Developing Middle Leaders

Edited by Professor David Collinson

Volume 2

“Not only are middle leaders the senior managers of tomorrow, but they are also strategically important in their current role of managing, leading and implementing organizational change programmes.”

(Collinson, this volume)
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Research is central to CEL’s organisational mission. Concerned to enhance the interrelationships 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 in numerous ways (Walter et al 2003). By broadening the knowledge base of the sector, research can inform policy construction and implementation. The findings of research may change organizational structures, cultures, resourcing or delivery. More subtly, they might lead to changes in understandings, attitudes or practices (Nulty et al 2003). Hence in many ways, research provides evidence-based knowledge that is useful and usable for those in the LSS.

A distinctive feature of the CEL practitioner programme is that those working in leadership and management roles within the sector conducted the research themselves. Research in FE and the LSS more broadly is still very much in its infancy. This research programme and the series of edited volumes emerging from it enable employees in the sector to develop a research “voice”, to participate in the setting of research agendas and to define the key themes for leadership. In doing so, practitioners are actively engaged as researchers in the process of knowledge production. During the six-month period of the 2006-07 research programme, two workshops were organised at Lancaster (one in November, one in February) to provide support, advice and guidance to all the researchers in undertaking the research, in analysing the data, and in writing-up the final reports. This process of strengthening a research community in the LSS by encouraging “practitioners” to become researchers constitutes a very important objective of the CEL research programme.

CEL created the practitioner programme with the intention that research can positively influence the sector and inform CEL’s teaching programmes. Equally, research engagement itself can constitute a learning experience, enhancing organisations and researchers’ own understandings and practices. The programme therefore seeks to foster the research-based skills and expertise of staff in the sector. By so doing, it is concerned to encourage the “research-engaged college”; a way of empowering staff and students through enhanced learning cultures to incorporate a virtuous circle of enquiry, critique and improvement into well-planned organizational and personal development. This increased focus on research-based knowledge and experience is particularly relevant at the current time, as the UK government is keen for FE colleges to offer more degree-level/HE programmes.

Underpinning this CEL practitioner research programme is also the view that theory and practice are both very important and are often mutually-reinforcing. Much of the debate about research impact focuses on the importance of “evidence-based” perspectives, but sophisticated empirical research should also be theoretically informed. Explicitly or implicitly, theoretical perspectives inform all research (Giddens 1979). For example, in the area of leadership studies many theories concentrate on leaders themselves and the qualities and behaviours deemed necessary to be an effective leader.
“effective” leader. Meindl et al (1985) criticised such leader-centric assumptions which tend to “romanticize leaders” by developing overly exaggerated views of what they, as individuals, are able to achieve. In contrast with mainstream approaches, post-heroic theories start from a different assumption, that leadership can occur at various hierarchical levels and is best understood as an inherently social, collaborative and interdependent process. Suffice it to say here, that theory and practice are best viewed as highly inter-related and the CEL research programme seeks to encourage mutually-reinforcing relationships between theory, development, policy and practice.

Middle Managers and Their Development

Over the past fifty years, middle managers have been a consistent focus of research in management and organization studies (Dalton 1969, Kantor 1977, Jackal 1988). In the 1990s many corporations began to lay-off middle managers (Cascio 1993). Those middle managers who survived restructuring and “corporate liposuction” found themselves working longer hours (Smith 1990). Various studies revealed the gendered effects of long hours working (Watson 2003). In post-diluting cultures, where long hours working was increasingly viewed as an heroic expression of masculinity, it appeared that women managers (in particular) were under pressure to follow the example of many male counterparts and prioritise company and career over home and family (Collinson and Collinson 1997, 2004). The comparatively small amount of research on middle managers in the LSS points to similar pressures and anxieties. Studies have found that middle managers often experience multiple leadership pressures and demands that can arise from above, below and from other (horizontal) functions, departments and peers (Briggs 2005). Research suggests that middle managers 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 frequently experience high degrees of ambiguity and ambivalence (Airley and Bailey 1997). Gleeson and Shan (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 current interest in distributed leadership has revitalised the (perceived) strategic significance of middle managers, particularly in implementing organizational change policies and programmes. This distributed model of leadership also places much greater responsibilities on middle leaders. Accordingly, in this era of devolved leadership, quality training and development programmes become even more vital to prepare middle leaders for these increased responsibilities. Equally, the increasing impact of management information systems and delegated budgets in the sector 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 responsibilities (Scholfield 2005).

Leadership development programmes in the LSS have tended to concentrate on those in senior positions, sometimes to the neglect of the middle layers of the organization (Nutley 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 (Fleason 2002). CEL research has found that many senior managers in the sector see the role and responsibilities of the principal to be so challenging, demanding and stressful that they are reluctant to apply for such positions (Collinson 2008). This succession crisis in FE may well intensify over the next ten years because of the high proportion of leaders due to retire.3

Key Research Messages

This volume builds on earlier studies published in the first collection of CEL practitioner research papers.4 It begins with two research reports that outline middle management development programmes that had very positive organizational and personal effects, while the final two papers address some of the potential pitfalls that can characterise some middle leadership development initiatives. The first report by Ed Sallis and Peter Hubert (Highlands College, Jersey) points to the potential value of coaching as a way of developing middle managers. They describe a new “solutions focussed” coaching programme at Highlands College. Initially the project focussed on classroom performance improvement but it soon became apparent that the techniques were much more widely applicable. Many of those involved with the project found opportunities to practise their new skills in circumstances that were not included in the original specification. Thus the project developed into the application of the solutions focussed approach to the college’s appraisal scheme. Sallis and Hubert outline the beneficial effects of this coaching programme.

3 Encouraging qualified women and BME candidates to apply for middle and senior management positions may help to address this. Historic research by CEL suggests that women and BME staff are significantly under-represented at senior levels.

4 In the first volume (Collinson 2007a), Watters and Casey examined leadership development in a successful adult and community learning service. Whelan et al explored the development activities for middle managers in Scotland’s FE colleges and Barker highlighted some of the current difficulties in recruiting FE middle managers.

2 Where senior executives sought to “slim down” the ‘bulky’ middle layers of their organizations.
In the second report, Harriet Marland (Bishop Grosseteste University College) and Julia Pollock (John Leggott College) focus on talent development for sustainable leadership within a sixth form college. They found that staff particularly valued the opportunity for reflection on emotional intelligence issues, which enabled them to grow into their leadership role. Those who participated in action research projects reported significant progress against organisational targets and new personal goals as a result of their training and participation. Working with others and sharing good practice opened up opportunities for leadership of curriculum initiatives which also had a positive impact on how staff perceived themselves. Consequently, “leading changes in learning” in the college became just as important as “leading organisational change” and resulted in a more diverse concept of leadership which, in tum, engages staff at all levels to aspire to leadership positions.

In the third report, Philip Barker and Janet Brewer (City College Bristol) examine the experience of curriculum middle managers during the introduction of competence-based standards to support performance. Their findings point to the insufficiency of the competence-based framework to support the development of middle managers, the difficulty of using the framework to ensure standardisation amongst middle managers, and the effects of using financial incentives to ensure the competence of middle managers. The competency framework also reinforced a concern with “portfolio building” rather than performance improvement and in some cases made staff feel undervalued and defensive. Highlighting the importance of clarifying the notion of leadership as a precondition for effective leadership development, the researchers argue that competence is not the only factor shaping performance. In many cases, they found that college systems and structures did not assist curriculum managers in undertaking their work.

The final report by John Evans (City College, Brighton and Hove) emphasises the value of a more sociological approach to researching succession planning and internal promotion for middle managers. A primary theme of this report is that middle management training needs to focus on developing whole teams rather than just individually promoted staff. The research found that many colleges were experiencing difficulties in recruiting middle managers. It also discovered that middle management programmes tend to concentrate on developing high-level technical expertise rather than leadership skills for managing diverse teams across curriculum areas. The research also found little evaluation and critical appreciation of what is actually happening in internal promotion processes of succession planning, aside from securing suitable numbers of apparently qualified staff for the next rung of the ladder. The report concludes with a number of recommendations about how to improve development and succession programmes.

These CEL research reports present a series of practitioner-produced empirical studies of leadership development dynamics in the UK LSS. They outline important empirical findings on positive initiatives currently underway in FE colleges, as well as critically examining some of the potential pitfalls with certain contemporary development programmes. Whilst these reports are published in this specific volume, it is important to emphasise that they are also highly inter-connected with other key leadership-related themes. So, for example, the focus here on middle leader development is inextricably-linked with quality improvement initiatives. As Ed Sallis and Peter Hubert state, “solutions focused” coaching was seen by senior management as a key part of developing “a self-regulatory model of quality improvement”. Conversely, “Leading Quality Improvement”, volume 3 of the CEL practitioner research series (Collinson 2007b), includes a report by Alton et al who argue that, within the outstanding colleges they researched, the main success factor in moving towards excellence was a recognition of the critical role of middle managers and a particularly strong emphasis on the ways that these middle leaders are identified, trained, developed and supported. Volume 5 of the CEL Practitioner Research Series on collaborative leadership (Collinson 2007c) includes a report by Claricoates, Cope and Sapsford which highlights the crucial role of middle managers in facilitating collaborative leadership in adult learning.

In editing this volume, the original research reports have been condensed to enhance the overall integration and cohesion of the collection. Most appendices have been removed. Every report has been structured using a standard format. Together, these reports highlight a number of key messages for middle leadership development and practice. Outlining positive proposals for enhancing the development of middle leaders, they emphasise the importance of formalised and planned leadership development and succession programmes. The research reports suggest that development programmes need to be informed by a clear conception of what is meant by leadership in the LSS. Overall, the projects suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the challenging role of middle leaders, how their skills and abilities can best be developed and the most effective ways to introduce succession planning.

5 Equally, diversity issues such as gender, ethnicity, age, faith and disability are central to the development of middle managers.
References


The Impact of “Solutions Focussed” Coaching on a College’s Leadership Culture

Ed Sallis and Peter Hubert, Highlands College, Jersey

Executive Summary

This research report examines the training of managers in Solutions Focussed coaching at Highlands College. Initially the project was confined to aiming for classroom performance improvement but it was soon apparent that the techniques were much more widely applicable. Many of those involved with the project found opportunities to practise their new skills in circumstances that were not included in the original specification. Thus the project developed into the application of the Solutions Focussed approach to the college’s appraisal scheme known as Lecturer Effectiveness. Lecturers reported that the new process encouraged deeper and more purposeful reflection on their practice in preparation for the performance review meeting with their line manager. They also reported that they felt they had far more control of their appraisal when compared with appraisals in the past. In most cases they implemented the changes they had identified very soon after the discussions, resulting in easy improvements in practice. Managers and lecturers also experimented using Solutions Focussed techniques in other circumstances; with groups, students and to help resolve issues outside of classroom performance. Such was the enthusiasm for using the Solutions Focussed approach that those lecturers in the pilot group were keen that it was rolled out to all staff as quickly as possible. This would require training for all so they could fully engage in the process. It was also agreed that to ensure all staff receive a uniformly positive experience from the new process, it would be necessary to provide additional training for managers to increase their skill level in operating with a Solutions Focussed approach.

Introduction

Highlands College is a general FE college serving the needs of the Island of Jersey. Although it mirrors the curriculum of mainland institutions, it sits outside the structures of the English FE system. It is not subject to strictures of OFSTED/ALI inspections and has over a period developed a process of Supported Self Improvement (SSi) using the expertise of external critical friends as a means of promoting continuous and verifiable improvement. The introduction of coaching skills for managers was seen as the next step in ensuring further improvement.

This action research project focuses on the impact that coaching has had on leadership through the ability of leaders to change and develop the culture in a positive direction. The vehicle chosen to test this was the impact that coaching can have in formal performance appraisal schemes. The use of coaching as a technique for developing effective performance appraisal is an aspect of the leadership process that is well documented (Rogers 2004) and is integral to appraisal schemes in a number of organisations (Institute of Psychiatry).

The impetus for introducing coaching skills to college managers grew out of the re-organisation of the college that established a faculty structure. One of the aspects of the role of head of faculty that the Deputy Principal argued for was that of acting as a coach for faculty staff. The college had for a year before the project worked with the Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) and its Head of Coaching, Shaun Lincoln, to introduce mentoring and coaching techniques in a non-specific way to the college leadership team. This had generally proved to be successful with colleagues anecdotally reporting benefits. However, while the college leadership team saw the potential of coaching for cultural change they needed both a specific set of techniques and a purpose to their endeavours.

Highlands College (2001) has had an appraisal system for academic staff operating for a number of years known as Lecturer Effectiveness. It is a variation of an appraisal scheme developed for school teachers in Jersey by Hay McAbee. An important feature of the scheme is performance related pay and as a result there has been a strong accountability element to it. Lecturer Effectiveness was chosen for the project because it was the main vehicle for improving performance in the classroom and workshop. One of the key research questions was whether it was possible to enhance lecturer effectiveness by introducing appraisers to relevant coaching techniques. This was important to the college because it has been developing a self-regulatory model of quality improvement for some years and was looking for a mechanism to integrate lecturer effectiveness into the overall quality improvement process.

Lecturers are subject to lesson observations per year by their line manager from whom they receive feedback on their performance in those sessions. The project was initially intended to only focus on the lesson observation aspect of the Lecturer Effectiveness scheme and the use of coaching techniques in the post observation feedback session. During the end of year lecturer effectiveness interview both the lecturer and line manager separately rate the lecturer’s performance against a range of criteria. Any differences in the ratings have to be discussed and are potentially a source of disagreement and discord. The lectures have the added incentive to maximise their rating as this is what triggers annual salary increments. Experience had shown that both parties were often left feeling the conversation could have been more productive and more focussed on moving forward rather than addressing past problems.

The opportunity of an action research project provided the stimulus to develop the college’s thinking on the issue. The cultural change that the leadership team wished to bring about was one which was improvement focussed, where the emphasis was on the positives in any situation and where blame culture had been eliminated. The aim was to prioritise the question “How can we improve learning and performance?” Coaching offered a way forward and seemed compatible with Kate Hilpern’s recent statement, “College principals in the UK who have introduced coaching into their educational institutions haven’t looked back” (Hilpern 2006).
As thinking about the lecturer effectiveness process progressed, using a Solutions Focussed coaching approach to lesson observation feedback raised the question of extending the technique to the whole lecturer effectiveness process. Given the accountability dimension of the existing process and the developmental nature of using Solutions Focussed coaching, the resulting dichotomy would need to be overcome.

Research Framework

Leadership theorists increasingly view coaching as a key competency of leadership. For example, Daniel Goleman and his collaborators in their book *The New Leaders* provide a useful definition of the importance of leaders as coaches:

> "What does able coaching look like in a leader? Coaches help people identify their unique strengths and weaknesses, tying those to their personal and career aspirations. They encourage employees to establish long-term development goals, and help them to conceptualize a plan for reaching those goals, while being explicit about where the leader’s responsibility lies and what the employee’s role will be." (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002)

Coaching provides a series of interventions that can add an important dimension to the appraisal process, altering the nature of the process from being solely about accountability to one embracing improvement (Lueger, 2004). The term coaching is used in this context rather than mentoring. The two terms are often used interchangeably but there are differences. Mentoring refers to a process of identifying and nurturing the potential of the whole person, while coaching relates primarily to performance improvement. It is the specific nature of appraisal with its role to assess and modify performance that links it most closely to the aims and purposes of coaching (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005).

Action research was considered to be the research methodology best suited to test whether culture change could be brought about through using coaching techniques. Action research is the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within (Elliot and Keynes, 1991). In this type of research practitioners study their own practice in order to improve performance or to understand the environment in which they work. Such an approach allows participants to reflect on practice and to use these insights to change structures or transform their work. Learning happens in real life situations through finding solutions to issues (Sallis and Jones, 2002).

The college has had previous experience of action learning and action research projects (terms the college use interchangeably) and felt that it was an ideal methodology for a practitioner project where we wanted to learn the lessons as the research progressed. While action research does not require a facilitator, it was decided to use Shaun Lincoln to facilitate the project as it had been his work that had stimulated the project. Not only did this provide the college with a critical friend, but it allowed for a considerable degree of essential training in coaching techniques required to carry out the action research project.

Through discussion with Shaun Lincoln it was decided to introduce appraisers to the Solutions Focussed techniques. While there are a number of important coaching models including SIMPLE and GROW (Whitmore, 2003), this project lent itself to Solutions Focus which is a simple but effective set of tools for performance improvement. Jackson and McKergow call Solutions Focus a “theory of no theory” by which they mean that it is a series of well- tried techniques for discovering what works and how to do more of it. It is about working out a series of small steps that can bring about desirable change that “ripple widely across people and departments” (Jackson and McKergow, 2002).

The roots of Solutions Focus are in positive psychology and social constructionist approaches that have links to NLP, Appreciative Enquiry and Family Therapy, all of which are about change through reflective thought. They are linked by the idea that knowledge is constructed locally by the interaction of people and they centre attention away from expert defined solutions towards conversations that lead to change (McKergow and Clarke, 2005). A simple way into the thinking of Solution Focus is to act in accordance with the following three rules:

1. If it works, don’t fix it.
2. Identify what works and do more of it.
3. Identify what doesn’t work and do something different.

The difference in approach between Solutions Focussed and problem focussed conversations is exemplified in the Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solutions Focussed</th>
<th>Problems Focussed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I want to find time to write an important report.</td>
<td>I can’t find time to write an important report.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When do you spend an hour or so writing each day?</td>
<td>When is writing a problem?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I do it first, before doing my post and e-mail</td>
<td>I seem to get sidetracked by the post and e-mail—there’s always so much to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>So, how to write the report?</td>
<td>So, what’s the cause of this lack of ability to focus on your work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write for an hour or two first thing. Delay doing the post and e-mail.</td>
<td>Well I’ve always been easily distracted and I’m a great procrastinator!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What else?</td>
<td>So it will be difficult to write this report then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrange meetings for the afternoon, when possible. Keep the first part of each morning free. That sounds great, I’ll try it tomorrow.</td>
<td>Yes, I guess so. Maybe I should shelve the project for a while until I’ve learned to become more disciplined.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(McKergow and Clarke, 2005)
To take staff through the coaching process the framework of the OSKAR model was used. The acronym stands for **Outcome**, **Scaling**, **Know-How**, **Affirm and action**, **Review** (McKergow and Clarke, 2003). (See Appendix 1)

In particular the work of Gunter Lueger (2004) was used as a fundamental part of the research. His article entitled **Solutions Focused Rating (SFR)** is subtitled **New Ways in Performance Appraisal**. He argues that too many existing appraisal systems are based on a problem-centred approach and in part stems from using a classic rating scale, usually of the five-point type with a rating from very poor to very good. This he argues can lead to conflict in interviews because the conversations are not about improvement but are about where on the scale people are put. The use of the classic scale creates a specific construction of reality. An employee’s performance is summed up as ‘good’ or ‘satisfactory’ as a result of using the scale and this leads to a static result at best or a deficit result at worst. Lueger calls this approach to appraisal a ‘guide to unhappiness’ (Lueger 2004).

In its place he suggests an approach that more truly mirrors performance. A rating scale that measures the peaks and troughs of performance and recognises that in all of us there is both poor and excellent performance and much that is in between. He believes that a change to the rating system combined with a Solutions Focused approach to interviewing that make performance appraisal into a positive process and leads to real change. The solutions approach builds on what the employee is doing well and asks the questions such as ‘how can you do more of it?’ It leaves out deficit and weakness questions and focuses on clear and achievable objectives (Lueger 2004). To emphasise the contrast in the two approaches, the lecturer effectiveness scheme operates by rating performance on an absolute scale that requires moderation of judgements to ensure equity across large numbers of appraised staff.

With a Solutions Focused approach, performance rating is on a relative scale obviating the need for moderation and allowing the participants to concentrate on the detail of changes in practice that bring about improved performance.

Such an approach to performance appraisal has considerable implications for appraisal systems in all colleges. It has the potential to link individual performance improvement with the wide quality improvement agenda and be an important component in the development of the self-regulating college. If coaching can work for individual performance appraisal then a Solutions Focused approach could be a vital tool for institutional performance enhancement. It is through action research that such insights are born and the college is already looking to change its quality system using such an approach.

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**Research Methodology**

**Action Research**

The principal research methodology was action research which is the “study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within” (Elliot & Keynes 1991). In this type of research practitioners study their own practice in order to improve performance or to understand the environment in which they work. For this project, this was extended to the management team of the college and a pilot group of lecturing staff. Such an approach allowed participants to reflect on practice and to use these insights to change structures or transform their work. Cohen and Manion (1994: 186) described the immersion of the researcher in the context of the research thus:

> “Action research is situational – it is concerned with diagnosing a problem in a specific context and attempting to solve it in that context; ... it is participatory – team members themselves take part directly or indirectly in implementing the research; and it is self-evaluative – modifications are continuously evaluated within the ongoing situation, the ultimate objective being to improve practice.”

In seeking to bring about a change in behaviour in the college management the use of action research methodology required the active co-operation of the individuals involved. Fortunately prior to the beginning of the project the management had undergone a short introduction to Solutions Focused coaching and was aware of the potential benefits they could bring about by adopting this approach. However, the brevity of earlier training had left individuals with an understanding of the process using the OSKAR (see Appendix 1) model but with insufficient skill to put it into practice effectively. Therefore the major enabling intervention was a two day training programme for the college management in October 2006 which involved a substantial proportion of practical work using the OSKAR model, paying particular attention to the phrasing of questions put to the coachee.

By engaging in the training process and discussing the potential for Solutions Focused coaching, it was realised by the Deputy Principal that the college had the opportunity to resolve some of the difficulties associated with the existing lecturer effectiveness appraisal scheme. Its accountability framework required lecturers’ performance to be rated against a number of criteria. Depending on the rating achieved the lecturer moved up, stayed on the same level or, in exceptional cases, moved down the pay scale. In reality the vast majority of lecturers moved incrementally up the pay scale year on year. With many lecturers having been in post for a long time, most of them had reached the highest point attainable on the scale and, provided they could avoid sustained poor performance, would remain there. In practice this removed the lever of accountability but left the in-built tension of having to agree a series of performance ratings. Despite the best intentions of the college management this mitigated against a truly developmental process for staff.
At this point a pilot group of lecturers was proposed with a request for volunteers. This group was given a half days’ training so that they would have an understanding of Solutions Focussed coaching and a familiarity with the OSKAR model. They were asked to rate their own performance against the various lecturer effectiveness criteria by assigning a percentage of the time that they judged their performance to have been either ‘Scope for improvement’, ‘Satisfactory’, ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’. This then formed the basis of discussion in the mid year review.

The Use of Surveys

The obvious route to finding out about the pilot group’s experience of Solutions Focussed performance review was to ask them via a survey. However, this immediately presented difficulties in that surveys generally only elicit shallow coverage, as indicated by Johnson (1994), in an area that is inherently complex. Additionally, it was difficult to write unambiguous questions and avoid confusion between information about lecturer’s experience of the process and information relating to their performance which was outside the scope of this project. This may have resulted in individuals not providing answers to some questions and thus, incomplete data.

Similarly with the appraisers it was essential to ensure answers to questions related to the process and not judgements about appraisers’ performance as lecturers. This distinction was considered particularly important given the sensitive nature of individuals’ performance. It was deemed easier to detect the nuance behind the answers to questions in face to face interviews.

Interviews

The project was supported by an external evaluator who acted as a critical friend and facilitated the interim feedback session with the majority of the management participants. This helped to keep the research on track and provided additional support throughout the project. This event was aimed at helping participants to critically assess the impact of coaching techniques on their performance and to help them understand whether the culture of the leadership team had become more Solutions Focussed as a result.

To obtain feedback from the experiences of the pilot group of lecturers as participants in Solutions Focussed performance reviews, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample. Additionally semi-structured interviews were conducted with individual managers. Given the complexity and variety of the relationships between managers and their staff it was thought that semi-structured interviews would enable that complexity to be explored in a flexible way that would be difficult using a more formally structured approach such as a questionnaire or a fixed set of interview questions. The interviews were initially intended to establish how much effect the managers perceived the use of coaching techniques and the application of the principles of OSKAR had had on the quality of the post lesson observation feedback and the level of commitment to change practice on the part of the lecturers. This was then compared with the perceptions of the lecturers.

The idea of recording the interviews and making full transcripts from the tapes was considered and rejected because of the time needed to produce the transcripts. Instead the interviewer took notes and wrote them into a record of the discussion immediately afterwards. Interviewees were given the opportunity to view the notes to confirm they were a true record and request modifications if they were not satisfied.

The issue of the researchers being insiders and senior members of the management, in one case, the Principal, of the college potentially had implications for the quality of the data collected. It was the college Principal’s decision to invest in Solutions Focussed coaching so there was a vested interest in its success. In either case this could potentially have inhibited the lecturers in the pilot group from being completely open when giving their views about their experiences of Solutions Focussed discussions. To limit this problem the Principal did not undertake any of the interviewing. When interviewing fellow members of the college management, the second researcher could also have received less than full answers to questions, given that he was the direct line manager of some interviewees and had long standing working relationships with all participants. The alternative danger was that knowing these individuals so well may have created the temptation to presume what the interviewee thought or felt about the subject and thereby bias the notes recorded. This placed more importance on the checking of interview notes by the interviewee to ensure their veracity. In practice there was no point in any interviews where the researcher became aware that participants were being anything other than completely open.

The individuals were interviewed over a period spanning from before some had undergone the Solutions Focussed training through to where both parties in the process had been trained, to where both parties had been trained. Some managers applied the Solutions Focussed approach in one to one discussions, others tried it with groups. Interview evidence has been grouped accordingly.

Observation

Direct observation of either the post lesson observation feedback sessions or the mid year review discussions was considered. This data collection method would have yielded less subjective data for analysis in that the observer would have been able to record the sequence and flow of the discussion. However, given that the researcher was an integral part of the introduction of the Solutions Focussed approach it could be argued that he had a vested interest in its success and approached the observation from the perspective of believing the process was going to work. The former could potentially have resulted in selective recording of data and the latter in being more sensitive to data that confirmed his belief; either would have produced a bias in the data collected. Additionally, the sensitive nature of discussions about an individual’s performance preclude observation by another member of staff. Therefore direct observation of the use of the OSKAR model in practice was rejected.
Time Constraints
The project was placed under fairly tight time constraints which limited the quantity of data that could be collected for analysis. The natural cycle of the lecturer effectiveness scheme was such that the first lesson observation should have happened before Christmas with the feedback session within a couple of days. However two faculties were preparing for the college's Supported Self Improvement process with the first visit by critical friends in November. As part of the preparation, lesson observations and feedback had happened early thus limiting the pool of potential interviewees. Mid year reviews should have taken place for the majority of lecturers in February but again the Supported Self Improvement process second visit in early March delayed the reviews. Therefore the number of interviews with lecturers in the pilot group was restricted and allowed little opportunity to assess how many of the identified actions had actually been carried out and if they had led to a discernible improvement in teaching practice or the learners’ experience. It should be noted that the time limited nature of this project and hence its apparent progression to a natural conclusion will not prevent the ongoing evaluation of the use of a Solutions Focussed approach to appraisal through to the completion of the appraisal cycle.

Evaluation
An evaluation session was held for the college managers and a separate one for the lecturers involved in the pilot. These were managed by the external facilitator who based the evaluation methodology on Kirkpatrick’s (1975) five Evaluation Levels.

Level 1: Reaction
This tests the initial reactions of the participants to the programme. It was important that a favourable reaction was gained in order that participants were motivated to learn. Reaction to a Solutions Focussed approach was tested using:

- Group discussion and exercises on the evaluation day
- Face to face interviews
- General participant comments throughout the programme

Level 2: Learning
In order to measure the extent to which participants were learning in line with the project’s objectives of an increase in skill or knowledge, change of attitude and/or behaviours, early application of new learning was assessed. This was assessed through:

- Group discussion and exercises on the evaluation day
- Observation and feedback from tutors and managers
- Self assessment of action based learning such as role plays at the training sessions and applying the skills in real and diverse situations.

Level 3: Behaviours
If learning had taken place this should have been translated into new behaviours. Therefore it was necessary to look at the extent to which a change in behaviour had occurred as a result of the project, either in the way managers conducted performance reviews or in the way lecturers responded to the actions they identified through the process. Potential ways this could be tested were:

- Observations and feedback from tutors and managers
- Face to face interviews

Level 4: Results
The final results achieved because of the learning acquired from the project covers both tangible and intangible results. This would normally focus on the final evaluation of the project objectives. However given the truncated timeframe of this project only partial results could be assessed.

- Tangible results:
  - Improved feedback from students
  - Increased levels of student retention and achievement

- Intangible results:
  - Positive change in management style
  - Increased responsiveness to improving practice by lecturers

Level 5: Community Impact
At a macro level the wider impact of the learning that has taken place and how that learning has been replicated beyond the area of the initial project can be evaluated. This includes the wider social impact of level 4 results on the community. This longer-term sustained change was beyond the timeframe of this project.

Research Findings
Manager and Lecturer (neither Solutions Focus trained)
To give some impression of the significance of the change in management practice in relation to improving the performance of staff, one interview was conducted to investigate how such processes had operated to date. Neither the manager nor staff member had had the Solutions Focussed training. The performance related discussion occurred soon after a lesson observation. It examined specific aspects of practice that had been observed, both positive and negative. This was compared with earlier targets and what was considered good practice.
Care was taken to mix the sequencing of positive and negative points. The negative points where no improvement had taken place since the previous observation were perceived by the manager to be aspects of practice that had become habit. At this point the manager had made a judgement about his staff member based on partial evidence but which directly influence the subsequent conversation because in this format it became driven by the manager. It was important in the manager’s view that the lecturer understood that his shortcomings needed to be addressed, but that despite those shortcomings there was good practice to build on. He suggested improvements with clear targets. However the manager was left unsure if in areas where there had been little or no improvement in practice, it was because he had an unrealistic expectation of the timescale for improvement or whether it was the lecturer’s ability or capacity to improve that was the problem. At the end of the meeting the manager perceived that the lecturer seemed positive and willing to implement the identified changes. When pressed to express more certainty that the required changes would happen, the manager admitted doubts despite believing that the approach he adopted was the best route to the desired outcome, i.e., improved classroom practice.

**Solutions Focus Trained Managers**

A number of managers used or attempted to use the OSKAR model in the mid year performance reviews they conducted with their staff. The staff were a mixture of those who were part of the pilot and those who were completely unaware of the model.

In one instance the staff member was perceived by a manager as underperforming as a result of a number of issues external to work. The staff member was asked to scale the level at which he was fulfilling the responsibilities of his job; he scaled at an 8 which was significantly higher than the manager estimated he would say. The manager did not divulge her estimate. The staff member then substantiated his judgement with solid evidence of which the manager was unaware. The manager was able to affirm the “know how” the staff member possessed which he found uncomfortable, partly because he was unused to having someone say positive things about his work. Actions were identified that could be taken to improve performance and the small ones were carried out immediately.

Another manager used the OSKAR model with a staff member who had undergone the coaching training and with one who had not. Where the staff member was familiar with the model, the manager found that short cuts could be taken whilst still following the model fairly closely. The process took only 10 – 15 minutes. A small action was identified and it was done very quickly and it has made a discernable difference. OSKAR was helpful in getting behind the apparent issue to come at the problem from a different angle. Had the manager operated in their default mode it would have resulted in her taking the problem from the staff member and sorting it out for them.

With the staff member who was unfamiliar with OSKAR the manager followed the model more closely and the process took about 45 minutes. Creating a vision for the future perfect was successful. The scaling part of the model liberated the manager from disagreeing with the staff member so that the conversation could focus purely on what action was necessary for an improvement in practice to take place. It was subsequently confirmed that the planned action had taken place. These examples were in stark contrast to the first example where the manager was unfamiliar with the Solutions Focussed methodology. In the latter instances the identified action happened very quickly and led to changes in practice unlike the first example.

In at least two instances managers adopted a Solutions Focussed approach when members of their staff came to them with issues they were unhappy about. By using the OSKAR model the managers were able to find out that there was a mismatch of expectation and experience which through careful questioning, the managers were able to realign their staff member’s perception of the situation to something more realistic.

More than one manager noted that it was necessary to concentrate on asking the right type of question and avoid assuming or giving the answer, or imposing their own perception on the conversation. It was also noted that the model did not work where there was an attempt to examine whether past objectives had been met or not, something that was confirmed by lecturers where their managers had done this. Some managers were confident enough to not follow the OSKAR model slavishly but dipped in and out of the model using whatever parts they judged would produce the desired outcome. A number of those interviewed expressed the view that a Solutions Focussed approach worked when there was a single issue under consideration and that picking the circumstances in which to use the technique was important. The approach worked best where there had been reflection on practice and/or there was a skills based issue. This accorded with the views of the lecturers interviewed as part of the pilot group. Where reflection had not taken place the process became protracted because of the need for the member of staff to recognise and acknowledge the issue and that it needed to be addressed, i.e., it can take time to build the platform.

There was little difference reported for the success of using solution focussed coaching between lecturers who had had the training and those who had not; with the latter the process took a little longer. Managers wanted the 100 point scale rolled out to all staff for consistency but recognised that other staff need to be trained to help effect a complete culture change.

Speaking about the Solutions Focussed approach and the OSKAR model managers expressed the following views:

> “Once you have used it enough there is no going back.”

> “It takes some of the pressure away from being perfect.” “...Aim to be a bit better.”

> “Using the 100 point scale has given us a way into self accountability and greater reflection on our practice than in the past.”
A Solutions Focus was again attempted in another group meeting, this time a whole faculty meeting. However this meeting occurred soon after criticism of practice from a critical friend which left the staff feeling insecure and uncertain. One variant that was used in this context to help them think about the future perfect learning experience was to ask them to remember a time when they had enjoyed learning.

One lecturer used a Solutions Focussed discussion to encourage a number of students to take responsibility for handing in work. More accustomed to being berated for failing to produce the necessary coursework they were initially taken aback by this radically different approach. However they did propose deadlines for submitting late work thus accepting they had it in their power to resolve the problem.

Solutions Focus Trained Managers with Groups

A Solutions Focussed methodology was used with an employers’ group to constrain their discussion to the meeting’s agenda. The OSKAR model was explained to them and they were keen to play along. Some background theory was given to help structure their thinking. The ‘know-how’ stage was particularly interesting and useful in what it uncovered and the groups’ response to that information about themselves. It was difficult to keep them from straying onto talking about the know how they did not possess, i.e., keep them positive.

They were asked to decide on what small steps they could each do away from the group at a later date as the changes being discussed had to be employer led. A deadline for them to return with their group action was set but they have failed to do this. Some have come back with individual actions but it is not yet known if they have actually carried out those actions. This inability to undertake action was interpreted by the manager in an historical context. It was stated that the employers were accustomed to the college taking the lead in what needs to be done and doing it for them. The meeting overran so in future the manager would allocate more time to allow the OSKAR process to unfold.

One of the participants in the employers’ group meeting said later

“This meeting provided a professional and positive platform to achieving some tangible outcomes, which was a significant challenge considering the size of the task and the attendee’s with their different focuses.”

“The manager only needed to remind us a couple of times about sticking to the Solutions Focussed approach and then we found ourselves reminding colleagues of this approach!”

A Solutions Focus was again attempted in another group meeting, this time a whole faculty meeting. However this meeting occurred soon after criticism of practice from a critical friend which left the staff aggrieved, and their anger proved to be a barrier to establishing a platform. This matches the experience of another manager who adopted a Solutions Focussed approach with a very emotionally charged member of staff and found that it took several meetings to establish the platform for change. With the group there was a much more positive response to the use of the model in a later meeting about the same issue. Like the first group application of the model this meeting overran significantly. Substantial agreement was achieved with the platform.

However with scaling there was wide variation. This may have been inevitable given that the scaling exercise is entirely subjective. However this was no barrier to agreement as a faculty to undertake an action, in this case use a common format for schemes of work and lesson plans. This attempt at a faculty-wide scaling exercise was in complete contrast to the experience of a team (each faculty consists of a number of curriculum area teams) in another faculty whose manager used the scaling exercise in a team meeting and found fairly close agreement on team-wide issues. The different experiences were almost certainly as a result of a disparity in operating practice between curriculum teams across that faculty.

The feedback on the meeting was very positive (because of the single item agenda) and by the end of the meeting everyone knew what had to be done and that they had the ability to do it. This was in contrast to normal meetings with large agendas which often become merely information sharing.

Findings from Kirkpatrick Evaluation with Managers

Reaction

Managers had initially been positive about Solutions Focussed coaching but were resentful at having to undertake an additional two days training in October 2007 at a busy time. However their positive disposition returned during the two days as they practiced the skills and gained in confidence with the coaching process. They ended the training re-enthused by the Solutions Focussed approach. It was felt that the OSKAR model provided a framework for current practice and worked well with the teaching standards taken in isolation from the lecturer effectiveness scheme.

Managers felt that it encouraged reflective practice to a greater extent than the old process.

Learning

Solutions Focussed coaching highlighted the problems inherent in the lecturer effectiveness scheme. The former was not consistent with the latter. That lecturer effectiveness was about accountability to management and validating judgements about an individual’s performance, was more clearly apparent. Using a Solutions Focussed approach required a change of mind set and one manager changed the language she used to include more imagery in discussions.
The process was found to be easier to use in one-to-one situations rather than with groups. It was important to concentrate on listening, remember that the manager was looking for the coachee’s own solution or outcome and thus achieve a shared understanding of the problem without taking the problem from them. Often where only small steps were identified, big changes in outcome were possible.

**Behaviour**

Managers thought there was more affirmation taking place, made possible by the style of discussions which enabled them to discover more of the knowledge and skills of their staff. In the past as managers it was thought that it was necessary to have the answer to every question or problem; now there was no need or pressure to always produce the answer. The Solutions Focussed conversation was occurring in many different situations, e.g. at college level, with staff, students, parents, employers changing the nature of those interactions and potentially the relationships. By adopting the OSGAR model there was a change to a more positive approach to problem solving. This was bringing about a change in the default mode of operation of managers, although that change was as yet incomplete. There was a resolve not to take problems from staff in the way they had done in the past.

**Results**

A Solutions Focussed meeting with staff on schemes of work resulted in an agreed change of practice that was implemented in time for the second visit of the faculty’s critical friend which had a positive outcome. With many of the other actions identified by staff and students in Solutions Focussed conversations the action may have been implemented but insufficient time had elapsed to assess whether there had been a measurable result as a consequence.

**Community**

This project could potentially have a wider impact in that there is consideration being given to extending the pilot to all staff, academic and non-academic, full or part time. It is also being considered for an extended pilot into local schools which if successful could result in a change in the entire system of appraisal for the Island’s teachers. None of this was intended at the outset of the project. However this has yet to take place and there are some structural matters that require resolution before the full impact in the wider education community could be realised.

**Feedback from lecturers in the pilot group**

Lecturers’ experience with the lecturer effectiveness scheme was varied; some found it a positive process while for others it was difficult and a cause of tension and potentially conflict. Specifically lecturers were critical of the lecturer effectiveness scheme in that appraisal and appraisee each rate the appraisee’s performance by assigning a number on the scale. During appraisal ‘Discussion was all about the number’. Variations in their experience of lecturer effectiveness across the college were deemed a result of the practice of the line manager. Members of the pilot group, following the training session, had high expectations for the Solutions Focussed approach. Nevertheless some retained a degree of scepticism about the new process before their review, based on negative experiences of the lecturer effectiveness scheme previously.

The lecturers liked the positive discussion. They felt the process worked well and gave a clear way forward when focussed on individual issues. It required significant reflection on one’s own practice before the meeting. The allocation of 100 points was a useful tool for focussing and structuring the self reflective exercise. By avoiding the debate about perceived lecturer performance grades anxiety levels for some were reduced. This meant that they felt in control of the discussion and were moving forward. For many lecturers it was important to come away with something practical to use in the classroom which this process produced.

An experienced lecturer felt that it was important to go in to the meeting and start by considering the final overall performance criteria. It was thought unnecessary to discuss every criteria one by one but that the conversation would naturally draw in those that were relevant to a single area of performance where improvement was being sought. By contrast, a new lecturer suggested that it was more appropriate to aim to identify a number of areas, perhaps indicative of differing needs at different career stages. It was observed in the evaluation session that a number of lecturers referred to their manager in this context as ‘my coach’.

In the view of one lecturer the session was, "led by myself, about my reflections, not about the manager’s reflections.”

"Would almost guarantee the discussion would be positive because of the nature of the focus, I could rave about it.”

For some lecturers the mid year review under the Solutions Focussed coaching pilot was not as they had anticipated from the training leading to a measure of disappointment. There was an attempt to follow the OSGAR model. The lecturer had reflected on their performance against each of the criteria and allocated the points to each grade. The expectation was that the conversation would then focus on how to improve practice to increase the proportion of points in the high grades when reflecting on practice at a later date. However the appraisee had also allocated points necessitating a discussion to decide the true distribution of points. There was little discussion about how to do more that was at a higher level of performance. In at least two cases the appraisee wanted to increase the proportion of points in higher grades over that allocated by the appraisee which the appraisee found to be very positive. However, this replicated the old style lecturer effectiveness scenario. There were also instances of managers attempting to use the objectives set in the previous June as the starting point of a Solutions Focussed conversation. Pursuing these avenues of discussion forced a backward looking perspective, the complete antithesis of the forward facing nature of the OSGAR model. One lecturer regretted not having the confidence to insist on bringing the conversation back to the new model. It was suggested by those lecturers that there was a range of proclivities amongst the college managers in understanding and operating the Solutions Focussed interview.
The lecturers in the pilot wanted the new process rolled out to all staff, ideally for the June 2007 round of appraisal. They deemed it necessary for all staff to have similar training to that they had experienced. Given the reluctance of some managers to completely dispense with some aspects of the lecturer effectiveness model it was suggested that more role play should be undertaken by managers to hone their skills. Although the principal focus of the project had been to use OSKAR with staff, lecturers thought there was a strong case for use with students.

Thinking ahead to the desirability of extending the Solutions Focussed approach to the full lecturer effectiveness scheme, some expressed concern about how it would fit with the need for a measure of performance for the purpose of justifying progression up the pay scale.

Conclusions

Using the OSKAR model for Solutions Focussed coaching has been successful in giving staff the opportunity to help others find positive outcomes for themselves. Initially intended to be trialled in a relatively narrow and controlled situation, staff saw the potential for their newly acquired skills and immediately experimented with the process in other circumstances, e.g. with other staff on non-performance based issues, with students to encourage them to take responsibility for their coursework and with groups. It was most successful when applied to a single issue and preferably in a one-to-one meeting. Although there was some success with groups but this was found to be more difficult.

Assigning 100 points across the grades in the Lecturer Effectiveness criteria not only enhanced the depth of reflection on practice amongst the lecturers in the pilot group, it helped, at least in part, form the platform for change in the OSKAR model prior to the meeting. Therefore meetings were more focussed and hence more useful. This has generated considerable enthusiasm for the process amongst both lecturers and managers. Therefore it is planned to extend Solutions Focussed training to all staff.

Management, having raised expectations, will now have to transform the Lecturer Effectiveness appraisal scheme to re-orientate it to be developmental and forward looking. There is also the need to solve the problem of performance related pay increments that are associated with Lecturer Effectiveness.

Problems in the pilot seem to have occurred because managers felt the need to look at whether objectives set last June had been met, i.e. a backward looking process which was at odds with the forward looking nature of Solutions Focussed coaching. This was deemed a transition issue.

From a leadership perspective there developed a disparity between expectation and reality when introducing the new process. To an extent this is an inherent danger with action research where the original research question is adapted opportunistically. For those managing such a project the aim must be to maintain a balance between riding the enthusiasm of staff for a proposed change and ensuring the change is controlled, so as to prevent avoidable negative side effects that in some way tamish or corrupt the anticipated benefits of the change. However the disparity was not sufficiently large that it detracted from the overall positive outcome. It did highlight that the college leadership should not underestimate the task of changing the thinking and practice of individual managers. To overcome the inertia of the Lecturer Effectiveness and accountability mindset in managers, further training will be necessary to ensure all lecturers undergo a uniformly positive experience when their appraisal falls due.

Another consequence for the college leadership with adopting the Solutions Focussed approach in the context of appraisal is that it cedes control of the process to staff. If the outcome is in line with the outcomes of the pilot, i.e. staff become more deeply reflective of their practice, identify action to bring about improvement and make those changes, then leadership in the college will have shifted towards the transformational end of the transactional – transformational leadership continuum.

Recommendations

This project examined the experience of managers and a small group of lecturers in using Solutions Focussed techniques. The feedback was so positive, to quote one manager “There is no going back.” Therefore to take this work forward the college should:

- Roll out the Solutions Focussed process and the OSKAR model to all staff with appropriate training so as to reinforce the cultural shift,
- Encourage the use of the Solutions Focussed process with students to transform the relationship between staff and students,
- Purchase training in the use of Solutions Focussed coaching in situations where there are multiple issues,
- Develop skills in using the Solutions Focussed approach in group meetings rather than just in one-to-one situations,
- Adapt the current Lecturer Effectiveness Appraisal Scheme to a Solutions Focussed approach,
- Work with local schools to assist them to determine if a Solutions Focussed approach to appraisal is appropriate for replication across all the Island’s educational establishments,
- Evaluate the longer term effect on both the leadership culture of the college and the impact of coaching on classroom practice and student achievement.

The lecturers in the pilot wanted the new process rolled out to all staff, ideally for the June 2007 round of appraisal. They deemed it necessary for all staff to have similar training to that they had experienced. Given the reluctance of some managers to completely dispense with some aspects of the lecturer effectiveness model it was suggested that more role play should be undertaken by managers to hone their skills. Although the principal focus of the project had been to use OSKAR with staff, lecturers thought there was a strong case for use with students.

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Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank all those college managers and the lecturers who volunteered for the pilot project who cannot be named for reasons of confidentiality. Their experiences and feedback form the backbone of this work. Critical commentary and ideas for developing the project beyond its original inception were gratefully received from Gary Jones, Deputy Principal. Thanks also to Jane Mann, Janine Waldman and Shaun Lincoln – Head of Coaching at the Centre for Excellence in Leadership; for the skills they imparted to college staff; and to Shaun for his subtle guidance in the evaluation stage. The research was managed by Highlands College Social Science Research Centre.

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Smart Leadership: A Partner Approach to Growing Your Own Leaders

Harriet Marland, Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln and Julia Pollock, John Leggott College Scunthorpe

Executive Summary

This research examines professional development with a particular focus on talent development for sustainable leadership within a sixth form college. The college is a Beacon institution with a strong focus on leadership development through Emotional Intelligence training. The key question for the research was "how can a college develop the confidence and talents of staff so that they are ready to apply for leadership positions when they become available?" The researchers looked at the elements of professional development that staff perceived as significant and the contribution made by their involvement in action research with a partner higher education institution. The main findings were that staff particularly valued the opportunity for reflection on emotional intelligence issues, which they found enabled them to grow into their leadership role. Those who had participated in practitioner research projects reported significant progress against organisational targets and new personal goals as a result of their training and participation. The opportunity to work with others and share good practice had opened up opportunities for leadership of curriculum initiatives which were having a positive impact on how staff perceived themselves. This means that "leading changes in learning" in the college has become just as important as "leading organisational change" and resulted in a more diverse concept of leadership which is engaging staff at all levels to aspire to leadership positions.

Introduction

This project explores a college's determination to nurture leadership ambition and skills within its own staff. It is a case study of one institution, but addresses two universal issues: a moral imperative of sustaining staff development and a pragmatic drive to enhance applications for promoted posts. Or, as the Principal put it:

"Sustainable leadership is going to be a forever challenge, isn't it? ... It is about trying to empower people whenever they are in the organisation to have a go at whatever they want to do ... I mean, in an ideal world you would always have a good internal candidate, though you wouldn't always appoint them."

Here empowering people "to have a go at whatever they want to do" encapsulates a vision of professional development that goes beyond improving performance against current commitments and looks towards talent development in potentially unexpected ways. The measure of success is seen in always having "a good internal candidate" ready to aspire to whatever new posts are defined.

Appendix 1: OSKAR Model

Outcome
- What is the objective of this coaching?
- What do you want to achieve today?
- What do you want to achieve in the long term?
- How will you know if this coaching has been of use to you?
- The future perfect.

Scaling
- On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 representing the future perfect and 0 the worst it has ever been, where are you on the scale today?
- You are at n now: what did you do to get this far?
- How would you know you had got to n+1?

Know-how and Resources
- What helps you perform at n on the scale, rather than 0?
- When does the outcome already happen for you, even a little bit?
- What did you do to make that happen? How did you do that?
- What did you do differently?
- What would other people say you were doing well?

Affirm and Action

What's already going well?
- What is the next step? What would you like to do personally, straight away?
- You are at n now, what would it take to get you to n+1?

Review
- What's better?
- What did you do that made the change happen?
- What effects have the changes had?
- What do you think will change next?

(McKergow and Clarke, 2005)
The college in question is an open access sixth form college with around 2000 students including some part time adult learners and international fee-paying students. The college mission to “be a centre of excellence for 16-19 year olds” is substantiated by its Beacon College status (upheld since 1999) and through the most recent full Ofsted report (2007) which described the college as “a good college with some outstanding features” and commended, among other positive features, how the college “successfully raised the aspirations of students who have previously not succeeded in education and gives them a sense of genuine accomplishment”. “Clear leadership across the college” was also judged as a key strength.

However there are inevitably challenges to maintaining, let alone extending, a reputation for excellence, and investment in staff development has been embraced as a driver for continued quality enhancement. Beacon status precipitated hosting good practice visits into the college and organising visits into other institutions for selected staff. However, in recent years there has been a deliberate focus on staff development through sharing best practice amongst colleagues within the college itself. One strand of this has had a teaching and learning focus. Innovative practice has been shared during an annual development week each June and, more recently, through regular twilight sessions held throughout the year. Attendance for the evening sessions is voluntary but numbers have remained buoyant with a core group of about a dozen people who attend almost every session. In 2005, the college began to work with a local Higher Education partner to provide pathways where teachers’ innovative work could be further developed and presented for accreditation within a Masters’ programme. The term “SMART group” was coined to indicate the intention to help colleagues share ideas in order to “work smarter, not harder”.

The other main strand of professional development concerns leadership skills. In 2002, the then principal commissioned a bespoke two-day Management Development course. The central feature of this course was an assessment of each participant’s application of emotional intelligence within their leadership role (Goleman et al 2002). The assessment is conducted using a 360° review in which results are compiled from quizzes both the participants themselves and several of their colleagues and is intended to lead to specific action planning that draws on strengths and plans further development. Each summer this course has been rolled out further to include the executive team, middle leaders and now aspirant leaders too. In 2006, a “SMART leadership” group was established with regular twilight meetings for short inputs and shared practice with the opportunity for participants to compile a portfolio for a Masters’ module on leading educational change. Fifteen people have enrolled on the module and SMART leadership meetings regularly have an attendance well in excess of this number.

This research study seeks to evaluate the impact of these initiatives in building the capacity and confidence of existing and aspirant leaders through identifying participants’ perceptions of the impact of their leadership development in the college and whether they reflect the Principal’s view that, “At least if you have got people to a position where they feel that, if the right opportunities come along then they can make a pitch for them, and you feel that they can put a reasonable case forward, then you’ve done what you need to do for them, haven’t you?”

The study is intended to inform the future design of programmes to “grow your own leaders” and could be of interest to other institutions facing similar challenges.
The key question for the research is:

- How can a college develop the confidence and talents of staff so that they are ready to apply for leadership positions when they become available?

Sub questions have been identified as:

- What elements in a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) do staff perceive as significant in their development as leaders?

- What contribution does involvement in action research with a partner higher education institution (HEI) make to talent development in further education (FE)?

Research Framework

The study of educational leadership has evolved through the categorisation of individualistic and impressive leaders to an analysis of traits of effective leaders in diverse situations (DES 1997). These shifts of leadership enquiry have been described as a move from trait theories and contingency theories, to transformational theories – and beyond (Lingard et al 2003). With the suggestion that traits and competencies can be learned and practised to enhance leadership capability, we are able to move beyond descriptions of leadership in action to actionable developments for developing leadership (Goleman et al 2002).

The study of leaders has evolved in parallel with a preoccupation with the individual who heads up an institution to the premise that many within the institution have distinctive leadership roles whether or not they are defined as such. Thus a head of department or subject leader has an explicit ‘middle leadership’ role, but equally an individual teacher leads learning in classes and, potentially, in wider situations too (West et al 2002). The identification of ‘every teacher a leader’ meshes with the move from institutional effectiveness studies to improvement studies and the re-visioning of staff development within the institution as a key factor in driving development forward and thus securing improvement. This development of a ‘professional learning community’ (Stoll and Bolam 2005) can embed the ‘deliberate fostering of developmental leaders who act locally and beyond’ (Fullan 2005: 51) resulting in more strategically focused capacity building (Davies 2006).

The outcomes of shifting the locus of leadership from one individual to all can be challenging at many levels. Thus West et al, through working with over 100 schools on Improving the Quality of Education for All project, characterise an emergent “dispersed leadership model which is both opportunistic and entrepreneurial” leading to a “different, dispersed and more diffuse style of leadership” (West et al 2002: 38).

Practitioner research reports commissioned by CEL (Collinson 2007) suggest that development for leadership roles, especially middle leadership roles, is an emerging area of interest that is not yet well developed across the FE sector as a whole. It is therefore hoped that the case study reported here will provide some positive examples that may inform developments in other settings and complement larger studies (Watters and Casey 2007; Whelan et al 2007; Barker 2007).

Research Methods

Staff development is an evolving process and this evaluation seeks to identify the early indicators of the impact of the recent programme through capturing individuals’ perceptions of their own evolution as leaders within the college. The study assumes an appreciative inquiry approach to evaluation (Cooperider, Whitney and Starros 2003; Preskill and Coghlan 2003). It thus seeks to elicit perceptions of the effectiveness of recent initiatives from participants in the college with the intention of providing insight into the most positive traits of the programme so that they can be further extended in this and other contexts. Participants were asked to share their aspirations as future leaders, as well as to pin-point how the programme to date had influenced their capacity for leadership. All participants were made aware of the purpose of the data collection activities and their right to personal anonymity or to withdraw from the research project.

The study is informed by documentary evidence and interview data. Semi-structured interviews with the principal (formerly vice principal) and two assistant principals (formerly curriculum leaders) were used to provide an overview of the development of leadership training and to indicate the vision for the future. Data were also collected through nine semi-structured interviews and email conversations with a wide range of staff in leadership roles throughout the college (forty-one staff were emailed and ten replied). These responses were used to elicit individual perceptions of the impact of leadership training to date and to articulate personal leadership aspirations.

In addition, preliminary audits and final impact reports from those engaged in the accredited modules were analysed. This provides a form of “educative research” (Gitlin 1992) in which the participant teachers become collaborative researchers through their own reflections on their moves into leadership.

Interviews were carried out by the authors, each of whom also contributes to the professional development programme in the college. The interviewers are thus situated within the research context and this provides a useful triangulation of findings.

Research Findings

- What elements in a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) do staff perceive as significant in their development as leaders?

One of the most influential elements of the CPD programme has been the use of the emotional intelligence report for individuals attending the Management Development course. A central element of the report is a self-assessment inventory mapped into the four quadrants of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-management, social...
In September 2006 the SMART leadership group was established. Meetings occur immediately after the school day and are centred round a specific theme, for example time management, data handling, or several of the group identify positive benefits from drawing on their different roles inside and outside education.

During the training, additional questionnaires are completed by at least three colleagues and the composite report is intended to provide a triangulated, or 360°, review of personal leadership style in action. Receiving a report informed by the perceptions of others is not always comfortable reading. Several participants have had to grapple with quite disparate views of their personal style of leadership, including negative comments which one person remembers as “traumatic, even though expected”. However the report is intended as a developmental tool which enables participants to identify and build on strengths and prioritise specific areas of development which can then be addressed directly through their role in practical ways.

Reviews conducted immediately after training indicated that 38 of the 40 participants rated the course highly as a tool to help them improve their leadership skills. Specific examples of areas for development were identified by many of the group up to three years after the initial course. For example, one commented that before receiving the report “I did not realise people could feel undervalued if I did not delegate work enough” and another found that the review highlighted “areas within my remit which do not come naturally and which I feel need developing” while a third found that it “highlighted a number of areas not previously discussed”.

Sometimes it is the discrepancy between self-review and colleagues’ views that precipitates further exploration. Thus one colleague reflects, “I do not feel I have a problem with self-confidence. I do, however, feel I need to develop a stronger presence in the department”. Whereas for another, the issue is the reverse, “Whilst I try outwardly to portray a persona of self-confidence, this is not always the case.”

Colleagues who undertook the training more than six months ago attest lasting impact and specific progress. For example, one reflects that the interim period “has allowed me to grow and develop as a leader” another that it “has seen me develop as a manager and move out of the shadow of the previous Head of Department”, while a third provides specific examples of improving communication through ensuring that meetings have an explicit agenda and minute just the agreed action points. The occasional dissenting voices come from those with different roles within the college e.g. in administration or cross-college responsibilities who found the follow up to the reports was too narrowly focussed on the remit of heads of department.

There is also some evidence that different editions of the course were more effective than others. One in particular is remembered because “the amount of encouragement offered and the excellent feedback was inspiring - focusing on what could, rather than what could not, be achieved and by giving direction about how to reach goals”.

The general consensus that the course is worthwhile can also be inferred from the number of applicants which, this year, is more than double the number of places available.

In September 2006 the SMART leadership group was established. Meetings occur immediately after the school day and are centred round a specific theme, for example time management, data handling, or team leadership. The first hour is used for a presentation and workshop drawing on current examples of effective practice. During the second hour those undertaking a Master’s module work in triads undertaking further tasks and planning specific developments within their role. At their best these sessions provide opposite inputs extended and applied through purposeful reflection. Some sessions are perceived to “raise awareness of issues faced by senior managers” and of “the political dynamic” of developments, others to provide helpful re-iteration of underlying principles and valuable opportunities to share ideas within and across departments.

As well as these professional development opportunities within college organised for groups of staff performance management links directly into the construction of an individual training plan so that personal needs are identified, agreed and addressed. However, while the procedure is well defined, the perception is that the effectiveness of performance management in sustaining professional development remains patchy. Amongst the replies received, individuals were confident that they would be supported in accessing relevant external training to realise their agreed needs but few recent external courses referred to developing leadership roles and one person explicitly stated that, after a disappointing experience on one such course, she would “prefer to spend time with other managers here”. Mentoring, coaching and work-shadowing were mentioned several times as potentially powerful forms of professional development.

● What contribution does involvement in action research with a partner higher education institution (HEI) make to talent development in further education (FE)?

During 2005-06 colleagues were offered the opportunity to complete a Postgraduate Certificate of Professional Studies in Education (CPSE) aligned to a project within their current teaching. Within their project reports are varied. They include a project to embed a praise culture in one department and another to introduce peer mentoring amongst A-level students. One study provides a systematic exploration of using students’ preferred learning styles in lesson delivery. Several others explore the impact of making teaching materials more intensive and challenging, for example one by extending the use of group work, another by incorporating more visual learning activities and a third by targeting higher order thinking skills. Each project was grounded on work already in progress but extended, explored and reported more systematically.
Two-thirds of the completed reports have achieved a good or very good standard, which is a significant achievement for a first module at masters’ level. Following earlier research into motivational and inhibiting factors for teachers in completing awards (Arthur et al 2006), it seems likely that the completion and standards have been positively influenced by the organisation within the college. The in-school co-ordinator has had a key role throughout in ensuring that the programme maintained momentum and addressed any emerging issues of concern. Thus study days and additional in-school tutorial support have been arranged and participants have been encouraged to work as critical friends to each other throughout the whole research and writing process. The co-ordinator has taken a personal interest in all the projects and facilitated further dissemination within the college. She has also been engaged in the research herself. She commented, “Those staff involved are now seen as leaders of learning across the college with several of them seeking management responsibilities, which they wouldn’t previously have considered within their reach.”

The link into accredited work began as a means to offer colleagues a personal and professional outcome to add value to work already on-going and already reported to others through the SMART teaching and learning sessions. However, the benefits of engagement with this level of work have been more wide-ranging than first expected, “We began the Certificate course to reward our teachers who work so hard. But even in the first year we have gained more than our money’s worth! The work has changed people’s perceptions. Teachers’ self-esteem has been raised. Initially they were worried ‘am I capable? Can I cope?’ Now all have developed materials for their whole department. They have grown in confidence and self-belief. They have gained from presentation to peers (in college and beyond) and from the audience dialogue and support. These teachers are now seen as innovators. It has changed the senior management team perception of individuals – more are now seen as having leadership potential and have been offered opportunities for further training.” [Assistant Principal]

The impact reviews submitted by participants after completing their project reports also reflect this gain in self-confidence. They acknowledge that they are “more reflective”, “more confident and assertive”, “well read and able to see subtleties in the situation” in their teaching. Evidence of impact on students is less confidently tracked, due to the timeline of the projects and the multiple influences that affect students’ achievements. However, each participant acknowledges significant impact at a departmental level and has presented the project to colleagues across the college. Several of the ideas have been taken up at an institutional level, and some have also been shared beyond the institution. The line managers’ contributions to the impact reviews are even more assured and comment on the perceived move of one “from team member to ideas leader” or that another has a “higher profile, [and is] now seen as an innovator by both the head of department and college leadership”. Six of the original certificate group are currently undertaking a further module on leading educational change.

The raised self-confidence, poise and profile of individuals have been recognised through promotion too, “All Certificate students 2005/6 have received promotions and/or career progression opportunities as a result of their involvement. Their status as innovators in the college has led to further opportunities to be involved in college initiatives and they have been excellent role models to other staff.” [Assistant Principal]

Participants in the certificate work thus appear to have gained in both personal confidence and professional aspiration through their action research work with students. The promotions signify that the gains have been recognised in the college too. An interesting feature here is that it is the leadership of learning within the classroom, rather than departmental leadership, that has been recognised. This suggests a broadening of the view of leadership in the college itself. Initial leadership training activities, such as the 360° review, were undertaken with those in post in hierarchical order starting with the executive team and moving on to heads of department and others who are designated as the middle managers in the system. The recognition of leadership potential of those engaged in classroom research suggests a more diffuse model of leadership. Dissemination of the projects not only identifies the motivational and learning gains in the classroom but also highlights the role of the participants – as pedagogical leaders. Their status as innovators has provided a bottom-up enrichment of the concept of leadership in the institution. Such a shift in the image of leadership perhaps correlates with a dispersed leadership model that Lingard et al. identify as “central to what is referred to as school organisational capacity building, focused on the best social and educational outcomes for all students” (2003: 54).

Key question

● How can a college develop the confidence and talents of staff so that they are ready to apply for leadership positions when they become available?

There is explicit numerical evidence that staff in the college are increasingly ready to apply for leadership positions. Four years ago the post of curriculum manager elicited just two internal candidates, this year seven have applied for a similar post. In the last six months, two curriculum managers have been promoted to posts as assistant principal, and the vice principal has been promoted to principal while a third curriculum leader has been promoted to vice principal in another college. In addition, all colleagues who completed a Postgraduate Certificate as part of the SMART teaching and learning sessions have taken on additional leadership responsibilities within or beyond their immediate departments.
However, although these figures suggest that the college has developed the confidence and talent of staff for leadership roles, they do not indicate how. Some intertwined themes have emerged which suggest developments within the college that may be important features in growing talent for sustainable leadership. These themes are developed in the final section.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Developing the Staff Learning Community

The SMART groups described in this paper were born of the realisation that, if colleagues from outside the institution were visiting and learning from the practice they saw, perhaps colleagues from within could learn from each other too. This deliberate sharing of best practice has been significant in establishing the college as a ‘learning organisation’ (Senge 1990) or ‘learning community’ (Stoll and Bolam 2005).

“Now, what we haven’t been good at historically is doing that internal dissemination. We have been good at external dissemination, we have been good at accessing good practices elsewhere but we have not been good at recognising that some people within the organisation have the experience actually to help and assist other people in the organisation.” [Principal]

These professional development groups provide a forum for sharing insights, ideas and issues. This opportunity for reflecting, sharing and learning together has been valued by many. As one said, “It provides reassurance, challenges your own thinking and offers alternatives which all too often you don’t come to yourself”. A significant aspect here is the element of “challenge” and “alternative” perspectives, alongside “reassurance”. The criticism of one colleague, that “most management courses do little other than provide a framework for common sense”, could be levelled at any session that was weighted towards reassurance without challenge. One success of the SMART groups is that the challenge and alternatives are generated from within and thus raise the level of engagement across the institution.

“I suppose that one of the things we have found is that the experience has been very motivating for staff that … the remorseless unforgiving nature of the hamster wheel of college life means that often people don’t have the opportunity to take time out and reflect in a supportive environment and that can be quite illuminating to people. … Staff are talking about teaching and learning for example … or managing people … and sharing that in a vibrant, engaged, environment where they are learning from each other. It is a space that, unless you create it, it doesn’t happen because of the nature of how frenetic activity is.” [Principal]

Emphasis on individual empowerment

The new principal has been a part of all the developments in his previous role of vice principal. However his new post puts his own personal leadership style and his perceptions of staff development under further scrutiny,

“My style of leadership is very much a belief that an organisation or enterprise can only go forward effectively if everyone has been given the opportunity to contribute to the direction in an appropriate way. Not going down a consultation fatigue process, but putting processes in place which allow people to contribute. So I would hope that that sort of approach to things would create a climate in which the investment in these people developing their leadership, skills, imagination and ambition, and working within that climate, ought to give them the opportunity to take up a new challenge in some way.” [Principal]

Here he dwells on an ethic of ensuring that colleagues are empowered to embrace new challenges. There is some evidence that this has been achieved. By placing importance on an emotionally intelligent dimension to leadership, the college has embraced a view that everyone can develop and enhance their own leadership skills. In addition, one outcome of the sustained action research projects has been to nurture the confidence and contribution of those involved.

Learning through mentoring, coaching and work-shadowing have been identified as particularly beneficial in empowering colleagues to embrace change and learn from tricky situations. One colleague writes that “Mentoring from senior management is essential when staff take on a new leadership role” and that meetings to track both needs and progress have been very beneficial. Another has “Maintained a relationship with my critical friend who acts as an outside agent for me to voice my ideas, concerns and issues with – she offers advice in the form of questions which enable me to reach my own outcome without her persuasion or direct influence.” Several also comment that they have benefited, or believe they would benefit, from visits to other colleges. These are perhaps areas that could be further developed so that they are not left to chance but developed systematically to further empower colleagues.

Broadening the Perception of Leadership Roles in the College

One institutional outcome of the work described here seems to be expanding the perception of leadership roles. Initially the College Executive undertook the 360 review and found it “useful and enlightening” with its focus on identifying and developing personal skills in managing adults. The Executive could thus be said to have modelled learning about leading and later to have opened up this opportunity to others in leadership roles. More recently these opportunities have been opened up still further to those who are not (yet) in conventional leadership roles. This is a deliberate policy to prepare people for the challenges of leadership, rather than to promote people into leadership positions and then put in a training programme.
Simultaneously, the sustained work through the masters’ modules has enabled some teachers to identify themselves as leaders of learning initiatives and to share these within and beyond their own departments. Interviews with this group suggested a particularly diverse range of leadership aspirations that included pastoral, inspectional and cross-curricular areas, alongside more conventional curriculum leadership roles.

This greater articulation of the leadership dimension within many roles, rather than identification of a hierarchy of specifically designated leadership roles, is fostering a “multi-level leadership” model which encourages colleagues to identify and develop personal leadership strands. The college is thus not only “growing its own leaders”, but simultaneously growing its concept of leadership.

**References**


Managing Managers’ Competence and Developing Leaders

Philip Barker with Janet Brewer, City of Bristol College

Executive Summary

This project took place in a large college of further education in the south west of England. It aimed to explore the impact of introducing competence based standards to support the performance of a group of curriculum middle managers. Using a web-based survey, face to face and telephone interviews, and the results of a postal survey, the views and experiences of 43 curriculum middle managers and a sample of their managers were sought. The initial findings point to the insufficiency of the competence based framework to support the development of middle managers; the difficulty of using the framework to ensure standardisation amongst middle managers; and the effects of using financial incentives to ensure the competence of middle managers. The notion of leadership, although recognised as important by both middle managers and their managers, appeared underdeveloped within the framework. This is recognised as an important issue if curriculum middle managers are to effect change within the organisation and successfully progress to senior management positions.

Introduction

This project aimed to explore the impact of the introduction of locally devised competence based standards on curriculum middle managers in a general FE college. It took place in one of the largest general FE colleges in the UK over a six month time frame between October 2006 and March 2007. Between 1998 and 2002 the college had seen considerable expansion due to mergers with four local colleges. It now operated from seven main centres with numerous local community sites. In 2005/06 there were 38,463 students of whom 14% were full-time and 86% were 19 years or over. 76% of full-time students were between 16-18 years old. During the past five years, recruitment of 16-18 year olds had increased by over 25%, from 3,000 in 2001/02 to 4,078 in 2005/06. The college structure included 14 faculties providing education and training provision ranging from Art and Design, Construction, and Hairdressing and Beauty Therapy, through to Engineering, Humanities and Science, and Transport Technology.

The college had achieved considerable success. In 2004 it achieved Beacon status, and at the time of the project had Centres for Vocational Excellence in Aeronautical Engineering, Supervisory Management and Hospitality Services. An OfSTED inspection in February 2006 graded both Leadership and Management, and Capacity to Improve as Outstanding. The effects of these developments, coupled with continuing demands to maintain and improve both quality and financial viability, had placed increased demands upon the role of both Heads of Faculty and middle management in the college. Senior managers had recognised the importance of middle managers in implementing change and had introduced two new grades for middle managers within faculties. One of these grades referred to curriculum middle managers, who were responsible for the management of teaching and learning. The other new grade was that of programme co-ordinator which was responsible for a specific area of education and training provision in a faculty. Programme co-ordinators reported to curriculum middle managers. Curriculum middle managers reported to Heads of Faculty. At the same time Heads of Faculty were developing their strategic role in the faculty.

Earlier research in the college had referred to the difficulty in the recruitment of curriculum middle managers and explored the different perceptions of middle management held by teachers and curriculum middle managers. This work supported a strategy for succession planning throughout the college, with a view to promoting existing staff to management positions. A further issue identified by senior managers concerned the diverse responsibilities amongst middle managers and variations in the rewards they received. These differences could be explained in terms of the merging of colleges and their different systems, together with faculties' different responses to their own particular sector's needs. Nevertheless, the differences presented challenges in terms of ensuring quality and financial responsibility across the whole college. It was envisaged that standardisation of performance across all curriculum middle managers would ensure that there were no gaps in either quality or financial viability of provision. As a result, the college started to introduce locally devised standards of competence for its managers, beginning with the curriculum middle managers.

During 2005/06 the Human Resources Unit of the college had produced competence-based standards for curriculum middle managers. This was achieved using a functional analysis approach, similar to that used in the development of national standards of occupational competence, and used to underpin the design of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). The process of producing the standards involved interviews and consultations with curriculum middle managers and Heads of Faculty. This produced four competency groups (Being a leader, Achieving results; Making processes and procedures work; and Expert in your field). Each competency group then identified four or five competency areas, there being a total of 19 competency areas across all four competency groups.

The importance of curriculum middle managers achieving these competence standards was deemed paramount by senior managers. All curriculum middle managers were to attend an eight-day training programme over a four-week period, which was based on the standards. They would then be required to demonstrate their competence over the following thirty six months through the production of a portfolio of evidence. Failure by middle managers to produce evidence of their competence within this timescale would result in the introduction of capability procedures. This portfolio would be assessed by the appropriate head of faculty and if deemed competent, the middle manager would receive an extended salary scale.
This project explored the experiences of those curriculum middle managers attending the training programme, and the implications of the use of competence based standards both for the curriculum middle managers and for their managers, the Heads of Faculty. The research questions were negotiated with different interested parties in the college (for example, Human Resources and Workforce Development, Quality Improvement Unit). Whilst each party had slightly different interests, the following research questions were agreed:

1. How can we support and improve the performance of managers in the college? In particular:
   a) How can we ensure a consistent approach by senior managers (heads of faculty) and curriculum middle managers (programme managers/co-ordinators) across the college?
   b) Does the use of locally-devised competence-based standards improve the performance of managers?
   c) What factors support the effective use of competence-based standards?
   d) What are the needs of senior managers in using competence-based standards with their managers?
   e) What is the impact of competence-based standards on managers’ motivation for self development and improvement?

Throughout the work of the project, ethical considerations were paramount. Participation in the project was always voluntary and anonymous. No respondent could be identified by any person other than the researchers. Only the researchers had access to the data and it is planned that respondents will receive findings from the survey.

Research Framework

The project was conducted in a context of increased significance for middle management. Recognition of the important role of middle managers in managing, leading and effecting change and development in organisations is key to the notion of distributed leadership. Some recent discussion has focussed on the notion of middle leadership, rather than middle management. In the context of education, middle leaders provide an interface between senior managers, and teachers and their learners. They take the organisation’s vision to the “sharp end” where teaching and learning take place. This can have the effect of increasing morale and confidence throughout the organisation. “Middle leaders play a pivotal role in making schools successful” (NCSL 2006: 1).

The multifaceted nature of middle management in education has been identified by a number of authors (Briggs 2005; Clegg and McKeeley 2003; Wolverton & Ackerman 2005). This in itself creates tensions in the role of middle managers. For example the “go-between” or “liaiser” role (Barker 2007; Briggs 2005) requires a constant reconciliation between the demands and requirements of senior managers, their external bureaucrats, and the middle managers’ own staff. Collinson’s useful recognition that FE staff seek leadership which provides “both structure and teamwork, both distance and proximity, both external and internal communities” (Collinson and Collinson 2005: 10) provides further insight into the demands made of middle managers in FE colleges. Whilst these concepts are clearly not incompatible, it is the middle managers dealing directly with their staff who face the reality of putting these different expectations into practice.

In the 1990s, in common with other organisations, further education colleges experienced a process of delayering. This process attempted to reduce the negative effects of bureaucracy, particularly in public sector organisations, by removing middle management roles in organisations. Middle managers were accused of slowing down the decision making process; impeding the flow of information; emprise building; adding unnecessary costs; creating barriers between the organisation and the customer; and disempowering the worker (Handy 1995). Delayering resulted in devolved responsibility for the achievement of performance targets and budgetary controls. Thomas and Dunkley (1998) question the efficacy of this process in removing inefficient bureaucracies, suggesting that the old bureaucracies have only been replaced by a different type of bureaucracy which is driven by an audit culture and the chasing of targets.

This process placed increased pressure on those middle managers who managed to retain their jobs (ids. Thomas and Linstead (2002) point to the psychological impact of delayering on middle managers and their resulting “fragile identities”. One middle manager they interviewed stated, “I feel sometimes like I’m losing the plot” (2002: 84). The psychological and gendered effects of the process of delayering on middle managers in the insurance industry are also explored by Collinson and Collinson (1997). The use of time-space surveillance as a means to monitor and control middle managers may be particularly pertinent to the FE sector, where the demands made upon middle managers by senior managers and external agencies appear to be ever increasing. Collinson (2003) explores further the effects of an organisation’s strategies of surveillance on individual identities and categorises the potential impact on individuals in terms of conformist selves, (career followers, rule followers); dramaturgical selves (manipulators, concerned with self image, information or data manipulation); and resistant selves (time-keeping, going slow, whistle blowing).

A further dimension to the context of this project is the use of competence based frameworks to support improved and consistent performance of managers. The notion of competence has become second nature in the context of education and training, with little consideration as to its meaning. Jessup referred to the importance of “breadth” in his discussion of the concept of competence. He stated “it does not refer to a lowish or minimum level of performance. On the contrary, it refers to the standard required successfully to perform an activity or function” (Jessup 1991: 29).

He went on to refer to the inclusion of “task management”, “contingency management” and “role/environment skills”. Although this contribution informs the detail of the concept of competence, for the purposes of this project it is sufficient to state that competence is concerned with performance to standards required in the workplace.
In 1981, the Manpower Services Commission’s New Training Initiative referred to the development of new standards to support the upskilling of the workforce and the widening of opportunities for the population, in response to a perceived lack of competitiveness in both the home and world economic markets. The development of competence based standards for occupational sectors and organisations gathered pace in the late 1980s and 1990s with the Review of National Vocational Qualifications (1986), the subsequent establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in 1987, and the production of national occupational standards by Occupational Standards Councils. The NCVQ subsequently merged in 1997 with the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to become the present day Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. This embedded the use of competence based standards into National Vocational Qualifications. Within the context of Management, the Management Charter Initiative under the auspices of the Forum for Management Education, developed competence based standards for managers in the late 1980s.

At the same time, organisations started to produce their own locally devised standards of competence as means to enhancing their own performance, and for use in specific management roles such as recruitment, appraisal, and in some cases as indicators of reward. Recent research on the effectiveness of these standards in improving performance is scant, and the earlier research that exists is frequently part of an evaluation study to monitor the use of standards. These evaluative studies, whilst useful for the projects they were supporting, were usually funded through the projects’ sponsoring body.

More recently, the notion of management competencies has been extended to the concept of leadership. Bolden and Gosling (2006: 153) warn against over reliance on the use competence based standards in the context of Leadership, stating that this approach is “a repeating refrain that continues to offer an illusory promise to rationalise and simplify the processes of selecting, measuring and developing leaders yet only reflects a fragment of the complexity that is leadership which may be required of leaders”. This comment suggests limitations to the use of competence based standards, particularly in the context of leadership.

CEL’s Leadership Qualities Framework attempts to define the “core characteristics” of Leadership and includes the definition of Qualities and Descriptors which show the attitudes and behaviours that may be required of leaders. Clearly this does not attempt to be competence based in the sense that the term is used in this project, or in the college’s competence framework. Each Competency Group contained in the college-devised standards is accompanied by a list of Behaviours and Attitudes which middle managers must demonstrate. The following table shows a comparison of the CEL Leadership Qualities Framework, and the attitudes and behaviours which accompany the college’s Competency Group ‘Being a Leader’.

### Comparison of Competency Group ‘Being a Leader’ with CEL’s Leadership Qualities Framework

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<th>CEL’s Leadership Qualities Framework</th>
<th>College devised Competency group Being a Leader and a Manager: Behaviours and attitudes</th>
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<td>FOCUS TO ACHIEVE</td>
<td>• Shaping the future</td>
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<td>• Business acumen</td>
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<td>• Act with integrity, honestly and fairness respecting and valuing diversity.</td>
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<td>• Encourage creativity and support risk taking.</td>
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<td>• Manage and lead by example and empower colleagues and team members, is visible and approachable.</td>
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<td>• Communicate regularly, consistently and appropriately.</td>
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<td>• Recognise the potential of others and motivate and enthuse colleagues and team members, demonstrate active coaching skills.</td>
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<td>• Recognise and celebrate success.</td>
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<td>PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE</td>
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<td>• Self awareness &amp; growth</td>
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<td>• Demonstrate support and conviction to business decisions, accept responsibility for decisions.</td>
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<td>• Demonstrate active listening.</td>
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<td>• Persistent and optimistic, even in difficult circumstances, stays calm under pressure.</td>
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### Research Methods

The research was carried out by two researchers. Four research methods were used to gather data as follows:

1. A web-based survey

All 43 curriculum middle managers who attended the eight days training were invited to complete the survey. Responses were received from 38, a response rate of 91%. Each manager was sent an email requesting the completion of the questionnaire. This email contained a web address which took them directly to the questionnaire.
These research methods were chosen for a number of reasons. The web based survey provided an economic and efficient means of contacting all the curriculum middle managers. It was accessible to them all, as it was known they all used email, and they could complete the survey at their own convenience. Confidentiality was ensured since SSL encryption was used. A further convenience for the researchers was the automatic collation of the data which respondents provided.

The semi structured interviews were used to provide opportunity to explore in greater depth than the survey would allow some of the issues relating to the curriculum middle managers' training and the use of the competence framework. The numbers of staff interviewed was relatively small and therefore manageable in terms of time. Telephone interviews were used with some of the managers of curriculum middle managers due to the limited availability of both the managers and the researchers.

The postal survey for the staff climate survey was chosen as the most appropriate way to reach as many of the 2000 staff as possible.

Research Findings

Each of the four methods used produced a range of findings pertinent to this research project:

1. Interviews with curriculum middle managers

The web-based questionnaire provided respondents with the opportunity to volunteer for an interview with one of the researchers. Six respondents volunteered and all were interviewed. These semi-structured interviews followed up issues which had arisen from the web based survey. Each lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were audio recorded to facilitate the analysis.

2. Interviews with the managers of curriculum middle managers

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five of the managers of curriculum managers. These interviews were conducted by telephone. Those interviewed were Heads of Faculty and in one instance a senior manager in a support unit. Interviews lasted for between 30 minutes and one hour and aimed to explore their perceptions and understanding of the competency framework, the use they had made of the framework, and also to explore their views on the function of middle management in the college. Owing to the time of year when the competence framework was introduced and the timeframe for appraisals in the college, use of the competence framework during appraisals in some of the faculties had not yet taken place.

3. Interviews with the managers of curriculum middle managers

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five of the managers of curriculum managers. Three interviews were conducted by telephone. Those interviewed were Heads of Faculty and in one instance a senior manager in a support unit. Interviews lasted for between 30 minutes and one hour and aimed to explore their perceptions and understanding of the competency framework, the use they had made of the framework, and also to explore their views on the function of middle management in the college. Owing to the time of year when the competence framework was introduced and the timeframe for appraisals in the college, use of the competence framework during appraisals in some of the faculties had not yet taken place.

4. Postal staff climate survey

Approximately two months prior to the start of this project, the researchers had conducted for the college a climate survey of all 2000 staff. At the time of this climate survey one third of the middle managers had completed their management training. The survey explored the staff's experiences of the college, on the theme of "What is it like to work at the college?". The staff survey included 36 statements with which respondents were asked to agree or disagree using a four point rating scale. Although the survey was conducted anonymously, staff were asked to select from a list of job titles the title that best fitted their own role. One of these roles was curriculum middle manager, and it was therefore possible to isolate the responses of these managers for use in this project. The survey was sent to the home addresses of all staff, although the survey was also made available on-line for those staff who wished to respond electronically. There were 52 responses which stated they were a curriculum middle manager, which represents a response rate of 76% in terms of the 43 curriculum middle managers in the college. This was considerably higher than the overall response rate for the survey, which was 51%.

The high response rate was achieved through informing curriculum middle managers about the survey during their training and the intention to send them the questionnaire. In addition, two follow up emails were also sent before the closure date. These follow up emails contained details of the response rate at that point in time. Throughout this survey, anonymity of respondents was maintained. It was not possible for the researchers to know which middle managers had responded.

The questionnaire was devised following consultation with the interested parties and one small group of ten of the curriculum middle managers. It was piloted with six staff (none of whom were curriculum middle managers). The questionnaire included a mix of four point rating scale questions, multiple choice questions, and open box questions.

These research methods were chosen for a number of reasons. The web based survey provided an economic and efficient means of contacting all the curriculum middle managers. It was accessible to them all, as it was known they all used email, and they could complete the survey at their own convenience. Confidentiality was ensured since SSL encryption was used. A further convenience for the researchers was the automatic collation of the data which respondents provided.

The semi structured interviews were used to provide opportunity to explore in greater depth than the survey would allow some of the issues relating to the curriculum middle managers' training and the use of the competence framework. The numbers of staff interviewed was relatively small and therefore manageable in terms of time. Telephone interviews were used with some of the managers of curriculum middle managers due to the limited availability of both the managers and the researchers. The postal survey for the staff climate survey was chosen as the most appropriate way to reach as many of the 2000 staff as possible.

Research Findings

Each of the four methods used produced a range of findings pertinent to this research project:

1. Interviews with curriculum middle managers

There were mixed views about the usefulness of the competence framework. 48% of respondents stated the framework was useful in helping them understand their role and how it fitted into the college's management framework. 47% stated the competencies were important to them to show that they were competent.

Middle managers were asked in "In what ways could the college's management competencies help you in your work?". 61% stated the main use would be in evaluating training and development needs for the future. 59% stated the framework was useful in helping them understand their role and how it fitted into the college's management framework. 59% thought the framework reflected what they did as a middle manager, but only 48% thought there were clear benefits to using it. 50% neither agreed nor disagreed that there were clear benefits to the competence framework.

2. Interviews with the managers of curriculum middle managers

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five of the managers of curriculum managers. Three interviews were conducted by telephone. Those interviewed were Heads of Faculty and in one instance a senior manager in a support unit. Interviews lasted for between 30 minutes and one hour and aimed to explore their perceptions and understanding of the competency framework, the use they had made of the framework, and also to explore their views on the function of middle management in the college. Owing to the time of year when the competence framework was introduced and the timeframe for appraisals in the college, use of the competence framework during appraisals in some of the faculties had not yet taken place.

4. Postal staff climate survey

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Middle managers were also asked what they thought the disadvantages of the standards might be. Of the 28 comments received, six felt that the standards did not reflect the structure of their work, and that they would be unable to achieve them. A further six were concerned about the time that would be needed to construct a portfolio to demonstrate competence. Two comments referred to the lack of any links to accreditation or recognition of prior experience or learning. One person commented “When I first saw the competency framework I felt overwhelmed and anxious”.

70% of respondents stated that gaining accreditation through the use of the standards was important to them and a further 14% stated it was of “some importance”. 17% stated it was not important. 61% thought this accreditation should be for an NVQ level 4 or 5 in Management. 16% of respondents reported that they already held an NVQ in Management (two at level 4, five at level 5).

In spite of the mixed views about the competence framework, the training programme itself received positive responses. Asked “How useful do you consider the training to have been?”, 84% stated either “useful” or “quite useful”. 73% stated the training had had an impact on their motivation, and 72% stated it had an impact on their leadership skills.

Interviews with six curriculum middle managers

A content analysis of the interviews with six curriculum middle managers, each from different curriculum areas, produced the following findings:

- Curriculum middle managers were asked whether the competence framework had changed what they do in their work. Two stated that it had made them more aware of their job and one of these stated that they now took more time to reflect on their work. The remaining four all stated that it had not really changed what they do and two of these stated they already knew what they had to do.

- Five of the six stated that they had not used the framework since their training. One added they had used the competencies “a little bit”, in the context of identifying the evidence they needed to produce for their portfolio.

- Two of the six interviewees felt that the standards had helped to clarify their job role. Two stated that they were already clear about their role, and one stated that they were still unclear about their role. The sixth interviewee suggested that it was “Difficult to realise that you are already competent - I don’t recognise things for what they are.”

- Interviewees were asked how important it was that there were differences between the roles of middle managers in different faculties. A mix of responses was received. One stated that all curriculum middle managers could have the same job description and that the standards should provide this. Two felt that there were differences in the roles of curriculum middle managers but that there were broad areas of commonality. Two felt that there were huge differences between what different curriculum middle managers did. The sixth person stated that the competences provided a base, from which individuals could identify what it was they needed to develop, thereby implying that the standards would be useful for middle managers whether or not they were required to perform them all.

- Four of the six curriculum middle managers referred to the amount of time that it would take to put the evidence for their portfolio together. One described how he had set up electronic files in which to collect evidence from his day to day work. When he realised that he would need to collect 57 separate pieces of evidence, he simply gave up. Another interviewee referred to taking a week off work simply to concentrate on getting their portfolio together.

- Interviewees were asked how important they thought leadership was in their work? Five of the interviewees clearly thought that leadership was important. The sixth was less certain, and commented that they were more concerned with consulting and introducing change. Three of the five interviewees thought leadership was about “enabling”, “supporting” and “facilitating” and a fourth said they would aspire to be a leader. Two interviewees could not remember doing anything about leadership on their training course.

- Two interviewees referred to the importance of retaining teaching as part of their role. One of these felt that this not only ensured they kept in touch with students, but also maintained their credibility with their own staff.

- Finally, interviewees were asked if they had anything else they wanted to say about the competencies. Two spoke about the time-consuming nature of evidence-gathering, and one of these was particularly concerned that staff are required
to respond to other factors in their environment which are not included in the competence framework. Another referred to the inability of all middle managers in the college to complete the standards since they were prevented by college regulations from managing budgets (a requirement of the standards). Only two signatures per faculty would be accepted by the college finance office to authorise expenditure (the Head of Faculty and one other person). Hence if there was more than one middle manager per faculty, some could not be managing a budget. Lastly, one of the senior managers stated that the standards lack a focus on the management of performance. "They are not target driven" she commented and went on to state that this was an essential aspect of her middle managers’ work.

● Where does teaching fit? Two senior managers referred to the lack of reference to teaching in the framework. "If you are to be an 'expert in your field', to what does this refer? Is this the expert teacher?" asked one. The other referred to how middle managers had to stop teaching and this was something many staff did not want to do.

● Learning and the competence framework. Although one senior manager thought that training and learning needs might arise from the process of using the standards, four thought the exercise was about middle managers demonstrating that they were competent in order to progress to the increased salary. The individuals’ motives for evidencing the standards are therefore financial, rather than improving performance. As one senior manager stated, "This process is not about learning. People may be competent, but there is not a lot of learning going on...but we really need to become a learning organisation and this doesn’t take us there".

● Time. All senior managers referred to the time it would take for staff to demonstrate their competence. Although the whole exercise would provide a baseline of staff performance, the process was laborious and time consuming. Furthermore, the standards were far too detailed to be used in appraisal. One commented "if we test continuous competence, this will take up hours and hours of people’s time!"

● Assessment. Three of the senior managers stated that they were already NVQ assessors and knew how to assess to standards. The issue of moderating evidence presented for assessment was frequently raised. All the time of the project, little progress had been made on this issue, although heads of faculty had agreed to meet to review the issue. One of the senior managers interviewed was pessimistic about heads of faculty agreeing on the evidence required to meet the standards. Another referred to the need for centralised guidance on the assessment of the standards and a procedure for moderation.

● Staff perceptions of the standards. Two interviewees referred to negative staff perceptions of the standards. One stated "They see it as a hurdle to get through...there’s a degree of cynicism about it". Another reported that one member of staff was initially quite angry about the introduction of the standards.

This middle manager had worked for many years in her role and was now being asked to demonstrate that she was competent, with no regard or recognition of her experience. There had never been any suggestion that she might be "incompetent". Yet a new member of staff could rapidly demonstrate their competence, and then be paid the same as she was.

Postal staff climate survey
Some of the questions in the staff survey were pertinent to this project and the findings from these are listed below:

● 93% of curriculum middle managers agreed with the statement that they understood their job role and what is required of them.

● 80% knew how their work would be judged.

● 71% felt that their manager provided them with clear leadership.

● 50% of curriculum managers disagreed with the statement "College systems help me do my work effectively."

Conclusions

Does using a competency framework ensure a consistent approach by managers across the college?

Standardisation of the role of curriculum middle managers across the college was an important aim of the managers who developed the competence framework. However, it is not clear how this will happen, since there is no process in place to standardise the evidence requirements demanded of the middle managers. Given the complex mix of culture, context, tasks and sector values found in a college this size, standardisation may result in inflexibility and lack of responsiveness to the needs of different client groups such as employers, community groups, ESOL students, HE or GCE A level students.

The importance of teaching to curriculum middle managers and their managers is still recognised, and there is concern that this issue is not addressed in the standards. The earlier research in the college (Barker 2007) had highlighted the variations in time that middle managers spent teaching. The issue reflects the work of Fletcher-Campbell (2003) in schools, who found some teachers simply did not want management positions if this meant that they would have to give up teaching and their contact with pupils. It is not clear how standards for teaching might be included in the middle managers’ standards, and in any case, such standards already exist (Standards Verifcation UK 2008). However, the concern about teaching indicates that achieving standardisation in the work of middle managers will only refer to standardising their management functions.
The reluctance of some middle managers to forego their expertise as teachers is reminiscent of the work of Thomas and Linstead (2002). Just as the process of delayering changed the area of expertise of managers (and their views of themselves), so the process of becoming a curriculum middle manager inevitably changes the principal focus of an individual’s role (from teacher to manager), with the potential for creating ‘fragile identities’.

**Does using a competency framework improve the performance of managers?**

There is no evidence to date that using competence based standards has actually raised the performance of managers. It is too early for clear evidence to emerge. However, what was apparent was that few of the middle managers or the senior managers seemed especially concerned about the issue of performance. Their discussion of the use of the competence framework centered largely on the question of portfolio building. The immediate concern was to find the evidence rather than to improve performance. This attitude was driven by a strong financial incentive to complete the portfolio. Learning and development were secondary in their planning. Learning needs would be met only when lack of evidence proved a barrier to portfolio completion and the achievement of the extended salary scale. The case for the use of competence based standards to actually raise the performance level of staff, particularly those that are already performing satisfactorily, is not made. Contrary to Jessup’s assertion, this study suggests that competence based standards result in assessing to minimum levels of performance.

Competence is not the only factor that affects performance. 50% of middle managers stated in the postal survey that college systems did not help them do their work. So however competent managers might prove themselves to be, they may still under-perform due to the inappropriate or inefficient systems with which they have to work. Managers may of course become competent at working with inefficient systems, but at a cost to both themselves (such as long hours or low motivation) and the organisation (such as high unit costs, low morale or minimum levels of quality).

**What supports the use of competence based standards?**

If staff are to use competence based standards, they clearly need to be confident that they reflect what they do and that they are achievable. Curriculum middle managers and their managers considered the competence framework with which they were working, whilst largely reflecting what they did, did little to inform them about their work. This is evidenced in the web based survey of middle managers, and in both groups of interviews conducted. This is not surprising, since in the postal survey of all staff, 93% of curriculum middle managers stated they understood their job role, and 80% said they knew how their work would be judged. Hence the standards only tell staff what they already know.

Both sets of managers saw limitations to the framework. Whilst some referred to the lack of reference to performance management and to teaching in the framework, others referred to inflexibility and the lack of recognition of context. Some staff would not be able to demonstrate their competence against the whole framework. This was because they either did not do some aspects of the framework, or in one instance would not be permitted to by college regulations. Interestingly, only one senior manager referred to the fact that middle managers, in negotiation with their head of faculty, could be deemed to have completed the framework on completion of 17 of the 19 competency areas.

Although all curriculum middle managers see leadership as important in their role, and recognise leadership in their own managers, the subject receives limited coverage in the standards. Of the behaviours and attitudes referred to in the competency framework, only three could really be described as referring to leadership qualities (Manage and lead by example; Recognise the potential of others; Encourage creativity and support risk-taking). The remaining qualities could be expected of all staff regardless of whether they were a leader. One senior manager referred to the need to become a learning organisation. This concept relies upon the decentralisation of leadership to enable staff to work towards their shared aims (Senge 1990). Within this context, this confirms the significance and contribution of middle managers as leaders.

**What are senior managers needs?**

The senior managers in the survey were familiar with the system of producing evidence to meet competence standards. Some of them were accredited NVQ assessors. Their needs were concerned primarily with understanding the processes for implementing the standards within the college and in particular for guidance on assessment and in particular the moderation of evidence. They wanted to be clear that the process was being managed effectively.

**What impact does a competency framework have on motivation, self development and improvement?**

Whilst there is some evidence that the motivation of middle managers was increased by the attendance at the training programme, this increase was not as a result of the use of the standards. For some, the opportunity for accreditation also acted as an incentive, although there were concerns that the college standards were not the same as the standards in the Management NVQs. In order to achieve accreditation, middle managers would have to duplicate their efforts and produce evidence for both sets of standards.

The psychological impact of introducing competence based standards should not be underestimated. Some staff had negative reactions to being required to demonstrate their competence when they had been doing their job satisfactorily for several years. This resulted in their feeling undervalued, especially in terms of their considerable experience. Both middle and senior managers were concerned about the time that would be taken to assemble their portfolio of evidence. It demonstrates the potentially negative and de-motivating effects that can result from linking the measurement of performance through a competence framework to grade and reward. Rather than celebrating competence and achievement, managers felt they had to defend themselves in order to justify their position and salary. This is very different from the approach the managers would have been used to using when teachers, where they would celebrate the achievement and competence of their students.
Furthermore the use of the competence framework can be seen as another form of surveillance. It is another organisation strategy to monitor and check on the behaviour and performance of staff. In this sense, the effects on individuals to which Collinson (2003) refers may be counter productive if the expectation of middle managers is that they will introduce change, maintain excellence, and lead their staff.

**Recommendations**

In the light of these findings the project will develop a series of recommendations for senior managers in the college. Some of these recommendations are likely to apply to all colleges, whilst others are specific to the college where the project was carried out. These recommendations will address the following issues:

**General Issues**

- Develop the leadership potential of middle managers to support development, change and flexibility in their work context.
- Provide clear procedures and structures for the moderation of portfolio evidence to ensure standardisation of assessment, and hence standardisation of performance by middle managers across the college. *(Since the research was conducted, college procedures for the verification and moderation of evidence are now being put in place).*
- Devise strategies to develop a learning culture within the organisation which is linked to notions of excellence and constant improvement.
- Provide support for middle managers which recognises the psychological changes that some new to the role may experience.

**Issues Specific to this College**

- Review the standards to ensure the inclusion of performance management.

**Acknowledgments**

Thanks to all the staff in the college who gave their time and views so generously and who saw their participation in this project as another opportunity in their elastic diaries to contribute to the success of the college.

**References**


Succession Planning for Colleges: The Transition into Leadership Positions in Further Education Colleges in England

John Evans, City College Brighton and Hove

Executive Summary

This report examines succession planning and internal promotion for middle managers in the GFE sector. Questionnaires were sent out to 150 colleges across the sector, which elicited approximately a 25% response rate. The research found that many colleges were experiencing difficulties in recruiting middle managers. It also discovered that there is no universal programme of staff development and training for succession planning and internal promotion. Programmes tend to emphasise operational and technical expertise development to the detriment of “people based” or “soft” skills development. They are focused on “correcting” deficiencies in organisational and personal effectiveness by increasing technical expertise. Hence, colleges are engaged primarily in what might be called high-level technical expertise development, rather than leadership skills for managing diverse teams across a curriculum area. The research also found little evidence of a critical appreciation of what is actually happening in internal promotion processes and the impact on succession planning, aside from securing suitable numbers of apparently qualified staff for the next rung of the ladder. The report concludes with a number of recommendations about how to improve development programmes. It is argued that only by focusing on whole teams can colleges create the right staffing climate, ethos and support for middle manager development.

Introduction

This project arises from the college’s own experience of running two “Managers into Leaders” programmes over the past three years, to address a range of challenges concerning the recruitment of staff in the local and regional context of Brighton and Hove. The college’s research cites the challenge of pay and conditions in the FE sector as a primary constraint, and as a source of potential “poaching” notably from 6th form colleges and school 6th forms (Collinson & Collinson, 2006). The experience in Brighton and Hove has been more clearly rooted in the local social and economic context.

This general FE college (GFE) serves a population of approximately 250,000. It is one of 7 GFEs in Sussex, alongside the same number of 6th form colleges, but with a myriad of school arrangements in the 11-18 sector. There is little movement between sectors in the area, due to the specialist nature of what the college provides. The ability to attract and recruit staff is almost entirely shaped by housing and transport matters, inward and outward: house prices are very high, comparable to some high London prices, thus preventing inward movement from other parts of the country. The transport system is effective thus allowing staff living in Brighton to apply for a wide range of jobs in colleges connected by good northbound road and rail links.

The only benefit of this is that staff in colleges to the north who tire of commuting can be attracted when the right posts appear.

The need to grow our own promoted staff therefore, is paramount, using the only other key source of potential young staff: local industry and the two universities (particularly the University of Brighton which has a more “vocational” offer than Sussex). This works well in attracting young administrative staff who wish to stay in Brighton post graduation, and has helped, to some extent, in attracting specialist vocational staff in particular disciplines.

Thus, the two “Managers into Leaders” (M2L) programmes were set up to serve two purposes: first, to demonstrate to certain groups of staff that they were valued and identified as potential future middle or senior staff in college, second to indicate that they would likely be “in the front row” when college reorganisations or promoted posts gave rise to new positions required for strategic reasons. The content of the programmes was designed to give them the analytical tools to manage and lead the immediate environment of their middle management positions, and to equip them with the frameworks and understanding that would allow them to articulate effectively an application for promotion, when the time came. In the second programme, participants were required to work on performance-based projects focussed on college activities that clearly needed improvement.

Three years on from the implementation of the programme, the Senior Management Team perceives that the performance of areas of the college where participants are based, or predominantly work, has not improved, nor has the perceived effectiveness of the staff concerned improved to tackle matters of weakness and inadequate practice.

The project, therefore, arose out of the need to benchmark the college’s activity against performance and practice in other colleges in order to address three key issues:

i) How were other colleges dealing with succession planning?

ii) What kind of content in succession planning or middle management programmes was being used to ensure effective behaviour changes had an impact on college performance?

iii) How were the staff who participated being supported before, during and after promotion?

A supplementary consideration formed part of the original list of questions to be answered: how should a college react to situations where internally promoted staff do not meet expectations in their new role, and over what period of time? We have not been able to address this question in the time period of the project, but it remains a central theme to be addressed. It also resonates with issues discussed below in terms of how colleges generally deal with the “underperformance” of promoted staff in general.
Research Framework

There is, currently, a massive literature on leadership. CEL, LSDA and Q&A are all involved in the operation and development of leadership programmes and research, in support of the promotion of institutional effectiveness. There is also a plethora of leadership programmes in the public and private sector, all focussed on it. It seems, changing the behaviour of those who aspire to leadership positions, by “correcting” their behaviour to secure alignment with organisational goals and objectives, and to make them fully effective in dealing with underperforming organisations and staff.

Other issues that have not as yet achieved full prominence in the literature are the questions of how can leadership be “distributed” and also what is the sociology of this leadership which is being played out in the middle of organisations where this distributed leadership is supposed to take place? Globally the tension and connection between skills and knowledge in the market place has yet to be worked through. The enormous shift in the balance between unskilled, semi-skilled, skilled and knowledge workers in all parts of the world has yet to resolve itself, along with the consequences for those in the middle of organisations, whether they be flat or hierarchically, if structured. This is the starting point for this project, that there is a group of people in the middle ground of Tertiary/Generic FE colleges whose roles cannot be understood through the discussions, recommendations and often stringent demands for leadership which surround them.

From a sociological perspective, Sennett (2006) sees middle managers in a more fragile position, stretched and contorted by the demands of their jobs, their teams and their social relationships, both inside and outside work. He asks,

“What values and practices can hold people together as the institutions in which they live fragment?...Only a certain kind of human being can prosper in unstable, fragmentary social conditions. This ideal man or woman has to address three challenges. The first concerns time: how to manage short term relationships, while migrating from task to task, job to job, place to place. If institutions no longer provide a long term frame, the individual may have to improvise his or her life narrative, or even do without any sustained sense of self. The second challenge concerns talent: how to develop new skills, how to mine potential abilities, as reality’s demands shift. The emerging social order militates against the ideal of craftsmanship, that is learning to do just one thing really well: such commitment can often prove economically destructive...modern culture advances an idea of meritocracy which celebrates potential ability rather than past achievement. The third challenge follows from this, it concerns surrender; that is how to let go of the past. The head of a dynamic company recently asserted that no one owns their place in her organisation, that past service in particular earns no employee a guaranteed place. How do you answer this? A peculiar trait of personality is needed, which discounts the experiences a human being has already had...Most people are not like this; they need a sustaining life narrative, they take pride in being good at something specific, and they value the experiences they have lived through.”

This is a long extract, but it sums up the tension at the heart of the current recruitment process in FE, between the need on the one hand to bring in “new blood” to colleges that will possibly re-energise teams and the environment, and on the other to bring forward local talent joining the institution at the start of their career.

A second starting point for this project was applying the work of Goffman (1959) to the context of succession planning and internal promotion. Nearly 50 years ago, Goffman argued that we all “act out” roles in context, and in doing so create a form of “fict” which we present to the world. These ideas are brought up to date by Cope (2001) in taking the concept of leadership and internalising it in a process of “leading oneself” through life and organizations.

“Where an individual has to be prepared to discard or throw away the current world view and accept an alternative frame of reference. In making this shift, the self-sustaining loop must be broken. This loop is a common process; people see the world in a particular way, and so expect it to behave according to criteria set out in their own particular mental map. For you to change yourself or others, you must create a break in the current pattern and force a shift to a new way of thinking. Once the world is seen in a new way, the shift can be used to reinforce this new world position. However, this process can soon shift towards the negative. If you decide to stop at that point (a singular shift) and don’t use the experience to energise further map shifts, then the change or learning will only be of limited value.”

This sociological perspective has been much neglected in the development of leadership programmes and in the consideration of internal promotion, succession planning and the creation of social capital. It is interesting to note that of the 275 million references to “Leadership” cited on Google, 204m focus on the psychology of leadership with a mere 2.75m references to the sociology of leadership.

Gobillot (May 2006) argues that,

“While we moved away from pure skills and knowledge training long ago, the principles we used for behavioural development are still too often embedded in a teaching model that relied on correction – connections require actions and dialogue based development.”

He talks from an emerging perspective on leadership analysis that rests on the capacity of leaders to make, use, exploit and extend connections as the core of their work, in an increasingly fragmented and consumer based business world. This does not deny or downplay the important individual level work done by, for example, Goleman to focus on the importance of personal learning and discovery in this process. However, it helps to level out the balance and move away from the intensive sense of all leadership performance resting on the individual.
Goleman (2002) identifies five “discoveries” that a person must make in the journey to developing and using effective Emotional Intelligence in this context. To summarise, people who successfully change in sustainable ways cycle through the following stages:

- The first discovery: my ideal self – who I want to be?
- The second discovery: my real self – who am I?
  What are my strengths and gaps?
- The third discovery: my learning agenda – How can I build on my strengths while reducing my gaps?
- The fourth discovery: experimenting with and practising new behaviours, thoughts, and feelings to the point of mastery.
- The fifth discovery: developing supportive and trusting relationships that make change possible.

Ideally, the progression occurs through a discontinuity – a moment of discovery – that provokes not just awareness, but also a sense of urgency.

Finally, to connect this together, to understand the social, psychological and business imperatives working out what leadership means at middle management level, it is good practice to “come at this from left field” and seek some inspiration and insight from unlikely sources. Olivier (2001) cites two of the greatest speeches in English literature as offering insights into the process of presenting self, developing motivation and securing energy from those in the middle of the organisation. Henry V makes two key speeches, one during the siege of Harfleur and the second before the battle at Agincourt. In the first, he talks about the sense of inclusion he feels, in what he is asking them to do, not through merely beating them again with strictures about performance targets, but with words that convey his sense of responsibility and his inclusion in their fate. Olivier claims:

“The habitual warriors among us forget to think about peace. We keep asking for more energy, more commitment, better results, faster…without any let up or time for rest and relaxation. This is simply not sustainable and can quickly cause burn out. It implies that if the troops meet the target in the short term, we will give them a bigger target in the long term. Where’s the motivation in that? Don’t punish people who work hard and get results……This is where those who think work is just about making money will fall down. They have nothing else to back them up and little understanding of what really motivates people. All they can do is baste their people with big rewards and threaten them with a big stick. Their version of this speech would be a little shorter: Once more unto the breach and I’ll double your bonus; dishonour not your mothers or I’ll fire the lot of you!”

The second speech is well known and equally powerful as an understanding of what motivates people and drives them forward. More importantly, in this context, it comes after a period of deep and painful introspection by Henry about what it is he must do, and what kind of person he has to be, to achieve his goals.

It is this combination of self-reflection and discovery, connectivity with wider networks, the development and creation of new identities and the understanding of what intrinsically motivates middle managers in succession planning schemes of internal promotion that is at the core of this project. The project has found that there is much consideration of self-reflection on management style, but an almost complete lack of connectivity with the sociological elements of networks, development of new identities and self-presentation, responses from peers to these identities, and the way that this connects with formal and informal organisational goals.

**Research Methods**

The following were the main research questions:

- a) How can colleges best prepare staff for promotion, through a career related staff development programme?
- b) What preparation should be developed with their peers who are left behind?
- c) What behaviours do colleges expect their staff to learn?
- d) How best can candidates be supported by their new peers and line managers?
- e) How best will any change in perceptions of self be developed?
- f) What is the best way to select internally promoted staff?
- g) What does a college do if expectations and aspirations are not met?

The project has not had enough time to answer all these questions, not least for the difficulty in engaging with the FE sector that is continually bombarded with questionnaires and consultations from all sides. The questions above were answered in two stages, by introductory letter and questionnaire, and by a follow-up letter to a selected group of colleges that indicated their involvement in three activities: internal promotion of staff, the existence of some kind of development programme, and the number of staff who were participating in such a programme.
The project created a core questionnaire, which was designed to open a communication dialogue with a range of colleges that would indicate their interest and commitment to such a process through their replies, and second, to find out what those colleges were doing in relation to internal succession planning, or indeed, succession planning in general. In order to do this, it was recognised that there is an important element of contextualisation required in asking any questions about recruitment and promotion. The questionnaire, therefore, has, what may appear at first sight, some fairly mundane questions about:

- the college size and number of students and staff,
- its geographical location in relation to other college's within certain mileage radii, and their type,
- the number of applicants that the college receives for middle management posts,
- the number of internal promotions made recently,
- and the perceived level of difficulty in recruiting suitable applicants, and finally
- whether, and what kind of middle management programmes are already running.

The original sample was 100 colleges. That is, approximately one quarter of the current number of GFE/6th form colleges in England. No particular size or geographical location was selected. This initial approach yielded approximately a 25% response; a further 50 colleges were mailed, and reminders sent to the original. A total of 36 colleges replied, thus producing a 25% response rate, representing approximately 10% of English FE Colleges. Colleges are currently faced with regular requests for consultation responses from a wide range of organisations, and their response is tempered by a sensible view of ‘What will they get out of it’. While not comprehensive, the response rate has enabled some valuable information to be gathered.

This initial sample was analysed and a chart of results produced, covering the following fields:

- Size of college,
- Environment and competition,
- Salary levels,
- No of applications,
- External training,
- Internal training,
- Planned group programme,
No of participants,
Cost and length of programme.

This gave us the structure of how to move on to the second stage, which engaged those colleges that had indicated a degree of interest and commitment to such research. Two groups of colleges were identified:

- the group had indicated a difficulty in recruiting staff externally, and were doing something about it internally,
- the second group had indicated they did have some difficulties in recruiting to middle management positions, but they had not had time to allocate priority work to developing succession planning programmes.

Letters were sent out to these colleges. The letter to the first group of colleges asked a range of questions about the content of their programmes, and asked them to put this into the context of their staff age profile. The letter to the second group of colleges specifically asked them to outline what would be their ideal content in such programmes, and to indicate where they already thought some gaps might exist in the thinking about middle management. An important part of the second round of engagement, with the first group above, was a request to be put in touch with individuals who had been promoted internally, in order to gain their insights and perspectives on the process. Some insights and findings have also been sought from sectors outside further education, in both the public and commercial sectors.

The third stage of the project is to bring participants together from both groups to test out the findings, and to test out perceptions about the gaps identified in this and previous research cited above. This phase will be conducted “post-project” in May and June 2007, through seminars and face-to-face interviews.

Research Findings

i) All 36 colleges in the original sample indicated their perceived level of difficulty in recruiting staff on scale of 5-1, with five being the most difficult.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of difficulty</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Colleges</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
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Within these figures there are some significant college responses, indicating that 27 out of the 36 experience some or considerable difficulty in recruiting middle managers. Of the 13 who indicated a “middle” position, they all said that this depended on the sector/area of expertise needed, especially in curriculum areas. In some specialist areas (including the project host college) it has now become common to receive no responses to external advertisements. Only one college, of the two indicating no great difficulty, said categorically that it had no problem with recruiting suitable candidates.

The colleges responding with (4) and (5) indicated extreme difficulty in attracting external staff to middle management positions. This was supported by their description of their competitive job market, with respect to a significant number of colleges within reasonable travelling distance, but where the rewards for the move were not seen as compensated for by the new travelling and working arrangements. Colleges responding in the (4) and (5) category also expressed concern about recruitment generally into the GFE sector, not as indicated by CEL (0006) as a result of pressures from within education, but because the nature of the UK economy has changed so dramatically over the past 20 years. It is perceived by many in colleges that there is no longer a pool of experienced staff who wish to come out of industry at a particular age, and contribute significantly to technical training, nor do they see the economic and social rewards as worthwhile, given the pressures on staff and middle managers. This has particular resonance for different fields of expertise, as the economy has changed. There is considerable further research and exploratory work needed in this area, if the supply of certain sector training is not to cease altogether – most notably engineering, construction, catering and care.

ii) Salary levels are broadly consistent across the responding colleges, with only two indicating salary levels above general levels. There is some small connection between salary levels and the local environment, to which colleges are responding by raising levels where perceived need is urgent. This does not just apply to the South East where one might expect house prices and other social factors to weigh heavily in putting pressure on colleges. It applies in all metropolitan areas that are feeling social price pressures, and the need to maintain staff rewards at levels which will hold staff in place.

iii) There is a clear relationship in the responses between lack of applicants and the existence of schemes to support succession planning and internal promotion. Where there is difficulty expressed about lack of applicants, there is also an indication and recognition of increased internal promotion, which is then associated with some form of training and development programme for the promoted staff. It was surprising to hear from a number of colleges – nearly one third – that had not yet either given the need for succession planning serious consideration or that were about to start a scheme but had not actually identified a start date or an appropriate group of staff to receive the training.

iv) Colleges that are operating an in-house scheme do report a sense of “good value for money” from it, in terms of contributing to a sense of worth acknowledged by the participating staff, and in improvement in morale that has so far had an impact on the performance of the core parts of the role required. At first glance, the cost of the schemes seems high. In the case of the project host, costs are approximately £1000 per person, on a cohort of 22 each time, which does not include the organisational matched funding surrounding the organisation and the off-site costs. These costs sit broadly within the range of expenditure indicated by responding colleges. (There was a notable lack of much more specific evaluative indicators, in terms of long term improvements in college or individual performance). It is important to indicate that such costs
vii) The final finding focuses on the content of the training and development programmes and a central concern of this project, namely: how are staff who have been promoted and developed internally perceived to be primarily managerialist in its ultimate aim, and not about leadership at all.

The following are the core subject areas which are, more or less, universally covered by the schemes with which the project has made contact. In one regional scheme, the content follows fairly closely a miniature form of a management diploma programme, while another interprets this in a rather strictly “FE need” way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scheme 1</th>
<th>Scheme 2</th>
<th>Scheme 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal effectiveness</td>
<td>Funding methodology and</td>
<td>Data protection.</td>
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<tr>
<td>– stress management, EI</td>
<td>budgeting – setting budgets,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>using IT, dealing with</td>
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<td>overspends.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating – report writing.</td>
<td>Marketing and what managers</td>
<td>Dealing with challenging</td>
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<td>need from it.</td>
<td>situations.</td>
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<td>Managing quality and change</td>
<td>Business excellence model</td>
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<td>– EFQM, job descriptions.</td>
<td>development.</td>
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<td>Performance management.</td>
<td>Managing customer</td>
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<td>principles of organisations.</td>
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<td>relationships.</td>
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<td>Managing, motivating and</td>
<td>Staffing issues – selecting</td>
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<td>developing people – mentoring</td>
<td>staff, timetabling, cover,</td>
<td>Team building and</td>
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<tr>
<td>coaching, personal development</td>
<td>health and safety, capability</td>
<td>assetiveness.</td>
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<td>planning, dealing with poor</td>
<td>and grievance procedures.</td>
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<td>performance.</td>
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Conclusions and Recommendations

The GFE sector in England is searching for a “silver bullet” that will secure its staffing in a time of rapid change and development. The research undertaken through this project suggests that programmes and training currently used are focussing on only half or even less of the actual problem. It is important to identify and be very clear in this statement about a number of variables which are cited as being key contributors to what many consider to be a “crisis” of staffing. These, in broad terms, can be described in the following way:

a) There is no universal shortage of applicants for middle management roles in colleges. There is, however, a very large range and difference between different parts of the country, and even with quite small geographic boundaries. The location and provision of GFE in England is probably now based on out-dated economic associations, and this is distorting the market and the ability of colleges to recruit successfully in some areas.

b) The geographic and economic shift, for instance, caused by the M25 in South East England has changed the recruitment capability of some colleges, just as it has changed the economic landscape of the area.

c) Salary levels for middle managers are broadly in line with a dual referenced base of comparison with other educational sectors and local social and economic conditions. However, there are clearly areas of need in leadership skills in terms of promotion and succession planning, and on offered salary levels, but not in competition with other post-16 providers.

d) There is no universal programme of staff development and training for succession planning and internal promotion. Programmes are loosely based on the outlines of Diploma in Management Studies (DMS) or Diploma in Management (DMS). The evidence very strongly suggests that what is actually happening in colleges is the development of technical expertise with very limited consideration of the “softer” sides of personal relationship management, personal change management and dealing with peer and colleague loss and gain across networks. Respondents, as indicated in (a) above suggest good value for money, and an added sense of worth among staff, and improvements in morale. Yet, none of the respondent colleges either mentioned an evaluative process, whether quantitative or qualitative, or indicated any dissatisfaction with the process. One might suggest that, in the cycle of institutional change, as is the current context for GFE in England, a five year evaluative cycle of effectiveness needs to be identified and developed, since this covers a sufficient time period for job holders to develop and perform in their roles.

Finally, it must not be ignored that GFE is currently facing and undergoing internal and external structural change. The relationship between the LSC and Local Education Authorities (Children and Young People’s Trusts) is in flux, the prospect of post-16 competitions for the tendering of work, the changing landscape of inspection and audit, and, in some sectors, fast moving economic change make it enormously difficult for colleges to look more than three years ahead. This, however, appears not to influence the shape and character of the development programmes seen in the project. It would seem sensible to suggest that, in the face of the change described above, there is only one strand of development that has any sense of suitable permanence, namely how staff are developed to deal with change, with changing relationships, and with changing working practices. Development programmes that focus on the development of mere technical expertise based on current needs are doomed to be an inappropriate use of resource.

This table indicates:

a) the broad spread of concerns that middle managers have to deal with and the way that it is described,
b) the very different emphases that colleges are putting on certain skills that are perceived to be required, and
c) that very little of what is considered is actually about leadership per se.

The subjects identified above focus almost entirely on the development of technical expertise through the understanding of process rather than people. It is acknowledged that the respondents did not give significant detail of the content, and thus there might be more beneath the surface of the response. Yet, in 2 of the three cases, the word leadership only accounted for 1/8th the subject framework. This suggests that the people issues are being under-explored.

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e) Programmes are focussed on “correcting” deficiencies in organisational and personal effectiveness by increasing technical expertise, rather than increasing the use and development of personal networks across role boundaries, both vertically and horizontally. One respondent in the second phase of the project, at a very senior level, admitted that this aspect of the challenge had simply not been thought of, but that it seemed like a good idea and would be incorporated at a later stage in their programme. For internal promotion to be successful, it is important to develop teams and colleagues not only those promoted. It was interesting and illuminating to find that no college had considered the impact and interaction of this process on the former peers and colleagues who promoted staff leave behind. No consideration was given to the type of behaviour that was expected at the end of the process and no indication or consideration was given as to what to do about staff who ultimately failed in their new roles, or who expressed discontent and wished to rescind the promotion.

f) The age profile of GFE suggests that this challenge will continue to be serious, given that GFE has traditionally relied upon a flow of applicants from industry and commerce at a certain age. Where colleges are able to recruit new staff into teaching roles, such staff should be developed and identified at an early stage as potential recruits to middle management positions in their respective sectors.

Thus, there are a number of core recommendations that have become evident from the limited scope of this project:

1. Colleges should identify early the ambitions and aspirations of teaching staff and seek ways to create both teaching based advancement and middle management based advancement for the right staff.

2. College development programmes should focus less on “corrective technical expertise” programmes, and instead focus on the softer skills of personal change management at all levels to avoid burnout and disaffection.

3. Development programmes should focus on whole teams, or whole subject sectors, not solely on individual advancement programmes, to ensure that all participants in the process engage with the business objectives of middle managers.

4. Such whole team development programmes must focus on the collaborative and networking needs of teachers and middle managers, and not solely on the assumed authority of one person – the middle manager. This authority can only be effective if the whole team understands and appreciates the business objectives which the middle manager is tasked with achieving.

5. Finally, personal change in such situations must encompass in the programme an appreciation of not only the business needs for a person, a middle manager, to change, but also how those business needs impact on the personal change required externally in their social and domestic context.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Ann Smith, Principal of City College, for supporting and encouraging this work, especially for her determination to implement and embed the “Managers into Leaders” programme on which it is originally based, and thanks to all the colleges that participated in the research through answering questionnaires and offering staff to participate in e-mail or telephone interviews.

References


Further information and Contact Details

Research and development are central to CEL's organisational mission and we seek to encourage mutually-beneficial interrelations between theory, development, policy and practice. We recognise that there are many innovative and effective leaders and leadership practices in the Sector that warrant investigation, analysis and wider dissemination of best practice. A particularly distinctive feature of the CEL practitioner programme is that it enables staff working in the sector to participate in the setting of the research agendas, to define highly relevant issues for leadership and to investigate and research these key themes.

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