This volume signals the start of an important change in which FE and post-16 employees are no longer merely objects of other's research, but are actively engaged as researchers in the process of knowledge production." (Collinson, this volume)
Research Publication Notices

Research Reports
The papers published in this volume include a condensed version of the main reports and their main findings.

Further information about the research programme and other papers in this series can also be found at the following websites:
http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/leadership/cel/ or http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk

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Researching Leadership in the Learning and Skills Sector: By the Sector, On the Sector, For the Sector

EDITED BY PROFESSOR DAVID COLLINSON

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This edited volume of CEL ‘practitioner’ projects showcases a number of final research reports produced by those working in the learning and skills sector on leadership-related themes. It is the first collection of research-informed practitioner papers to be published as a CEL edited volume. The nine papers included in this volume address issues that are not only highly topical, but are also very significant for understanding leadership dynamics in the UK post-16 education sector. Focussing on the themes of quality improvement, middle leadership, and equality and diversity, their empirical findings highlight a number of important policy implications for CEL as well as for leadership both in theory and practice. Some of these findings may also have a wider generalisability, particularly in relation to other UK public sector organizations.

Alongside a substantial HE research programme based at Lancaster University Management School between 2003 and 2006, CEL commissioned two phases of practitioner research projects, first in 2004-05, and then again in 2005-06. This research programme was the result of a personal initiative by the chief executive of CEL, Lynne Sedgmore, who was keen to encourage a community of ‘practitioner scholars’ and to provide an opportunity for practising leaders and managers in the sector to undertake research on highly relevant issues. Over the two-year period, 36 projects were funded and it is on the basis of submitted final reports that this volume was compiled. The funded research projects covered a large number of topics and were linked to one of the six main research themes from the Lancaster HE research programme: effective leader-led relations, explicating leadership, diversity, leadership development, networked management learning and strategy.

What makes this collection particularly unique is that the reports are written by those working in leadership and management roles within the sector. Research in FE, and in the post-16 sector more broadly, is characterized by a preference for practitioners to be more the objects of other’s research, but are actively engaged as researchers in the process of knowledge production.

I believe that supporting and encouraging sector leaders to take time to think, reflect and inquire into their ongoing daily leadership practice is essential in the 21st Century and is a prerequisite for excellence. The ability to conceptualise and to understand the basis of leadership action individually and collectively is a valuable leadership capability. It has always been a desire of mine that Further Education develops a community of practitioner scholars who make a significant contribution to leadership practice and development within the sector.

This new edited volume of CEL practitioner research projects is part of fulfilling that desire and, I hope, will encourage more leaders to engage in research. This volume brings a new perspective of sector leaders acting as researchers, researching themselves and their organisations to develop insight, new concepts, practical suggestions and new ways of understanding the leadership arena within the learning and skills sector.

There is clearly an existing hunger by many leaders and managers at all levels, to engage in research and we hope, through this collection, to encourage more. In totality these reports highlight important messages for policy, leadership development and perhaps more importantly – they highlight specific messages and action points on key leadership practices such as communication, quality improvement and succession planning. They also clarify key challenges still facing the sector on diversity and equality, middle managers, and the need to create a research based culture in FE.

I thank all the project leaders and their teams who have had the commitment and courage to step forward and bring these projects to such successful fruition. I also want to acknowledge the foresight of Professor David Collinson who has skilfully created and edited this volume in the interests of the sector.

I hope that the sharing of these powerful projects, with their fascinating narratives of learning, development and change, will assist you in your own leadership practice and understanding. Hopefully you will be inspired to step forward with a project of your own.

Lynne Sedgmore CBE

1. This appetite for research across the post-16 education sector was further highlighted by the enormous response to a nationwide tender conducted in the summer of 2006. The tender resulted in another 29 practitioner research projects being funded for six months (October 2006 to March 2007).

Foreword by Lynne Sedgmore, Chief Executive, CEL
Accordingly, this research programme and edited volume begins the process of enabling employees in the sector to develop a research ‘voice’, to participate in the setting of research agendas and to define the key, important themes for leadership. These practitioner research projects can therefore be viewed as facilitating the voice of ‘followers’ as well as ‘leaders’ (as both researchers and researched) on the nature of leadership in their sector. This process, of ‘practitioners’ becoming researchers, constitutes a very important impact of the CEL research programme.

2. Research Impact

Research is central to CEL’s organisational mission. Concerned to enhance the inter-relationships between research, policy and practice, CEL seeks to increase the impact of research on leadership development and on sector policies and practices. Research impact can occur at many levels and in various ways (Walter et al 2003). The findings of research may change policy, organizations, resourcing or delivery. More subtly, they might lead to changes in understandings, attitudes or practices (Nulley et al 2003). Theoretically-informed and built on systematic methodologies, robust research and analysis can also facilitate sophisticated recommendations for organizational change. Accordingly, research can provide evidence-based knowledge that is useful and usable for those in the learning and skills sector.

CEL commissioned the practitioner research projects with the intention that their dissemination can positively influence the sector and inform CEL’s teaching programmes. By broadening the knowledge base of the sector research could provide a stronger basis for policy construction and implementation. Equally, the research reports might facilitate debates about key leadership and development issues, which in turn, can lead to significant improvements in organisational practices. This research process may also help to strengthen the sense of a research community across the post-16 sector.

The practitioner research programme draws on and fosters the research-based skills and expertise of staff in the sector. Indeed research engagement can constitute a learning experience, positively impacting organisations and researchers’ own understandings and practices. It is increasingly common to highlight the ‘research-engaged school’ and to see this as an important way of improving school performance (Hardscomb and MacBeth 2003). This term refers to a school that investigates key issues in teaching and learning, uses enquiry for staff development, turns data and experience into knowledge, draws on evidence for decision-making and promotes learning communities (Sharp et al 2006). In a similar way, the CEL practitioner research programme encourages the ‘research-engaged college’, a way of empowering colleagues, staff and students through enhanced learning cultures to incorporate a virtuous circle of enquiry, critique and improvement into well-planned and targeted development.

Much of the debate about research impact focuses on the importance of ‘evidence-based’ perspectives, but in addition, sophisticated research should also be theoretically informed. It is important to recognise that all research is informed by theoretical assumptions and that ‘evidence’ always has to be interpreted (from a particular perspective). While ‘practitioners’ can be rather sceptical about theoretically-informed research, sometimes viewing it as ‘too abstract’, ‘impractical’ and/or ‘idealistic’, ‘theorists’ may be critical of ‘empirical research’, particularly if it fails to acknowledge its own theoretical assumptions. Emphasising that all social actors (implicitly if not explicitly) inevitably hold (theoretical) assumptions about the world, their organisations and even themselves, theorists argue that there is no such thing as ‘value-free’ data (Giddens 1979).

For example, within the leadership literature there are numerous theories, all of which carry specific assumptions. Most theories concentrate on leaders themselves and the qualities and behaviours deemed important (Raelin, 2003; Shamir 2004). Rejecting the common stereotype of followers as passive recipients, these writers argue that ‘effective followership’ is particularly important in the contemporary context of greater team working, ‘empowered organizations tend to be led, not by ‘larger than life’ charismatic egoists, but rather by leaders who are quiet, ‘courageous’ followers are a precondition for ‘high performance organizations (e.g. Potter et al 2001; Chaleff, 2003; Seteroff, 2001; Kelley, 2004). Questioning the leader-centric and gendered assumptions of many mainstream approaches, ‘post-heroic’ perspectives contend that leadership in organisations can occur at various hierarchical levels and is best understood as an inherently social, collaborative and interdependent process. This approach assumes that leadership is the responsibility, not only of those who occupy senior positions, but also of all those engaged in supervisory functions. Rather than the traditional model of top-down, command and control, there is a growing view that, especially in high performance organisations, leadership is dispersed through team-based interdependencies, fluid, multi-directional social interactions and networks of influence.

Underpinning this research programme and edited volume then, is a view that theory and practice are both very important and are often mutually-reproducing and implicated in one another. Rather than treating them as entirely separate categories, it is assumed here that they are a crucial condition and consequence of one another.

4. ‘Theory’ may also seem somewhat irrelevant to the specific and local pressing concerns of particular organisations. Practitioners are often so driven by the need to respond to the deluge of day-to-day pressures that they have neither the time nor the inclination to consider more abstract ideas. They can become so immersed in the daily that they are unable to reflect upon broader patterns and the wider picture. Conversely, one possible benefit of practitioners undertaking research is that they have the advantage of proximity, of close experience and deep-seated knowledge of specific local issues.

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5. Meindl et al (1985) criticised a tendency in the literature to ‘romanticize leaders’ by developing overly exaggerated theories and ‘idealised’ assumptions about the world, their organisations and even themselves. Theorists argue that there is no such thing as ‘value-free’ data (Giddens 1979).

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Accordingly, this research programme seeks to encourage interrelations between theory and practice, to draw on the benefits of both theoretical insight and empirical detail to shed light on leadership dynamics in the teaching and skills sector. It is envisaged that this approach will enhance the impact of research on post-16 leadership policies, practices and theories.

3. Summarising the Reports

The volume is broken down into three primary sub-themes: (a) Leading Quality Improvement, (b) Developing Middle Leadership and (c) Leading Diversity. The first section on leading quality improvement presents three research reports designed to highlight key issues in the teaching and skills sector that can both enhance leadership and make a step change in the quality of organizational practices and performance. The second section examines the development of middle leaders and in particular presents three reports that explore the important, inter-related areas of leadership development, succession and the experience of middle management. The final section includes three reports that consider some of the inter-related issues around equality and diversity, questions that are of vital importance for the teaching and skills sector and therefore for CEL.

3.1. Leading Quality Improvement

Effective communication is an essential, but often neglected, element of the leadership process and a very important facilitator of quality improvement in organizational performance. In the first report, Alex Louis (The College of North East London) highlights the potential value of enhanced communications for effective leadership in the teaching and skills sector. Louis conducted a telephone survey on communication, yielding 57 responses from FE and sixth form colleges across England and Scotland. She also conducted an in-depth case study at one particular college where 25 middle managers had participated in a CEL leadership development programme. Her research found that, whilst CEL training had been a very positive experience for participants, research respondents at various levels viewed internal communications within this college as problematic. Louis also found that employees at different levels in the college define ‘good communication’ in quite different ways and that these competing definitions are themselves a barrier to enhanced communications. Arguing that these patterns have a wider generalisability across the sector, Louis contends that in their drive for improvement, few colleges have adequately addressed issues of internal communications. The report makes various recommendations about how to improve college communications.

In order to enhance understanding about leading quality improvement, it would seem important to try to identify the key factors that make ‘successful colleges’ successful. In the second report, Gill Alton, Biddy Flowe, Amanda Rudolph and Paul Smith (Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education) outline the critical success factors for their research identified at four FE colleges. Their primary concern is to identify the key issues and challenges for colleges and their leaders in seeking to manage sustained growth whilst also maintaining quality. The colleges they researched had all achieved significant growth (at least 30%) whilst maintaining quality and were judged to have good or outstanding leadership and management. Their report also considers barriers to quality maintenance, approaches to overcoming such barriers and the ways these research findings could be used to improve future performance. Based on these findings, this report highlights the importance for colleges of focussing on the learner experience, managing the student experience and on leading the institution in the interests of the needs of learners and staff (particularly through ‘visionary’ leadership).

The relationship between governing bodies and principals is also a potentially important facilitator of effective leadership and quality improvement. Yet, up until recently, this has received little attention. Exploring the nature of the employment relationship between principals and boards, Ron Hill’s study of seven FE colleges uncovers a wide range of working relationships between the chair of the board and the principal (some being close working relationships, others being more distant and remote). On the basis of his findings, Hill recommends that boards should play a much ‘stronger role’ in relation to college principals, which he argues, will enhance the overall quality of strategic college management. Boards need to consider and formalise the best ways to monitor and reward the performance of principals and to provide strategic vision (without drifting into either ‘micro-management’ or a ‘friendship club’). Hill also identifies an important role for CEL in assisting boards with the clarification of their responsibilities. It should be noted here that CEL has developed the ‘Leadership Skills for Governance’ initiative (in collaboration with the Association of Colleges). This provides workshops, partnership initiatives, consultancy services, good practice guides, recruitment advice, policy forums, conferences, research and online support.

3.2 Developing Middle Leadership

The small amount of research that has examined FE middle managers suggests that they often experience multiple leadership pressures and demands that can arise from above, below and from other (horizontal) functions, departments and peers (Briggs, 2005). They frequently inhabit two different, sometimes dichotomous and conflicting worlds; one in relation to those in senior positions and the other regarding their own staff and students (e.g. Leader, 2004). In this ‘go-between role’ they can experience high degrees of ambiguity and ambivalence (Waller and Bailey, 1997). Gleeson and Shain (2003) consider the contradictory identities of middle managers in mediating large-scale organizational change and intensified targets. They document the volatile working conditions that give rise to ambiguity for middle managers who are caught in the middle between senior management and lecturers. Middle managers respond to these changes through ‘willing compliance’ (those who are wholeheartedly committed to the change process), ‘unwilling compliance’ (those who are sceptical and disenchanted but only develop a range of defensive coping strategies), and ‘strategic compliance’ (those who are able to reconstruct the change process in ways that maintain their core values).
The increasing impact of management information systems and delegated budgets has intensified the role of middle managers and also results in first line and more junior staff (such as programme managers) being drawn into middle managerial responsibilities. Middle managers are now often responsible for the accurate input of extensive performance and achievement data (e.g. enrolment, attendance, punctuality, retention and achievement). Equally, delegated budget systems give responsibility for income and expenditure not only to heads of department, but also to programme managers. These first line managers are increasingly expected to incorporate strategic objectives and decision-making into their job role (Scott 2002).

Concentrating on those in senior positions, sometimes to the neglect of the middle layers of the organization (such as heads of department), leadership development across the sector has tended to be rather patchy (Nufsey et al 2003). The importance of positive interventions in relation to the leadership development of middle managers is further underscored by the fact that there is currently a consistent lack of candidates for FE principal and senior management positions (Freaseon 2002). Research has found that staff in the sector see the job of principal as so challenging and stressful that this is now a significant barrier to senior and middle managers applying for such positions (Collinson 2006). An important effect of excessive audit cultures, inconsistent funding and multiple community engagements might be a growing disinflation for qualified candidates to apply for principal vacancies (Collinson and Collinson 2005a, 2006).

Against this background, qualitative research by Kate Walters and Lorraine Casey (The National Institute of Adult Continuing Education) explores the approach to leadership development by a highly successful local authority adult and community learning service (ACLS). This report examines how both strategic and operational leadership can best be developed, how training and development needs are identified and implemented, and the cultural factors in the organization that enable and/or inhibit leadership development. Whilst this ACLS appears to be working effectively, the research found that more could still be done to enhance the leadership capacity of line managers. Yet, Walters and Casey also discovered that such initiatives seem to run counter to the culture of the service and its current ways of enacting leadership. They recommend that the organisation creates a much more explicit leadership development strategy, forum and programme.

Research by Lesley Whelan, Karen Kerr and Eugene Rauch (The Scottish Further Education Unit) examines the leadership and management development activities of middle managers in Scotland’s FE colleges. Their findings are based on 107 completed online questionnaires from FE middle managers combined with 6 in-depth interviews with senior managers. Emphasising the heterogeneity of FE middle management, the researchers found that a significant number of middle managers were neither interested in pursuing a more senior post, nor did they feel prepared for a senior leadership role. The researchers argue that middle managers have a ‘pivotal role’ in colleges and that their development is vital for the organisation to achieve its strategic aims, to provide a quality service and to retain a pool from which to select senior staff. As in the previous report by Walters and Casey, the researchers argue that leadership development needs to be a much more planned process and they make a number of recommendations for improving the professional development, succession planning and talent management of middle managers. Whilst some of their findings may be specific to Scottish FE colleges, most have a wider generalisability.

The third report in this section focuses on the experiences and perceptions of middle leaders in FE colleges. Philip Barker (The City of Bristol College) compares teaching staffs perceptions of the middle management role with those held by the (middle) managers themselves in a large tertiary FE college. Based on a survey (designed to identify the time middle managers spent on specific activities) and on semi-structured interviews (exploring perceptions of middle management), Barker found that teachers valued middle managers’ role in supporting staff and being ‘fair’, whilst middle managers themselves highlighted the performance of their management functions and their contribution to the strategic direction of the faculty. Informed by these differences in perception, Barker recommends that recruitment advertising should emphasise that middle managers enjoy their role and believe they can make a difference. Given the long hours worked by both groups, he advocates increased flexibility in working hours. He also suggests that, since applications for middle management positions are low, greater economic rewards be made available.

The foregoing reports on middle management development raise important issues that contribute to both policy and practice on leadership effectiveness in the sector. They highlight particular problems around leadership succession and the need for much greater attention to these issues. Sufficient to say here, that the effectiveness, experiences and challenges facing middle leaders in FE are increasingly important aspects of CEL’s research, programmes and policies.

3.3 Leading Diversity

Embedding the principles and values of equality and diversity into organizational processes frequently constitutes a major challenge, particularly for those in leadership positions. An important recurring issue here is that the terms ‘equality’ and ‘diversity’ can have many different meanings and be defined and enacted in various ways by different interest groups. The report by Margaret Andrews, Andy Anastasiou, Lumi Joshi, Joannie Andrews and Lisa Yates (Hackney Community College) adopts a broad definition of diversity (incorporating issues of ethnicity, gender, religion, disability, class and sexuality) and focuses in particular on issues around disabilities, ethnicities and religious beliefs. Their research found that managers revealed a positive awareness of the needs of college staff. Managers responded to staffs needs by introducing flexible working and prayer time, purchasing specialist furniture and equipment and adapting timetables so that staff with access needs work only on one floor of the building.
4. Research Messages

These CEL research reports present a series of practitioner-produced empirical studies of leadership dynamics in the UK learning and skills sector. They present some important empirical findings on leading quality improvement, middle leaders and leading diversity that contribute to a deeper understanding of leadership dynamics in the sector. Whilst the following papers have been allocated to particular, discrete sub-sections, it is also important to emphasise the overlaps and inter-relationships between these central themes. For example, the issues of communication, quality improvement and governance raised in the first section are, in practice, often highly inter-related and inter-connected with questions around middle leadership and diversity raised in subsequent sections.

In editing this volume, the original research reports have been condensed to enhance the overall integration and cohesion of the collection. All appendices have been removed and the empirical findings have been anonymised. Every report has been structured using a standard format which includes the following sub-sections: Executive Summary, Introduction, Research Framework, Research Methods, Research Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations, References, Acknowledgements and Footnotes.

Together, these reports highlight a number of key messages for policy and practice. First, they point to the potential organisational benefits accruing from closer attention to communication within colleges, to the learner’s experience and the role of governance boards in enhancing effective leadership and quality improvements in organisations. Second, the reports emphasise the importance of formalised and planned leadership development and succession programmes for middle managers and programme managers in FE colleges. The projects suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the challenging role of middle leaders and how it can be supported. Third, the research reports also highlight numerous leadership challenges around diversity and suggest some of the initiatives that can be instigated to improve equality in the sector. In sum, this volume contains research-based knowledge about post-16 leadership by the sector on the sector and for the sector.
References


Leading Quality Improvement

Talking About Talk: An Analysis of Communication and the Management of Change in Further Education

ALEX LOUIS, COLLEGE OF NORTH EAST LONDON

Executive Summary

Since Ofsted began its regime of inspections, government agencies and researchers have offered many answers to the question, ‘what makes a college successful?’ Although consistently referred to in Ofsted reports, one key aspect of improving performance remains largely neglected. This is the area of communications. The following report argues that managers, staff and inspectors view internal college communication as problematic. It also suggests that ‘communications’ remains a very loose term and that few colleges have overtly addressed issues of internal communications in their drive for improvement. Based on an in-depth case study of one organisation, the research found that staff at different levels in the organisation appear to use different definitions of what constitutes ‘good communication’ and that this can pose problems for an organisation seeking to adapt to externally driven changes. The research explores the nature of the ‘conversations’ between middle and senior managers and asks whether the interchanges that take place daily, support or hinder key internal processes that could lead to improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.

Introduction

This report seeks to assist managers, governors and staff in FE concerned with creating a successful college. The starting point for the project was a long-held belief that communications activity within the public sector is a crucial factor in the quality of the services provided to the public, whether they are residents, patients, or in this context - learners. The ability to lead and manage in further education assumes a level of competence with the practicalities of communication - use of relevant technologies to communicate, and the ability to communicate effectively verbally and in writing. However, these skills are largely untested in recruitment and performance management in education. Basic communication skills - understanding and being understood - are increasingly more complex within modern organisations and arguably the modern manager must be capable of communicating with others in a much wider arena than the managers of even 10 years ago. The arrival of email, intranets, and video conferencing in particular has impacted upon the ability to understand and be understood.
Within many parts of the UK, public sector there has been a growing demand for more sophisticated communication processes. Government-led public inquiries into serious errors in services frequently point to communication breakdown as a central cause. The Victoria Climbe case, for example, highlighted poor communications between within key local agencies as an important contributory factor in the tragic death of Victoria Local government communication processes, such as public meetings and spending on publicly materials are frequently under scrutiny from the public, the media and Government. Many local government communication teams have been expanded to include community consultation roles and communications experts are increasingly likely to figure in the ranks of senior management. The Health Service has introduced inter-disciplinary training in communication skills for all health care staff. This is a clear attempt to create a shared understanding of what is meant by effective communication, which at the same time recognises the devastating effects that poor communications can have in a health care setting.

Yet, while colleges increasingly produce communication strategies aimed primarily at staff, there has been little change in their structures to create posts or specific functions to manage this aspect of the organisation’s functioning. In the majority of cases important strategies have been produced without any kind of communications audit. There is very little published research into communications within colleges. Despite the introduction of structures to improve communication, satisfaction surveys continue to feature communication problems as key factors in staff dissatisfaction. Success for All, which sets out the modernisation agenda for post-16 education, makes no mention of communications as an an area for improvement or development in organisational or individual terms. FENTO (Further Education National Training Organization) has produced competences for managers within further education that include advanced communication skills as an essential pre-requisite. However, for many colleges, communication remains a concept much closer to ‘marketing’ than communications very much viewed as a supplementary issue. Success for All focuses on achievement by improving the choice and quality of education and training provided by colleges, sixth form colleges and private sector training providers. Yet, there has been no clear message signalling the need to change the way in which colleges manage and indeed view, communication. It is my hope that this report will at the very least provide an opening for discussion on this subject.

As a participant on the Centre for Excellence (CELI) in Leadership’s Modular Management Programme (MMP), I was interested in comments made by colleagues during an evaluation process who said that they felt one of the outcomes of the programme was an improvement in communications. Since communications as a specified subject was not part of the programme, how was that improvement achieved?

1. Further education operates within a sea of information covering every aspect of education and training. The myth that more communication equals better communication is one that pervades the sector. In fact, the recently published white paper ‘Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances’ acknowledges the overload facing colleges and by definition the staff.

2. The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CELI) was launched in 2003, and is considered by Government to be an important contributor to the Success for All agenda for the learning and skills sector. CELI has been leading the work to develop leadership and management with an increasing number of colleges through a range of programmes, research and events. One of those programmes is the Modular Management Programme (MMP) which is aimed at middle managers within FE. The MMP has been designed with the aim of contributing to “the development of a co-operative culture within the organisation”.

Had there been an impact upon the delivery of the curriculum? Had the increased awareness of self, teams, strategy and external environment helped communication, not just between the participants of the programme, but also within the teams led by managers, and indeed - and perhaps most importantly - senior managers?

This report sets out a number of questions to investigate the place and ‘status’ of communications in the FE sector in general, and in one college in particular:

- Given the importance of effective communications in the management of change, why does communication not feature in policies and documents as a key aspect of leadership and management?
- What conscious or unconscious definitions of communications do those working in FE carry with them?
- What is meant by ‘good communications’?
- How important is communication perceived to be?

The report examines aspects of organisational and interpersonal communication within a single institution focussing in particular on communication between senior and middle managers. It explores whether those at different levels in the organisation are using compatible mental models when they think and talk about ‘communication’. This is an important question, particularly given that the nature of leadership and management features significantly in both the inspection and quality assurance processes that currently prevail in further education. In this context, it is essential to unpick how senior managers, middle managers and staff define and experience communication.

Research Framework

Communication theorists have described communication processes as more complex than the simple transmission of information from ‘sender’ to ‘receiver’ (Berlo 1960). There is significant evidence from management theorists that the process of organisational change requires close attention to communication, both in terms of process and message (Clampitt 2005). Creating a sense of shared ownership, achieved primarily through effective communication amongst key internal stakeholders, is viewed as a crucial aspect in creating sustainable organisational change (Balogun et al 2004). This approach has been applied in this research and has encouraged a focus that falls equally on message and process. It is evident from the data that while the medium may not be the whole message, it plays a larger role in organisational communication and the need for careful consideration of the tools managers choose to communicate.

There is now clear evidence that positive staff attitudes help to produce successful colleges (Ofsted, 2005; Owen and Davies, 2001). The Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) has carried out research into staff satisfaction within FE over a five year period (1999-2004) which consistently highlights staff dissatisfaction with communications across the sector.

1. Further education operates within a sea of information covering every aspect of education and training. The myth that more communication equals better communication is one that pervades the sector. In fact, the recently published white paper ‘Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Chances’, acknowledges the overload facing colleges and by definition the staff.

2. The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CELI) was launched in 2003, and is considered by Government to be an important contributor to the Success for All agenda for the learning and skills sector. CELI has been leading the work to develop leadership and management with an increasing number of colleges through a range of programmes, research and events. One of those programmes is the Modular Management Programme (MMP) which is aimed at middle managers within FE. The MMP has been designed with the aim of contributing to “the development of a co-operative culture within the organisation”.

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Given the importance of effective communications in the management of change, why does communication not feature in policies and documents as a key aspect of leadership and management?

What conscious or unconscious definitions of communications do those working in FE carry with them?

What is meant by ‘good communications’?

How important is communication perceived to be?
In order to examine communication structures within colleges, a telephone survey was conducted. This yielded 57 responses from general FE, sixth-form, and specialist colleges across England and Scotland. Questions were directed in the first instance to the marketing team in these organisations. Data were collected on the various communication structures used by colleges to support cross-college communications. Respondents were also given the opportunity to make general comments about communications within their institutions.

In addition, an in-depth case study was undertaken over an eight-month period at one specific college. This urban vocational further education college is based in a very ethnically diverse, economically and socially deprived area. With approximately 900 staff, including 350 hourly paid teaching staff, it serves a local population with courses ranging from pre-entry level to foundation degrees. The questions asked of college staff looked specifically at the difference between communication on a daily basis and views on the communication of strategic issues. In-depth interviews with middle managers were particularly revealing when reporting on how strategic decisions were communicated to wider staff groups by senior managers. Do meetings facilitate situations where attendees feel part of the process of developing and informing strategy? Are middle managers who see ‘effective communication’ as being essentially two-way, satisfied with their input during strategic meetings?

5. This research has therefore focused upon the experience of change by those managers who have participated in the MMP and examines the extent to which staff feel valued and share a common purpose with their managers” (Ofsted, 2004). According to Ofsted, creating this ‘shared vision’ is a critical prerequisite for success.

6. The college principal became an early participant in CEL’s MMP programme because he wanted to encourage middle managers to think more strategically about the wider institution. “I wanted people to understand that they already had skills which they possibly did not recognise. I wanted them to enhance and develop new skills together in the hope that they would find new ways of working together that would help them address other issues.”

In total, over 80 per cent of the college’s middle management team are undertaking the MMP.

If staff felt they were not valued or communicated with, this appeared to cloud their overall attitudes to their job and employer. It is worth noting here that a majority of staff in managerial positions as well as non-management staff had a negative opinion about the effectiveness of communications within their own college.” (LSDA, 2003)

Similarly,

“Staff commented frequently on poor communication between senior management and staff but also between academic and support staff, as well as sites and teams. A lack of consultation or consideration of staff views was cited as a major concern. Staff wanted to have some control over how they do their work and involvement in decisions that affect them.” (LSDA, 2003)

Such research findings have helped to focus attention on communication-related issues within colleges and many have developed systems to communicate with staff as a result. Although the LSDA do not analyse what respondents mean by ‘communications’, ‘consultation’ and ‘involvement’, these findings do help to break down the word ‘communication’. Further research by the LSDA (Martinez, 2001) into successful colleges also highlights the importance of communication. Martinez advocates ‘a shared approach’ as both underpinning and facilitating good communication. If the notion of a ‘shared approach’ is considered to be an essential element of change management then any attempt to examine organisational communication has to address the issue of how far staff share an understanding of the word communication.

Research Methods

This research focused on collecting information designed to uncover the extent to which there was a shared understanding and definition of communication. Two overarching questions informed this research project:

● How is communication defined and experienced by staff at different levels of the organisation?
● How effective are the structures used to facilitate, support and encourage communication?

3. Colleges have introduced mechanisms such as intranets, electronic bulletins, remote email access, and staff newsletters to keep people informed. Many of the electronic structures established to communicate with staff have been in place for between 4-5 years, coinciding with the dissemination of these LSDA sector-wide surveys.

5. For this reason it has been necessary to frame questions which would begin to unpick the contradiction between staff wanting and recognising ‘good communication’ as important. If colleges with a shared common purpose amongst staff and managers do better – and the evidence from college inspections is that they do – then there is significant value in assessing the degree to which, for example, managers and staff are taking part in the same conversations, as well as how far communication practices help to create a shared culture.

3. Ofsted’s chief inspector, David Bell (Ofsted, 2004) cited good communications as an essential component of the successful college. He goes on to link effective communications with a climate of trust, consultation and the presence of mechanisms to sustain ongoing dialogue at both strategic and operational levels of activity.
The impact of the programme is important, not simply in terms of justifying the expenditure on a large-scale management development initiative. It must be seen to provide value to the college and to the managers themselves. There is a real need for the college to consolidate its progress since receiving an ‘unsatisfactory’ Ofsted grade in 2002, and to develop its capacity for further improvement. Taking the next step from ‘unsatisfactory’ to ‘good’ and ultimately ‘outstanding’ status is crucial for the learners, the local community and the staff. In the quote above it seems that the college principal tacitly recognised the pivotal role of communication within the drive to improve.

Against this background, the research methods used during the research were:

- Seven in-depth interviews with middle managers to collect qualitative data.
- Fifteen members of staff from across the college, working at different levels, were interviewed using a set of questions formulated to collect individual definitions of communication and views on the use and effectiveness of communication.
- Twelve questionnaires were completed by middle managers from the MMP.
- Nine questionnaires were received from senior managers.
- Four management forums, one whole-college staff conference and five cross-college meetings were observed using participant observation. Observations were made on the balance of the agenda (e.g. strategic and operational) from comments made by staff. In particular, how far the Chair directed debate, turn-taking - frequency and type of comments made by attendees, items resolved through debate, and the degree to which attendees were satisfied with the outcome of the meeting.
- Staff surveys covering a four-year period from 2001-2005 were reviewed.7

Field researchers were recruited within the college. A briefing meeting took place to outline the context of the work and to ensure that researchers had an opportunity to ask questions about the project. Each researcher was given the option to undertake face-to-face interviews, a telephone survey or to examine the extensive range of material collected on various aspects of the research topic. All elected to do at least two types of research.8 Researchers were assigned different parts of England, Scotland and Wales. Each researcher received an electronic file with the details of the geographical area in which the colleges were located, the questions for the face-to-face interviews with college staff, a timesheet and a short note about how to introduce the survey to interviewees.

7 At this college, for the fourth consecutive year, communications and management style feature as the top two issues which staff feel need to be addressed in order to improve organisational culture. The most recent internal survey reveals that the ‘common thread’ of what there should be better cross-college communication; this is similar to the previous staff surveys. Communication issues ranged from staff wanting to be consulted or have their views considered (Staff survey, 2005).

8 At least two researchers were comfortable enough with the issues to ‘probe’ the responses for deeper insights into the respondents’ thinking, particularly with questions they directed at other institutions.

9 Unfortunately constraints on time meant that only England and Scotland were covered. It was also hoped to follow-up the initial survey of colleges with further in-depth research into those colleges judged to be ‘outstanding’ to examine how communications activities are planned and realised. However, the timescale for the project did not allow for this aspect of the research to be followed through.

Research Findings

In 2003 the college underwent a significant restructuring process. Over half of those in the first cohort of the MMP were at the college at that time. The MMP included a requirement for participants to take part in a final team project. Working in self-selected ‘learning groups’, one of the subjects chosen by one of the learning groups was, ‘How can senior managers and middle managers work together more effectively to move the college forward?’ As part of the work carried out by the learning group, a ‘forcefield analysis’ was produced based on a questionnaire with middle and senior managers (Fig.1). The highlighted sections of the forcefield analysis show significant divergence between senior and middle managers in the preferred methods of communication used between the two groups. The following research findings highlight this divergence.

![Fig. 1 Forcefield analysis produced by MMP participants](image-url)
This research project therefore suggests that there is a lack of consensus over the meaning of ‘communication’ itself as well as its purpose. A degree of misalignment appeared to exist in people’s understanding of:

- how communication ‘fits’ with consultation
- participation and understanding of decision-making processes
- the language of communication

This report explores each of these three areas in turn, and considers how planned communication strategies can help the process of cultural change. Can effective communication combat the forces that hinder change and ‘compliance’ with college-wide systems?

How does communication ‘fit’ with consultation?

The cultural web model (Johnson and Scholes 1989) is particularly revealing when applied to this college. Managers in the first cohort of the MMP used the model to examine some of the underlying assumptions that exist within the organisation (Fig. 2). The cultural web uses six elements to understand the ‘taken-for-granted’ within organisations: the stories, symbols, power, organisational structures, controls, routines and rituals. This research found that information and communication were significant issues for the college.

The ‘stories’ (Fig. 2) centre on un-professionalism, poor systems and a lack of communication. This cultural paradigm “encapsulates and reinforces the behaviour observed in other elements of the cultural web” and is evident in the continuing difficulties with compliance within college processes. Middle managers are faced with the difficult task of presenting these college processes to staff and ensuring that they are followed. It is clear from the cultural web that different interpretations of communication exist. The responses below from middle managers to the question, ‘what does ‘good’ communications mean to you?’ illustrate these different interpretations.

“Good communication is when the whole team takes responsibility for its actions. It’s when people within a team are motivated enough to remain assertive to what’s happening around them. As an organisation we also have a responsibility to prevent information overload. Along with this, for good communication to take place there must be effective systems in place. These systems should be thought through in terms of bureaucracy and red tape.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“Engaging in two-way conversations, respect of, and trying to understand different viewpoints. Accepting my viewpoint might not be correct, being open to change. Clarity of intent and meaning, openness (e.g. no telling people that they are having their jobs re-written without any consultation/involvement). No bullying. Good communications = good leadership and management.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“Simple stuff like everyone knows what is going on - clear messages etc. and clear lines of management - responsibility and accountability - on a deeper level all on board for vision and common purpose.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“Honest, frank but respectful leaving a clear understanding as what’s to happen next. Making sure information is read and digested, getting the team to take their own responsibility in reading and understanding information whether by email, word of mouth or other forum.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“People being open and honest with each other and listening to each other, so that genuine dialogue takes place.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“When communicating messages we need to be clear, concise and to the point. Effective communications = good leadership and management.” (Middle manager, MMP)

The focus in these and other comments from middle managers is on the quality of communication. Middle managers seek ‘honesty’, ‘openness’ and ‘clarity’.

By contrast, senior managers’ responses to the same issues were characterised by comments exclusively linked to communication processes. When asked whether they saw any differences in the way communication operates across the college, they assessed the degree to which structures were effective in passing on ‘the message’.

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“Communication has) improved in structured meetings at every level.”
(Senior manager)

“There is more effective use of email and meetings, but it’s still far from perfect.” (Senior manager)

“I think it has improved through the introduction of groups like the curriculum group and the management forum. Too much email sometimes obscures how good this method is for certain types of communication.” (Senior manager)

“I believe that communication has improved. I would highlight in particular availability of management information on the college intranet e.g. learner numbers. Improved team working in general across the college. Improved weekly bulletin.” (Senior manager)

This focus on the ‘control mechanisms’ of communication is natural territory for those in leadership roles. If you control the medium, perhaps you have a greater chance of controlling the message. Controlling the message is important as it allows leaders to provide direction, and steer organisations through difficult times. This may help to explain their emphasis on using a more effective process for communication.

“Ban all routine emails. Bring different groups more together/more often to discuss/debate issues, but then ban the Principal in particular from giving his view straight away. Introduce the concepts of real consultation and involvement in decision making for middle managers. Open up senior management team meetings, have middle managers going in on a regular basis to present/discuss reports, ideas etc. There is still a huge gap between us. In some senses it’s like MMP never happened!” (Middle manager)

Comments from senior managers do, however, demonstrate that some are also seeking the same kind of honest, open, two-way communication as middle managers.

“I do not wander around the College as often as I’d like to, and I think when you bump into staff and chat informally, you are more likely to develop comfortable, easy relationships with them. I should do more MBWA (management by walking around).” (Senior manager)

Participation and understanding of decision-making processes

The relationship between senior managers and middle managers must work well to ensure that the mission, vision and values espoused by institutions are woven into the fabric of colleges. Managers who have developed reflective thinking skills like those encouraged as part of the MMP tend to want to be part of decision-making processes and seek to be involved in shaping and managing change.

To some extent the college has been successful in clarifying decision-making processes. It produces a termly publication outlining diagrammatically the staffing structure, areas of management responsibility and the remits of the main college committees. There are regular monthly meetings of the support services, weekly cross-college curriculum meetings and scheduled termly management forum meetings (which are held on an ‘as and when necessary’ basis, for example before and after a recent re-inspection).

Communication is supported via a reliable college intranet, accessible to staff and learners both inside and outside the college. A weekly email bulletin is compiled and distributed to all staff each Monday, and the use of all staff email messages is restricted to a limited number of staff. An innovative thematic management bulletin linked to the college’s planning calendar has been recently introduced. However it remains significantly under-used at the current time. The staff newsletter produced bi-monthly until September 2005, was widely distributed and well regarded. An online version is planned. A full college conference is held each December and July, open to all staff full and part-time. Attendance at both events is generally high.

The mechanisms colleges introduce to facilitate communication are important. The information provided by over 50 colleges as part of this research is evidence of a widespread commitment to informing staff. Colleges make considerable investments into developing infrastructures that they believe will facilitate effective communication. Staff use a variety of communication tools as part of everyday communications to and deliver strategic messages. But there is little evidence that managers, in particular, give considered thought to matching the ‘medium’ to the ‘message’.

The language of communication

The College 2003 staff survey recognises that there have been some improvement in communication, such as those outlined above. These improvements are structural and directly connected to communication initiatives introduced after a full inspection in 2002, which deemed the college to be unsatisfactory. Interestingly, none of the new communication methods were designed to be two-way.

“Communication has generally improved - more structured, regular and minute team meetings at all levels. More meetings around core business of learning and teaching and quality improvement. MF (management forum) operates more regularly and more embedded. Better planning through highly visible and scrutinised QIP for curriculum areas. Mission, vision and values better (more clearly) articulated and communicated. CEL/MMP meeting provided forum for better personal communications between middle managers. CEL coaching MF provided some better communications/ understanding between SMT/MMP.” (Senior manager)

The paradigm produced by the MMP group of middle manager’s cultural web is at the heart of the communications paradox central to this research. Their view that “openness is not appreciated” is in marked contrast to the views of senior managers. When asked whether there is upward communication within their teams, all respondents answered yes, although some expressed reservations.

10. Yet simple and useful models exist outlining how different media can be used to convey particular messages. (e.g. Johnson and Scholes 1989)
Some senior managers feel that the processes used to communicate do not necessarily deliver the messages they want to pass on. “We probably still don’t make it easy enough for most staff to find out new important information. I prefer a ‘Team Brief’ with a regular written briefing, gone through at a session involving Management Forum… with managers obliged to ensure it is distributed at team meetings with key messages highlighted.” (Senior manager)

Middle managers want space to discuss systems with a view to adapting them, and see their interactions with senior managers as missed opportunities. At the college an MMP final team project looking at business planning made a number of recommendations. First among these was that a management forum should take place where senior and middle managers could agree about purpose. To the college’s credit, the senior managers took on board the recommendations, reducing the paper work and streamlining the process. But, they did so without holding the forum.

“Having more open debate in management forum relating to strategic and operational issues (would improve communication). Fostering a sense that we are all working towards the same end - schools vs services has to stop.” (Middle manager, MMP)

Senior managers assumed a greater level of shared understanding than appears to be experienced by middle managers who have a very different perspective on the nature of the communication with senior managers and across the college.

Reflective thinking: impact upon communication

The middle managers who took part in the MMP believed that the programme had impacted on the ways in which they view communications and how they communicate.

“I think we have lots of barriers at different levels in this organisation to improving communication. Some of these are structural and some are cultural. As an organisation, although things are improving we still feel very tap - down. As Heads of Schools we often receive information after decisions have been made rather than as a consultative process. I don’t believe this organisation should, or could, be run by committee but meaningfulness of communication is sometimes lost when you receive a 50 page document about something that has already been decided on two weeks before. We spend a lot of time disseminating information but not having any meaningful dialogue about what it means.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“To improve communication I would definitely reduce meaningless communication - ‘less is more’, define what is our strategic roles as Heads of School/Service and have more workshops in management meetings.” (Middle manager, MMP)

While middle managers are focused upon dialogue, senior management connect purposeful communication with action. “Many staff do not realise that consultation is just that, an information exchange. Many think that consultation means that staff need to be in agreement before policy is implemented. We are at work in a business, which has needs and priorities, the first being the service to our learners.” (Senior manager)

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“Having more open debate in management forum relating to strategic and operational issues (would improve communication). Fostering a sense that we are all working towards the same end - schools vs services has to stop.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“It would be useful to separate meetings dealing with operations from meetings dealing with strategy and vision. Most of our meetings are the former. There is quite a bit of overlap between CLEG+ (Curriculum and Learner Experience Group) and Directorate meetings.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“I think I am a better communicator. I am using the tools about logic bubbles, alignment, storming/norming much more than I initially thought I would and am better able to change my own management position to suit a situation.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“I reflect more on how I communicate and delegate to the team as a whole. In addition my verbal communication with my line manager and SMT has improved in that I believe it is more considered and better prepared.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“Yes, I am much more aware of how people respond to me and how I respond to others. I have also made good use of knowing my TA (transactional analysis) drivers and logic bubbles - not everything I do and say makes sense to others!” (Middle manager, MMP)
The introduction of greater levels of reflective thinking however seems largely to have extended to peer-to-peer relationships and team relationships led by middle managers. Colleagues who have undertaken the MMP frequently refer to the ‘logic bubbles’ of others - the ability to see the logic of another person’s thinking and point of view in any given situation. The ability to ‘put yourself in someone else’s shoes’ creates an empathy with them, and arguably goes some way along the road of ‘shaping’ their point of view. It is also an important first step in considering how to respond to a message, and perhaps, in considering how messages can be misunderstood. While some middle managers acknowledge improvements in communication with senior managers, the improvements appear limited.

“...I am a better communicator I believe so, in respect of my team. I think partly as a result of increased confidence in my management/leadership skills. Also because of the work we did around transactional analysis. So I believe that I am more consistent in using the ‘adult’ form of communication and not being sucked in to parent/child, child/child. With regards to upward communication to SMT, I don’t think much has changed. It still feels dictatorial especially when they are in a group, speaking to middle managers in a group. I have always had the confidence to speak openly to SMT members 1-to-1, but don’t really think that they take on board what’s being said, or really listen unless it fits in with their existing view.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“I try and make more of an effort with my own staff, especially my curriculum management team, and we have done some work together on ‘process’ (not ‘task’), such as the Team Health Audit to improve teamwork and therefore communication. With members of SMT, however, I don’t feel that communication has improved at all, because there has been no change in the culture.” (Middle manager, MMP)

“The agenda for any communication is generally dictated from above. They feel free to ignore things they don’t like or that don’t fit in with their perspective. Priorities and tactics differ considerably. I don’t think the CEL programme really dealt with this. Mostly I feel there is no room for discussion in the college, so communication is very one way.” (Middle manager, MMP)

Corridor conversations

Implicit in some of the responses of middle managers and explicit in others is the fact that the debate some middle managers wish to have with senior managers at this particular college does in fact take place through informal means. Between themselves staff do report discussions about strategic decisions, planning proposals and the policies that they deal with every day. It is also clear that this kind of communication is highly valued.

“I...come out of a meeting and have a chat with someone who I know will be able to tell me what was not being said in the meeting.” (Middle manager)

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research has sought to uncover some of the taken for granted assumptions about communications that help structure the everyday experiences of people working in FE. Its findings suggest that those responsible for promoting change and quality improvement need a greater understanding of, and respect for this aspect of their organisation’s operation and its potential role in supporting quality improvements.

Actions need to be taken to help bring communication issues to the fore, in the same way, for example, that a college’s financial status or overall examination achievements should figure in the thinking at all levels of management.

These findings confirm the recommendations of a recent Cabinet Office report that highlights the need to change the way colleges view internal communication. It recommends that:

(a) College principals and senior management teams develop clear strategies and internal communication plans for communicating the 'bigger picture' to all staff, explaining policy changes, why information collected is needed and how it is or will be used by requesters. As part of these strategies, the following additional recommendations are made:

(1) College principals play a personal and visible role in leading internal communication of key changes in the sector to all staff within their colleges.

(2) College principals ensure that, where appropriate, responsibility for internal communication forms part of the performance agreements and assessments of senior management.

Colleges can learn much from other parts of the public and private sector where communications practitioners are found at quite senior levels. Although colleges operate in increasingly difficult financial climates, where tough decisions are made every year about organisational priorities, the most successful colleges have made considerable strides towards encouraging debate.

This research suggests that there is considerable scope to develop communication between managers at all levels so that they can act as effective agents of change. Over the last ten years, there has been an enormous amount of talk, about how to improve the quality of FE. The argument of this research report is that not enough of that talk has been...talk about talk.
How Do Leaders and Colleges Sustain Growth Whilst Maintaining Quality?

GILL ALTON, BIDDY ROWE, AMANDA RUDOLPH AND PAUL SMITH, GRIMSBY INSTITUTE OF FURTHER AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Executive Summary

This project explores possible commonalities in the ways that FE colleges seek to maintain quality during periods of rapid growth. Drawing on research in four colleges, it suggests that colleges need to ensure that staff feel valued and well-supported and that organisational strategies focus on: the learner experience and on leading and managing in the interests of the needs of learners and staff. The report highlights various barriers to maintaining such high-quality provision (such as short-term funding targets, failing to match learners’ abilities to available learning opportunities, failing to recruit and/or retain sufficient teachers and a compliance culture). The research suggested numerous ways of overcoming these barriers including maximising multiple income streams, understanding the (local) market, ensuring that provision matches need, actively seeking local market intelligence, partnering with schools, ensuring that senior managers are visible, accessible and approachable and that staff buy-in to the vision. Interviewees proposed that developing mechanisms to encourage the sharing of good practice were crucial in maintaining a high quality experience for learners, where they feel supported, and are able to achieve their desired goal.

Introduction

From 2001 to 2005, Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education doubled its turnover from £16m to £32m, as a consequence of the growth in student numbers (particularly higher education students) and a significant expansion in the range of learning activities offered by the Institute. At the same time, the Institute has maintained the quality of its provision, as affirmed through visits by a range of external quality audit organisations, including the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) which in 2003 commented that leadership and management, QA arrangements, management information systems, and approaches to financial management were all good.

Senior managers in the Institute felt that this phenomenon may well be observable in other (similar) situations. This research project was therefore devised in the expectation of eliciting appropriate data, so that information about models of good practice could be disseminated. Using information supplied by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, four colleges were identified as having achieved significant growth over the last (few) years (by at least 30%), were judged as maintaining the quality of their provision and were viewed as having good or outstanding leadership and management. Arrangements were made for researchers to conduct interviews at these colleges with principals and in some cases other colleagues.

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Each discussion was designed to focus on eliciting what strategies were employed, what success factors had been noted, and what lessons had been learned within the colleges concerned, in respect of quality maintenance in the context of significant growth.

Research Methods
Using information supplied by the Learning and Skills Development Agency, four colleges were identified as having:

- achieved significant growth over the last few years (by at least 30%)
- were judged as maintaining the quality of their provision
- were judged to have good or outstanding leadership and management.

Arrangements were made for researchers, and in one case an independent consultant, to visit these colleges. Semi-structured interviews with four college principals, and their colleagues, were conducted as a means of exploring strategies that had been learned within the colleges concerned, in respect of quality maintenance in the context of significant growth.

Research Framework
There are more than 300 colleges of general further education in England, offering a wide range of vocational and academic programmes of study up to level 4, for over 4 million learners post-16 (and, increasingly, for some colleges, post-14). In many cases, colleges now provide higher education studies - more than 10% of HE provision is now delivered through the FE sector, most of that through the 30 or so “mixed economy” colleges.

Historically, most colleges were established to meet the training needs of specific industries in the area, eg steel, mining, food processing, textiles, agriculture, hospitality, and so on. However, in the last 30 years, with the decline of many traditional industries, and following incorporation in 1993, colleges have significantly diversified their curriculum bases, as a response to public demand, the changing nature of industry and commerce in England, and especially in response to direction from Government.

During this period, many colleges have grown significantly in terms of learner numbers, and therefore income, and have generally invested in new or refurbished building stock, capital equipment, and human resources. Like other publicly-funded bodies, colleges have been expected to demonstrate that the provision on offer is of sufficient quality to meet learner expectations, as well as giving value for money to the taxpayer.

Prior to incorporation, Her Majesty’s Inspectors (HMI) and also the Advisory Services of Local Education Authorities (LEAs) conducted quality inspections. Following incorporation, this role was undertaken primarily by inspectors from the Further Education Funding Council, and more recently from the Office for Standards in Education, the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI), and, for higher education provision, the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).

Currently, inspections are predicated on colleges establishing good quality assurance and improvement procedures, including self-assessment, which are focused on the experience of learners. Primarily, inspectors are interested in learner success (i.e. do learners complete their courses of study, and achieve recognised qualifications) and how the management and leadership of colleges supports this. Capacity to improve is a key judgement in the new inspection framework and it focuses on the potential to progress from the current position of the college to a much more successful position or one where very high standards are maintained. Capacity to improve is based on the ability to diagnose strengths and areas for improvement, focus on raising standards and act effectively to bring about improvement. Clearly this is an important aspect for any organisation wishing to grow whilst maintaining quality.

Research Findings
College “A”
College “A” is located in the only large centre of population in a predominately rural setting - the nearest next large town (and FE college) is over 30 miles away. Some local wards in the town are amongst the most socially and economically deprived nationally. The college operates from two main campuses in close proximity, together with a number of community centres.

The college’s last inspection by Ofsted/ALI in 2003 graded leadership and management, and quality assurance arrangements, as good. It has a large number of HE as well as FE students, a strategy adopted partly to meet the higher education and training needs of a dispersed rural population, and the large number of small to medium enterprises in the area. The college sees itself in a “market” that is unpredictable – there is a continuous tension between responding to Government-led initiatives (and therefore target-related funding), responding to the current expectations of local and wider communities, and developing new curriculum provision to help ensure future growth.

A well-structured approach to strategic planning is believed to be essential to maintain quality whilst continuing to grow, based on a mixture of vision in terms of how the college perceives itself as a provider of education locally (and especially for its HE provision, regionally, nationally and internationally) and its need to respond to the requirements of funders. Central to this, senior managers suggest, is having sufficient curriculum provision, structured in such a way as to ensure maximum opportunities for learners to progress according to need, as well as at the same time meeting the needs of employers. They argue that quality facilitates growth, not vice versa.
The principal and senior managers take pride in being visible and approachable, which is seen as part of an effective approach to communications, and which involves all staff appreciating that the principal plays a key role in keeping a focus on quality. This encourages innovation and the development of new ideas, which are vital for the college's success in maintaining quality whilst growing.

Senior managers acknowledge that, on occasion, the burden of administration on teaching staff can be overwhelming. They feel that through this continuing focus on teaching and learning, senior managers can help to ensure that teaching and learning maintains high quality. They also believe that by focusing on the needs of their learners, with a vision of what they wish to achieve at programme level, the college can ensure that it is moving towards the overall strategy of the college.

Part of this strategy involves ensuring that teaching staff share resources more widely and that examples of good practice are shared and adapted. Meetings to share good practice and ideas are held regularly. Senior managers feel that only through this continuing focus will staff - especially teachers - maintain their ownership of the quality agenda and be able to ensure that learners succeed.

College "C"

This college is a general further education college. The main and new purpose-built of three campuses are located on the edge of a large and ethnically-diverse town, where achievement at 16 for 5 GCSEs at Grade C and above is significantly below the national average. The college offers a wide range of curriculum provision, together with some HE, (mostly NVQ Level 4 and 5), and has, as one of its key strategies, that of widening participation (i.e., attracting learners from under-represented groups and areas). The college was last inspected in 2005, when inspectors noted the high success rates of learners, especially those aged 16-19 on Level 3 programmes, good teaching and learning overall, and effective leadership and management.

Recent rapid growth in learners from 6,493 in 1999/00 to 17,290 in 2004/05 has been achieved through increased enrolments in the 16-18 market, development of work based (blended) learning (particularly first time level 2 and essential skills qualifications) and adult and community learners which are partly LSC funded and partly full cost recovery. Success rates have risen from 49% to 80% during that time.

Senior management recognise the further potential to increase 16-18 year old participation rates, which currently run at around 74%, and the value of taking part in the Employer Training Pilot scheme, which has been successful in reaching employers who have previously been engaged in training their workforce. The strategy for growth and development is three pronged: (14) 16-18, adult and business services. However, the college also recognises that in pursuing the widening participation agenda, new business should only be sought if the organisation is confident of delivering quality provision, as the principal explained.
“The widening participation agenda, you can still do it if you can partner or give good quality provision. The only message I’ve got is don’t go there unless you’ve got good staff and good resources. If you think you can do a good job then give it a go and give it your best shot.”

The principal also believes that it is essential to remain innovative in terms of meeting customer demands, and in particular to respond to programme needs and planning appropriate modes of delivery. It is believed that quality, particularly at level 1 and 2, can be affected by an inappropriate mode of delivery for the customer group, and that for some courses success rates are significantly improved by delivering short intensive courses, rather than longer and more protracted modes.

Senior managers believe that good staff and good resources are essential to maintaining and improving quality, especially in the drive to attract ‘new’ learners, and that learning centres away from main campus have to be equally well-resourced in terms of staff and facilities. They recognise the value of offering training and development opportunities for staff and of monitoring the quality of teaching through standardised observations of teaching. Personnel details are described as, ‘Excellent staff, well qualified, and proud to work at the College. Low levels of absenteeism, low turnover, good professional development programme.’

The principal believes that senior managers work well as a team, and managers meet regularly to monitor the college’s performance and the quality of the curriculum. In addition, the principal emphasises that, at all levels, management is open and approachable, and communications are effective across the college. This is aided by the fact that most staff and managers work together in open plan offices and are readily accessible to colleagues.

The key drive for the college is that ultimately (LSC) funding depends on having high success rates, and so the ways in which the college is led and managed are focused on that. The emphasis on attendance monitoring and early intervention and appropriate support for individual students was stressed as the key to successful retention.

“It’s difficult making good decisions after the bird has flown and its getting that ‘in year’ reaction and support and help and getting teaching and learning advisors and whatever it needs.”

The principal also recognises that poor attendance can be an indicator of poor teaching. The college has therefore developed strategies to investigate the quality of teaching when attendance data indicate that there might be a problem.

“If you have got a good attendance monitoring system, then not only is it an early warning device to the quality of the course and getting learner feedback, it’s also a good guide for teaching performance.”

However, the principal believes that the process of self-assessment and review (SAR) is not always the best tool for supporting the drive to improve success, as it is too slow and in many ways summative. What is needed are good IT-based data capture and analysis systems so that early identification of problems of poor attendance and retention on specific programmes can be highlighted early and action taken. Staff also need to be well-trained to use the MIS effectively. Their ownership of data and targets are seen to be essential to further improve the quality monitoring process. In order to maintain and further improve the quality of provision, the college is intent on continuing to develop its approaches to determining the quality of activity in classrooms and other learning environments, based on good practice shared with other similar colleges.

**College “D”**

This college is a medium-sized general further education college located in a town in a popular tourist area. It occupies three main centres, and provision is also available in another nearby town at an adult and community education centre. In addition, the college leases premises for a multi-skills centre on an industrial estate and also provides a wide range of community-based courses in five information and communications technology (ICT) centres and a range of other community locations.

Since 2001, the college has worked closely with local secondary schools and created a family of schools to develop a strategy for providing a wider curriculum for students aged 14 to 19. The overall achievement at 16 in the local area is well above the national average and the post-16 participation rate is lower than the national average. The college has some HE provision and is hoping to grow this over the next few years, and overall there are good opportunities for progression through the college. It has restructured its curriculum to maximise the efficiency of delivery and mostly runs at 75% capacity. In the last inspection in 2005, the inspectors commented on the high success rates overall, the quality of resources, good teaching and learning, and the effective tutorial system.

The principal feels that the college’s approach to strategic planning is good, in order to meet the needs of students who have not been successful at school and developing more effective partnerships and improving the college environment. Staff and governors are appropriately involved in setting strategic objectives, which are focused on improving retention and pass rates, and strategies employed include good pre-course information, well-managed and delivered tutorials, and active attendance monitoring.

The college employs a member of staff to work closely with students who are ‘at risk’ of leaving their courses, and this has significantly contributed to improved retention rates. At risk students are identified at interview. There is clear communication to parents to gain their support. Risk factors considered include educational and social pressures such as employment. At risk students are monitored weekly.
The principal believes that, by ensuring good support for new staff members as well as existing staff, with good communications between staff and managers, and managers able to act effectively to tackle poorly performing teachers, the college is able to drive forward a clear and explicit agenda on improving the quality of teaching. All applicants for teaching posts are observed by the Quality Manager as they deliver a session to a group of students. The opinion of the students is considered as well as the manager’s grading of the teaching and learning observed in the session. Applicants who do not have at least a satisfactory grade at this point do not proceed with the remainder of the interview.

There is a mentoring and induction system. Staff who are new to teaching have a reduced class contact initially and we provide remission for those undertaking a teaching qualification. The principal believes that

“We have a clear agenda on quality in the classroom, staff are more aware of what is needed for a successful grade. Those who did not buy in to the changes have left or retired and we are working to share the skills of our experienced staff. We value staff and have put in place awards for staff who have gone above and beyond the job, or those with excellent qualities. They are nominated by their teams.”

The next section now outlines the critical success factors that appear to re-occur across these four colleges.

Conclusions: Critical Success Factors

1. Organisational strategies

Our analysis of the interviews suggests that, in order to maintain a high quality of learner experience during periods of rapid growth, colleges need to ensure that staff (especially those in direct day-to-day contact with learners), feel valued and well-supported. They also need to ensure that organisational strategies:

a) focus on the learner experience, including:

- An appropriate curriculum offering, including good progression opportunities, combined with good initial advice and guidance.
- Valuing and encouraging hard-to-reach groups, using short courses for diagnosis of learner ability and to provide positive feedback by celebrating early success.
- A well-resourced tutorial system, which incorporates both academic and personal aspects, and which identifies at-risk learners early on (e.g. student support advisors whose role it is to facilitate personal relationships with those deemed to be at risk, centred on support and early intervention if a learner shows signs of struggling). “Parents recognise that the college is trying out all options to support their learners, good communication gets the parents on side.”
- Good facilities and physical surroundings.
  “Business planning is critically important to ensure you have the right staffing and physical resources to offer quality provision” (College A).
- Valuing and encouraging hard-to-reach groups with ‘bite sized’ provision often not assessment based (e.g. outdoor activities, car maintenance, how to be a DJ etc).
- Remove additionality, which might detract from the achievement of the primary learning goal, but add enrichment which develops group cohesion and a sense of belonging to the course ensuring an excellent pre-16 college experience that facilitates progression to post-16 education with a much clearer view of career aspirations. “Gaining market share has been helped by the new building. That helps with recruitment but it doesn’t make a difference to retention and achievement - it’s still a people business” (College C).

b) focus on managing the student experience, including:

- The importance of encouraging a teamwork approach to delivering the curriculum “course teams take ownership of the problems, it is important to make staff aware of the retention process” (College B).
- Access to high-quality IT facilities for staff, combined with appropriate training in its use and value.
- A rigorous approach to identifying and dealing with unsatisfactory classroom practice. “It’s dealing in real time so if you’ve got early warning indicators like poor attendance in classes or early drop out rate or you’ve just got the course wrong or whatever then deal with it” (College C).
- Appointment of suitable staff, expecting high standards of teaching and learning to be apparent at interview “if they don’t show the right skills in the classroom, they are eliminated from the interviews.” “If that means I cannot deliver some subjects, then I will pay for the students to go elsewhere rather than drop the standards.” “When appointing new staff, selection must be 100% on ability” (College C). “Improving the quality of teaching and learning will improve our retention and achievement. Vocational staff have a right to as much development in teaching and learning as they do in their own vocational area” (College A).

c) focus on leading and managing the institution in the interests of the needs of learners and staff, including:

- A visionary and forward-looking leadership, which seeks opportunities for business development. “Our business development unit has a separate name and we have a deliberate strategy to work with the business market” (College C). “The college reputation for quality and new learning facilities will all help but competition will increase and we have to keep working to stay on top” (College C).
● Challenging convention and National and Regional strategy. “The LSC has got to get used to the notion of winners and losers. If it is truly contestable then there will be some losers, private and public, all I’m saying to the LSC is let it happen, let them adjust, we’ve got to” (College C).

● A purposeful approach to leadership and management throughout the organisation, “Distributed leadership is essential as you grow” (College A). “You’ve got to be pragmatic, you’ve got to be flexible; you’ve got to act like a little organisation” (College C). “We have new clarity, maximising funding and quality of the curriculum” (College D).

● Visibility and approachability of senior managers “Principal believes it is his job to go round and thank people for what they do” (College E).

● A common feature of successful colleges to be a programme of social activities which everyone is invited to take part in such as parties, competitions etc (College A).

● A high quality, trusted, user-friendly MIS system which can be used as an effective management tool, with analysis appropriate to the level of use.

The importance, availability and accessibility of complex MIS data was considered to be vital but the interpretation of that data was seen as the key to successful quality monitoring. “It’s how it’s used and its links to the processes and it’s how people use that effectively” (College C). “You hunt relentlessly success rates, it’s success rates that count” (College C). “A lot of concentration has gone into the achievement profile” (College D).

● A comprehensive range of opportunities for staff to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding e.g. management training for aspiring managers aids with succession planning and recognises and values staff by providing internal promotion opportunities. “Most promotions are internal appointment - it recognises and values staff” (College E).

● A high profile principal who encourages and supports community engagement and activity, which places the college in the heart of the area it serves.

● Appointment of quality staff who are inducted into the culture and aspirations of the college and are therefore able to underpin the strategies.

● Recognition and understanding that the job of teaching is demanding, and that ultimately it is the role of managers at all levels to facilitate this, maximising the high quality image of the college in the community.

2. Barriers to maintaining high-quality provision (a strategic view)

Analysis of the interviews also suggests that senior managers appreciate that there are a number of factors which may mitigate against ensuring the high quality of provision, including:

● Trying to meet short-term funding body targets, especially as priorities shift, by over-recruiting learners when there are not the resources (including staffing) to ensure a quality experience. “We try to make decisions on viable groups in September, everything goes on the MIS system and we get printouts twice a day and then we meet to reallocate resources, split large groups and close small ones” (College D).

● Failing to recruit learners “with integrity” - i.e. not matching learners’ abilities and aspirations to available learning opportunities.

● Failing to recruit and/or retain sufficient teachers to deliver the curriculum.

● Not meeting the need to develop teachers to become effective over a short timescale when recruited fresh from “industry”, including perceived excessive teaching commitments for staff new to teaching.

● Failing to achieve an appropriate balance between full-time and part-time teaching staff.

● Having a compliance culture in an organisation which is managed through high levels of bureaucracy, consequently reducing the effectiveness of teachers.

● Failing to maintain equivalent standards in outreach centres, especially when at some distance from the main campus. “Our rule is that you treat the classroom at the end of the corridor exactly the same as you would the satellite” (College C).

3. Overcoming barriers/avoiding pitfalls

Based on their experience about strategies that had been developed and deployed to maintain quality, interviewees offered a range of suggestions:

● Maintaining a strategic view of potential developments at a national, regional, and local level, in order to be “ahead of the game” when planning and resourcing provision.

● Maximising the multiple income streams to be less vulnerable to change.

● Understanding the (local) market, to ensure that provision matches need (including opportunities for progression) and is planned for. Actively seeking local market intelligence to plan effectively.

● Partnerships with schools to drive up participation levels.

● Ensuring that senior managers are visible, accessible and approachable, and that the principal acts and is seen by staff as the “principal teacher” rather than the head of a commercial enterprise.

● Developing a teamwork ethos to delivering the curriculum, and within that, the role of team leader as manager.
Executive Summary
This research project explores the nature of the employment relationship between principals and boards by interviewing chairs of corporations, principals, and clerks to corporations. Drawing on research in seven colleges, the study found a wide range of working practices in use that have been developed locally, often informed by the working practices of governors from their own employment or other experiences. However, there appears to be no guidance to colleges on executive employment practice. Given this absence and the lack of specific training for chairs and governors, and also for clerks to corporations, the risk of developing employment difficulties or not maximising the potential of the principal is considerable. There seems to be little detailed or structured consideration given by boards to their role as employer of the principal. The research found examples of close and more remote working relationships between chair and principal. It is possible to interpret the chair’s role in some colleges as proxy for line manager, in others there is a more discrete, subtle role performed by the chair on behalf of the board. The report outlines a number of recommendations about how to improve the board’s performance as employer of the principal.

Introduction
This research project aims to review the nature of the employment relationship between the governing body of further education colleges and the senior professional officer of the college i.e. the principal. Each college governing body is required to appoint and employ a principal who is chief executive of the institution. Thus, the principal is responsible to the governing body (of between 12 and 20 governors) for the performance of the college. Typically, the chair of the corporation acts as day to day contact with the principal on behalf of the board, with formal appraisal undertaken at least once per year. The performance of the principal as leader and executive manager is of crucial importance to the success or failure of the college. At the same time, performance management and development is the employer’s role. The framework for this investigation of the employment relationship between principal and governing body is the psychological contract (Guest and Conway 2004).
There is currently no substantive evidence on the nature and practice of the employment relationship between employee (principal) and employer (governing body) within FE colleges. The purpose of this research project is to identify current working practice, to consider the nature of identified working practices in the governing body/principal relationship and to provide guidance to (a) governing bodies, (b) principals and (c) clerks to colleges on the mechanics of the employment relationship and good practice. By providing greater clarity and improved advice on developing the employment relationship between college governing bodies and principals, it is envisaged that the overall quality of strategic college management will be enhanced which should, in turn, improve the quality of the learning experiences offered by colleges.

Within the overall research project, this study specifically aims to consider the following aspects of the employment relationship between the governing body and the principal in further education colleges:

- What are the elements of the formal employment relationship between the principal and governing body and what characterises the employment relationship for each party?
- How is the principal’s performance managed and developed by the governing body?
- What are the perceptions of the quality of the employment relationship by both parties and what are considered to be ‘good practice’ experiences by the respective parties?

Research Framework

The professional employment category of the ‘college principal’ substantively developed at the end of the nineteenth century as technical colleges were being formed with often a mix of public and private funding. Shipman (1984, p15) identified three historical factors from the late nineteenth century which shaped the public education service in England - an early and sustained voluntary activity which established a tradition of de-centralised control of education, restricted government intervention which aimed to facilitate the conditions for private enterprise, and realisation that general social conditions reduced the impact of any one public service.

In the late 1960s governance arrangements were significantly revised with the production of the Weaver Report, which articulated board/principal relations in a form which is familiar today. As Barr (1982, pp95-96) explains, the Weaver Report gave expression to the concept of ‘partnership’. Thus,

The members of that partnership are the local authority, which maintains the college and determines the general educational character and size; the governing council, which is responsible for the general direction of the college; the academic board, which plans, controls and allocates resources to the college’s various educational activities; and the principal, who is academic leader and is responsible for implementing policy, and for the college’s internal organisation and discipline.

The employment category of ‘college principal’ can be located within the rise of professional society (Perkins 1996). In addition, the professionalisation of the role of principal has been emphasised in recent times by individual pay bargaining practices at local level, essential training preparation for the responsibilities with the formation of the Centre for Excellence in Leadership in 2003, increasing accountability through the planning and funding role of the Learning and Skills Council and increasing demands on leadership within complex public sector constraints (Foster Report 2005, p10).

Under these circumstances it is necessary to appreciate the conditions currently established by statute for the leadership of colleges. The critical change to the board/principal relationship came with the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, which provided corporate status for the governing boards (further education corporations) of colleges and produced a direct employment relationship between the board and the principal (whereas previously the principal had been employed by the local authority).

At the time of writing the latest version (2001) of the statute under which further education corporations operate provides the responsibilities of a further education corporation (as an exempt charity) as:

- to determine the educational character and mission of the college and the ensuring of the effective means of monitoring whether college management is fulfilling the mission.
- to ensure the solvency of the college and the safeguarding of its assets.
- to approve the annual estimates of income and expenditure.
- to oversee the appointment, grading, suspension, dismissal, and the determination of pay and conditions of senior postholders and the clerk to the governing body to set a framework for the pay and conditions of service of all other staff.

In relation to non-profit and public sector organisations, Carver (1997, p101) states that ‘no single relationship in the organisation is as important as that between the Board and its chief executive officer’. He continues by advising that whilst the choice of chief executive is important, the establishment of an effective relationship between the board and the chief executive is more important.

Within FE colleges, relations between the ‘board’ and the ‘principal’ (as chief executive) are to a large extent, unregulated, unchecked and left alone to the respective players. There is specifically no audit or detailed inspection and there is no guidance to boards and principals on ‘good practice’. The performance of the college is assumed to reflect aspects of the performance of the combination of the board and the principal. There is considerable flexibility in the approaches to be used in the formation and maintenance of board/principal relations.
Leadership in an educational setting such as a college of further (and often higher) education is recognised by some commentators as a particular and specialised function. The process of determining the aims of an organisation is a fundamental leadership task but, warns Bush (2003: 3), due to government policy, educational institutions may be ‘left with the residual task of interpreting external imperatives rather than determining aims on the basis of their own assessment of student need’. Bush terms this lack of scope to make core decisions ‘botted leadership’. There is evidence from the Foster Report (2005: 475-2) that this condition has been experienced in further education with criticism of the ‘strategic architect’ of further education (the Department for Education and Skills) and its agency (the Learning and Skills Council). Mufford (2003: 3 - 13) develops this theme by cautioning that there may be procedural illusions of effectiveness in educational leadership i.e. targets, performance indicators, outputs; there may be a fostering of dependence on ‘the leader’ in educational institutions; there may be a reductionist approach to education which removes discretion in educational practices. Whilst there may be some flexibility in the nature of board/principal relations, this ‘freedom’ is constrained by the limits of government policy initiatives and the expectations of the key government agency for post-16 learning - the LSC.

In the midst of the vagaries and preferences of political interest in further education is the employment relationship between the board and the principal as employer and employee respectively. The idea of the ‘psychological contract’ has been developed over the last forty years from Argyris (1960) as a model for comprehensively considering an employment relationship. Wooldridge (2001 : 4) quotes Schein’s (1980) definition of the psychological contract as “the unwritten set of expectations operating at all times between every member of an organisation and the various managers and others in that organisation.” Guest and Conway (2004: 13) argue that the delivery of promises, fairness and trust form a composite measure of the state of the psychological contract. Emmott (op cit 2004: 6) suggests a ‘positive’ psychological contract is the best guarantee of good performance outcomes. Conway and Birrer (2004) suggest that the psychological contract can ‘go wrong’ or be ‘breached’ in four main ways - by poor human resources practices, lack of support from the employer, additional demands on performance and a history of breaches of the ‘deal’ e.g. accumulated disappointment produced by pay reviews.

This research study explores the nature and practice of board/principal relations by using the psychological contract as a foundation for the development of ideas. Thus the ‘deal’ between the board and principal has been at the centre of this enquiry. The study examines the main terms and conditions of employment of college principals (as experienced by the postholders interviewed) and the respective views of college principals, chairs of further education corporations and clerks to college corporations (as observers of the employment relationship). This study does not record specific terms and conditions. This material is systematically provided by the annual AoC senior staff pay and conditions survey.

Research Methods

The project was conducted between 1st April 2005 and 31st March 2006. In order to discover details of the employment relationship between the principal of a college and the board, the project was designed to talk, in confidential terms, to principals, chairs of boards, and also clerks to corporations. It was planned to visit nine colleges, two located in Northern Ireland, seven located in England. Gaining access to colleges for the purposes of research is difficult. There are many pressures of time and performance placed on colleges; also chairs are volunteers and clerks are not usually full-time employees. The amalgamation of a time and day at mutual convenience proved too difficult in the case of two colleges. A summary of the interview arrangements is provided below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Principal interviewed</th>
<th>Chair Interviewed</th>
<th>Clerk to the Corporation Interviewed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College A</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>College B</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>College C</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>College D</td>
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<tr>
<td>College E</td>
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<tr>
<td>College F (NI)</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
<td>College G (NI)</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Six colleges were general further education colleges, one college was a land-based college.

The research interviews were structured and highly confidential. They were carried out between 19 September 2005 and 26 April 2006. All interviews were undertaken by and recorded in note form by the researcher. The study is grounded in qualitative research methodology to explore the interpersonal aspects to the board/principal relations. Confidentiality has been provided to all participants to permit personal views to be expressed and recorded and so the identity of individuals and colleges has been reserved within this written account. To assist with the clerk to the corporation’s perspective of the employment relationship between the principal and the board, a group of clerks were also asked to address a series of questions (see footnote 6).
To reflect on the nature of the interviews with principals, chairs and clerks an advisory group was formed. This included one principal, one clerk, one chair of the board, one solicitor specialising in employment, one solicitor specialising in education and one LSC officer specialising in college effectiveness. This group provided valuable insight into issues and interpretations of the relationship between college principals and college boards. Members of the group were asked to comment on the first final draft of the report.

Research Findings

The main findings from this research study are clustered as follows:

- The role of (a) the Chair of the Corporation and (b) the Board
- Employment experience of the Principal
- Formal employment policies and procedures
- Pay and performance
- Contribution from the Clerk to the Corporation

The role of (a) the chair of the corporation and (b) the board

A series of questions were asked to chairs about their knowledge of the role and their working practices. The research revealed that the role of the chair of the corporation is crucial in all matters in relation to the principal. From the range of responses to questions from chairs regarding the employment of the principal a number of issues emerged which are worthy of discussion.

Firstly, there is the interpretation of the role of chair (usually by the office holder themselves). For example, one chair interviewed declared that he was in working contact with the principal about three times per week. In other cases, contact was made by the Chair infrequently and ‘as necessary’, or ‘on average once per month’.

Clearly the experience of employment in being principal varies considerably at the extremes of this range of contact practice. Some chairs (sometimes together with vice chairs, and sometimes also with the clerk to the corporation) had monthly business meetings with the principal. Some chairs did not use this practice - there seemed to be no connection between the regularity of informal contact by chairs and the use of the practice of a regular business meeting by chairs.

Secondly, there is the communication route between the board (as employer) and the principal (as employee). The usual method for board members is via a meeting through questioning and comment. The chair fulfilled the more personal communication with the principal at other times. As recorded above, this communication could vary considerably in frequency.

Thirdly, the nature of chair/principal communications ranged from the strategic only (with a chair recognising and maintaining the governance/management interface throughout) to coaching, professional advice, considered opinion on behalf of the board, adding in local knowledge, testing of proposals and actions, general support/guidance and counselling. Some chairs seemed to fulfil a highly engaged line manager role because they thought this role was best for the board and for the principal and it was expected or required of the chair.

Fourthly, many chairs believed that they were, in effect, mentoring, supporting and challenging the principal on behalf of the board and also managing the board’s perceptions of the principal. There was evidence from all chairs interviewed that, whilst the Board approved the annual performance objectives for the principal, either only the chair alone or an inner ring of governors (e.g. chairs of committees), owned the performance objectives of the principal. Chairs accepted that many board members would not be sure of the working practices of the chair and the principal relationship. However, it was also accepted by chairs that board members would draw a significant amount of confidence in the principal from the attitude and views of the chair in relation to the principal. One chair described his relationship with the principal as ‘professional’ and included ‘listening to the principal and testing ideas and proposals’. The chair saw himself as a bridge or a channel between the principal and the board.

Fifthly, chairs valued openness from the principal in all aspects of contact. Chairs wanted to be able to appreciate the ability of the principal in problem solving. This aspect of trust was crucial to the formation of confidence by chairs in principals. There was no correlation between the amount of contact between chairs and principals and the degree of expressed trust and confidence by a chair in a principal.

Sixthly, the chair played an important part in the effective monitoring of the principal’s performance by (a) judging the principal’s performance in general, based on all types of contact experienced (b) judging the principal’s performance in relation to agreed performance objectives (c) leading the annual appraisal of the principal (d) demonstrating the principal/chair working relationship to members of the board.

Employment experience of the principal

From the participating principals three differing forms of employment experience were presented.

A charismatic chair and an advisory board

The charismatic chair who ‘had a clear sense of what’s wanted’ was a strong motivator who provided feedback to the principal on performance. They also tended to characterise the board’s role as advisory. Some chairs in this category reported that they believed the overall ‘calibre of governor’ on their board was not high and they felt it was necessary to compensate for this in personal dealings with the principal. As so much of the process of governance was framed by the personal style of the chair the principal saw the chair as the employer rather than the board. The principal recognised a vulnerability in this position with so much invested in the chair/principal linkage. There was also a pragmatism by the principal based on the belief that as principal a key role is to ‘manage’ the chair and the board.
A strong chair and a strong board

In this case the chair tended to be less personally involved but strong, combined with a strong board. Here the principal was very sure that the board was the employer by its attitude and style and particularly the performance environment established by the board. Systematic performance management (and performance related pay) characterised this type of employment experience. The board (and particularly those governors tasked with negotiating annual performance objectives with the principal) took their role seriously and, using their personal expertise, applied a discipline to the process. Where this model was used, principals reported that they appreciated what was required of them, accepted that failure to achieve was possible and could have financial consequences for them, and were highly motivated. Again there was recognition that the board and the chair were there to be ‘managed’ by the principal.

A less involved chair and board

In the third case there is less involvement by the chair and the board. One principal within this model felt that governors were too deferential to himself and senior staff that he would appreciate and benefit from more challenge, and, whilst the board approved annual performance objectives, there was a sense that this was done for the record rather than as an active process within board/principal relations. Within this model principals had to be self-motivated as there was little specific direction from the board other than a general board/principal relationship and the fulfilling of general governance responsibilities.

Formal employment policies and procedures

Other than the specific cases of performance management and performance related pay, there were no examples of principals enjoying the benefit of board determined executive employment policies (with one exception - see below). All principals and chairs were asked about any formal consideration of the principal’s professional development, which was presumed to be an adjunct to performance objectives. In some cases there seemed to be an assumption that the principal as senior professional in the college would be unlikely to require or benefit from professional development. There was little consideration of a structured professional development programme with declared aims or specific purpose. In one case there was an example of a professional development theme, agreed between the board and the principal, involving participation in a local regeneration scheme. This activity was seen as benefiting the college generally and the principal specifically and was recorded under the heading of ‘professional development’ indicating its origins and purpose.

Of particular note was the deliberate process by which this planned activity had come about involving principal and board support.

Pay and performance

In three cases there was a performance related pay scheme operating which connected the achievement of agreed performance objectives with pay additionally (excluding the Northern Ireland system). In each of the three cases there was a sophistication to the scheme in place including the weighting and scoring of targets. There were examples of additional payment being withheld due to non-achievement of targets. There appeared to be satisfaction by both the employer (as represented by the views of the chair) and the employee (as presented by the views of the principal) with these schemes. Indeed principals appeared to be advocates for this type of system citing the benefits of clarity, focus, motivation and, of course, financial reward if successful.

However, other research studies highlight a number of issues and difficulties about pay bargaining. This is certainly not to malign boards or principals involved in the use of performance related pay, but it is to question the possible effect of such systems on the employment experience of principals, particularly when account is taken of the following view expressed by Pfeffer and Sutton (2006: 115), “There is a tendency to over-estimate how much employees are motivated by extrinsic job features e.g. pay, and to underestimate how much employees are motivated by intrinsic job features like being able to make decisions or have meaningful work.”

As a counter-balance to this position it is interesting to note that in the case of the two Northern Irish colleges there is a regional pay scale/pay banding (which operates for all colleges in Northern Ireland). The principal’s salary is determined by the size of the college. There was a clear sense that relations between the principal and the board differed because of this arrangement (and also the fact that there was a regional annual appraisal scheme). The difference (judged through conversation rather than observation in practice) was that boards were more advisory, particularly on knowledge regarding local employment and training issues, and less connected to the employer role simply because there were fewer decisions to take in relation to that role."

2 In the particular case of colleges in Northern Ireland, the principals recognised that there was, in reality, a shared influence over their employment arrangements (as the board technically the employer) and the N.I. Department of Employment and Learning (D.E.L.): Significant aspects of employment were determined by D.E.L. e.g. achievement of performance related pay, appraisal scheme framework, regional pay framework for principals.

3. Details of aspects of conditions of service for principals can be found in the AoC annual senior staff pay and conditions survey.

4. Bebchuk and Fried (2004) drew out some interesting points about the general issue of pay bargaining between chief executives and boards. They highlight a tendency for chief executive pay to outstrip pay awards to other staff, the often close relationship between the chief executive and (a) the chair and (b) the board, the possible contradiction between setting tight performance objectives and expecting creative flexible leadership and the reality that in many cases chief executives are setting their own performance objectives (albeit that the objectives are formally approved by the board). Pfeffer and Sutton (2006) review incentive schemes and question assumptions about financial incentives being the most important of all motivators. They suggest that financial incentives can motivate to achieve more effort or more focussed effort (but as a consequence of not addressing other possibly more important matters) assume that the job performance is under the control of the chief executive, can provide information about what the organisation values and what its priorities are and can encourage the less able or motivated to seek out less competitive workplaces where their performance level will be less penalised. Pfeffer and Sutton also warn against the possible effect of the incentive or pay systems equating to the degree to which the organisation values an employee.

5. It should also be noted that the relationship between the principal and the chair/board can be affected significantly if the college is in difficulty. This research study does not address these circumstances but suffice to say it is important for boards to establish resilient arrangements i.e. not simply fair weather customs, to address the employment of the principal under difficult conditions.
many of the employment elements in relation to the principal and he was not included in meetings between the chair and principal. He believed that those aspects of college governance that covered the employment of the principal and senior staff did not ‘sit well with the internal clerk.’

Conclusions

There are a series of conclusions emerging from this research study, the most significant of which relates to the psychological contract for principals. There appeared to be no special consideration given to principals other than performance related pay elements to remuneration packages. Working practices were either by agreement with the chair or personally determined by principals. The experience of ‘supervisory leadership’ varied considerably for principals. For some, there was a clear framework from both the board and the chair, for others the chair was the embodiment of supervisory leadership, with the board acting in a more advisory role. In two cases there seemed to be little sense of effective ‘supervisory leadership’ for the principal from either the chair or the board.

‘Motivation’ within these varied circumstances was provided in a number of ways. Many principals referred to the importance of ‘self-motivation’. In these cases there were limited expectations of boards...principals expressed their gratitude to the chair for advice, guidance, wisdom, challenge, and general encouragement.

The articulation of the ‘promises made’ was difficult to assess. Principals were pragmatic about what they could achieve, the college governance framework and the external influences within which they operated. The relationship with the chair seemed to count for a considerable amount of the satisfaction expressed by the principal.

Two principals interviewed were more remotely connected to their chairs and their...employer to act as an employer, to set expectations, and to require achievement was not being delivered.

Contribution from the clerk to the corporation

The clerk to the corporation was asked to comment on the employment relationship between the board and the principal and, in particular, to identify significant characteristics of the relationship. The boards of most colleges participating in the study had decided to establish a remuneration committee. This committee considered the performance of the principal (in relation to agreed performance objectives). In two cases the remuneration committee was specifically not chaired by the chair of the corporation to ensure impartiality from the ongoing and informal chair/principal relationship. Many boards included at least one member with human resources expertise. These members were considered to play a more leading role in aspects of college governance regarding the employment of the principal and senior staff.

Clerks observed differing relations between the principal and the board. In some cases the board was effectively endorsing a working relationship formed between the chair and the principal. In other cases, the board was taking the lead role and setting the framework of expectations for the chair and principal to operate within. In one case the clerk considered that the board did not appreciate its role as employer and, due to the composition of board members, demonstrated its inability to provide the necessary support and challenge to the principal. In some cases the clerk was often a participant in chair/principal meetings and, in such circumstances, the clerk felt he/she was able to interpret the nature of the employment relationship more accurately. Clerks also believed they could provide an interpretative role in such meetings for the benefit of both the principal and chair.

Clerks emphasised the importance of the honesty and integrity in working practices demonstrated by the principal. The demonstration of these values set the tone with which working relations could be formed and developed. Under these circumstances, clerks felt they were able to strengthen something that was strong. Where there were less certain qualities some clerks felt they were not able to operate effectively and the role became solidly administrative rather than developmental. One board (through the encouragement of the clerk) ensured that its Special Committee met at least once per year to consider its role and prepare for its remit. This meeting took the form of a workshop and was intended to be developmental for members. Such a practice sensitised the members of the Special Committee to the employment responsibilities of the board and the possible application of certain senior staff employment procedures.

In one college the appraisal of the principal (and chair and clerk) included a 360 degree process using a questionnaire. This provided the opportunity for all governors (once per year) to contribute their views on the performance of the principal. It was considered to be a useful means of providing clear board feedback to the principal and assisted the focus of the appraisal procedure. In one case the clerk was also a senior member of staff (in all other cases the clerk was an independent clerk i.e. with no other employment relationship with the college). This clerk felt he was outside...
Recalling Carver’s belief that there is no single relationship in the organisation that is as important as that between the board and its chief executive, the view about the psychological contract for principals is a crucial one for the functioning of a further education college. Taking account of principal’s perceptions of procedural fairness, trust and the delivery of the deal, the majority of principals interviewed confirmed a positive psychological contract.

The key influences on this psychological contract are not sophisticated, nor do they reflect a predetermined ‘executive package’ of arrangements for the principal. There is a simplicity to the employment experience for principals which centres on:

- the relationship with the chair (usually informal and sometimes structured);
- the relationship with the board (usually at formal meetings);
- the determination of annual performance objectives for the principal by the board;
- the remuneration arrangements (usually through remuneration committee advice to the board).

There is little extra provided for the principal by the board as an employer.

Other conclusions emerging from this study are as follows:
- There is no evidence of structured thinking by boards about the employment of the principal post-selection. Induction to the post of principal and a formal probationary period with a recorded outcome were not evidenced.
- There is no standard ‘approved’ specific training or written guidance for the board on the employment of the principal.
- There is no approved training or guidance for the chair of the corporation on relations with the principal.
- There is a high dependence in some colleges on leadership by the chair of the corporation with, in such circumstances, the board taking an advisory role.
- There is an expectation by principals that boards should challenge and scrutinise proposals by the principal and that this process and interaction can enrich the employment experience of the principal.
- There is limited awareness on most boards of the principal’s annual performance objectives.
- Boards may not have properly considered how best to monitor the performance of the principal, with the possible merging of the college performance and the principal’s performance appearing in comments from principals, chairs and clerks.
- There may be an over-dependence on management and reward by performance objectives by boards.
- There is very limited interest by boards in developing and using executive policies and procedures to develop and support the principal. A particular example relates to the structured professional development of the principal.
- There was no evidence of a protocol or framework to address issues of dispute between the chair or the board and the principal (and the role of the clerk therein).
- There is a wide range of possible practices associated with the clerk to the corporation in relation to the chair/principal relationship stretching from the ‘closely involved’ type to the ‘largely excluded’ type.
- There are particular difficulties for an ‘internal clerk’ in adding value to the employment experience of the principal.

Recommendations

In the light of these conclusions, the following recommendations are suggested:

To the Centre for Excellence in Leadership

1. To develop greater understanding of the meaning of educational leadership for the post of college principal.
2. To devise a range of executive employment policies and practices suitable for application by boards in relation to college principals.
3. To devise and provide material and training for chairs of the corporation and clerks to the corporation on the employment of the principal.
4. To undertake research into the merits and difficulties associated with the use by boards of performance management linked to pay rewards for college principals.
5. To offer guidance to boards on best practice in formulating performance objectives for college principals.

To boards of further education colleges

1. To develop a structured executive induction programme for newly appointed principals.
2. To monitor the principal during the probationary period and formally agree the completion of the probationary period.
3. To define the nature of relations between the principal and the chair.
4. To ensure all board members and the principal are ‘colleagues’ and are not hierarchically related.
5. To require the chair and vice chair of the corporation to undertake training regarding relations between the chair and the principal, and the board and the principal.
6. To recognise the value of the clerk to the corporation as adviser to the board and to define the role expected of the clerk to the corporation in relation to the employment of the principal.

7. The clerk to the corporation should provide a new chair with a working file in relation to the principal including job description, CV, references, previous performance objectives, grievance and disciplinary arrangements etc.

8. To ensure that the principal’s performance objectives are defined in relation to the person and that all board members are familiar with these performance objectives.

9. To consider the best ways to monitor the performance of the principal (as distinct from the performance of the college).

10. To review the use of performance related pay practices and consider other benefits from achievement of objectives.

11. To ensure that there is a structured professional development programme in place for the principal.

12. To ensure that the board provides vision, values and a strategic mentality, acts as employer at all times and does not drift into proxy micro-management or a principal’s supporters or friendship club.

13. To request annually the Special Committee to meet to consider its responsibilities and any procedures of relevance to the committee.

14. To consider the re-formation of the Remuneration Committee to embrace responsibility for wider employment experience of the principal and senior staff into e.g. a Senior Staff Employment Committee.

15. To consider the development of a simple protocol to cover issues of dispute between (a) the chair and the principal (b) the board and the principal (and to consider the role of the clerk to the corporation within such a dispute protocol).

16. All boards should seek to include in their membership at least one governor with executive human resources expertise and/or utilise regular advice through co-option to a senior staff employment committee.

References


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Finally, I would like to thank the clerks to the corporation who participated through discussion of the role of the clerk in relation to the employment of the principal and also David Jackson for his contribution.
Developing Multiple Level Leadership in Adult and Community Learning (ACL)

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Executive Summary

This research project explored the approach to leadership development of a highly successful local authority adult and community learning (ACL) service. The research considered how leadership at strategic and operational management levels can best be developed and supported. Research findings suggest that the service’s culture and values, as espoused and enacted by strategic and operational managers, do indeed foster and support professional and personal development. The service’s commitment to developing leadership capacity appears to encompass both the development of leaders at all levels and the development of leadership as a collective endeavour.

Having said that, fewer than half of the participating middle managers perceived their line managers to be ‘developing their leadership capacity’ or themselves to be ‘developing the leadership capacity’ of those they led, and few perceived themselves to having been ‘coached’ as separate leadership activities. Similarly, few considered ‘developing leadership capacity’ as important to themselves, to those they led, or to the service. This suggests that within this organization there is still room for improvement in leadership development and in ways of enacting leadership. The report concludes with a series of recommendations.

Introduction

During 2002 the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) undertook a survey report to ascertain the leadership and management development needs of post-compulsory education and training, or as it has now become, the learning and skills’ sector (Pearson 2003). This report identified ACL leaders and managers as having the greatest need for development and support across the widest range of management activities considered by the survey. The needs identified related to changes in the operating context such as the introduction of regular external inspection, and managing information and resources. ACL leaders and managers were found to be significantly less likely than FE managers to have access to management development or to work in an organisation that planned management development proactively.

Similarly inspections by the Adult Learning Inspectorate (ALI) of ACL providers during the pilot phase (2001-2) and the first year of the initial inspection cycle (2002-3) suggested that leadership and management, and in particular curriculum leadership and management, was not well developed. While there was often a clear strategic vision for the service, this was not always effectively linked to operational management.
decisions, behaviours and activities. Leadership and management development programmes have been in place since 2002-3 and national quality improvement programmes have sought to ensure that issues are addressed and suitable support is provided. As the first cycle of inspection has progressed, some ACL providers have performed well, but the Chief Inspector of the ALI observed in his latest annual report that improvement in the quality of ACL overall remains fragile. This suggests that there is a need to identify specific successful approaches to leadership and management development adopted by those providers judged to be demonstrating effective leadership in this part of the Learning and Skills Sector.

This report draws on research conducted at a large local authority ACL service that performed very successfully in the third year of ALI inspection, being awarded Grade 2 (Good) for Leadership and Management, with contributory grades of 2 for Quality Assurance and Grade 1 (Outstanding) for Equality of Opportunity (EO). This adult learning provider serves the whole of a large county, making provision through three adult colleges and in a wide range of community locations. Adult education is secured through direct delivery and through partnership arrangements, for example with further education colleges and many voluntary sector organisations. The curriculum covers a wide range of subjects and skills areas, caters for diverse needs, and includes academic and vocational qualification courses and courses not designed to lead directly to accreditation at a number of levels. The day-to-day leadership of the service is through three geographical zones, North, South and East. Each zone has a principal and senior management team. The zones have their own fit-for-purpose management arrangements, and operational practices vary as appropriate to the communities served.

The primary purpose of this research project was to explore the approach to leadership development operating within the provider organisation, and the development of leadership at various levels, with a view to informing other providers in the ACL sub-sector of the learning and skills sector. The service participated in the expectation that the project would generate relevant findings that would assist in taking forward its leadership development strategy. The main research question was:

**How can leadership at strategic and operational management levels, and in particular at the level of leaders of teachers/curriculum areas, best be developed and supported?**

Subsidiary questions were:
- What conceptualisations of leadership are helpful/unhelpful?
- How are training and development needs identified?
- How do internal and external training interventions contribute to leadership development?
- What factors in organisational climate and culture enable/inhibit leadership development?

**Research Framework**

The research question makes explicit the idea that leadership is not the sole prerogative of individuals occupying formal positions as leaders. The concept of ‘distributed leadership’ is implicit within the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) and in inspection reports, many of which have identified inadequacies in curriculum leadership. This framework has had a major influence on the ACL sector. This is not to suggest that those in formal leadership positions do not have a critical role to play - rather the opposite. The values and beliefs that senior leaders hold in relation to leadership, how they conceptualise leadership and their consequent enactment of their roles are highly influential in terms of organisational culture, as well as explicit policy and strategy regarding leadership and management development, and thus the empowerment of leaders at multiple levels.

One purpose of this project was to understand how leadership is conceptualised within the service, and to consider this in relation to theoretical models such as transactional, contingent, transformational, empowering and distributed leadership. When designing the research, a distinction has been made between leaders as agents, and their development, and leadership development, as a collective and collaborative phenomenon.

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1. "Managing Better" and since 2004, “Leading Adult Learning”, designed and delivered by NACE with FPM, and since 2004-5 sponsored by CEL.
2. 2001-4 Adult Community Learning Quality Support Programme (ACLQSP); 2004-present Support for Success (s4s).
3. To date, no local authority ACL provider has been graded above this level for management and leadership by ALI. The ALI noted strong strategic and operational leadership at all levels and in each zone; good management understanding of the service’s strategic objective, the effective use of target setting, monitoring and data analysis to achieve improvements; effective staff development and good communications; well-conducted management meetings; and a commitment to continuous improvement.
4. 4. It was the first local authority provider to be awarded the top grade for EO.
5. This is an outward looking service. Senior managers are active in national and regional fora. This is reflected in a willingness to engage in pilots, projects and innovative developments to further develop practices and provision. Strategic managers continuously look for opportunities for business development and quality improvement. Partnerships and working relationships with key contacts are actively nurtured. In common with many other ACL providers, the service has a hierarchical structure with few ‘levels’. Less common, and in part reflecting the large geographical area, the history of the service, and mixed mode of securing provision, is a set of cross service leadership and management mechanisms overlaying the hierarchical structure so creating a ‘matrix’. Also typically, there are fine established management posts for senior managers, but large numbers of part-time and seasonal staff. The majority of senior leaders and managers at all levels have been teachers. Many operational managers are involved directly in curriculum delivery and have a regular teaching commitment reflecting organisational needs. Consequently, while hierarchy is recognized and indeed considered useful, relationships may be less hierarchical in nature than in other parts of the learning and skills sector. Some managers operate at several levels for different purposes, and in relation to different elements of their roles. There is a considerable degree of permeability between leadership and management activity per se and the organisation’s ‘core business’ of teaching and learning.
6. The proposition that within ACL there is a need to enable and support distributed leadership in order to improve curriculum leadership and management, and the practical implications of this, has been explored elsewhere (Nashenbali and Watley 2005).
Rogers et al (2003:13) offer a useful conceptual model or framework for understanding organisational approaches to leadership development. This offers two axes. The horizontal axis is a ‘leadership’ continuum from the individual to the collective; the vertical ‘leadership development’ axis is from a position of prescribed competences and skills to a position where leadership is construed as an emergent ‘bundle of qualities’, both individual and collective.

**Figure 1 The LSRC Leadership Framework**

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<th>Prescribed and individual</th>
<th>Prescribed and collective</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual</strong></td>
<td><strong>Collective</strong></td>
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Research in the field of school leadership suggests that leadership development activity and content can be understood in terms of three categories:

- a managerial or technicist concept which emphasises the achievement of targets;
- a humanistic approach which is ‘people-centred’, collegial, negotiated and collaborative; and
- a pragmatic approach which operates on the basis of organisational needs and requirements (Lumby et al 2005:17).

Yee (1997) identifies a number of key conditions for leadership development in an educational context, which include the creation of a positive climate for learning, the creation of supportive networks, the recognition that learning depends on the social and cultural context, the importance of coaching, and a focus on improving problem-solving (Yee et al: 19). These conditions are relevant to the concept of organisational learning.

This research explored whether there is a shared view on the part of leaders and ‘the led’ about the nature of leadership - whether it is understood in terms of individual competences or a collective activity, and how it should and is exercised at different levels within the organisation. Also, whether there is a shared understanding of leadership development - is it perceived as ‘leader development’ with an emphasis on skills development related to the achievement of specific results or outputs, or leadership development in the sense of developing approaches to leading and managing that are widely adopted to achieve organisational objectives in a manner congruent with service values. We also considered the extent to which the organisation’s culture is understood in similar or different ways at different levels, what has determined or influenced this, and the perceived linkage between culture and leadership.

The analytical framework underpinning the research design and subsequent data analysis includes consideration of the following themes:

- organisational culture and structure;
- mechanisms and processes for enacting leadership and management;
- organisational and individual expectations and perceived requirements relating to leadership;
- training and development;
- internal and external influences on leadership development.

**Research Methods**

The research activity was jointly planned by NACE with a small team of senior managers from the service’s CPO sub-committee. The aim was to work collaboratively and for mutual benefit. The research was designed to interrogate perceptions of leaders and managers at several structural levels, from the head of service through zone principals and deputies to senior and ‘middle’ operational managers. Research activities comprised the analysis of background information/relevant documentation, individual semi-structured interviews with the local authority lead officer and strategic senior managers, a survey of middle managers, focus groups with middle managers, observation of management meetings, and informal meetings with strategic and operational managers not participating in other aspects of the research.

Thirteen interviews of approximately 45 minutes duration were conducted with the senior local authority officer responsible for the service, and twelve strategic managers, by telephone or face to face. This group included principals and senior managers from all three zones. Questions covered:

- approaches to leadership and management encouraged by the service;
- conceptualisations of ‘leadership’;
- leadership characteristics the service seeks to recruit or develop;
- the levels at which the service seeks to develop leadership;
- how training and development needs are identified and addressed;
- interviewee’s conceptualisations of leadership, styles and skills;
- organisational culture;
- the influence of the Common Inspection Framework, and inspection.

Interview schedules were forwarded well in advance and respondents were asked to confirm their willingness to answer the questions prior to commencement.
A survey of operational managers was emailed to 48 managers, including the 17 managers who attended focus groups. Participation was entirely voluntary. Eight replies were received, one of which was only partially completed. The respondents were diverse in terms of roles, time in post (from three months to two years), length of service (from three months to eleven years) and number of staff managed (from none to 36 part-time staff). The responses were from all three zones. The questions for the interviews and the survey covered most of the same topics, with minor changes in wording.

During the week beginning January 16th 2006, three focus groups with operational managers were undertaken, one for each of the three zones. Service senior managers identified the staff to be invited to attend. A total of 17 managers participated, eight from North Zone, four from South Zone and five from East Zone. The focus groups concentrated on leadership activities as experienced and enacted, and the level of importance to managers, their teams and the zone or service attributed to a range of leadership activities; participation in continuing professional development; and perceptions of how leadership was enacted within the service. Participants were asked to consider and respond to a typology of leadership activities (adapted from Lurnby et al 2005:15).

During the same week as the focus groups, direct observation was undertaken of a number of scheduled management meetings. Several informal meetings took place with senior and operational managers to ensure that the organisational context and relevant systems and arrangements were well understood. A range of documentation supplied by the service was analysed, as was the service’s recent ALI inspection report.

Responses from senior strategic managers through one to one interviews were analysed in relation to the research questions and were compared and contrasted with the analysis of responses from those middle managers participating in the survey and in focus groups. A statistical analysis was made of the responses to instruments used in the focus groups for prioritisation of leadership activities.

**Research Findings**

While the service operates within the county council’s leadership development strategy, there is no explicit discrete service strategy for leadership and management development in support of organisational objectives and priorities. Leader and leadership development takes place through a range of activities and experiences across and within zones and as an aspect of wider CPD. This perhaps reflects the proposition (enshrined in the Common Inspection Framework) that the primary purpose of leadership and management is to enable all learners to achieve; judgements about effectiveness are based on consideration of the extent to which this is the case. There does not appear to be a whole organisation view of the total of leader/leadership and management development that is either needed or provided. However, arrangements are in place to ensure that training and development needs, including those relating to leadership and management, are identified and responded to, and these are well understood and widely accessed.

The service Strategic Management Group (SMG) is attended by all three zone principals and key cross-service staff. Each principal has a strategic area of responsibility, supported by relevant formal cross-service groups. The Quality and Curriculum group delegates work to a CPD group and to cross-service Curriculum sub-groups. Personnel issues are dealt with by the service SMG. The Equality and Diversity Group has two sub-groups, one for Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and another for Health and Safety. There is a Widening Participation group attended by representatives from all zones and people with countywide roles. Under Management Services there are sub-groups for Audit and Finance and Management Information Systems. Smaller sub-groups are set up as necessary.

The three principals operate as a team and network continuously. There are no formal mechanisms for other strategic managers to meet as a group e.g. as a senior managers’ forum, or for operational managers to meet as a generic group, though frequent networking takes place through the cross-service groups described above, and through zone meetings. Much development work is collaborative in nature. Staff readily and necessarily consult peers within zones and across the service.

Arrangements are in place for the induction of new management appointments to the service, or internal promotions, at all levels, and for all new staff. When individuals take on new tasks or duties, training needs are considered at the outset, a training plan is drawn up, and a mentor allocated. There is a probationary period of six months. Line managers provide support where necessary, for example by working alongside a new manager on specific aspects of the role. A wide range of CPD, both internal and external, is offered and accessed. Staff development records show that managers actively engage in training and development. These needs are considered and built in to all development plans. Service and zone in-house CPD priorities are agreed annually, as are priorities/criteria for approving applications for external courses.

The following summary of research findings focuses on interviews with senior managers and focus group responses.

**Findings from senior manager interviews**

There was a high degree of consensus on the part of the senior staff interviewed in relation to most questions. Taken together, their answers present a clear account of the service’s values, culture and strategy. The findings present a picture of a service that is well led, and of the influence on the organisation’s approach to leadership and management of external inspection.

8. Any impression that the research was in any way related to inspection activity was avoided. The approach adopted was essentially appreciative (Cooperrider 2005). The research activity was explicitly designed to provide opportunities for comparison and contrast between perceptions at different structural levels, in a non-formal, ‘appraisal-based’ system that could provide the opportunity to self-appraise against competences, and receive endorsement for these assertions, as a means of building up a portfolio for career progression purposes.

9. Two systems currently operate for identifying the training and development needs of different groups of staff. These are being integrated progressively. This is not a live or contentious issue at senior levels. However, some academic contract operational managers expressed a wish for a more formal, ‘appraisal-based’ system that could provide the opportunity to self-appraise against competences, and receive endorsement for these assertions, as a means of building up a portfolio for career progression purposes.

10. The responses from senior managers contained strong echoes of those given by the former head of service, to whose influence many referred.
Management is more concerned with implementation, ensuring systems are operating properly, tasks are completed, action is taken, goals are realised and objectives achieved. Managers encourage people to perform and give their best, ‘do things right’, operate efficiently and effectively, encourage team-work, get the job done, understand how the organisation operates and keep the systems working.

Leadership is assumed to be necessary at all levels, as an intrinsic aspect of managing teams. Staff are encouraged to understand how what they do impacts on others and to see their roles in relation to the wider context. Everyone in the service is expected to take responsibility. Strategic managers are aware that, as well as providing opportunity, time, space, and encouragement, individuals need help with developing their understanding of the ‘how’ of leadership.

Identification of leadership and management training needs

The primary mechanism for performance review is through two formal systems. All academic staff have an annual professional development review. Officers employed on other terms and conditions participate in the county council’s PDA/Review system, which is competence-based. The common elements include a requirement for reflection and self-assessment prior to a discussion with the line manager opportunity to review performance and any support needs, and the identification of training and development needs. These systems are in the process of being aligned. This is not a live or contentious issue at senior levels. Emergent training and development needs are also identified through line management arrangements. Some consideration has been given to succession planning and talent development. There is, however, no general acknowledgement of the need for succession planning or a visible strategy. Some senior managers perceive a tension between succession planning, ‘growing your own’ leaders and managers through internal development and promotion, and the desire to ensure and promote equality of opportunity.1

The research found a strong encouragement for all staff to access CPD. However, there is no internal management or...
A number of activities were identified by respondents as contributing to the development of leadership. These included:

- participation in cross-college groups and working groups;
- project leadership;
- deputising for principals/senior managers;
- representing the Zone or service externally;
- work shadowing;
- ‘acting up’ in a more senior position on a temporary basis;
- contributing to internal CPD or external training events.

Many references were made to the inspirational and supportive style of a ‘visionary’ former head of service, an approach that combined genuine delegation and discrete monitoring, empowering people, but ensuring they did not get into difficulties. For many interviewees, this way of working, that encouraged individuals to develop their own style within a clear framework of values and a strong culture, had been both influential and exemplary, demonstrating an effective way to develop people’s abilities and confidence.

There was a high degree of support for the explicit values of the service regarding culture and behaviours. Many interviewees referred to internal role models and to the importance of observing leadership in action - ‘Learning through osmosis’.

Several interviewees had experienced at earlier stages in their career leadership and management approaches and practices that they definitely did not want to emulate - ‘seeing how not to do it is important too’. In particular, mention was made of cultures that blamed and de-motivated people. A number of interviewees compared the service’s culture to that experienced in FE and ACL elsewhere. It was felt that a combination of ‘FE rigour’ and ‘ACL compassion’ was a good mix. External development programmes provided helpful opportunities to work with people in similar roles and contexts.

The importance of the organisational culture was emphasised by all interviewees. Leaders were responsible for setting and ‘living’ the culture, managing and monitoring it. The culture encourages openness, initiative, autonomy, responsibility and a supportive approach to development and change. A ‘whole organisation’ view is sought, avoiding ‘silo-thinking’, and ensuring that personal agendas are not pursued in conflict with wider values and interests. Consistency, co-operation and collaboration are valued. The culture ensures that people can work with difference, any issues are addressed, and ways forward are found and developed collaboratively. Individual leaders do not compete and neither do zones, although there is pride in being associated with the zones and with teams as well as with the service. Effective line management as well as leadership and management mechanisms minimise the risk of distinct zone sub-cultures undermining the whole-organisation culture. Structures and mechanisms serve and embody the culture.

zones are at different stages of development. Not all managers are equally comfortable with changing expectations arising from the service’s commitment to continuous improvement. Workload was mentioned as an issue by a significant proportion of strategic leaders. There was a feeling on the part of several interviewees that a residual culture of ‘niceness’ represented a risk. Fears were expressed that impending funding cuts would have a damaging effect.

Most interviewees felt the Common Inspection Framework (CIF) and regular inspection had significantly influenced the service, accelerating organisational and cultural change. Inspection had played to the agenda the service wanted to pursue and endorsed its approach to leadership and management. There had been a “shift from ‘niceness’ to visibly highly professional leadership and management”, and greater clarity about goals and objectives, and the need to measure performance. Quality had been ‘honed’ and a balance created between effectiveness and efficiency. A greater sense of belonging to a ‘service’ as well as to particular institutions and/or zones had developed. Several interviewees felt that inspection had reinforced pride in the service.

Findings from focus groups

During the focus groups operational/middle managers were invited to consider a typology of leadership activities (adapted from Lumby et al 2005 p 26-29.), to identify those they perceived to be enacted by line managers (service strategic managers), and to rate these in terms of importance to themselves, in relation to their own leadership role, and to the service. Secondly they were asked to identify those activities they enacted when leading the teams or individuals they line-managed, and again to rate these for importance to their own subordinates, and to the service.

The findings suggest that middle managers are more likely to be aware of, and perceive as important to themselves and ‘followers’ those leadership activities concerned with motivating, developing and reinforcing the culture and with transformation rather than transactions and contractual considerations.

Aspects of leadership involving data were seen as key for strategic managers and important to the service, but not important to the majority of middle managers or their teams. Data and data analysis may impact less on middle managers’ day-to-day work. Setting clear targets was seen as important to the service by the majority of middle managers, but by a minority of ‘followers’ including themselves. Targets were seen as less important at the delivery level.

12. In his 2003-4 Annual Report the Chief Inspector of the ALI identified a “conspiracy of nice-ness”, as a significant weakness in ACL.
Conclusions

This report has presented a detailed case study of one ACL service’s approach to leadership development. The outcomes of the action research show that leaders at multiple levels have shared understanding of the service’s expectations concerning how leadership is enacted, and ways in which skills and abilities related to leadership are developed. A collective understanding of leadership as a way of being and behaving, derived from and reinforcing a strong organisation culture based on widely understood and endorsed values was in evidence during all the research activities. This culture has been deliberately cultivated and is reinforced through the manner in which leadership is enacted at all levels.

Organisation structures and management arrangements are designed to serve and reflect the values and culture as well as to enable the service’s objectives to be achieved. There is significant investment in staff training and development and the prioritising of CPD reinforces the understanding by leaders at all levels that they are valued. There is an understanding at all levels that learning is most likely to occur as a result of reflection on experience, in an atmosphere which encourages this and where people can be confident that they will not be blamed when mistakes are made or innovations are not fully successful. As Morgan (1997: 340) observed, “we learn through ‘feel’ and lived experience as well as through abstract conceptual processes.”

The service has an explicit intention to develop ‘informed and effective leadership’ throughout the service, including effective and supportive performance management of staff. This commitment appears to encompass both the development of leaders at all levels in terms of their attitudes, skills and abilities and the development of leadership as a collective endeavour and responsibility. In effect, a way of working and behaving. The development of leadership in this sense is more about culture and ethos. Leaders at all levels are well-informed concerning the mission, aims and objectives and values of the service, its policies, strategies and systems. Participants demonstrated understanding of the complexities of the local, regional and national operating environments.

A shared understanding of the service’s expectations concerning the skills and abilities associated with leadership and management was evident among senior managers and echoed by operational managers. There was broad agreement about the approaches to enacting leadership that were sought, when recruiting, promoting or developing staff. Leadership was seen as part of most management roles; an individual activity within a wider framework. Leadership as a collective activity was not directly alluded to but was implicit in many comments about the organisation’s culture and values, and behaviours that were encouraged and enacted. All participants understood the mechanisms for the identification of training and development needs.

A particularly surprising finding was that despite an explicit policy commitment at the organisational level, fewer than half of participating middle managers perceived their line managers to be developing their leadership capacity; few saw themselves as developing the leadership capacity of those they led, and very few considered that developing leadership capacity was important to themselves, to those they led, or to the service. Few reported that they had been ‘coached’ in any formal sense. This suggests that ‘developing leadership capacity’ or ‘coaching’ as distinctive elements of line-managers’ roles to some extent still runs counter to the service’s culture, approach to leadership development and ways of enacting leadership.  

Focus group participants were asked to identify positive aspects of leadership as enacted within the service. The aspects valued in all three groups were: senior managers being accessible; the supportive culture and the service’s strong commitment to CPD. Aspects mentioned in two of the three groups were the ‘no blame’ culture, being listened to; effective communication, that issues raised are responded to, the flexible structural and systems frameworks, and opportunities to be involved in meetings and working groups. Participants could also identify any aspects of how leadership was enacted that they felt could be improved. In two groups it was suggested that in-house training in relation to leadership aspects of operational managers’ roles would be valued.

Middle managers identified from a range of types of internal and external staff development opportunities those to which they had access, and those accessed during the past three years. Awareness of most types of opportunity was high. Only half were aware they could have access to a mentor or participate in work shadowing. A minority saw the opportunity to ‘act up’ in a more senior post as available. Few considered they might undertake a secondment or external placement. All had participated in between 5 and 12 staff development opportunities. Most had participated in cross-service groups, attended in-house training events and an external training event, and had led a project or development. Only a third reported having been coached or mentored; however, this suggests that any mentoring or coaching by line managers had been informal and/or not acknowledged or recognised as such.
Participants frequently referred to the service’s culture and values, confirming that particular aspects of culture reflecting espoused values have been embedded. Findings from the research activities suggest that the culture and values, as espoused and as enacted by strategic and operational managers, foster and support professional and personal development, and in the broadest sense ‘learning’ at all levels, and are conducive to developing ‘leadership’ both as a set of individual practices and as a collective activity. Taken together, the research findings suggest that respondents consider the service to be genuinely committed to leadership development at all levels. The approach to leadership favoured by and practised within the service is essentially transformational rather than contractual, necessary managerialism and pragmatism is tempered by a humanistic and people-centred culture. Leadership is understood to be distributed throughout the service as well as positional.

The organisation does not have an explicit, separate strategy or development plan for leadership development. The approach adopted includes both the development of individuals’ skills and competence and of leadership in a collective sense. The strategy is emergent rather than prescribed. There is a consensus between senior managers that a range of opportunities and experiences support leadership development and that the manner in which senior managers enact leadership fosters the development of leadership among middle managers. The latter were less aware of this, and few perceived the development of leadership capacity as important for themselves or for the service. This may be related to the absence of an explicit service strategy or programme for leadership development in context. Evaluations of CEL sponsored ACL leadership and management development programmes suggest that participants particularly value training in the company of peers that is highly contextualised for ACL. The nature of the Professional Development Review (PDR) process experienced by academic staff, described by some as ‘not appraisal’, may also be relevant here. Operational managers did not readily distinguish between CPD relevant to their various management roles and responsibilities, and CPD relating specifically to the leadership aspects of their roles, or leadership as a collective activity.

Recommendations

There may be value in setting up a cross-service leadership and management development group or forum to facilitate operational managers sharing experiences, ideas and learning relevant to both leader and leadership development. Operational managers currently access and provide mutual support informally, usually by email, phone or, when the opportunity arises, at meetings. The sharing of effective leadership and management practices on a more systematic basis, linked to an explicit programme of development activities, would be congruent with the service’s commitment to self-assessment, self-evaluation and reflective practice. A forum could further support the development of leadership throughout the service and could be integrated with and inform the design and development of an in-house leadership and management development programme.

The service may also wish to consider the benefits of:

- defining terms so that the policy commitment to “the development of informed and effective leadership” is better understood;
- articulating a more explicit service leadership development strategy;
- encouraging individuals and their line managers to reflect on leadership practices and relevant professional development prior to and during PDRs;
- establishing a cross-service leadership development forum;
- creating an in-house leadership and management development programme.

This programme might include training modules, practice elements such as project leadership, work shadowing, action research using action learning sets with support from the line manager or zone CPD manager in a mentoring capacity in order to encourage reflexivity, so maximising learning and development.

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The Preparedness of Middle Managers for Senior Roles in Scotland's College

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Executive Summary

This report details research on the preparedness of middle managers for more senior management positions in Scotland’s FE colleges. Drawing on a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews with senior managers, this project found that significant numbers of middle managers are neither interested in progressing further nor are they prepared for more senior college roles. A significant number of middle managers had also received very little or no professional development in the past year. When senior managers were asked about their promotion, although they felt prepared to embrace a more senior role, a number of them did not consider that they had the required knowledge and skills to perform at that level. They agreed that specific staff development activities and other development opportunities, such as ‘acting up’, managing large teams and wider college exposure, had positively contributed to their preparation for a more senior role and they recommended that middle managers have these and similar opportunities. The report concludes with a number of recommendations designed to improve the professional development, succession planning and talent management of middle managers.

Introduction

Changes in the internal environment of colleges in Scotland, such as an ageing workforce and flatter organisational structures have raised questions about whether Scotland’s colleges will have enough management staff who are able to perform at the right levels to meet the demands of a complex and ever-changing sector. This research aims to examine some elements of succession planning, focusing on middle managers and their path to professional development and in achieving the necessary skills for advancement to senior management. Particular emphasis is given to reviewing the extent to which middle managers in Scotland’s colleges perceive themselves to be prepared for a more senior role.

At present, the development of senior managers is well catered for through the Leadership Programme offered by the Scottish Further Education Unit. However, there is no equivalent for the middle managers in Scotland’s colleges. The main development opportunities they are offered are those provided by their own college, the opportunity to participate in post-graduate management qualifications and the opportunity to attend workshops and events run by SFEU. It is therefore pertinent to ask whether middle managers in Scotland’s colleges have the opportunity to participate in the required leadership and management development that would enable them to perform effectively in a more senior management role, as well as improving their performance in their current roles as middle managers.

While the majority of succession planning has focused on the most senior members of organizations, the general principle of having a pool of individuals who have the relevant competencies to achieve current and future organisational goals can be equally applied further down the organisational ladder and this view of succession planning has gained support in recent years (CEL, 2005). Burgoyne et al (2004) highlighted that leadership and management development can lead to increased leadership and management capability, which in turn enhances performance for economic and social benefit. They further suggested that it may be possible to achieve greater effectiveness from any investment made in leadership and management capability by improving the precision or focus of the activity rather than necessarily increasing the size of the investment, that is ‘the right approaches are used for the right purposes to achieve the right outcomes as they vary according to circumstance’ (Burgoyne et al. p. 3).

To date, no research has been undertaken that examines the management and leadership development of middle managers in Scotland’s colleges. Given the changes to the workforce and the positive impact that management and leadership development can have on individual and organisational performance, there is strong justification for undertaking this research. The three main questions addressed by this research were:

1. In what types of professional development do middle managers in Scotland’s colleges currently participate?
2. What types of professional development do middle managers in Scotland’s colleges think they need?
3. Do middle managers in Scotland’s colleges have the opportunity to participate in professional development that would help them prepare for more senior roles?

Research Framework

Academic middle managers are defined as heads of school, curriculum managers and cross-college managers with a pedagogical responsibility. In the context of their work role they interact with learners, lecturers, support staff and external professional bodies. The incorporation of colleges in 1993, and the resulting market orientation of further education institutions and new systems of funding and accountability, had a major impact on FE middle managers. Leader suggests that ‘further education has become a private sector service governed by public sector policy’ (2004, p.70) and this means that although government is still responsible for directing overall educational policy and strategy, colleges have been expected to take on more responsibility for their own direction and management. As a result of this change in direction, colleges recruited senior and middle managers with specialist business expertise for new market oriented posts, including income generation, enterprise and quality (Harper (2000 cited in Leader 2004). Thus it is important to acknowledge that middle managers
Lumby et al. (2005) found little evidence that middle managers in the learning and skills sector in England are being developed. Makori (2005) acknowledged the significant role of middle managers/leaders in achieving school improvement and effectiveness but questioned whether they receive appropriate support in terms of their professional development as they attempt to achieve this effectiveness. Given the pivotal role of middle managers in colleges, it is reasonable to suggest that they too have a crucial role in bringing about college, improvement and that professional development, including leadership development, is vital to ensure their ongoing effectiveness.

Leibman et al. (1996, p. 22) define succession planning as ‘the deliberate and systematic effort made by an organisation to identify, develop and retain individuals with a range of leadership competencies who are capable of implementing current and future goals.’ In the corporate world succession planning began as a reactive and short-term process through which individuals were identified and developed to fill specific posts. However, it has since evolved into a process that takes a longer-term perspective and is much more proactive in nature. It is now recognised that individuals will not necessarily stay with the organisation throughout their careers and a focus has been placed on developing a pool of people with a range of leadership competencies who can meet the future needs of the organisation.

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) defines talent management as ‘about identifying current and future leadership ability, raising aspirations and creating opportunities for development, challenge, experience, growth and progression so that current and aspiring leaders are able and motivated to be the best value they can be to the sector and maximise their potential and career satisfaction’ (CEL, 2005, p.6). They suggest that by managing talent in this way employers can alleviate many of the difficulties associated with the recruitment and management of leaders, vacancy filling and strategic workforce planning. They further suggest that the real challenge of talent management is investing in the development of leaders without knowing exactly how their leadership talent will be used in the future. However, they emphasise that this does not mean that new skills and knowledge are not used, but that individuals are challenged to use their skills in their current as well as in their next role. ‘Good succession planning and talent management is therefore not just about workforce development but about quality improvement across the board’ (CEL, 2005, p.7).

1. While the educational sector schools have been able to provide evidence of the link between leadership and organisational performance (Ofsted, 2003) and the Scottish Funding Councils argue that the achievement of excellence in leadership and management activities are vital to the health and well-being of colleges and higher education institutions (SFCFHE, 2003).

2. While the direct relationship between leadership and management development and organisational performance remains to be proven in the learning and skills sector, there is general acceptance that leadership is important to educational organisations, including colleges. Lumby et al. (2005) found different types of leadership in operation in the learning and skills sector - for example they found examples of transactional, transformational and distributed leadership styles. Collinson and Collinson (2005) also found that leadership occurs at many different hierarchical levels in a college and is not just the province of the college principal or the senior management team.
Research Methods
This research project conducted an online questionnaire with middle managers in Scotland's colleges and in-depth interviews with senior managers in Scotland's colleges. The survey questions included information on the following areas:

- Individual participant’s characteristics, qualifications and college role,
- Characteristics of their college (e.g. size, location),
- Details about recent personal professional development activities,
- Perceived professional development requirements,
- Their future career aspirations, development needs and opportunities.

Before the questionnaire was launched, a pilot test was carried out with a small sample of middle managers. Amendments/modifications were made to improve the clarity of questions and to use more relevant terminology. The online questionnaire was distributed to all middle managers in Scotland’s colleges via Staff Development Officers. The total number of middle managers is estimated to be 400.

The qualitative component of the research involved six in-depth interviews with senior managers from colleges in Scotland. To develop a balanced sample, senior managers were selected to ensure coverage from: 1) large, medium and small colleges and 2) both areas of curriculum and support responsibilities. The interview itself was planned as less structured to allow the senior managers to fully describe their experiences and thoughts about: 1) how prepared they were for their senior management role, 2) what activities or experiences helped them to be prepared for the higher position, 3) how could current middle managers prepare for a role as a senior manager, and 4) whether adequate resources and experiences are available for middle managers to prepare for the transition to senior manager. The senior managers who were interviewed during this research represented both the curriculum and support areas within a college (three interviews were carried out with each group) and were from small, medium and large colleges.

The online questionnaire of middle managers in colleges provided a broad base of knowledge of the perceptions of middle managers, with regard to professional development. In-depth interviews with senior managers were the most appropriate method for obtaining the knowledge and experience of senior managers as to what types of career development are available in their colleges and what type of skills and qualifications are necessary to advance from a middle manager to a senior manager.

Research Findings
The respondent profile from the online questionnaire was as follows:

- One hundred and seven middle managers completed the questionnaire, of whom just over half (58%) were female and 42% were male. This represents about a quarter of all middle managers in Scotland's colleges.
- Over three-quarters (78%) are over 40 years old with 37% aged over 50. Only 18% were aged between 31-40 years and 5% were aged 21 - 30 years.
- Ninety-eight per cent of the middle managers were of white ethnic origin.
- About two-thirds of middle managers (64%) held a learning/training/assessment role, 25% were managers of a specialist function and 11% were managers of learning/training support services.
- Forty-five per cent of the middle managers had been in their current post for between 1-5 years, 37% had been in post for more than 6 years and 18% had been in post for less than a year.
- Over a quarter of middle managers (26%) had been in a management role for greater than 11 years, 33% had been in a management role for between 6-10 years and 37% had been in a management role for between 1-5 years. Only 4% had been in a management role for less than one year.
- Fifty-three per cent of middle managers had between 1-10 staff reporting to them, 24% had between 11-50 staff reporting to them and 23% had more than 50 staff reporting to them. Only 4% of middle managers had no staff reporting to them and 2% had more than 50 staff reporting to them.
- About two-thirds of middle managers (65%) did not hold a management qualification.
- Fifty-seven per cent of middle managers held a full professional membership in a professional organisation.
- Over half of the middle managers (53%) were from community colleges, 29% were from city-based colleges and 18% were based in rural colleges.
- Over half of the middle managers (53%) were from colleges that had more than 50,000 Student Units of Measurement (SUMs), 46% were from colleges who had between 20,000-50,000 SUMs and 1% were from colleges with less than 20,000 SUMs.

3. In September 2005 a literature review was undertaken focussing on succession planning and talent management in the college sector; the development of leadership and management capability, and the roles and responsibilities of middle managers. In October 2005 the questionnaire was developed. During this process, it became apparent that asking similar questions to those previously used would allow some opportunity to compare findings of the different studies. Thus, several questions were included from previous research projects of a similar nature. Once the 28 questions were compiled, they were put into the online survey questionnaire software. In November 2005 five participating middle managers piloted the online survey questionnaire. In December 2005 the online survey questionnaire was launched. To improve the completion rate of the survey, a paper questionnaire could be downloaded and completed so it could be sent by either e-mail or by post. By January 2006 the online survey was closed with 107 completed questionnaires received. During February and March 2006 a qualitative analysis of the middle manager questionnaires was completed. Interviews with senior managers were completed and a qualitative analysis of the senior managers interviews was completed and the final report prepared.

4. Only one college felt unable to participate, explaining that their staff had recently been asked to complete a number of questionnaires and they thought it was too soon to ask them to take part in another survey.

5. One student unit of measurement (SUM) equates to 40 hours of learning, equivalent to one assessment credit.
Professional development undertaken by middle managers

Over half of middle managers had received six or fewer days of professional development over the last 12 months. 21% had between 7 and 10 days of professional development and only 24% had 11 or more days (Figure 1). When asked about the number of days of professional development for leadership and management skills, 42% of middle managers had none, 35% had only 1 - 3 days and 14% had 4 - 6 days. This left only 9% having more than 10 days of leadership and management training in the year (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Number of days of professional development undertaken by middle managers in last year

The percentages of middle managers participating in the three most common types of professional development were: ‘one-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) in your own organisation’ (87%), ‘one-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) away from your organisation’ (75%) and ‘learning from experience’ (51%) (Figure 2 overleaf). What is also evident is that middle managers have had fairly limited experience of other types of professional development. For example, only 12% of middle managers had participated in mentoring, only 5% had experienced a secondment/placement with other organisations and only 4% had participated in job shadowing in the last year. This finding is further confirmed when reviewing responses to the question on perceived effectiveness of different types of professional development in improving leadership and management performance.
Only 35% of middle managers currently hold a management qualification and when asked how important is it that they obtain another management qualification in the future, 25% thought it was not at all important, while 22% rated it very important. Qualifications are seen as a bonus, with middle managers stating, "It's more important that you can do the job and be credible in your job and I think qualifications are just a bonus, really."

When middle managers were asked which were the most effective types of professional development in improving leadership and management performance, their highest responses were 'learning through experience' (34% of respondents rated this as very effective), 'a sabbatical period of at least three months' (27% of respondents rated this as very effective) and 'going on short courses' (22% of respondents rated this as very effective) (Table 2). Comparatively, only 9% of respondents rated 'one-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) in your organisation' as very effective and only 14% of respondents rated 'one-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) away from your organisation' as very effective. This suggests that, while one-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) in your own organisation or away from your organisation are the most frequently undertaken type of professional development activity, they are not necessarily perceived as the most effective. Those types of professional development rated as least effective include 'job shadowing' (13% rated this as very ineffective) and 'working with paper-based training materials at your own pace' (12% rated this as very ineffective).

Table 1: Participation in different types of professional development activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of professional development activity</th>
<th>Participated in professional development</th>
<th>None development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sabbatical period of at least three months (n=62)</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job shadowing (n=68)</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondments/placements with other organisations (n=68)</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance-learning over a network (n=68)</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with paper-based training materials at your own pace (including self-study packs) (n=71)</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term, part-time courses (n=67)</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring (n=61)</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with computer-based training materials at your own pace (n=74)</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned project work (n=76)</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going on short courses (2-5 days) (n=76)</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visits/exchanges (n=82)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) away from your organisation (n=97)</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from experience (n=92)</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) in your own organisation (n=101)</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Perceived effectiveness of different types of professional development undertaken by middle managers (based on those who have participated in the type of development)
When middle managers were asked about the importance of different activities in their current job, the three top responses were: ‘building and maintaining productive working relationships’, ‘managing quality in the delivery of services’ and ‘maintaining and developing team and individual performance’ (Table 3). Middle managers identified their main development needs to be in the areas of ‘maintaining and developing team and individual performance’, ‘managing finance’ and ‘leading and managing change and continuous improvement’ (Table 3). Overall, middle managers rated the importance of these activities in their current job (average mean score for importance in current job is 1.58) more highly than their need for development (average mean score for development need is 2.48).

Table 3: Importance of different activities by middle managers in their current role and their development needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Importance in current job</th>
<th>Development need</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building and maintaining productive working relationships</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>2.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing quality in the delivery of services</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>2.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining and developing team and individual performance</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading and managing change and continuous improvement</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>2.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing and developing self and own performance</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing and sustaining services for learners</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing human resources to support the provision of services</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning to achieve the vision</td>
<td>1.61</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning resource requirements</td>
<td>1.68</td>
<td>2.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a vision</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>2.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing finance</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing physical resources</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Key: 1= high importance/very high need, 5=low importance/very low need)
Middle managers were asked about their development needs in a number of leadership activities. Table four highlights the key areas for development for middle managers as ‘implementing clear accountability procedures’ and ‘setting clear targets for performance.’ The overall rating of need for this question (mean score = 2.63) is very similar to the average mean score on the question related to general management activities (mean score = 2.63).

Table 4: Need for development in leadership activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership activity</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementing clear accountability procedures</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting clear targets for performance</td>
<td>2.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage all members of staff to take initiatives</td>
<td>2.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modelling best practice</td>
<td>2.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing goal consensus</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking the tough decisions</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to make decisions</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating a strong vision of the organisation needs to go</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing leadership capacity throughout the organisation</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the skills and knowledge of staff</td>
<td>2.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building strong relationships with staff</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building democratic decision-making structures</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving all staff in decision-making</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing material incentives to motivate staff</td>
<td>3.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Key: 1= very high need, 5= very low need)

When senior managers were asked about whether middle managers had the necessary leadership and management skills for their current role, there was a mixed response. It was generally felt that there were some with the necessary skills and others who had gaps in their skills. Many senior managers felt that middle managers could benefit from leadership and management development training where gaps were observed. When questioned about how to ensure that middle managers have the necessary skills for their role as a middle manager, the majority felt that college led staff development programmes and annual staff reviews were the main tools available. However, all noted that there were a range of training opportunities available within the college (some mandatory) or out with the college. Senior managers felt strongly that the use of a professional development plan and an annual staff review were the best way to identify development needs and provide opportunities.

Senior managers were asked what knowledge and skills were key to the role of a senior manager in a college. A common thread in their responses was that the skills thought to be key to this role were people management, staff development and team working. One of the senior managers noted the following items: effective communications skills, good negotiating skills, problem solving, listening, familiarity with budget and financial matters, and being able to demonstrate leadership skills and fostering/motivating a team. Other managers focused on the need for supporting, encouraging and managing staff in areas such as career development. Others commented on having a good knowledge of their current function, knowledge about the sector and the curriculum. Some senior managers focused on the need to be strategically aware and see beyond the operational aspects of the college. This included the need to understand the wider issues and being able to interpret and implement sector policies.

Opportunities for professional development?

All the middle managers were asked how interested they were in a senior management role; over one third (35%) were very interested and one-fifth (20%) were interested. Almost one-quarter (23%) were very uninterested in a senior management role. Middle managers were asked about their preparedness for a senior management role and only 11% stated that they were very prepared and another 30% felt prepared. When asked why they felt prepared or unprepared for a senior role, 27% explained they were not interested in a senior management position regardless of whether they were prepared. There were, however, 30% of the respondents to this question who felt they were prepared (and for some well prepared) for a senior management role. Statements by the remaining 41% of middle managers noted their feeling of being unprepared for a senior management role. When asked to evaluate the significance of six different potential constraints on their ability to develop as a college manager and leader, middle managers stated clearly that ‘lack of time for development activities’ was substantially above the next two ‘lack of rewards for achievement’ and ‘lack of resources.’
Conclusions

This research suggests that there are opportunities to improve the preparedness of middle managers for senior roles in Scotland’s colleges. Just over half (55%) of the middle managers surveyed were interested in a senior management role in colleges and 41% of middle managers felt prepared for a senior role. This indicates that there are significant numbers of college staff that are neither interested in progressing further nor are they prepared for a more senior role in colleges. The lack of interest in pursuing a more senior management role by middle managers limits the pool from which senior staff can be selected and is an issue that should be addressed by Scotland’s colleges.

Senior managers suggested that staff development provides one way of preparing middle managers for a senior role in colleges. However, over half of the middle managers (51%) received less than 7 days ... in the last year. It was also evident that those perceived as most effective were not the most common types undertaken.

When asked whether adequate resources were available to middle managers to prepare them for a senior position, most mentioned inadequate financial resources (from the college) and a lack of time (from the point of view of the individual middle manager). The finance issue did not appear to be a major constraint if the development need is apparent. Time for middle managers to prepare for a senior position appears to lie with the individual and he/she has to make the commitment of time without much in the way of college assistance during the college day. On the issue of adequate development opportunities, most senior managers mentioned that various opportunities (outside of training sessions) were also available to the middle managers, although the middle managers might have to initiate the development of the opportunity. As to the constraints for middle managers in developing the skills for a senior management position, half of the senior managers noted the lack of time to participate in development opportunities.

Senior managers were asked how middle managers might be better prepared for a senior role. Key comments were: they must be competent in their current middle manager job, they should seek out existing opportunities, they should shadow senior managers to understand the role of a senior manager, and should access appropriate staff development and training programmes. Senior managers also mentioned the importance of the staff development programme and annual staff development interviews, having strong role models and mentors at senior level and having an appropriate selection process for advancing middle managers.

When asked to select the arrangement(s) for leadership and management development, which best described conditions in their college, over half of the respondents (51%) selected ‘the college responds to individuals on an ad hoc basis’.
Although, 41% did select ‘the college plans leadership and management development and proactively suggests activities to me’. Approximately 30% of the respondents agreed with each of the following statements ‘the college responds to the individuals within a clear and explicit plan’ and ‘Individuals have to make their own leadership and management development opportunities’.

Five out of the six senior managers commented that their college provided some type of management development programme and/or CPD for middle managers. For many an annual staff development review was the place to identify development needs for the middle manager and the prelude to negotiation and scheduling of development activities for the next year. When asked how the college currently prepared middle managers for the transition to a more senior role, senior managers responded that there were development opportunities available, such as; training in a variety of areas, college based management courses (mandatory), opportunities to act up, or to participate in senior level management groups. However, this development activity did not take place as part of succession planning or talent management within the college.

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These findings are largely compatible with those from research in English FE colleges. The results of the online questionnaire and the studies of Lumby et al (2005) and Frearson (2002) were compared and a number of similarities were identified. Lumby et al (2005) reported a similar pattern in the types of professional development that were most commonly undertaken (learning from experience, one-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) in your own organisation, one-day seminar(s) or workshop(s) away from your organisation) and a similar discrepancy in the types of professional development undertaken and their perceived effectiveness. Lumby et al (2005) and Frearson (2002) also rated similar activities and leadership activities important, as was found in the online study with middle managers in Scotland’s colleges. Frearson (2002) recognised time as the most important constraint to the undertaking of professional development and the lack of a comprehensive planned approach to professional development by colleges was identified.
middle managers have these and similar opportunities. Resources generally were not seen as a major barrier to preventing middle managers from participating in staff development, although time constraints were perceived as a major restriction on the ability of middle managers to take advantage of staff development opportunities by both middle and senior managers. This makes it vital that the professional development undertaken is appropriate to the needs of the individual and the organisation. Middle managers also felt constrained by the lack of rewards for achievement and the lack of resources. While some middle managers experienced a planned process to staff development, others were not so fortunate and there is scope to improve this process. Although colleges implemented staff development review systems, this did not necessarily mean that there was a planned process of succession planning or talent management that would enable middle managers to progress to more senior roles.

Recommendations

Burgoyne et al. (2004) argued that to achieve greater effectiveness from leadership and management activities it is more important to improve the precision or focus of that activity rather than increasing the amount of investment. This would suggest that careful consideration should be given to the amount of professional development that middle managers receive and the type of professional development activity that is offered. Consideration should also be given to the role of development activities that lead to a qualification in management, as there was a mixed response to this issue by both senior and middle managers. It is also important to investigate whether teaching and support staff have the same developmental requirements.

The following additional recommendations can be made. Firstly, staff development is vital for middle managers to maintain performance in their current role and to enable them to progress to more senior roles in Scotland's colleges. As middle managers have a pivotal role in colleges, it is vital that they are sufficiently developed so that the organisation can achieve its strategic aims and provide a quality service. It is also vital that middle managers are developed so that colleges have a pool of individuals from which senior staff can be selected. Secondly, to facilitate the move from middle to senior managers, it is suggested that a more planned process is adopted by all colleges that builds on existing staff development review systems and leadership development programmes.

Thirdly, the current lack of interest by middle managers in more senior roles could be alleviated by the development of a programme that facilitates and manages the transition process from middle to senior manager. This may involve a greater use of some professional development activities like job shadowing and mentoring. Fourthly, when time is identified as a major constraint to the development of middle managers, colleges need to be creative in developing staff development programmes that overcome this obstacle. There does not appear to be a magic solution here, but efforts should be made to overcome (or ease) this constraint or this cadre of middle managers will be unable to advance as a college manager and leader, or to maintain the essential skills to perform well as a middle manager.

Finally, further research should also be undertaken to ensure that the professional development needs of middle managers are fully understood and provided for. Research should be undertaken to help determine the types of professional development, including those that lead to management qualifications, that will be most appropriate and how much time needs to be given to the development process to achieve particular outcomes. As middle managers are such a heterogeneous group, research is also required to investigate whether different groups of middle managers have different professional development requirements.

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Succession Planning for Middle Managers: Exploring the Factors Affecting the Recruitment of Teachers to Middle Management Posts

PHILIP BARKER, CITY OF BRISTOL COLLEGE

Executive Summary

This project compared the perceptions of the role of middle management held by teaching staff and their managers in a large college of further education. It used a questionnaire survey to identify the time that middle managers spent on different activities. Semi-structured interviews were then used to explore the perceptions of middle management held by teachers and the experiences of their immediate managers. Whilst the perceptions and experiences of the two groups were found to be similar in terms of the overall issues, the importance of these issues to each group varied. Teachers placed greater importance on the role of middle management in the support of their staff and being seen to be ‘fair’, and the potential tensions created by having to meet the demands of their staff and their own managers. Middle managers emphasised the importance of performing management functions as part of the college’s business cycle and of contributing to the strategic direction of their faculty. The report concludes with a number of recommendations regarding succession planning.

Introduction

This research project aimed to explore teachers’ and middle managers’ perceptions of the role of middle management in one of the largest colleges of further education in England. The college, in the south west of England, had almost 35,830 enrolments (of which 15% were full-time) and 85% of the students were over 19 years or over. There were nine principal sites situated around the city including the suburbs and city centre. The College offered a very wide range of courses, from pre-entry level to further education. There were 14 faculties, providing education and training to a comprehensive range of industrial and commercial sectors including: art, media and design, business, construction, engineering, food, leisure and travel, and hair and beauty therapy.

During the past eight years the college had seen considerable change and expansion. A series of three mergers with other local colleges had resulted in increased numbers of students and staff; the identification of new sites and upgrading of existing sites causing considerable disruption to both staff and students; and an expansion to the senior management team. In the past four years all but one of the senior managers in the college had changed. These developments had all impacted on the organisation’s structure, job and promotion prospects for staff. A more hierarchical management structure had emerged, and a move away from what had been a very flat and lean organisation in terms of the number and levels of managers.


Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following people and organisations: the senior managers in Scotland’s colleges who generously gave their time to take part in the in-depth interviews, the middle managers in Scotland’s colleges who completed the survey questionnaire, CEL for funding the research and Marian McMorland and The SFEU staff for supporting the research activities.
This inevitably increased the demand for middle managers. A further significant effect of the mergers was that there was little movement of staff into the college. Prior to the mergers, staff had moved between smaller colleges, but now these staff all worked for the same college. Moving between colleges became less attractive to individuals particularly because of the increased travel and disruption to their lifestyle.

The merger of the organisations in particular, together with the diversity of programmes and services they offered, had resulted in differences between the responsibilities of staff and the rewards they received. Staff could be doing very similar jobs for very different levels of reward and vice versa. Alongside these changes, the demographic trend of middle managers in the college suggested that many would reach retirement age in the next few years. At the same time, some faculties received very few applications for middle management positions when they arose. In one instance, there had been only one external application for a middle management post (and this proved unsuitable). A potential crisis in the recruitment of middle managers was anticipated. It was in this context that the project was designed to inform what actions might be taken to address this issue.

The report addresses issues that are pertinent to the college concerned, but which may have relevance to other colleges. It contributes towards our understanding of staff perceptions of the role of middle management in the further education sector, why people apply for middle management posts, the experience of middle management, as well as understanding aspects of the culture of the sector. The project attempted to address the following questions:

*How can we develop a robust leadership and management development strategy for teachers and middle managers in colleges?*

*How do teaching staff in the college view the roles of their managers? What attracts teachers in the college to become managers, such as programme co-ordinators, team-leader or head of school?*

*Are middle managers’ expectations of their role and responsibilities prior to their appointment being met? Are there differences between these expectations and their actual experiences?*

*How can this information be used to encourage and support teaching staff to become effective middle managers?*

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**Research Framework**

Within the context of education research, the field of middle management in further education appears particularly under-researched. An internet search for articles containing ‘middle managers’ and ‘further education’ produced only 34 titles, of which only one was relevant to this project (Briggs, 2005a). Other titles focused on gender issues in management, total quality management, and on middle management in higher education (HE). Where education research addresses issues of middle management, it does so in the context of schools (mainly secondary) and HE. Whilst there are undoubtedly some overlaps in issues of management in these different contexts, there are significant differences between the further education sector and schools and HE. These differences include, for example, the frequent emphasis on vocational education and training and associated links to different industrial and commercial sectors; and differences in culture between FE and HE, such as the emphasis on peer review and ‘originator’ in universities as opposed to the inspection culture and ‘interpreter of curricula’ in further education (Simmons 2004).

The role of middle managers in further education is demanding and complex. There is a seemingly infinite number of variables which may affect what middle managers do and their success in fulfilling their role. The work of Briggs (2005a) describes the roles of middle managers in further education (Corporate agent, Implementer Staff manager Liaiser, Leader) and shows the range of functions they fulfil. CEL (2005) has attempted to map elements of best practice in curriculum leadership and included a set of ten core areas of work. Leader’s (2004) attempt to define the strategic role of middle managers in further education underlines the significance of the role not just as providing the interface between senior managers and teachers, but also as potentially instrumental in determining the strategy itself. This is determined according to the middle manager’s effectiveness as a leader.

Briggs (2005b) also explores the complex relationship between leadership and ‘ethos’ in sixth form colleges and its impact on middle managers. Culture and values within the organisation have also been seen as impacting on the efficacy of middle management roles. Busher and Harris (1999) point to the impact that school culture may have on individual leadership styles. In a different sector, Feldman identifies the problems that professional values may present to middle managers in the mental health sector. These issues underline the complexity of understanding the role of middle management in further education, as the culture and values of this context are impacted upon by the numerous other cultures and associated values with which the organisation works. Thus the culture and values of a construction faculty are determined not just by those of the further education sector, but also by those of the construction sector, and similarly with, for example, hairdressing, catering, or transport. Hence middle managers may do different tasks and have different styles within a college that reflect their different contexts. And they may all be effective in senior management terms.
Research Methods

The research project focused on the issue of succession planning within a college. The study was undertaken by one researcher and a project plan was developed to timescales, with the work being conducted over a six month period (September to March). The project uses a small-scale questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews to explore the perceptions of the role of middle management held by teachers and middle managers in a large further education college.

In order to ensure the relevance of the research to the organisation, senior managers in the organisation were consulted on the aims and research questions of the project and approval was sought from Heads of Faculty (HoFs) to approach their staff to conduct the interviews. Ethical considerations were paramount. All participants took part voluntarily. Staff were invited by email to participate in the project interviews. A second invitation was sent to non-respondents, after which no further contact was made. Confidentiality was assured and maintained and no data would be traceable to any individual member of staff. This was agreed with (in fact, requested by) all senior managers during the initial consultation phase.

The methods used in the project were designed to integrate with staff work patterns and incur as little disruption to everyday work as possible. The project used a questionnaire survey of all 14 HoFs to gain their perceptions of how their staff that were paid as managers spent their time. This was linked to other internal work which was already underway within the college. The survey was conducted within a short timeframe and represented their perceptions, rather than being based on hard data that HoFs might have held on file. The findings presented in this paper provide a college level view, but it is worth noting that there were differences between faculties.

The survey was followed by confidential one to one interviews with 10 teachers and 7 middle managers on two different faculties in the college. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and an hour. The faculties were identified by senior managers of the college, as they were deemed to be those where issues around succession planning were particularly relevant. Middle managers were over-represented in the interviews as within the two faculties there were only eight middle managers, compared with 32 teachers and many more part-timers. The interviews with teachers and middle managers were conducted using a semi-structured interview schedule. This allowed the interviewee to cover the same issues with each interviewee, but also allowed flexibility to explore issues that the interviewee felt were important. All interviews were voluntary and confidential.

Research Findings

The survey

The survey of HoFs’ views on how 68 managers in the faculties spent their time was conducted across all 14 faculties in the college. It revealed wide differences in how managers spent their time. Of the middle managers, 39% spent no time teaching. However, 25% spent between 25-30% of their time teaching, and 3% spent 40% of their time teaching. Closer inspection of this data showed that such variations existed within the two faculties chosen to conduct the staff interviews. Although HoFs estimated time spent by middle managers teaching did not rise above 13% (four spent 10% of their time teaching, one 13%, and two spent 0%), there were wide variations particularly on the management of teaching (25% to 0%), the use of data (25% to 5%) and finance (from 33% to 2%). Whilst this can be seen to reflect the responsibilities of individual staff through their job titles, it does confirm the lack of uniformity of activities undertaken by middle managers, both across the college and within faculties.

The interviews

The interviews concentrated on exploring experiences of managing (for the middle managers) and of being managed (for the teachers). The HoFs’ survey had shown clearly there is no blueprint in the college...
Furthermore, this go-between role extended beyond matters internal to the organisation. Four teachers saw the role as significant in implementing government policy. In this sense, middle managers are seen as agents of national strategy. They may find themselves having to implement policies with which they may not agree. Teachers stated that middle managers responsible for curriculum areas liaise and work with awarding and accrediting bodies. When qualifications and their associated standards or syllabus change, middle managers are responsible for implementing these changes and ensuring that the programmes meet the requirements of these accrediting organisations. Some middle managers were also seen as responsible for marketing programmes and contracting and liaising with employers (who are buying training). They are the link between clients and the providers of the training. One teacher commented, ‘If things go wrong, they are the fall guy’.

The authority role
Teachers stated that middle managers had authority over them and the support staff. They had kudos and status in the faculty. In this sense they could make demands and requirements of the teachers. They were responsible for ensuring that the work got done. Closely linked to this issue and mentioned by half the teachers was the expectation that middle managers are responsible for allocating work, and being fair. ‘They have to expose any skivers’, said one. This was seen as something that was unpleasant to do, although it needed to be done. Another aspect of this role, to which teachers referred, was the autonomy held by middle managers. They could take decisions without referring to their own managers. This was seen as a positive aspect to the role, as it meant you could “get things done and make a difference”. However, it came with responsibilities.

The management role
In addition to these roles, teachers saw middle managers as having many responsibilities for the general management of programmes. This included keeping data about, for example, success, retention, achievement, attendance, ensuring that cover was provided for staff who were sick, organising timetables and rooms, conducting reviews and appraisals, monitoring development plans, contributing to the organisation’s annual planning cycle, as well as troubleshooting and fire-fighting if things were not going to plan.

The leadership role
Without exception, teachers thought that middle managers should be effective leaders. However, there was a range of qualities used to describe what constituted effective leadership, which included:

**Personal qualities**
- A good listener
- Has confidence
- Always there for staff, supportive
- Consistent and fair
- Being seen not to be “easy”
- Able to take difficult decisions
- Lead by example: “You do need to be a good teacher”
- Honest
- Have vision and direction
- Inspiring
- Cope with pressure
- Prepared to work long hours
- Juggle everything
- Understands what’s going on in the faculty/team

**Expert knowledge**
- Know what teachers have to do
- Keeps up to date with programmes, syllabuses, national developments
- Understands what’s going on in the faculty/team

Would you like to be a middle manager?
All except two of the teachers interviewed said they would not like to be a middle manager. They would all miss the teaching and the contact with students. Some had taken a conscious decision not to apply for middle management posts. This was because they thought it would disrupt their lifestyle and personal circumstances (for example, they had young children and wanted to give them time). For others, they did not want the responsibility and discomfort of “being in the middle”. One teacher stated that the money was insufficient recompense. The teachers who would consider a middle management role felt they were already in this role.

Would life change if you became a middle manager?
Teachers were asked how they thought they might change as a person, and how their lifestyle might change if they were to become middle managers. As a person, they thought becoming a middle manager would:

**Change the relationship they have with their colleagues.** Six interviewees felt that becoming a middle manager would change the friendly working relationship they had with their colleagues. They valued this relationship and would not want to lose it. This was clearly an important part of their work. It was also clear that their perception of being a middle manager involved, in some way, being separate from the front-line teachers in order to maintain respect from their staff and have authority over them. If things are going to be “fair”, and middle managers are to take hard decisions, then they have to keep apart from the mainstream of staff. In addition, one teacher stated that middle managers have to “keep their cards close to their chest… be less open” in order to retain the respect and confidence of their staff.
A manager responsible for quality improvement in her faculty.
A contracts manager responsible for bringing in new business and setting up and managing contracts.

Middle managers were asked how they became middle managers and what they did. Interestingly more than half of them gained their position during the recent developments in the college and all were internal candidates for their posts. Their work fell into the following roles:

The go-between role
Only two of the curriculum managers referred to having to keep two sides happy, i.e. teachers and senior managers. The other interviewees spoke about enjoying the strategic view that their position gave ... difference both for staff and for students. In this sense, it seemed that they actually enjoyed this aspect of their work.

The authority role
At least four of the middle managers stated that they enjoyed the autonomy and decision-making powers that they held. One interviewee felt that being able to take decisions was what defined a middle manager. In only one instance was this referred to in terms of controlling staff, or “getting them to do things”. The same person stated that when you became a middle manager, “you crossed to the other side”.

The management role
With one exception, all referred to managing a team of staff, although the size of their teams varied from 10 to around 25-30 (including part-timers). One of the four managers responsible for a curriculum area ... and fill in forms. In doing this, they often referred to the pressure of work “there’s just so much to get through.”

Those middle managers who did not manage a curriculum area spoke about activities which were very specific to their role. For example, the contracts manager was concerned with getting in new work, costing work, and setting up and monitoring contracts. She stated that essential to her role was her authority and autonomy to take decisions about what could be done. The operations manager saw herself as a team leader and motivator. She was concerned with monitoring work, setting rules and anticipating problems. The manager responsible for quality improvement spoke about the importance of knowing the college well, and how it worked. Apart from trouble-shooting, she also saw herself as supporting and mentoring staff.

What are the benefits and downsides to being a middle manager?
The teachers were asked what they thought were the benefits and downsides to being a middle manager in the college. The following table shows their views:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Downsides</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You get to see the bigger picture</td>
<td>being caught in the middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You get respect, acknowledgement and status</td>
<td>what is going on (X4) (x4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You really can make a difference</td>
<td>you get all the flack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are an ambassador for your faculty and the college</td>
<td>you can’t please everyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are in control and have autonomy (x2)</td>
<td>it’s more responsibility and work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you can mould things as you and your team want</td>
<td>you’re not in touch with students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it’s a chance to test things out and then move on to bigger things</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do middle managers say they do?
There were differences between what middle managers were required to do, and this was reflected in their different job titles. Broadly, the middle managers interviewed fell into one of the following groups:

- Managers of a curriculum area. They manage a number of programme co-ordinators (x4).
- An operations manager, who manages a team of administrators.
- A manager responsible for quality improvement in her faculty.
- A contracts manager responsible for bringing in new business and setting up and managing contracts.

Middle managers were asked how they became middle managers and what they did. Interestingly more than half of them gained their position during the recent developments in the college and all were internal candidates for their posts. Their work fell into the following roles:

The go-between role
Only two of the curriculum managers referred to having to keep two sides happy, i.e. teachers and senior managers. The other interviewees spoke about enjoying the strategic view that their position gave them, and the opportunity to make a difference both for staff and for students. In this sense, it seemed that they actually enjoyed this aspect of their work.

The authority role
At least four of the middle managers stated that they enjoyed the autonomy and decision-making powers that they held. One interviewee felt that being able to take decisions was what defined a middle manager. In only one instance was this referred to in terms of controlling staff, or “getting them to do things”. The same person stated that when you became a middle manager, “you crossed to the other side”.

The management role
With one exception, all referred to managing a team of staff, although the size of their teams varied from 10 to around 25-30 (including part-timers). One of the four managers responsible for a curriculum area referred to their being the “oil that keeps things ticking over”. Others saw their role as more “hard-edged” and referred to the need to meet targets, work to deadlines, manage data, generate income and take difficult decisions. Another curriculum manager referred to managing an annual cycle of work, “like lesson observations, business planning, producing programme reviews and the faculty’s self assessment report.” These curriculum managers also referred to the need to write reports, and fill in forms. In doing this, they often referred to the pressure of work “there’s just so much to get through.”

Those middle managers who did not manage a curriculum area spoke about activities which were very specific to their role. For example, the contracts manager was concerned with getting in new work, costing work, and setting up and monitoring contracts. She stated that essential to her role was her authority and autonomy to take decisions about what could be done. The operations manager saw herself as a team leader and motivator. She was concerned with monitoring work, setting rules and anticipating problems. The manager responsible for quality improvement spoke about the importance of knowing the college well, and how it worked. Apart from trouble-shooting, she also saw herself as supporting and mentoring staff.
Conclusions

The juxtaposition of these perceptions suggests that the issues teachers consider significant in the role of middle management do in fact reflect the experiences and perceptions of middle managers. However, the priorities that each group gives to the issues are different.

The go-between role.

Teachers identified this as an aspect of the middle manager's role that they would dislike. However, it was barely referred to by the middle managers and certainly was not something they found unpleasant. ... of their work, particularly in terms of informing and implementing strategies. They enjoyed having the “bigger picture.”

The authority role.

Middle managers recognised that they had authority and this was manifested in their power to take decisions about work and budgets (which teachers did not have). Although only one referred to controlling ... and who they could go to for advice. Both groups recognised the importance of the strategic role in middle management.

The management role.

There are few misperceptions amongst teachers about what middle managers do, although one teacher did suggest that middle managers have more regular hours, an issue not borne out in the middle management interviews. Although teachers experienced in their own position. It seems that both groupsexperience this, but for slightly different reasons.

The leadership role.

Although there were many similarities between the two groups in terms of their descriptions of leadership, teachers placed greater emphasis on the need for leaders to be supportive of their work and to be someone they could turn to for support and advice. This was not reflected in the middle managers’ descriptions of their own role, although two did refer (unsolicitedly) to their requiring this of their own manager. The requirement that middle managers should be “fair” and seek out skivers was not referred to by middle managers. It may be that this is a reflection of the ethos and culture of the teachers’ interviews.

Losing contact with students.

This was one of the principal reasons that teachers gave for not becoming a middle manager. Interestingly, this was confirmed by Fletcher-Campbell (2003) when exploring the perceptions of middle management in schools. Although some of the middle managers retained a small amount of teaching, none of them identified it as something they missed.
Recommendations

Given these differences in perceptions between the two groups, it is worth considering the implications for succession planning for middle management. Firstly, it seems that middle managers enjoy the impact that their work has. Although they may not be working directly with students (something the teachers valued), they do feel they can make a difference for both students and staff. This aspect of their role could be given more prominence in advertising and awareness-raising of the work of middle managers. Middle management posts might be structured to provide opportunities for teaching.

Secondly, both teachers and middle managers feel they work long hours. This was the expectation and experience of both groups. Increased flexibility in working hours should be encouraged. This would certainly be needed if part-time teachers were to be encouraged to become middle managers.

Thirdly, although this has been a very small-scale study, some of the responses from both groups may be the result of the ethos and culture that pervades the two faculties. This might reflect the management styles of past managers and of the commercial or industrial contexts that the faculties serve. Whilst this is an issue that has remained largely unexplored in this project, further research could inform the impact of pervading cultures. Fourthly, the issue of rewards for middle managers should not go unnoticed. Although this was referred to by only two teachers, it could be that applications for middle management posts remain low because applicants can earn more in other parts of the local economy.

Given the limited scale of this project, work is needed to extend the research to other faculties and to other colleges. The findings should also be integrated with other projects and initiatives within the college. The impact of ethos on the work of individuals also requires further exploration and its impact, in particular, on succession planning. If this affects the perceptions of individual teachers and results in an inaccurate or inappropriate perception of the role of middle management, then it may well affect their willingness to apply for middle management positions.
Executive Summary

This report explores the equality and diversity practices used by managers within a further education college in inner London. A pilot programme was created which incorporated the development of leadership skills and equality strategies for curriculum and support managers. Five participants on the programme agreed to participate to track the effectiveness of the project in supporting their management development. All of the managers identified an awareness of the needs of staff with disabilities. They cited examples of flexible working to incorporate staff needs, such as adapting timetables, allowing prayer time, working with flex-time and communicating closely with nursery staff (in order to work with the requirements of staff with childcare responsibilities and religious requirements). The importance of being approachable so that staff could come to a leader with their individual needs was emphasised. Getting to know staff a little better was identified by managers as valuable in helping to reduce the stress of individuals and enabling staff relationships to be more effective. The pilot programme was found by managers to be effective in supporting them in working with individuals, with their teams and in examining their role as leaders.

Introduction

This research project addresses the equality and diversity dimension of managing change within inner city further education colleges. It was designed to enable the college to identify its current good practice and to draw on the expertise of management development trainers, researchers in further and higher education and equality and diversity consultants to devise an institutional management development programme which meets the needs of education managers. Since its inception, the college where this research took place has invested consistently in leadership training and development of its senior and middle managers. A strategy to develop lower level and prospective managers was agreed by the senior management team and governors in 1998, and in 1999, the college set out to champion equality and diversity practices within all of its functions. In 2000, the college implemented a human resources strategy to recruit a staffing profile representative of the local communities and the student body.

The ever-changing policy contexts of FE, the need for legal compliance and the regional changes affecting London makes it difficult for colleges to consolidate effective diversity practice, for managers to develop reflective practice and for the sharing of good practice to inform management development. This research project
reviewed equality and diversity practices used by managers and also utilised its membership of the Network for Black Managers, Black Leadership Initiative and Staff Development London Network. In addition, diversity and equalities specialists were consulted to identify management strategies. Information from the consultations was used to design a pilot programme which incorporated the development of leadership skills and equality strategies for curriculum and support managers at the college. Using an action research approach, five participants on the programme agreed to participate in the project and kept diaries, took part in interviews and undertook peer mentoring. These were utilised to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme and to inform the development of a bespoke programme. A college-wide seminar was held and a summer conference was organised to disseminate the project and incorporate ideas from a larger group of staff across the College.

Research Framework

A number of writers have examined leadership models and styles in education, describing a range of models from instructional, situational to participative leadership (Leithwood et al. 1999, Wildy and Louden, 2000). It has been argued that further education generally makes use of, and values, managerial or instructional leadership (Sawbridge, 2000). However, recent research across the learning and skills sector shows that the transformational style of leading is considered to be the most effective choice for leading in a diverse environment (Lumby et al., 2002). In practice, it is argued that there is no one approach being used in leadership among successful providers, but rather a mix of transactional, transformational and distributed approaches is used. Horstfall (2001) has argued that colleges need to develop standards for leadership practices, focusing more on empowering models that recognise the personal attributes required by leaders.

In terms of leadership development, Lumby (1997) notes that a minority of studies show that more is being spent on developing leaders in colleges in the UK than ever before and that much of this money goes to developing senior management teams, rather than first line managers. Lumby, 1997). Approaches to developing managers’ skills in FE are slowly changing. The most popular means are the use of short courses and accredited, competence-based development. Other less popular means of developing managers include coaching and mentoring, secondment, networking, academic study, and research. There are indications that a limited number of college managers and schools make use of coaching, with some uncertainty or initial scepticism, but with surprisingly positive results (CEL, 2008).

There have been fewer studies that focus on the relationship between leadership and diversity. While some research points to issues faced by black practitioners in FE (see below) there are virtually no studies focusing on leadership and class, religious or sexual orientation in FE. There are some non-educational studies demonstrating how diverse leadership teams often outperform non-diverse teams. One study on nursing suggests that ethnically diverse teams do experience misunderstanding and conflict (Drechselin et al., 2000). This research suggests that leadership, which validates different realities and alternative perspectives, is a powerful mitigating factor in dissolving these tensions. Overall, however, there is little research that addresses the advantages of teams and/leadership teams that are diverse in terms of class, ethnicity, religion, gender disability or sexuality in FE.²

A few studies have shown that black professionals, aspiring leaders and black leaders are struggling in FE, where they are faced with a range of institutionally racist practices (CBS, 2002). BME leaders and other professional staff document that they are subject to a variety of judgements. These are broadly identified as, ‘representative’ (of the ethnic or religious group they come from), non-universal, e.g. non-white and therefore not representing ‘reality’ as it is defined by their white peers and the organisations in question. Black staff also report being feared by white colleagues when they work in predominantly white institutions. In this setting, black professionals are often unable to assert, celebrate or affirm their cultural or religious identities (CBS 2002).

There is some evidence in relation to FE to suggest that, for many black professionals, career development is described as a cul de sac. Within FE highly influential culturally based systems requiring ‘normalised’behaviours (e.g. in relation to communication styles, values, dress etc) can result in working class and black staff being denied entry to a range of resources, positions or opportunities because they do not fit into these ‘normalised’ values or behaviours (Lumby 2005 et al). A study by Klic (2002) argued that staff development programmes for black staff have only aimed to ‘raise the self esteem’ of black staff rather than focus on developing the organisation itself. These programmes have put the responsibility for change firmly on the individual, implying that if only a person of colour could build their self-esteem and deal with their ‘lack’ they would be able to withstand or even change the racism around them. These training programmes, it is argued, have ignored the need for organisational, administrative or policy and practice changes in relationship to leadership and discrimination.

1. A major contributing factor here is limited time and limited money, which means that these approaches are viewed as the most effective and efficient. More research needs to be done on this issue.

2. A recent study by LSRC (2002) indicates that within the UK educational sector as whole, most leaders feel that diversity is an issue they ought to know about, should be able to define and take action on. However there was still a minority of leaders who did not believe it should be a priority.
The pilot leadership programme was developed in the autumn term of 2005 and managers began the first day of the pilot programme on 18th November. A diary format was developed and each manager recorded their reflections on managing diversity. A summary of the activities is in the box below:

1. Literature review.
2. Consultation with Network for Black Managers, Black Leadership Initiative, London Continuing Professional Development, Professor Ian McNay (University of Greenwich), College networks/specialists to establish the range of research on leadership, management development, managing diversity and reflective practice for leaders/ managers.
3. Develop in-house leadership programme.
4. Select case study sample from group of teaching and support staff, male and female, black and white staff attended new, in-house leadership programme. Permission was sought from 5 individuals to participate in the case study.
5. Participants attended leadership programme.
6. A case study approach, using interviews, one-to-one and focus groups with sample.
7. Case study participants used diaries to record their practice in between training programme dates.
8. Elements of action research formed part of the approach so that, in the evaluation of the leadership programme, the outcomes were used to develop a bespoke programme for the College. The evaluation ... networks e.g. National Black Managers, Black Leadership Initiative, other FE colleges, Staff Development London Network.
9. Five case study participants were identified. Follow-up interviews with five case study sample.

The research explored theories and models of leadership and diversity in the further education sector and examined the following questions:

* Are there specific leadership skills needed for a diverse workforce in the learning and skills sector?
* What are the equality and diversity practices which support the development of teachers and support workers into confident leaders?
* In developing reflective managers and leaders, how do we integrate and measure the performance of successful diversity strategies?

There have been a number of research projects on women’s experiences as leaders in education internationally (Astin at al, 1991) and also within the UK including a variety of documented experiences about the barriers that female leaders generally face in terms of career progression in organisations (Kaye, 2000 and Egginns, 1997). It is noted that in all sectors of education, men are more likely than women to achieve promotion to senior posts. Egginns also draws on literature that argues for a best practice model which tackles organisational, attitudinal and work/family barriers. Egginns recommends that this needs to be part of the mainstream, embedded practice, rather than a peripheral marginal activity. Questions about which leadership characteristics women leaders possess is a frequent area of debate. Research is contradictory with some studies indicating that women function with more collaborative approaches embracing negotiation and influencing as key tools, while others suggest that male and female managers who hold equivalent positions do not differ in personality, leadership style, motivation or effectiveness.

The lack of research in FE is well recorded. There is also a dearth of research and literature on equality and diversity management development within FE. This project set out to address these deficiencies and to establish a bespoke management development programme that would build managers’ capacities to manage diversity.

Research Methods
The research project team consisted of the LPD manager, a Senior Lecturer/Teaching and Learning Mentor, a LPD (Leadership and Professional Development) officer, the LPD coordinator, the Teacher Training Co-ordinator, and the Director of Lifelong Learning. The team considered ethical and organisational issues and resolutions and at each stage of the research considered the planning and the evaluation of research activities. The senior practitioners designed and delivered the leadership programme, one senior practitioner and the senior continuing professional development designed the focus group interview questions. The interviews were all conducted and transcribed by one senior practitioner to ensure consistency. The review of literature and methodology was carried out by two senior practitioners and the director of lifelong learning. The continuing professional development coordinator, one senior practitioner and the director of lifelong learning attended network meetings and consulted with ‘experts’ to influence the design of the leadership programme and to receive feedback on the development of the research. The senior practitioners met weekly and the research team met monthly. Eight managers contributed to the focus groups. Five managers agreed to participate in the case studies. They were selected from across curriculum and support service areas of the college.3

3 However, only four managers completed the diaries.
A mainly qualitative approach was used in this project because the research is based on social interaction. Usher (1996) claims that the qualitative approach to research fails to provide understanding of ‘meaning’ within ‘social interactions’ and that: ‘We need to understand the meanings that construct and are constructed by interactive human behaviour. Human action is given meaning by qualitative schemes or frameworks’ (Usher 1996:18-19). Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research that leads to ‘deep understanding’ and requires the researcher to have an understanding of the context with subjects. Phenomenologists often use interviews as the main method for collecting data and work with transcripts. They give priority to the voice of the subjects. Phenomenological research does not aim to generalise findings or to connect to sets of constructs or covering laws. The aim is to interpret data rather than to gain firm facts (ibid). This requires multiple readings to become familiar with the data in order to search for ‘regularities and essences’ (ibid: 14). The researcher may need to contact interviewees on more than one occasion to gain this familiarity and empathy. Characteristics associated with phenomenology were used within this research: focus group interviews and participants’ diaries were the main research method used for collecting data. Interview schedules used a combination of open and closed questions to structure the interview.

An action research approach was adopted because the project was intended to improve individuals’ and college’s practice. McNiff (2002) states that action research is appropriate for workers to explore how well they are performing within contexts where they are attempting to live their values more fully in practice. Action research is a cyclical process that enables change and understanding to occur at the same time (Denscombe 1998).

The case study approach was chosen because the research was based on ‘cases’ (five managers in a further education institution). Yin (1994) describes the case study as naturally occurring. It is not artificially created for the purpose of the research but pre-exists the research and continues to exist after the research is completed.

The case study uses a mixture of methods: personal observation (which for some periods or events may develop into participation); the use of informants for current and historical data; straightforward observations of the everyday world, and study of relevant documents and records from local and central government, travellers etc (Cosley and Lury’s 1987: 65). ‘The case study approach was selected because it is ‘ideally suited to the needs and resources of the small-scale researcher. It allows even endorses, a focus on just one example, or perhaps two or three’ (Blacker et al 1996: 66).

Denscombe (1998) argues that the defining characteristic of the case study is its focus on individual instances rather than on a wide spectrum. The aim, he suggests, is to illuminate the general by looking at the particular. The case study also provides the opportunity to carry out in-depth research which can bring valuable insights into areas that other methods such as surveys could not make apparent (ibid).

Research Findings

All the managers indicated an awareness of the needs of staff with disability and additional health needs. Leaders had purchased equipment such as magnifying equipment for staff with visual sight problems and ‘I think the needs of staff with additional care needs is well met when timetabling’ and, “Being flexible and taking into account child care commitments of staff members.”

Managers emphasised the importance of working sensitively in relation to perceptions of staff with religious needs, ensuring that other team members (who had viewed prayer time as extra break time) had a ‘better understanding of their own world and the life of a religion’ in order to have more of an understanding of when staff were ‘a little bit distracted’ or ‘stressed.’

4. Gadamer (1975) argues that there is more to truth than the scientific method and that the natural sciences do not provide the only method of rationality. He states that the researcher is not separated from the historical and cultural context that is interpreted and forms the research. Gadamer maintains that knowledge within the social sciences cannot be objective and asserts that understanding is approached from an individual’s situation, their description in history, society and culture. Arguing that researchers should recognize and use their own preconceptions as the starting point for acquiring knowledge, he suggests that this makes the researcher more open-minded and in the process of interpretation and understanding, preconceptions are placed at risk, tested and modified.

5. Rather than coding the data, the researcher repeatedly and carefully reads the transcripts. By being cautious in making inferences from the transcripts, the researcher ‘reaches the “life-world” of the informant, capturing the “essence” of an account – what is constant in a person’s life across its manifold variations. This approach does not lead to covering laws, but rather to “practical understanding” of meanings and actions’ (Miles and Huberman 1994: 6).

6. McNiff provides an additional list of criteria to be considered when researching the quality of the change or improvement that is claimed to have been brought about by action research: does the research show that they live in terms of what they believe? Is the research accountable for the knowledge claims made? Does the researcher show how they have changed in their thinking and practice and how this has influenced others? This research adopted McNiff’s approach to action research and it also used the support of others such as ‘experts’ in the field of diversity and leadership, continuing professional development and the college’s diversity development research group to act as critical friends in scrutinising the robustness of the research approach and any claims made.

7. Stake (1995:8) suggests that ‘the real business of case study is its particularisation’. Stake (ibid) explains that in each case study there are sets of interrelationships which both hold together and shape the data but also relate to factors that are outside of the cases. Case studies can therefore enable the familiar to be seen anew which is as Atkinson and Delamont (1998) state, the benefits of a case study approach is in its capacity to build on existing theory by the comparative analysis of data from different cases.

8. Managers did not mention sexuality or ‘race’ and gender was only mentioned once, with one manager stating that he tried to ensure there was a balance in terms of gender in his teams.
Working in a diverse college: general challenges

The managers identified many challenges and ‘conflicts’ they faced in working at the college. These were conflicts between providing quality ‘putting the learner first’ and funding constraints; conflicts with providing a quality service and not having the funding for adequate or specialist administration staff and, for two leaders, conflicts between being managers and being teachers. Some of these issues have an impact on managing time effectively and are all causes of worry and sometimes stress for the managers.

The most common challenge mentioned by most managers (some of whom were line managers) was the conflict between providing a quality service for the learner and the constraints of funding, leading to what one person described as an, ‘inevitable compromise.’ As this theme expanded, a lack of clarity about the combination of a managing/teaching role emerged, and the difficulties of managing the enormity of these roles, ‘What are we?’ one person asked, and another noted, ‘Managing my own workload is difficult with the amount of teaching we are expected to do.’ One leader described this situation as ‘a false economy’ in which the college was not getting value for money from its staff, ‘We need SMT to realise that the SL role is more of a managerial role than a teaching role and that a well managed curriculum area ensures more income for the college than the money it saves by getting us to teach more.’

Funding constraints were also a key theme noted in relation to administration. When discussing this, managers spoke in ‘them/us’ language, which separated them from other staff (perhaps more senior managers) in the college. They suggested that, ‘the college’ was unwilling to acknowledge the value of more specialist administration staff who had specific and much required ICT software skills and leadership skills. The impact for managers was again the ‘false economy’ of managers spending valuable time (and therefore college money) carrying out time consuming administration activities. There was a sense in which some managers felt unsupported by, ‘the college’ although others were keen to say they felt supported and had been helped in practical ways, for example by the college’s mentoring system. Finally there was an underlying theme of some managers feeling undervalued and that their work was unseen and unrecognised.

Managers discussed the need to remain updated with developments, ‘taking place both outside and inside college’, to be able to adapt to change and the ability to support other staff with responding to change. As a result of the latter challenge, some managers observed that leading within the college required influencing and motivational skills. It was noted that this was being addressed to some degree by the current leadership programme but that more support in terms of training would be valuable.

Two of the managers cited that team dynamics had been a challenge for them in terms of ‘getting the right people to work together’ and trying to improve working relationships. One perception was that many teams in the college were not pulling together. The communication side of team work was frequently mentioned, with managers indicating they had worked consciously to improve their listening skills. This was often discussed in terms of successes and challenges and despite sometimes having feelings of ‘not getting anywhere’, participants were able to cite incidents of changing team dynamics, improved relationships and inclusion.

Has the leadership course been useful?

All the managers noted that the programme had enabled them to reflect on their leadership styles and abilities, for example, ‘The time spent reflecting on and discussing ideas and views on leadership has certainly made me more aware of myself as a leader and the kind of leader I am’ and ‘It has been a good opportunity to reflect on... leadership in general and myself, and how I behave, how I go about things.’ One new manager noted ‘I am more confident that I’m doing the right things’ as a result of meeting peers on the course and seeing their work.

Managers also commented on how the course had enabled them to improve a range of skills such as better negotiating skills, improved communication and consideration of choices. One manager said, ‘To focus a little bit more before I engage in my normal style and think, is there another way that might be more effective to approach this issue? Two individuals felt it was too early to say what the practical impact would be, but added that they were aware that they now have more resources to draw upon for the future.

In terms of a wider impact on teams and the college, several participants cited specific experiences of teambuilding successes as a result of information gathered and skills learnt from the course. In one case, the team dynamic involved an incredible amount of conflict and distrust which was transformed by the openness of the manager and their willingness to listen,

“My boss was out of the office, so the team decided to ‘ambush’ me! They literally criticised both myself and my boss, and didn’t hold back on that front at all (in the past) I would have interrupted them and told them how hard we were working and that we didn’t feel supported by them. This would probably have resulted in even lower morale! What I was able to do because of the training: I stopped, breathed, listened, thought, then acted. I let them speak and because I really listened I was able to pick up on a couple of issues that were really deep down at the heart of their unhappiness. They mentioned that they didn’t feel we worked as a team. I was able to turn this into a positive - saying ‘I’m so glad you feel that way, that’s how we’ve been feeling’ etc. We then agreed action points - which was to ensure we go into each others’ offices everyday to catch up on what we’re doing - and more formally - to have fortnightly brainstorming sessions where everyone brings an idea to the table and we all work together. Immediately members of the team started volunteering to help me with my workload and wanted to get involved with everything. Two weeks on, I never have to ask for anything to be done - as they still volunteer. So thank you!”

In addition, individuals were able to cite experiences where their improved leadership skills had enabled teams to reach agreement over difficult issues and where close-working relationships had been improved by better communication. Several participants described that the course had led them to feel more “empowered” in terms of improved motivation; feeling emotionally and mentally stronger and more confident. One participant noted that he now tended to take a lead more in areas where, before the course, he had held back. The managers suggested that the
This research project has highlighted areas for the further development of leadership skills within the FE sector. Planning for the next leadership programme will incorporate the findings of this research in order to build on the positive aspects and to raise the profile of managing diversity in an inner city FE college within the programme.

Recommendations

- Future research to devise instruments that are more explicit in examining the range of diversity issues.
- A year long research project to implement and test changes to the management development programme and their impact.
- Collaborating with another FE institution to explore the management of diversity.

References


Leaders of the Future - Integrating Diversity within the Learning and Skills Sector

VIKI HOLTON AND COLIN BERTIE, ASHRIDGE BUSINESS SCHOOL

Executive Summary

This report outlines a small research study designed to explore the career development of black and minority ethnic (BME) staff in the learning and skills sector. The research examines the careers of successful individuals from race and ethnic minority backgrounds. Using qualitative research methods, this study found that lack of support, lack of inclusion, lack of career help and a tough work environment negatively impact on the careers of those interviewed. The support that individuals either receive or do not receive is just as critical as the difficulties caused by a tough work environment, the lack of career structure and career development. The research found a certain ambivalence from respondents about what is perceived to be ‘special treatment’, such as subsidised places on training programmes and the work of the Black Leadership Initiative. There is a feeling by some of those interviewed that they do not wish to be singled out in this way. The report concludes with various recommendations about recruitment and selection, organisational culture and career development.

Introduction

Currently few black leaders exist across the learning and skills sector. One report states that there are only seven black principals (1.8%) among the 386 Further Education Colleges in England (Whittaker 2005). It is important therefore to understand the barriers for those BME staff among the 600,000 or so staff working in the sector. Although there are general problems with regard to recruitment, retention and career development, these are issues that often prove more acute for BME staff. Not only are there current difficulties in recruiting leaders but, as noted by Hollingsworth and Hodgson (2005), there is every chance this problem will increase because of the high proportion of current leaders who are likely to retire over the next five to 10 years. The sector is beginning to understand the need to invest time and resources in training and career development, as shown by the launch of CEL in 2003.

The Foster report (2005) highlighted the need for more initiatives to help improve the diversity of the workforce. The evidence also indicates that BME staff find it more difficult than their white colleagues and that in some cases racism (either intentional or unintentional) may be a root cause of some problems. It is also evident that senior managers in some colleges mistakenly believe that developing and publishing a diversity policy is all that is required to improve the careers of BME staff. Other issues identified in our study are also relevant to staff generally. An example is the need to make staff feel valued, a point highlighted in Sir Bernard O’Connor’s report published towards the end of 2005.


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Managers who participated in the Leadership Programme and in the case studies cannot be named for reasons of confidentiality. Thanks to Rajinder Mann, Earl Laird, Peter Stone, Chief Omilade John, Professor Ian McNay, Chris Nursey, Ian Ashman and Chrissie Farley.
Our research explored career development issues and asked three specific questions:

*What factors support the career development and progression of those from race and ethnic minority backgrounds?*

*What are examples of existing best practice in the sector?*

*What factors hinder the career development and progression of this group?*

**Research Framework**

A number of individual and organisational related factors can impact on the careers of black and ethnic minority individuals. One aspect is isolationism - as noted in the 'Challenging Racism' report by the Black Staff Commission (2002) - only eight per cent of institutions provide support or development groups for black staff. Anecdotal evidence highlights the difficulty of gaining recognition, a point made by Stella Mbuabeghu, one of the few black women to be appointed as a college principal, when talking about the situation for ethnic minority staff (Midgley, 2004). This is supported by evidence from CEL’s Management Index which surveyed 165 individuals (Tumbull 2003). A key finding was the problem of gaining respect and recognition. Only 24 per cent of ethnic minority staff believed their pay and rewards matched the effort they give to their job. In contrast, just over half of the survey group generally believe this to be true. Ethnic minority staff in the Ashridge/CEL survey were also more likely to highlight barriers to their progress. The majority (70 %) believe that they face barriers that stop them progressing to top leadership roles whilst fewer (50 %) of the total survey group believe this to be the case.

Holmes and Robinson (1999) describe an atmosphere (for black managers in general) of absence and silence. Liff and Dale (1994) in their work in local authorities also highlight problems created by working in a culture with white, male work norms. This issue is also well documented in research studies about women managers (Marshall, 1990). Similar findings from Creepan et al (2003), again in local authorities, are more negatively expressed as it describes a culture of institutional racism. A slightly different perspective in America is taken by Civer and Livers (2002) who describe implicit rather than explicit barriers. In their study of the experiences of black managers they highlight how people may feel alienated, a feeling that is often created by a series of seemingly trivial incidents.

Factors which help individuals, or act as coping strategies, are personal networks, finding key supporters early on in their career, the chance to gain key skills, to work on key projects and to gain a breadth of experience. All of these issues were noted by Hammond and Holtton (1992) in a study of career development of women in the IT sector. Roosevelt Thomas' work in America (1991) describes the need for inclusion rather than exclusion and the importance of valuing diversity. Whilst both these studies took place in the early 1990s and concern corporate groups, we believe the issues are still relevant for the mid 2000s and for BME staff in the learning and skills sector. It is also relevant to note the increasing awareness in recent years of the importance of inclusion. This is reflected in the fact that organisations such as printing giant RR Donnelley, Dell (Woodard 2003), Shell and Tesco look at ways to create a workplace culture that provides opportunities and a supportive environment to include, rather than exclude, staff from diverse backgrounds. These companies have successfully increased the representation of minority staff at all levels and won awards for their efforts.

**Research Methods**

The researchers identified a group of five individuals at senior levels who had the potential or were already the next generation of leaders in the FE sector. We were also interested to identify those with key knowledge about BME issues. We felt that it was important to capitalise on experiences in supporting BME staff and to assist with this we interviewed three knowledgeable individuals including a founder member of British Telecom's network for BME staff. This network has existed for over a decade and we felt that this experience would add value to our study. The rest of the sample group consisted of 10 more junior managers in the learning and skills sector. The two groups selected were identified in a variety of ways including announcements in relevant newsletters/websites; through existing Ashridge CEL contacts, those who attended Ashridge CEL’s Personal Leadership Journey programmes and respondents to the CEL Management Index, as well as those involved with CEL’s Black Leadership Initiative.

The 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted during November and December, 2005. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face but the majority were telephone interviews. In common with many research interventions we recognised that individuals with busy jobs may feel reluctant to give access for an interview. However, with the exception of a few refusals this was not an issue for our study. We guaranteed confidentiality to all those who participated and for this reason we have not included a list of names, job titles or organisations where they work. All quotes used are therefore non-attributable.

In most cases interviewees received a copy of the questions prior to the interview. The objective of this approach was to ensure:

- the interviewees had the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and career to date prior to the interview;
- the questions were clearly stated and so the schedule was easy to follow for those interviews which were conducted by telephone.

The interviews were taped and transcribed into notes or captured by written notes. The qualitative material from the interviews used in this report was content analysed to establish key factors and critical incidents that both helped and hindered individuals' career progression.
Research Findings

The list below summarises the themes highlighted by individuals about what has both helped and (in italics) hindered their career progress. These themes can be divided into four distinct areas, namely support, work environment, career structure and joint responsibility/inclusion.

What Helps (Examples of what Hinders are in bold)

**Support**
- Training identified - blocked from attending
- Provision of Mentoring/Coaching/Support/Shadowing and Secondment opportunities
- Ongoing recognition
- Help given to gain key knowledge
- Given support and challenge at crucial times

**Work Environment**
- Line manager offering autonomy
- Racism
- Macho management style
- BME individuals rarely feel included

**Career Structure**
- Take opportunities as they come along, as there is not a ‘rigid’ career plan
- Feedback on skills
- Working in roles that are specialist/marginalised and therefore rarely lead to senior progression
- Job/role considered "too valuable" and Individual blocked from moving on
- Little/no career advice or career counselling
- Huge gaps between jobs

**Joint Responsibility/Inclusion**
- Not 'either or' but both the individual and the organisation involved in identifying career opportunities as they emerge
- Individual’s attitude is one of being open to nudges/pushes/kicks up the backside from others to go in a new direction
- Feedback both formal and informal from colleagues, manager
- Willing to move ‘across’ before moving up: Consider ‘mastery’ at a level before moving up
- Work to develop self-belief, self-awareness, persistence, passion, personal drive, assertiveness and self-confidence
- Not ‘wearing’ ethnicity as a ‘badge’, aim for advancement based on performance and merit

Each area is briefly examined in the following sections.

Support

All those we interviewed talked about the importance of support, highlighting, in particular, the two areas of personal support and support for learning and development. Firstly, they referred to personal support from others, whether they be peers, line managers, mentors or coaches, (or even family) in the form of recognition, confidence building, encouragement, challenge and appropriate questioning.

"Line managers, colleagues and ‘head hunters’ (i.e. senior people in other parts of the organisation, on the look-out for talent)... people I have kept in touch with over the years and have given me wise and timely advice."

"Career development aided by an overwhelming number of supportive principals and managers, some of whom were prepared at the key times to give me a ‘kick up the backside’ and push me towards applying for a different role."

Secondly, support for learning and development in the form of appropriate training, secondments, shadowing and ensuring that key knowledge is passed on to the individual.

"The sector is full of Jeremias who feel that because they got to where they have without any training ‘why should you get training opportunities?’"

"Learn from others all the time."

"Relevant, current, ongoing training and development aided my career development and progression."

Work Environment

To what extent does the work environment help or hinder productive performance and advancement? It seems that where the boundaries of responsibilities, job roles and expectations are clear, then allowing the individual the autonomy to make their own contribution aids career progression.

"Autonomy in the things I have done allowed me to develop my projects in my own way. Main thing: I was given an opportunity to develop a project ‘from scratch’ by my immediate line manager. Once we had jointly set goals, I was given a lot of autonomy proposing a number of ideas to spend the budget. I ran my ideas past the boss and his reaction was ‘get on with it’, I have discovered that looking back, key components of my career have always included autonomy."

In relation to racism:
- A general point made concerned the fact that BME individuals rarely feel included and that the onus was on them to ‘fit in’ with others. The specific question of racism was highlighted and more than one person said “racism does exist in our sector” and this manifested itself in different ways, as illustrated below:

<table>
<thead>
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</table>

3. Many of the qualities outlined below presented themselves in positive and negative forms in the interviews. For example, “access to training helped me” and “lack of access to training hindered me.”

4. It is important to emphasise that these examples were given by individuals to illustrate what they meant by racism, rather than random comments that we decided to classify as racism.
"Although there was lots of good project work, it was marginalised. Out of all the opportunities within the organisation, only a few were open to me as a black worker."

"I had not experienced discrimination with regard to jobs, but think that 'black men find it more difficult'... I think this is about the negative perception of 'black men'. Some employers expect or anticipate problems... From my own experience, those black men in organisations I have worked in have said to me that they find it difficult... The negative perception does seem to extend to both their self-perception and the perception of others towards them. Self-perception in that the black man comes to a new role expecting he will experience difficulties. Perception in others in that employers, peers, etc., sometimes have a negative expectation of what is likely to happen."

"I worked on a project that was successful, income was coming to an end and I was faced with a 'fait accompli' of a £x cut in salary, and told that I could either 'take it or leave it'. I took things further as I was dissatisfied and eventually my salary cut was restored and it was agreed to backdate it. I felt that certain people wanted to force me out."

A number of interviewees said they look for advancement based on merit, and "don't wear ethnicity as a badge".

"Didn't choose the Black and Minority Ethnic route, but stuck with the 'main stream'... Wanted to be 'elevated' based on merit around my performance and achievement, to 'let (my) achievements talk for themselves.'"

"Being black doesn't define me completely."

Career Structure
Receiving feedback on skills for the present role, and exploring the additional skills set needed for the next role were seen as important for career development. It was recognised that some roles that are specialist or marginalised, may not lead directly to a senior role. This, along with the huge gap that is perceived to be present between some roles, may require a 'bridging' or intermediate role. Making use of the 'career ladder' metaphor it was suggested that this may be around the idea of maximising one's skills and experience at a 'rung level' before looking to move up a rung. The perception is that, as careers advice does not seem to be generally available within the sector, individuals need to actively go out and find such advice.

"They gave both formal (appraisal and personal review) and informal feedback."

"There are huge gaps between next jobs and little/no effort at helping acquire this knowledge."

"Progression for some people need not be vertical, but there can be a 'broadening of experience'... I am ambitious to 'master' each level as I progress."

"I had limited career expectations. With regard to the 'career ladder' metaphor, maybe there is more development that could occur at different rungs of the ladder."

"There was little effort to help me in my first management role and this seems to be standard across the sector. There seems to be a 'sink or swim' approach to your first job, your first management role, etc."

"I was less likely in the early part of my career to ask others or to consult. It was 'me alone.'"

This situation is aggravated by some problems with the existing infrastructure, such as lack of career advice available to individuals and the huge gaps that exist between some jobs. These examples seem to illustrate what might be described as a 'DIY (Do it Yourself) career structure'.

Joint Responsibility/Inclusion
With generally no fixed, well mapped out career plan, it was seen as necessary (but not sufficient) that both the employee entering the organisation and the organisation itself take mutual responsibility for the career advancement of the individual. This theme seems to be more important when compared with the other three themes. To have the 'right attitude' with such joint responsibility seems to have helped the individual respondents to progress their careers, even when the conditions under the other three headings have been less than ideal. The perception was that the individual needs to have an attitude that:

- Actively seeks opportunities for advancement and career advice, even when the organisation is not so good at offering such opportunities and advice, "I had to personally identify most of the opportunities myself."
- Open to maximise the opportunities as they emerge, "Take advantage of opportunities as they emerge... Didn't always have a career plan, just emerged in response to opportunities."
- Regularly seeking and being open to all-round appropriate feedback, whether it be formal or informal, "Got feedback which boosted my confidence. See myself as approachable and open to informal feedback."
- Considers gaining 'mastery' at one 'rung level' before moving up the 'career ladder' to the next level, "I was willing to 'step down' in status or grade to move across, before coming back and 'moving up.'"
- Aims to continuously develop their self-belief, self-confidence, persistence, passion and personal drive to 'succeed', "Adopted a 'Why not?' attitude which boosted my self-confidence and self-esteem."

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Conclusions and Recommendations

These research findings indicate what has hindered and helped individuals. We found that lack of support, lack of career help and a tough work environment negatively impact on the careers of those interviewed. Bearing in mind that this is a small sample group it can only be regarded as a pilot study, and therefore our conclusions may be questioned. However, we consider that our findings are sound and offer the conclusion that all the four areas identified in figure 1 reinforce existing knowledge about the issues which face BME staff.

Figure 1: Key Findings

- **Lack of Support**
  - Not given support and challenge at crucial times
  - Little help given to gain key knowledge
  - Lack of mentoring coaching/support
  - Lack of recognition

- **(Tough) Work Environment**
  - BME individuals rarely feel included
  - (Tough) Work Environment
  - Line manager did not give autonomy
  - Racism

- **DIY Career Structure**
  - Little/no feedback on skills
  - Had to step down to move across
  - Huge gaps between jobs

- **Joint Responsibility/Inclusion**
  - Willingness to seek feedback
  - Actively seeks career opportunities
  - Aims to develop self-belief/confidence
  - Maximise opportunities
  - The aim to lead to senior progression

There is a certain ambivalence about what is perceived to be “special treatment”, such as subsidised places on training programmes and the work of the Black Leadership Initiative. There is a feeling by some of those we interviewed that they do not wish to be singled out in this way and that people may not sign up for initiatives targeted at BME staff. One way of resolving this would be to create initiatives that are also available to all staff. CEL could make a major contribution by offering a career counselling service - a telephone helpline is one option. Another model is a successful project, hosted at Ashridge during the 1990s, the NHS Women’s Career Development Register which provided coaching and career development advice.

We had hoped to find examples of existing best practice within the sector. However, beyond case studies and anecdotal knowledge there seems little information about employers who are leading the way in terms of creating an inclusive environment for BME staff. Publishing such information could help show other organisations how to create a better, more inclusive environment for BME staff. Other recommendations for CEL and employers in the learning and skills sectors include:

**Recruitment and Selection**
- Provide new BME staff with a mentor and provide support and training for both parties. This may be another BME individual but it could be another more experienced member of staff.

**Organisational Culture**
- Set up opportunities for senior staff to learn about the views of BME staff e.g. lunch events with the Principal or Vice-Principal. (The same approach could be applied for other diversity groups.)
- Ask for feedback as to whether BME staff feel valued by colleagues and by their line manager.
- As well as providing mentoring for new BME staff (see above), this should also be available for key jobs e.g. their first senior role.

**Promotion and Career Development**
- BME staff should have an annual career development discussion - using either the career planner designed for this project or an existing guide within the organisation.
- BME staff who apply unsuccessfully for new appointments or promotion should be given feedback about why they did not succeed.

5. BT’s experience is also of interest. It found that a series of development workshops targeted for BME staff, which included speakers at senior management/CEO level, created major change. People understood more clearly their own skills and felt encouraged to apply for other new roles. It also established networks across the business which helped overcome their feeling of isolation being perhaps the only BME individual in their department.
Acknowledgements

We wish to thank all those individuals who took part in the interviews for this study. We are also grateful to colleagues and those within the learning and skills sector who helped guide our thinking during the early stages of the research.

References


Diversity, Emotional intelligence and Racial Identity

SUE CHAMBERS, CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COLLEGE

Executive Summary
This report outlines an action research project designed to establish a college staff development programme that could enhance staff skills and competencies in their relationships with other staff and learners in an increasingly culturally diverse community. Our starting point was the assertion that a person's emotional intelligence, how they manage their feelings, and how a person positions themselves in terms of their racial identity, will have a fundamental impact on their interaction with others. The project centered on the development of a questionnaire that would assist staff to capture information about their emotional intelligence competences and skills. Key to the development of the questionnaire was the pilot study, which captured both quantitative and qualitative data with 100 staff from an FE college and a sixth form college. The ‘Teachers’ Emotional Literacy (TEL) questionnaire, which measures the emotional literacy of staff based on nine emotional literacy domains, is the result of this research work. This will play an integral part in future staff development programmes.

Introduction
The aim of this research was to enhance the ability of staff and learners to relate to each other and to communicate in an effective and positive way. It sought to create a staff development programme for college staff that would support the development of their skills and competencies to enable them to enhance their relationships with learners in an increasingly culturally diverse community. Our starting point was the assertion that a person’s emotional intelligence, how they manage their feelings, and how a person positions themselves in terms of their racial identity, has a fundamental impact on the way that person interacts with others.

Working with Dr Richard Majors1 and Dr Janet Helms2 the aim was to create a programme with a sound foundation based on research into emotional literacy and racial identity. If an instrument could be developed which would help staff to identify those areas of their emotional intelligence that could be enhanced, this may significantly impact on their ability to forge positive relationships with people of different races and cultures. This work is being developed in partnership with a sixth form college that had also identified challenges faced by staff in their work with learners. The building of positive staff-student relationships is key to the achievement of learners and neither college could identify any staff development programmes that addressed the issue of the emotional intelligence of staff.

In January 2003 the Ofsted Inspection report for this particular FE college referred to its commitment to providing equality of opportunity and the awareness of and respect for cultural diversity. The monitoring of the effectiveness of the college’s equal opportunities policy and the academic performance of students from different ethnic minority backgrounds was described as exemplary. Yet, a key question remained. Why did the achievement of black and minority ethnic (BME) students remain lower than their white counterparts in some areas of college provision? Clearly we needed to continue to find strategies to address this issue which indicated that some learners were being disadvantaged. In the local town 40% of people do not possess a level one qualification. The fact that achievement levels in the college were lower for some BME groups was unacceptable in an increasingly culturally diverse community. There were potentially damaging social, cultural and economic effects for the college and wider community.

Running in parallel was another issue. Teaching staff through their trade union had raised concerns about what they saw as the increasingly difficult behaviour of learners. Outside of the classroom environment the behaviour of learners was reported as being of concern. In particular, staff perceived the behaviour of young women of Asian heritage as being increasingly unacceptable. The challenge was to get to the heart of the relationship between staff and the learner. There are two sides to every relationship and there seemed to be an emphasis on a deficit model that it was the learner who was at fault and problematic. A series of key questions were raised. What impact do staff have on the learner experience? How can we equip staff with the skills they need to enhance the staff/student relationship in an increasingly culturally diverse society? How could programmes be developed that would be at the cutting edge of best practice providing bespoke training for staff based on an individual needs analysis?

Research Framework
Burrell and Morgan (1979: 1) argue that social scientists approach their subject in different ways via explicit or implicit assumptions about the nature of the social world and the way which it might be investigated. They argue that there are four distinct sociological paradigms which define fundamentally different ways of analysing social phenomena. Each one determines the way in which the researcher attempts to investigate and obtain knowledge about the social world and thus has important methodological implications. Involving staff was key to trying to see the world through their eyes and for the research to be practically based to provide evidence which may lead to solutions, not just for the individual, but potentially for the college and wider further education sector.

1 Majors is an educational psychologist who had worked at the City College, Manchester and delivered a ‘Rites of Passage’ project to black Caribbean young men, which had been the subject of a BBC2 documentary. He has written extensively on the education of black children. In addition, an Impact Assessment was commissioned and an external consultancy undertook research work to consider qualitative evidence from both students and staff on the impact of race equality policies on their experience at college.

2 Helms is the Augustus Long Professor in Counselling Psychology and Director of the Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture at Boston College, USA.
On investigating racial identity, we discovered that Helms had developed a racial identity scale: The White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale - Revised (WRIAS) measures how white teachers felt about being white as well as how they feel about people of colour (Helms, 1996). The WRIAS measures six types of white racial identity: Contact, Disintegration, Reintegration, Pseudo-Independence, Immersion - Emersion and Autonomy. The People of Colour Racial Identity Attitude Scale (PRIAS) looked at teachers of colour’s feelings about people of colour as well as the feelings of white people. This measure comprises four scales: conformity, dissonance, immersion/resistance and internalisation.

The pilot study captured both quantitative and qualitative data with 100 staff from the college and the sixth form college. The questionnaire was completed anonymously and forwarded to Helms’ team for analysis. The SPSS research package was used to analyze the data. A college group, chaired by the Principal, has been a real catalyst for change. This group consists of managers and staff from across the college who are interested in taking this work forward. The Diversity and Equality group of the Development Board has considered this work from a strategic standpoint. In addition college governor support was essential. This type of research-based work does not have a natural home in the FE sector and it has taken a real leap of faith by Governors to support this work. Regular progress reports to governors have therefore been an important part of this work.

In November 2004, Helms was the keynote speaker at a conference on racial identity at the college. In her presentation entitled ‘How to have a Race and be a Winner’, Helms talked through the schema or typology which identifies stages in a person’s racial identity. The typology describes schema within each of the two scales: ‘People of Colour Identity Scale’ and the ‘White Identity Scale’ and provides descriptions of a person’s stance in respect of race – their own construction of their race and the positions they take up in respect of people of other races. Clearly an individual’s racial identity is a key facet in shaping a person’s emotional intelligence and the way they form relationships. Over sixty people from the college and local partner organisations attended the event. If there was any doubt about the need for this work, the response from conference delegates showed that this was a real issue, not just for the college but for the local community.

Helms and Dr Guerda Nicholas returned in June 2005 to brief staff on the implementation of the pilot questionnaire. Lecturers from the college and sixth form college answered questions about their relationships and beliefs, as well as how they behaved and preferred students to behave in their classrooms. They also answered questions about their beliefs about race. Racial identity is the term used to describe teachers’ beliefs about race. The TEL consisted of 73 questions divided into 9 scales that are used to measure different aspects of emotional intelligence among teachers. The classroom teaching practices were used to measure teachers’ preferences for structured versus flexible classroom environments. The White Racial Identity Attitudes Scale - Revised (WRIAS) and the People of Colour Racial Attitudes Scale (PRIAS) were also used.

Research Methods

Majors had undertaken research into the emotional literacy of teachers in Scotland and this was used to inform the Teachers’ Emotional Literacy Scale (TELS) which measures different types of skills that teachers use to form relationships with students. The term emotional literacy is used to refer to the different types of attitudes and skills that teachers use. Majors had identified nine domains that illustrate the competences required by staff to forge effective and meaningful relationships with learners. The domains are as follows: Self Esteem, Confidence, Enthusiasm, Forgiveness, Power, Social Justice, Youth Culture, Tipping Moment/Relationships, College Ethos.

3 Focusing on leadership and management, Goleman’s work does not provide a way of taking forward the ideas and theories into other settings outside of the leadership and management context. Nor is it a racialised theory. It does not take into account the impact of a person’s racial identity on their emotional intelligence, skills and abilities.

4 A key question was whether we could facilitate a way of integrating the two elements of this work to develop a questionnaire that combined the TELS questionnaire with the WRIAS/PRIAS rational identity scales. The outcomes would serve to provide staff with an individual profile that could produce information about their emotional intelligence and racial identity and a college profile that would enable the issues facing the two institutions to be identified.
Teachers who were able to forgive their students or to build relationships with their students seemed to be unaware of racial issues and they did not withdraw into their communities of colour.

The style of 55% of teachers is described as ‘Standard’ (on this criteria). These teachers did not appear to feel strongly about anything related to their teaching. Within this teaching style, white unmotivated teachers may be disconnected because they do not understand the racial tensions in colleges and classrooms.

The responses for the two colleges were also analysed separately and classified into eight different teaching styles. For the FE College, the profile indicated that 16% were social energetic, characterised by ‘excitement and enthusiasm’. 5% of respondents had a ‘self-reflective’ teaching style. These teachers seem to be dissatisfied with their role and are not very involved with their students.

Conclusions

Informed by a sound research basis, we have developed a questionnaire that may help to determine the emotional intelligence of FE staff. The questionnaire is the property of the colleges and we need to complete the emotional intelligence questionnaires in April 2006 (see appendix 1). The TELS questionnaire is an integral part of the programme.

The review and evaluation of the first pilot module will be an important part of the programme.
The results from the pilot survey suggest that it was possible to develop a measure to evaluate teachers’ emotional literacy using the nine domains of effective teaching. The report by Helms and Nicholas revealed the following conclusions about the racial identity and emotional literacy of staff at the FE college. Almost half of the participants (Undifferentiated) had a pattern of scores that, when compared with their peers, did not exhibit strong characteristics with respect to the TELS domains. The scores were all on or around average. The picture this paints is one of staff whose emotional literacy profile is unexceptional in any respect. How can these staff motivate and engender a climate of enthusiasm and energy to meet the emotional needs of students? There are also specific issues with respect to the other three groups which need to be evaluated. For example, the Social Energetic group have an issue with exerting power (which could be problematic in certain circumstances). The Dictatorial group have relatively low enthusiasm and self esteem whilst the Solitary group seem to have issues relating to youth engagement and social justice. This initial analysis from the pilot work gives some information about the issues facing the college that can inform their staff development programmes. The outcome of the research provides a questionnaire that can be used to analyse the teaching styles against the emotional literacy domains. It also provides the formula with which the questionnaire can be analysed.

**References**


**Acknowledgements**

Thanks to all those who took part in and supported this research. For their vision and drive to progress this work, Ian Millard and Angela O’Donoghue. To Pauline Tomlinson for her interest in developing and supporting this work and for achieving the much needed support for the project. For their stamina, determination and sense of humour at times when we needed it most, the programme delivery and support team, Steve Dowds, Val Howell, Gina Peace, Pas Plummer, Richard Sargeant, Anil Sharma and Sandy Willett and, of course, Richard Majors.

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**Appendix 1: ‘Me, You, Us and Them’ - Challenging our Approach to Diversity**

**Module 1**

Self Awareness 1

- How do I see myself?
- How do others see me?
- Values
- Self reflection
  - Myers Briggs
  - Belbin
  - Johari’s Window

**Module 2**

Cultural Awareness/Celebrating Cultures

- Youth Culture/Class

**Module 3**

Coping & Influencing Techniques

- Power & Conflict
- Mediation
- Emotional Punishment
- Transactional Analysis

**Module 4**

Self Directed Study

- Self Awareness 2
- Action Planning
- Learning Set based

**Module 5**

Challenging the College Ethos & Culture

- Cultural Web
- The Individual and their Contribution

**Induction**

- Identity questionnaire
- Emotional Intelligence
- Racial Identity
- Learning and Communication Styles
- Disclosure & Confidentiality
- Identifying Learning

**6 hours**