. How can their influence be transmitted to others within the department and beyond?	6. How would you describe the nature of your roles and responsibilities in the decision-making processes within your School/department?
7. How would you describe the nature of your roles and responsibilities as one of the School/Department leaders? What makes you to say so?	7. How would you describe your relationship with your HoD and your colleagues in decision-making processes?
8. How would you describe the nature of your relationships with other staff members you work together? What makes you to say so?	8. How would you view a regular staff without leadership positions to participate in decision-making and leadership activities?
9. What factors can affect staff' engagement in decision-making and leadership activities?	9. What factors can affect staff' engagement in decision-making and leadership activities?
10. Given the current situation at the University, which areas should be improved to make people's capabilities more successful?	10. Given the current situation at the University, which areas should be improved to make staff engagement more successful?
11. Would you have any other comments to add in about how leadership is carried out in your department, which we did not touch on during the interview?	11. Would you have any other comments to add in about how leadership is carried out in your department, which we did not touch on during the interview?