"Improving leadership practice within the Learning and Skills Sector has been the primary objective of CEL since the organisation’s inception. Effective leadership development and succession planning are central mechanisms for achieving this key strategic objective."

(Collinson 2008)
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Leadership Development and Succession

Editorial Introduction, Professor David Collinson

Introduction

This is the ninth edited collection in the series of CEL volumes designed to showcase research produced by “practitioners” in the Learning and Skills Sector (LSS) on important leadership-related themes. It addresses the key, interconnected issues of leadership development and succession planning. Improving leadership practice within the LSS has been the primary objective of CEL since the organisation’s inception. Effective leadership development and succession planning are central mechanisms for achieving this key strategic objective.

This volume presents four research reports that raise significant, but under-researched questions about the conditions, processes and consequences of current leadership development programmes and succession planning within the LSS. These four research reports build on earlier CEL practitioner volumes (Collinson 2007a and b) as well as other significant CEL policy initiatives around ‘Building future talent’, ‘Career development’ and ‘Talent management’, all of which have explicitly addressed important questions about how best to identify and develop junior, middle and senior leaders.

The research findings in the four practitioner reports comprising this volume highlight a number of key messages for improving leadership development and succession processes in the LSS. The first two reports explore leadership development in a sixth form college and five FE colleges, respectively. The second two reports examine leadership succession, first within four FE colleges in relation to team leaders who might progress to middle management, and second regarding Principals’ experiences of their career journeys.

Few studies of leadership development have explored the longer term impact of training and development programmes within organisations and on individuals. In the first report, Ruth Scotson (Worcester Sixth Form College) examines a middle management leadership programme and considers the extent to which ideas from this course were subsequently implemented within organisational and personal practices. Scotson found that ten group members modified their personal leadership styles and implemented newly developed skills, such as coaching. She also identifies certain barriers to the implementation of this training and development programme.

The research report by Rob Whitton (City of Sunderland College) examines leadership development in the FE sector and explores its links with organisational culture. His research findings reveal a positive correlation between post management development and cultural organisational fit among those managers surveyed. After
the development course, individuals did indeed feel more integrated with their organisation, its values, goals and culture. The notable exception was junior managers who felt they now “fitted in” less well. These junior managers were particularly critical about the leadership/management development they had received. Whitton concludes that there is considerable room for improvement in training and development within the LSS, particularly for middle and junior managers.

Philip Barker and Janet Brewer (City of Bristol College) explore the significance of leadership amongst team leaders in four UK colleges. They found that many team leaders had low ambitions to become a middle manager and were reluctant to be trained for leadership roles. A key finding was the continued importance of teaching for team leaders, and their reluctance to forgo this should they move into middle management positions. Barker and Brewer found no evidence that providing teachers with a leadership role would encourage them to become middle managers.

In the final report, Tony Jowitt and Jill Westerman (Northern College) outline their research findings about succession planning and how this can help sustain the quality of leaders and senior managers in the FE sector. Based on interviews with nine FE Principals, the research found that the dominant career path for principals and chief executives was through a teaching/lecturing route. Principals identified supportive relationships both in their organisation and outside as significant in assisting their career progression. In addition, the research found that all nine colleges had developed systems designed to identify talented individuals and to mentor and coach them. This report concludes that the sector is now addressing the issue of succession in much more effective ways, and doing this predominantly through talent management systems.

In editing this volume, the original research reports have been condensed to enhance the overall integration and cohesion of the collection. Some of the original reports included extensive reviews, for example of the leadership literature and recent government policy documents, as well as presenting more detailed accounts of research methodologies and findings. In the interests of space, these sections have been edited down, most appendices have been removed and every report has been structured using a standard format.

**The CEL Practitioner Research Programme**

These four CEL reports are drawn from the 2007-08 round of research commissioning. In the summer of 2007, the Lancaster research team launched Phase Four of the CEL practitioner research programme with a nation-wide tender process. As in previous years, this tender attracted an enormous response, providing further evidence of the very strong appetite that exists across the LSS to conduct research on the sector, by the sector and for the sector. For the period October 2007 to March 2008, the evaluation panel agreed to fund 35 practitioner research projects, based on the following research themes: Distributed Leadership, Employer Engagement, Equality and Diversity, Leadership Excellence, Leading Quality Improvement, Learner Voice, and Talent Management and Leadership Development.
The CEL practitioner research programme enables practising leaders and managers in the sector to undertake research on highly relevant and topical issues. It is the result of a personal initiative by the chief executive of CEL, Lynne Sedgmore, who was keen to encourage a community of “practitioner scholars” and to provide an opportunity for practising leaders and managers in the sector to engage with research. The main aims of the programme are to:

- support research that critically investigates leadership issues in the LSS,
- provide the sector and stakeholders with evidence-based and theoretically-informed research findings by addressing current issues,
- strengthen networks linking practice, research and policy to build awareness of the importance of practitioners engaging with the research process,
- disseminate research findings as widely as possible and communicate these in ways that are useful to recipients,
- encourage networking between researchers to build a sustainable research community within the LSS.

Since its inception, we have steadily increased year on year the amount of funding allocated to the Practitioner Project Scheme to cope with the large number of applications received through the annual tendering system.

The programme provides individual practitioner-researchers with the opportunity to develop their own original research question, reflect on current practice, and produce research findings that can both shape organisational change and improve future policy and practice. Each project begins with a clear plan to examine a particular research question informed by specific assumptions, methodologies and objectives. Practitioner researchers attend two workshops which provide support and guidance in undertaking the research, analysing the data, and writing-up final reports. The design of each workshop is a mixture of information-giving and network opportunities with space for dialogue and discussion. There is also an opportunity at each event to deal with any dilemmas or issues that may have emerged during the project.

Research is central to CEL’s mission. Concerned to enhance the inter-relationships between research, policy and practice, CEL seeks to increase the impact of research on leadership development and on sector policies and practices. Research impact can occur in numerous ways. 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 (Nutley et al 2003). Hence in many ways, research provides evidence-based knowledge that is useful and usable for those in the LSS.
There are many leadership issues in FE, and in the LSS more broadly, that warrant investigation and analysis. Yet, research in this sector is still very much in its infancy (Hillier and Jameson 2003). 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. This strengthening of a research community in the LSS constitutes an 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 researchers’ own understandings and practices. The programme is therefore designed to foster the research-based skills and expertise of staff in the sector. 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 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 empirical research (Fox, Martin and Green 2007). Suffice it to say here, that theory and practice are best viewed as inter-related and the CEL research programme seeks to encourage mutually-reinforcing relationships between theory, development, policy and practice.

Since the practitioner scheme began in October 2004, over 100 projects have been funded. In 2007, CEL published five edited volumes of evidence-based practitioner research, as follows:

- Volume 1 - Researching Leadership in the Learning and Skills Sector: By the Sector, On the Sector, For the Sector
- Volume 2 - Developing Middle Leaders
- Volume 3 - Leading Quality Improvement
- Volume 4 - Leadership and the Learner Voice
- Volume 5 - Collaborative Leadership.

To date, over 7,000 copies have been distributed across the sector with Volumes 1 & 4 already having to go to reprint. From the current phase (2007-08), we are now publishing another series of CEL practitioner research volumes.

Feedback received so far from the sector indicates that the CEL Practitioner Research Programme is beginning to have a significant impact, informing practice, influencing leadership development, helping to engage those working in the sector
with research and building a sustainable research community. A key aim of the programme has been to disseminate the research findings as widely as possible and to communicate these in ways useful to recipients. Practitioners, stakeholders and policy makers are much more likely to engage with the research if it is relatively easy to digest, useful and practical. Therefore the research is disseminated in comparatively small, readable reports that are designed to facilitate the implementation of evidence based research into practice.

The CEL programme provides practitioner researchers with space to reflect on current practice, to explore how other organisations work and how they could improve their performance as individuals, teams and in organisations. It can also facilitate staff development in the LSS. For example, CEL research publications are being used on leadership and management programmes and as professional development for staff, with some colleges giving accreditation for participation in a research project as part of their CPD.

For organisations, the research has encouraged new collaborative partnerships and the sharing of good practice. CEL has found that engaging practitioners with the research process has given the sector a sense of ownership, as well as increasing awareness of the importance of research and how it can influence and improve policy and practice. In these ways, the CEL practitioner research programme is helping to facilitate more reflexive, critical and reflective learning cultures within the LSS.

References


Exploring the Impact of a College-Designed Middle Manager Leadership Programme upon College Practice

Ruth Scotson, Worcester Sixth Form College

Executive Summary

This research examines the impact of a middle management leadership programme. Training took place in June 2007, with a follow up session in October 2007. All participants were volunteers and were fully involved in the design of the programme. They rated the initial training as outstanding and the project considered ways in which ten group members modified their personal leadership styles and put into practice newly developed skills, such as coaching. Reasons for the different degrees of success were examined, including the barriers to the implementation of training at personal, departmental and/or institutional levels. Some members of staff made more progress than others, partly due to changes in the personnel around them and time pressures. However, it also became apparent that the reviews conducted as part of this project have encouraged participants to continue to reflect upon the ways in which the leadership programme can be implemented. Even with outstanding training, there needs to be the opportunity to review the progress and engage in self reflection on an ongoing basis.

Introduction

Worcester Sixth Form College is an open access College of approximately 1550 full time students and one thousand part-time students, the majority of whom are on level three courses. There are approximately two hundred and fifty members of staff and the College has a very good record of support for staff development activities. The College is proud that it retained Investor In People Status in March 2007. Within the College, five days per year are devoted to staff development activities and most staff requests for external training have been met.

An in-house training programme for middle managers was run as a series of fourteen, mainly twilight sessions, during 2003. The content of the training programme was well received and participants particularly liked the delivery style of the course tutor. However, the number of sessions was felt to be too great and some participants felt that they needed more time to consider how to put the vast number of different ideas into practice. A request was made for a different style of course that was held over a limited number of days and which was more practical in focus. A one-day course was delivered by a different training organisation in 2006, with the
option of extending it into a longer training programme. However, the feedback from participants was rather critical and it was decided not to continue along this route.

Instead, further research took place and a different trainer was engaged, whose reputation for the delivery of high quality training was made known to the College. He was Dennis Lavelle from Emeritus Training and he was able to design a programme that was responsive to the requests from members of staff within College. The focus was on developing an awareness of personal leadership styles and how coaching skills could be developed for use with other members of the teams for which the participants were responsible. It was encouraging that all but one member of staff who had attended the one-off session in October 2006 were keen to contribute their ideas on the design of the actual leadership programme and to participate in it. These sessions took place in June 2007, with a further follow up day in October 2007.

In their evaluations, each of the participants in the main part of the leadership training programme in June 2007 rated the training as “outstanding” and so the main focus of the project was to consider:

- why staff had participated in the project;
- which parts of the programme they found particularly useful and relevant to their work;
- how far they were able to implement these ideas with their teams;
- the nature of any barriers, whether at a personal, team or institutional level;
- recommendations about what arrangements should be put in place to make the implementation of ideas from some outstanding training, even more likely to occur in a meaningful way.

Research about middle leadership training has tended to focus on the design and content of the programmes but this project aimed to look beyond the point of delivery and to take a longer term view of whether, over a period of months, even an excellent training programme could make any noticeable difference to the work of busy professionals.

**Research Framework**

There has been significant discussion recently about the distinction between the terms “leadership” and “management” with regard to education. Bush (1998) links leadership to values or purpose, while management relates to implementation or technical issues. However he sees both as equally important and notes that although a clear vision is necessary to establish the nature and direction of a change, it is equally important that the innovations are implemented efficiently.
Previous CEL practitioner research reports (Collinson 2007) suggest that development for middle leadership roles is not, as yet, well established throughout the FE sector. However, from the research which has taken place, it is widely agreed that middle leaders have a crucial role to play within an organisation. Briggs (2005) suggests a model of five key aspects for middle managers in colleges: corporate agent, implementer, staff manager, liaison and leader. Corporate agency involves an awareness of, and the need to work within, the strategic values of an institution. The implementer aspect involves the carrying out of college policy, while the work of the implementer and staff manager relate to working with both college systems and the differentiated needs of members of teams. Liaison work requires middle managers to work with other managers, staff and external agents over whom they do not have any direct responsibility. This theme of increasing responsibility for middle managers is also echoed by Schofield (2005) who considers how, in an age of increasing accountability, middle managers have had to take on responsibilities for the accurate input into management information systems of extensive performance and achievement data. In FE colleges, as a result of delegated budgets, programme leaders have also become responsible for monitoring income and expenditure.

As well as the increasing responsibilities that staff with middle management responsibilities have had to face, Schofield also points out that more junior staff have been drawn into middle management responsibilities. This shift of responsibilities fits in with an ethos that many within an institution have distinct leadership roles whether or not they are defined as such (Marland and Pollock 2007). This is the key to the notion of distributed leadership and it is hardly surprising that recent discussion has focussed on middle leadership, rather than merely middle management (Barker and Brewer 2007). This trend is not necessarily a negative development and Harris et al (1995) suggest that the most effective schools are often where authority is delegated to middle managers. However, it is apparent that the individuals concerned do need training for their role.

A further reason why training for middle managers is essential is that studies have found that they often experience multiple leadership pressures and demands that can arise from above, below and from other departments and peers (Briggs 2005). Leader (2004) suggests that these middle leaders often inhabit differing and conflicting worlds; one in relation to those in senior positions and the other regarding their own staff and students. However, this role is crucial to an organisation and, by taking an organisation’s vision to the learners, they increase morale and confidence throughout the organisation.
Lumby et al (2005) suggest that leadership development activity and content can be understood in terms of three categories:

- A managerial concept which emphasises the achievement of targets;
- A humanistic approach which is "people-centred", collegial, negotiated and collaborative;
- A pragmatic approach which operates on the basis of the needs of the organisation.

With reference to Yea (1997), they identify a number of key conditions for leadership development to take place. These include the creation of a positive climate for learning, the creation of supportive networks, the recognition that learning depends on the social and cultural context, the importance of coaching and a focus on improving problem solving. This provides a useful model against which the leadership programme of the author’s own institution can be measured.

In Frearson’s survey report (2002), leaders and managers across the FE sector regarded professional development as a low priority. Leaders and managers at all levels within general FE Colleges recognised that they needed more support to deal effectively with “Maintaining morale and motivation in staff” and “Making effective use of management information systems”. Middle managers in general FE Colleges also placed some value on “learning through experience” and “secondments/placements elsewhere”. However, as Frearson points out, “the fact that middle managers regarded most professional development activities as less of a priority in 2002 than in 1997 gives cause for concern”.

Frearson found that a lack of time remains the most significant barrier to leaders’ and managers’ engagement with professional development. In contrast, the least significant obstacle was the lack of organisational encouragement and support. Respondents to his survey from general FE Colleges perceived fewer obstacles to their development in 2002 than in 1997. However, time still prevented many members of staff from wishing to take part. From the author’s perspective, this was an interesting finding, since it was one of the main reasons why the structure of the leadership programme in the author’s College in 2007 was significantly different to that of 2003.
Research Methods

The main focus of the research was to consider the impact of the in-house leadership programme. Sixteen members of staff volunteered to take part in the training and their diverse roles are listed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Number of staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of Department</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equivalent of Head of Department but with cross-College responsibilities</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Administrative Manager</td>
<td>2 (one from December 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second in Department</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Leader</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of Support Staff with aspirations to take on a leadership role</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members of Teaching Staff with aspirations to take on a leadership role</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relatively low number of heads of department was mainly due to the fact that a large proportion of them had taken part in the 2003 management training programme. It was partly for this reason that participation in the programme was made optional and also because every attempt was made to ensure a positive climate. Members of staff who were not as yet middle managers officially, but who had some leadership experience on which to reflect, were also invited to participate, although for the purpose of this project, only those with leadership roles were asked to take part. They were all willing volunteers.

The main part of the leadership training programme took place in June 2007 and the evaluation of the programme was already known. All participants had rated it as outstanding in terms of delivery and meeting their needs for people management and so there was every likelihood that the ideas from the training could be implemented. Dennis Lavelle was asked to return to College on 29 October 2007 to review and extend the training and to ensure that aims for implementation by individuals were not hampered by unrealistic aspirations or misunderstandings.

Since the project focused on the responses of individuals to the training, individual research interviews appeared to be the best approach. These were planned at regular intervals throughout the project to allow changes through time to be recorded. The first set of interviews were held shortly after Dennis Lavelle’s visit on 29 October, although in practice, most took place from mid November onwards.
The second set took place in January 2008 and the third set of interviews towards the end of the project. Logs or blogs were compiled by some of the individuals to record developments between interviews, although very few participants maintained the log throughout the period. Due to pressure of time, participants tended to review developments shortly before each interview and, since these were at fairly close intervals, this approach seemed perfectly adequate.

The comments made were followed up by discussions with line managers, who were in a good position to observe the developments and to verify many of those that were discussed. This approach was particularly useful where a member of staff worked exclusively within one department and was not the head of department. However, verification of the impact of the training upon practice proved more difficult to achieve where the line manager was outside that department or in the case of the two participants in the project who had cross-College roles. Here some prompting was necessary to produce comments upon how practice had been modified.

Key questions to investigate in the first round of interviews related to:

- Why members of staff chose to participate in the training?
- Which theories and the strategies from the training they found particularly relevant to their work?
- How they planned to implement these ideas?
- What problems or difficulties were anticipated and how they planned to deal with these?
- How far the individual believed that their aims had been achieved to date?
- What the unexpected outcomes of their training had been?
- Other general points that staff wished to make.

Accounts of these interviews were typed up and the interviewees were invited to comment upon their accuracy. In the later rounds of interviews, the same notes were revisited to encourage staff to either confirm whether the implementation was going according to plan or whether there were unforeseen positive or negative developments. It is true, that as a member of the College’s SMT, staff may have been a little wary of revealing their true feelings to the author. However, the promise of anonymity and constant reassurance that honest comments about limited progress and its reasons were as valid as glowing accounts of change, appear to have produced honest and open accounts that were largely verified by discussions with line managers. Where the verification was not possible, it was largely due to the fact that the line manager was too removed from the day to day running of the team to observe what were sometimes quite small changes in approach.
Research Findings

Why staff chose to participate in the training: All of the ten participants involved in the project volunteered to take part in the training, although five of them had discussed the idea as part of their annual Performance and Development Review (PDR) with their line managers. Therefore, participation in the training was not merely an ad-hoc reaction but, for at least half of the participants, was part of a more long term plan. The main reasons stated for participation in the leadership programme were as follows:

- To develop a particular aspect of leadership style (2);
- To aid future career development (2);
- To assist with new leadership responsibilities (2);
- To rethink personal approach to leadership (2);
- To develop skills to work more effectively with a particular member of staff (1);
- To develop skills to assist with cross-college role (1).

In terms of Lumby’s research (2005), the humanistic and pragmatic approaches appear to have been the dominating factors.

Why staff found the Leadership Programme effective: The following reasons were offered:

- Dynamism of programme leader (3);
- Negotiation of content of the programme (1);
- Support of colleagues and non-judgemental atmosphere (1);
- Balance of theoretical and practical activities (3);
- Opportunity to reflect on ideas (1);
- Inclusion of some fun activities with a serious message (1).

However, it should also be noted that three of the participants did comment upon the fact that they found the follow up session not as useful as the main part of the programme. Although they welcomed the opportunity to recap on the ideas covered previously and to discuss their implementation, they would also have liked to develop some of their skills further, in areas such as coaching. This finding highlighted the need for more detailed involvement in the planning of the training and the need to avoid the assumption that because the previous sessions had been so outstanding, that a more hands off approach was perfectly adequate.
Which ideas they found particularly relevant: In the interviews, all participants revealed that they had enjoyed the aspect of the course that dealt with the determination of their personal learning style and personal leadership style. All were familiar with the former, but the categorisation of leadership style into “collaborators”, “influencers”, “delegators” or “directors” was new to them. Further sub categories within this framework were also explored. This learning was enforced through practical team challenges, where observers of the group viewed the different roles and had the opportunity to discuss them. Furthermore, group members had the opportunity to reflect upon how the different roles were evident within the teams and departments within which the individuals worked each day. This section of the programme led to a discussion of how different leadership styles were needed according to the different levels of competence of staff and the tasks to be faced. In an “ideas carousel”, staff were invited to consider how they might approach different real life situations that they chose to raise.

All but one member of the project had found the problem solving approach particularly useful, mainly because they did not usually have the luxury of time to stand back and reflect upon specific situations. The member of staff who did not enjoy the problem solving approach felt that the issues were too difficult and complex to describe in a few minutes. It was through these discussions that the techniques of coaching were explored in depth and put into practice. Five participants in the project particularly enjoyed the development of this skill and three would have liked to develop this further in the October training. Two members of the group came to realise that they were very controlling in their leadership style and that more delegation might be mutually beneficial to all concerned.

Leadership styles are closely related to motivation and six members of the study group picked out the parts of the programme that related to motivation as being very relevant to their current work in College. They considered Herzberg’s (1966) maintenance and motivation factors and a variation of McClelland’s (1961) Achievement Theory. In the leadership programme, the members valued the opportunity to consider whether they were motivated mainly by achievement, affiliation or power. One group member came to realise that it was only with this personal reflection that the different categories became meaningful to her, since although she rated very highly on the search for “power” in her motivation analysis, this related more to personal empowerment than a search for control over others. Five members of the group went on to discuss how they were able to identify the factors that motivated other members of their teams, with the comment that their approach to different members of staff may differ if they wanted to achieve a given outcome because they would appeal to the motivating tendency.

How they planned to implement the ideas: Given the highly reflective and personalised nature of the training programme, all members of the group commented that they would put into practice a greater sense of awareness of the different motivating factors and leadership styles of those with whom they work.
Given a greater understanding of the terms, six members of the group said that they felt more like managers than leaders. All members of the group identified specific aspects on which they plan to work and these are explained in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group member</th>
<th>Role within College</th>
<th>Issues to work on</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| A            | head of department                                           | • Motivating some part-time members of staff to take a fuller role within the department  
• Continue to use an affiliative style but also to display other more directive styles when the situation demands |
| B            | Equivalent of head of department but with cross-College responsibilities | • To develop coaching skills with other three members of the team                                                                                                                                                    |
| C            | Equivalent of head of department but with cross-College responsibilities | • Coaching skills with at least two other members of the team                                                                                                                                                     |
| D            | College administrative manager                               | • To assume a less directive role in meetings and to encourage other individuals to participate more                                                                                                            |
| E            | College administrative manager (from January 2008)           | • To consider when and how to use different leadership styles in different situations                                                                                                                               |
| F            | Second in department                                         | • Use coaching skills with two members of the department – one of whom had experienced some difficulties in the delivery of some lessons and one who will be joining the staff in January 2008 from a non-teaching background |
| G            | Second in department                                         | • To develop more skills as an “affiliator” and to place more emphasis on relationships within the team                                                                                                              |
| H            | Subject leader                                               | • To focus on the use different leadership strategies with two members of the team who have very dominant personalities and often wish to follow an independent line                                                                 |
| I            | Subject leader                                               | • To develop existing skills as an affiliator but also on occasions to be more directive and task focused  
• To use coaching principles with at least two members of staff  
• To implement ideas from the programme entitled “ideas carousel” that encouraged the sharing of ideas and good practice |
| J            | Subject leader                                               | • To use different leadership styles to work with a new and assertive member of the team  
• To use awareness of how staff are motivated by different factors to work more effectively with the head of department who is sometimes viewed by others within the department as too task focused. |
Implementation of the ideas: By the time of the first interviews in November 2007, eight of the ten participants in the project had decided in general terms about which aspects of the programme they intended to implement, although two of the participants (E) and (F) commenced some of this work only in 2008. However, it does appear that the discussions in November, as part of the completion of this project, were important in finalising what tasks would be carried out.

By the time of the final round of interviews in March 2008, group members (A), (E), (F), (G), (H), and (I) considered that they had made significant progress in implementing the aspect of the course that they had identified. For example, participants (A) and (G) enjoyed some success in developing a more affiliative style. For (A), birthdays had been celebrated within the team and three part-time members of staff had volunteered to help in the redecoration of teaching rooms. For participant (E) the course affected how she had consulted staff and motivated a part-time evening employee who was not always consulted about decisions within the team in the past. Coaching techniques were being used by participants (F) and (I). In the case of the latter, the member of staff also enjoyed some success in being more directive and insisted that all members of staff should share responsibility for an allocated amount of invigilation, even though one member of the team was keen to leave College early on one of the days allocated. The subject leader felt that her status among the other team members increased by the stance she had taken.

However, these six participants in the project felt that they were more aware of the reasons behind the actions that they were taking and would claim that the training had made a difference in their approach to their work. In the case of participant (A), he was able to describe how he had appealed to the different motivating factors of his team in making a decision about the change in the A Level syllabus. It is also true that there have been some unforeseen developments and that over time, together with the opportunities to discuss the impact of the training, new opportunities have emerged to put the training into practice. For example, participant (G) has become much more aware of a sense of vision for her team and has become more keen to look to the future and to make long-term plans. It is this sense of vision that Bush (1998) picked out as an “essential component of effective leadership.”
Barriers to the implementation of the training: Participant (H) felt that she still did not have sufficient skills to deal with the difficult members of her team, although the discussions linked to this project have enabled the specific requirements to be identified more clearly. Additional training on coaching and non-violent communication was arranged. However, in keeping with the ideas of Frearson, time does appear to have been a major factor in hindering the consideration of how to implement the ideas from the leadership programme. The pressures of department reports, department review meetings, two subject reviews with each student, a whole-college training day, the need to complete data returns and the need to mentor and review the progress of new staff, all took their toll within the Autumn term. Five members of the group said that they had very little time to consider the implementation of the training beyond the issues that were raised in the November interviews. The way in which staff have multiple roles and the fact that more staff have been drawn into management roles, as referred to in the literature review, all appear to be very much in evidence.

From the discussions with the two members of staff who had cross-College responsibilities, the difficulties of liaising fully with representatives from across College were stressed. Members of staff tended to come and go even from pre-planned meetings and had been put under pressure to attach more importance to meeting with their regular department, rather than with the cross-College groupings. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that there are only thirty minutes of common staff “free” time over the College week. The conflicts to which Leader (2004) referred to were very apparent in this situation.

However several participants in the project were also badly affected by the unexpected death of a much-loved colleague. There were also two further instances of staff covering for the absence of a colleague over a number of weeks. There was also the resignation of one member of staff with whom participant (J) planned to work. The study illustrated clearly how unexpected events can often concur and have a significant effect on the ability of colleagues to carry out activities that are beyond their standard, regular responsibilities.
Conclusions and Recommendations

The research findings support the view that middle management responsibilities are held by a wide range of heads of departments, second in departments, staff with cross-college responsibilities and subject leaders. The range of responsibilities described by Briggs (2005) appears to hold true. Given the varied nature of the tasks required, the differing tasks and priorities sometimes expected by more senior managers, colleagues and students, it does appear that CPD, in the form of a leadership development programme, is needed. It had been identified as a target by five of the ten participants in the research project as part of their annual PDR interview. However, as Frearson suggested (2002), the pressures of time caused by these different demands made it less likely that these individuals would be able to implement fully the ideas that had been generated by the leadership programme.

The leadership programme delivered by Dennis Lavelle was very well received and its success appears to have been due to the dynamism of the presenter and also to the nature of the material, which was perceived as particularly relevant to the staff who took part. A balance was achieved between theory and reflection upon current practice, with plenty of opportunities to consider how to use the ideas to solve current challenges. However, this research suggests that outstanding evaluation sheets, taken immediately upon the conclusion of the training, do not necessarily guarantee that the training will have long-term impact. The pressures of time and unexpected developments have impeded some of the work of participants in the project from reflecting upon their training and implementing their ideas. The two members of staff who hold cross-curricular roles within College have found this particularly difficult.

Nevertheless, in spite of the difficulties, and the fact that some of the activities might have taken place anyway, many encouraging developments have taken place. All participants in the project claim to be more aware of their leadership styles and how and why different team members respond to different challenges. Furthermore six of the ten participants in the project would claim that the training has had a significant impact upon their management style. For two participants in the project, the discussions have led to arrangements being put in place for further training; one for more training related to coaching techniques and the other to participation in the Subject Learning Coaches programme. Two unexpected developments are that three participants in the project have said that they now understand more fully about how students respond to different teaching styles and that they appreciate the need to be more flexible in their teaching methods. Two other participants have identified how the leadership programme has helped to breach the divide between teaching and support staff. Both had leadership responsibilities within the support staff and their comments serve to illustrate the fact that such barriers are sometimes still difficult to break down, in spite of College policies.
It does appear that the very act of carrying out the research project itself has aided the work of self-reflection and increased the likelihood that the ideas from the training will be implemented. What seems important is that some time has been set aside officially for the participants in the project to discuss their ideas with a critical friend. It could well be that this is a model that should be adopted more widely within College and more use made either of the PDR to reflect upon achievements and plans. An additional opportunity may be offered through the new Workforce Reforms of 2007 as members of the teaching staff are required to reflect upon their training, and not merely record its existence. Rather than a necessary evil, perhaps this legal requirement can be used constructively to encourage more reflection upon the training that has taken place. The ways in which this reflection is carried out and the effects of this reflection upon practice would make for valuable future research. From the author’s research to date, it appears that this is an important ingredient in ensuring that even the most successful training opportunities have a real and long-term impact.

**Acknowledgements**

My thanks and appreciation are given to Dennis Lavelle from Emeritus Training for delivering such outstanding training sessions and to the staff of Worcester Sixth Form College for their willing participation in the project and for their frank and honest discussions. I am grateful also to the staff in the College’s Learning Resources Centre for their invaluable help and advice in the literature search. Without the support of all these individuals, this project would not have been possible.
References


Investigating Management Development in the Further Education Sector

Rob Witton, City of Sunderland College

Executive Summary

This report examines management development (MD) in the FE sector and explores the relationship between MD and organisational culture. An online multi-college survey obtained perceptions from all managerial levels at 5 Colleges on areas of MD support, MD systems, organisational culture and several cultural fit factors. The research findings reveal a positive correlation between post MD and cultural organisational fit. The data confirm that, after MD, individuals did indeed feel more integrated with their organisation, its values, its goals and its culture. The notable exception was junior managers who felt they “fitted in” less well than prior to MD. Other hierarchical differences in the perceptions of MD were also apparent. For example, almost half of junior managers felt they had no support during MD. By contrast, no senior managers felt this. The report concludes that within the FE sector there is considerable room for improvement in MD programmes.

Introduction

This report explores the relationship between MD and organisational culture in the FE sector. It is now widely accepted that culture can have an affect on organisational performance if not widely researched. That it can have an impact on MD has been less well discussed and examined. Models of MD abound and its value is unquestioned, but what if this new skills and knowledge base itself was a contributory factor in limiting post development application? According to Handy (1993), culture is a combination of deep-set beliefs about the way work is organised, authority exercised and people rewarded and controlled. MD can modify these beliefs, whilst conversely culture has the potential to significantly influence MD and its effectiveness.

This research was designed to discover some of the cultural factors that could negatively affect MD and its application. The main research questions were:

1. To what extent does organisational culture restrict post development organisational fit for current and potential college leaders and managers?

2. What management development support have college managers received and how does this compare with support in other sectors?
3. Do managers at different levels have differing perceptions of MD and organisational culture and what are the implications of this?

4. How can organisational culture in FE colleges support or inhibit learning and application from periods of MD?

5. What are the implications and issues for the effective leadership of colleges arising from the degree of fit between organisational culture and college arrangements for leadership and MD?

**Research Framework**

In relation to MD, Stewart (1999: 221) suggests that,

> "Much research and writing and therefore common usage of the term, assumes or implies formalised and structured systems within work organisations for the provision of MD."

As Stewart points out, this often excludes smaller organisations and also discounts accidental, informal or situated learning. Pedler and Boydell (1985) define development as a process of transformational change towards a different, but unknown state of being. Mumford (2004: 14) offers a broad definition as, "An attempt to improve managerial effectiveness through a learning process”.

Cummings and Worley (1999) highlight the link between MD and training,

> "Training or other processes to increase managers’ knowledge and skills in order to improve performance in present jobs or to prepare them for promotion. Increasingly tied to career planning and development."

Most definitions of organisational culture portray it as a combination of the beliefs, attitudes and norms of the people within the organisation. The traditional, behavioural approach to culture is often taken for the diagnosis of organisational culture, which asks; “How are things done around here?” and investigates “the way the game is played”. In this research, survey questions allowed respondents to articulate their thoughts on this in general terms as well as specifically towards MD.

Hierarchical cultural models (e.g. Denison & Spreitzer 1991) see values determined around internal affairs and stability within a mechanistic approach. The rapid nature of change within the FE sector makes this cultural strand no longer effective or suited to a fast moving environment. Therefore, the move in FE is often seen as being towards a rational culture with a focus on the external environment and goal achievement. These ‘old’ and ‘new’ cultural models are frequently competing in FE colleges up and down the country. FE colleges also exhibit elements of a third more organic cultural approach, of participation and creativity.
Research Methods

Initial objectives based on empirical observations looked to explore some of the implications and impacts of organisational culture on MD. These same observations led to a loose hypothesis that a loss of cultural fit post MD was common within the FE sector, that the journey of the individual took them to a place that was potentially at odds with the cultural working environment.

Several research methods were explored that would help gain further insight into the subject and the perceptions of college managers across the 5 colleges. The following discussion provides the rationale behind the choices made. The limiting time factors in obtaining information from such large bodies of people was an area for serious consideration. A methodology was needed that would provide a substantial amount of information from a large number of staff in 5 colleges in a short space of time, a method that would facilitate analytical research as well as obtaining measurable data covering the perceptions and experiences of college managers.

An on-line survey was a logical, effective and appropriate choice to make. This was supported by informal interviews taking the form of conversations with college managers. Survey Monkey was used to provide an insight into managers’ experiences and perceptions of culture and management before and after management development. Interviews with managers would then further explore the relationship through experiences in greater depth.

It was decided firstly to undertake a pilot study within City of Sunderland College to test the software package and methods of analysis. This consisted of a small random sample of senior managers from both academic and non-academic areas. A draft of the pilot was read by two critical friends before release and was received positively. Primarily the aims of the pilot study were:

- To test a never used before on-line survey system;
- To assess ease of use by respondents;
- To undertake practise data analysis;
- To look for early signs of trends.

The questionnaire design included a small introduction, which sets out the rationale, aims and conditions of the study before moving to the main body of the survey. It was designed in a relatively straightforward way in order to secure the maximum number of respondents. At the interview stage interviewees were encouraged to participate in discussion freely and spontaneously.

To obtain a good response, the survey design had to be carefully considered. A balance between user friendliness and the acquisition and analysis of valid data needed to be incorporated. Balancing these needs was found to be by far the most difficult area of preparation. The design used was a highly structured format with few open-ended responses available. Respondents were invited to provide qualitative
comments to encourage use of their own words without steering them into a set
direction or pre-judging the responses with fixed alternatives. It was decided that the
use of few open-ended options was justified taking into consideration the difficulties
with analysing this much data from such a large number of variables. Some
classification questions are used to obtain a small amount of demographic
information. This was used in the analysis of possible trends in response to
particular classifications. Analysis looked to determine if a relationship between
certain variables existed.

The nature of the information required by the survey and interviews meant that
identifying respondents is not necessary, so the respondents remaining anonymous
would not have any adverse affect on the survey results or analysis. The provision of
the respondents’ personal details was also not required for survey analysis and was
requested purely on an optional basis. It was further decided that all the survey data
must be treated as confidential, only the researcher and support team had access to
the questionnaires. The participating colleges only received an analysis of findings.
An explicit statement of confidentiality was made at the start of the survey.

Five FE colleges volunteered to take part in the research project. Informal
conversations with college employees had already provided much of the impetus for
this research, and this continued to be a valuable method of gaining information.
It was felt that managers would be more likely to respond or “open up” in an
unstructured and seemingly casual conversation. These techniques ranged from
simply listening to and analysing gossip through to conversations using open ended
questions to obtain the perceptions of the individual in line with the research needs.
Careful thought was given to the choice of words and confidant.

Research Findings

The survey obtained 72 responses across 5 FE institutions, a slightly disappointing
result and certainly one disproportionate to the effort put in to persuade college
managers this was time well spent. The survey will however remain open to allow
further respondents from a wider spread of colleges to take part. The large multi
variable response format of the questionnaire provided the opportunity for multi-
variable analysis on a massive scale (far more than could be processed within the
 confines of this project). It allowed for analysis of data, answering the main research
questions but also in providing valuable insight into areas not previously considered.

Employer Support

Respondents were asked how employers had supported MD. Table 1 displays the
findings filtered by sector and managerial level.
Table 1: Percentage of managers perceiving listed support mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support Mechanism</th>
<th>All FE Sector Managers</th>
<th>FE Senior Managers</th>
<th>FE Faculty/Department Heads</th>
<th>FE Team/Programme Leaders</th>
<th>Other Public Sector Managers</th>
<th>Private Sector Managers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Succession planning</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Funding</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full funding</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time off</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time on the job</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line manager support &amp; guidance</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior Manager support &amp; guidance</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No support</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of particular note is the difference across the FE hierarchy in the number of managers who felt they received no support for MD, from senior managers who felt they did receive support, to close to half of junior managers who felt they had received no support. This potentially leaves junior managers not only ill equipped to perform the changing roles asked of them, but also less able to make effective application of skills and knowledge gained during MD. This is further supported by qualitative comments such as:

"Management development is not always open to all. There is very little in the way of formal support and training for frontline managers - team leaders and supervisors etc. The focus seems higher up (if there is one). There is no obvious pathway for those who are keen and energetic about development. We don't openly celebrate our successes. There needs to be a greater emphasis on identifying good role models for managers (well, all staff really)."

This is a surprising initial perception, with which many interviewees agreed, several adding comments such as:

"The College is far better at recognising the achievements of students than staff."

A definite hierarchical trend is apparent across several key support mechanisms. It would appear that, the more junior your position, the less support you can expect (although other factors are also significant). A clear pattern can be seen of decreasing perceived support by line managers and senior managers, and a perception of lessening time off for study and lessening full financial assistance across levels. It is also noteworthy that a far higher percentage of senior managers felt that progression planning was in place during their MD.

It was apparent that financial support within the FE sector was good, but many other areas of support were missing for far too many respondents. Findings suggested that financial support was more than twice as common as line manager support and five times more common than mentoring. Preliminary comparative analysis with respondent experience in the private and none education public sectors suggests that both these sectors offered more candidates work time to study than the FE sector but provided even fewer candidates with either mentoring or managerial support.
MD systems

During informal interviews and qualitative responses, significant negative feedback was received regarding college in-house MD programmes, as the following statement illustrates,

“Greater investment appraisal is carried out for a new photocopier than for management development.”

Several interviewees elaborated with negative MD stories, such as:

“Management development has been very poorly managed. We all had to undertake 8 days of development, plus 4 health and safety, plus produce evidence of competencies, which are poorly worded and do not follow usual competency rules. This has been incredibly time consuming with the threat of disciplinary action if not done - not good for morale. Particularly at a time of lots of change and reorganisation - but who is interested?”

“Current senior management has introduced an inappropriate matrix management system, which is recognised by the majority of middle managers as being unworkable, but who are paying lip service to it until it fails. They have recently carried out a management reorganisation which would not pass scrutiny for anyone investigating age discrimination. Morale is quite low. Little confidence in senior management by both staff AND OFSTED.”

“Much of the training available with current FE does not apply to my area of responsibility.”

“Higher level management qualifications are just not valued in current college. We are operating a sheep dip approach to training.”

“We have paid consultants to deliver a management development programme that looks like the old GNVQ Business.”

These comments illustrate managerial disenchantment with MD practices in FE. This pattern was also supported by survey findings. When asked to choose statements that best described MD systems at their current college, less than 13% of respondents agreed that MD systems were overt, only 22% agreed systems were efficient, only 24% disagreed that systems were biased (among team leaders this fell to 14%). Rather strikingly, 57% of junior managers actively agreed that MD systems were biased. This compared with 25% of senior managers. Conversely, 33% of junior managers felt that MD systems were efficient compared with only 17% of senior managers. Once again, hierarchical differences were apparent. When addressing perceived fairness in MD systems, 57% of senior managers, 53% of middle managers and 44% of junior managers agreed that systems were fair.
The Cultural Environment

Table 2 displays movement in agreement with 5 statements designed to measure cultural fit pre MD with the same statement assessed during or post MD.

Table 2: Cultural fit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural belonging</th>
<th>Senior Managers</th>
<th>Middle Managers</th>
<th>Junior Managers</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pre/Post MD Pre</td>
<td>Pre/Post Post</td>
<td>Pre/Post Pre</td>
<td>Pre/Post Post Pre/Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I identified well with organisational goals</td>
<td>6.38 7.13</td>
<td>7.0 7.83</td>
<td>5.5 6.0</td>
<td>6.34 6.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I identified well with departmental goals</td>
<td>6.38 7.13</td>
<td>7.64 8.13</td>
<td>5.8 6.18</td>
<td>7.02 7.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt part of the greater organisational culture</td>
<td>6.5 6.88</td>
<td>6.88 7.83</td>
<td>5.4 5.73</td>
<td>6.06 6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt part of departmental culture</td>
<td>6.5 6.88</td>
<td>7.38 8.17</td>
<td>5.7 6.0</td>
<td>6.95 7.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I fitted in well</td>
<td>6.63 7.38</td>
<td>8.0 8.21</td>
<td>6.7 6.0</td>
<td>7.24 7.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Score based on an average rating out of ten)

The findings display a post MD progression (at all levels), with the one exception being the perception of junior managers in “fitting in” post MD (which lowered slightly). This was an expectation based on the original hypothesis. However, in isolation against an overall positive forward movement in all factors this is not at all sufficient to support an assumption that loss of cultural fit post MD is a common phenomenon. It is also worthwhile noting that once again differences across levels in the hierarchy could be discerned. This time with the highest ratings from middle managers who evaluated all factors higher pre-development than both senior and junior managers did post-development.

Other qualitative comments included:

“It is a very unhappy place to work at the present time.”

“Different culture that says it wants good communication but since then it’s got worse. Existing long term managers advised to leave to get on. It helps to be a mate from their previous institutions.”
Other findings included:

- 49% of managers have been with their current college for more than 10 years. For senior managers this rose to 60%.

- 57% of managers sampled were over the age of 45.

- 61% of managers have undertaken a programme of MD in the last 4 years.

- The most common reason stated for leaving previous employment were: for personal development, a lack of progression opportunities, outgrowing the role, poor leadership and outgrowing the organisation, a factor that could be an indicator of a loss of cultural fit.

- Only 11% of respondents felt that MD selection systems at their current college were overt and only 22% would describe these systems as efficient.

Conclusions

Support for MD is crucial to its effective application. The findings of this research show that MD in the FE sector has a great deal of room for improvement. This is especially the case for junior managers where significant differences in perceptions of support were apparent from the bottom to the top. Clearly something needs to be done in our colleges to change negative perceptions and restore faith in MD support, MD systems and in-house MD programmes, especially among junior managers.

Recommendations

Colleges must take note of the negative perceptions of management development articulated by managers and in particular junior managers in the sector. These managers need to have the opportunity to progress because of MD systems, not in spite of them. It is too easy to suggest that these are the negative perceptions of a demotivated few. It is recommended that other institutions survey their managers.

Colleges could explore the possibility of sharing MD good practice, then look to take that a step further and share MD practitioners. College MD programmes could offer outside experts with the contemporary experience to offer tailored programmes. If validated through a local HEI, HEFCE funding is a possibility.

In light of these research findings, this College is reviewing all aspects of its management development programmes.
References


Leading Teachers:  
The role of leadership in teaching and middle management  

Philip Barker and Janet Brewer, City of Bristol College

Executive Summary

This study explored the significance of leadership amongst team leaders in four very different UK colleges. Using a web based survey, 163 responses from team leaders explored their activities and their perceptions of leadership. This data was supplemented through a further web based survey and interviews with middle managers in one of the colleges. Key findings include the importance of teaching for team leaders, and their reluctance to forgo this should they move to a middle management position; some 30% of team leaders expected to leave the further education sector before they retired; and there were some anomalies in the leadership practice of team leaders. Of the team leaders, 16% did not consider themselves to be leaders. There was no evidence that providing teachers with a leadership role would encourage them to become middle managers.

Introduction

This project aimed to explore the significance of leadership in the role of those staff in colleges responsible for a small team of teachers. These staff are referred to as team leaders. Earlier research (Barker and Brewer 2007) had indicated the importance of leadership in middle management positions, although this research also suggested that its importance may be under recognised. In the context of succession planning, team leaders may aspire to progress to middle management positions (and beyond). Hence, their views and experiences of leadership, and the acquisition and development of leadership skills, are important.

The project aimed to explore the meaning and significance of leadership in the role of team leaders who might progress to middle management positions.

The main research questions were:

1. How can we support the succession of FE teachers to middle management positions?

2. Does giving FE teachers a defined leadership role affect their likelihood of wanting to progress to middle management roles?

3. How and in what ways is leadership important to FE teachers and their managers?

4. What are FE teachers’ perceptions of leadership?
The project took place in four colleges in different parts of the country. They included a large general FE college in the North East of England (College A), a medium sized community college in the London area (College B), a small general FE college in the South of England (College C), and a large general education college in the South West of England (College D). College D was the lead college for the project. Whilst it cannot be claimed that these colleges are representative of the LSS, their participation and contribution to the project raise the reliability of the findings beyond that of a project based in one college. The findings are therefore likely to be relevant to other providers in the sector.

Research Framework

The context in which this research took place is one of increasing recognition of the importance of middle leadership in organisations (Collinson 2007). Horsfall (2001) recognised the significance of the role of team leader in achieving student outcomes and suggested the significance that leadership had within the role. Recent reviews of the nature and impact of leadership and leadership development suggest different forms or styles of leadership proliferate (Lumby et al 2005, Harris 2004, Frearson 2002, Muijs et al 2006, Jameson 2007). Transactional, transformational, distributed and instructional leadership styles are all examples, although these are just the tip of the iceberg. Recent work by Jameson examines the concept of collaborative leadership in the LSS. This explores the incidence of collaborative leadership within the sector and its understanding of the concept within the context of communities of practice. Although the research shows an understanding by managers within the sector of the concept of collaborative leadership, there is little evidence of its practice.

Whilst Lumby et al suggest that transformational leadership may be more effective in improving organisational performance, in practice there is a mix of both transformational and transactional leadership in operation. Hartley (2007) suggests there is little evidence of a causal relationship between distributed leadership and school achievement. Rather, the evidence suggests that distributed leadership is more likely to have an impact on the motivation of staff and the quality of teaching (Harris 2005) rather than improving learning outcomes (Harris 2004). The impact of collaborative leadership on organisational performance is yet to be explored. Leithwood, again in the school context, has identified common leadership practices which improve students’ learning. The ways in which these are used, however, show a responsiveness to, rather than a dictation by, the contexts in which they take place. This suggests the situational nature of leadership. Leaders choose particular styles of leadership in order to lead in particular contexts (Muijs 2006).
Measuring the impact or efficiency of different leadership styles frequently reflects the politically driven emphasis on performance management. So improved learner success, value added or value for money are used as indicators of increased efficiency or effectiveness. Where different measures are used to judge the efficacy of leadership, different understandings of leadership may emerge. Vasse’s stimulating research on leadership in the context of developing a “learning organisation” suggests that factors other than leadership may determine this outcome. So a “learning organisation” may be the result of different or similar leadership styles, in spite of the contexts being similar in terms of performance management.

The arguments concerning the significance of middle leadership and middle management have been well rehearsed (Barker 2006; Briggs 2005; Collinson and Collinson 2005). Leadership is not something that only the executive and senior management team do. If real change is to be implemented in organisations, and the hearts and minds of those who deliver organisational outcomes won over, leadership which develops the knowledge, motivation and aspirations of teachers and their immediate managers is needed. Earlier research (Barker 2006; Barker and Brewer 2007) indicated the low recognition of the significance of leadership in the curriculum middle manager role, and in the role of team leaders who might aspire to become middle and senior managers.

Implicit in the notion of succession planning is the idea that teachers will aspire to and develop into management and leadership roles. This will inevitably involve change for teachers, not just in terms of what they do, but also in terms of their identity. Bathmaker’s work on the professional development of teachers and the challenges of “dual professionalism” usefully explores the reality with which new teachers grapple in the context of communities of practice. The process may be reflected in the change through which individuals pass as they move from teacher to leader and manager. The shift to taking on attributes of leadership in order to progress to the next career rung may compound the challenges of maintaining a coherent and changing identity. This can have implications for how team leaders and middle managers are supported by their organisation in this transition.

This review of the research framework identifies some key aspects to the context in which this research took place. Although different styles of leadership have been identified, there is little to suggest they impact upon student performance; measures of the impact of different leadership styles are value laden and may be politically motivated; middle leadership is undervalued in terms of its potential for supporting change in colleges; progression from teacher/team leader to curriculum middle manager/leader may involve a change in identity for the individuals concerned.
Research Methods

The project used a variety of methods to gather data. An initial literature review identified themes about which data should be gathered from team leaders. Participating colleges were identified through a CEL Practitioner Research Programme workshop. Each participating college had a project representative and these representatives were briefed about the aims of the project, and the staff for whom it was appropriate to send the questionnaire. The lead college distributed a job role description for team leaders. These staff should not be classed (or paid) as managers, yet they might aspire to become managers.

A web-based survey was set up for team leaders to access. They would be sent an email containing a link to the survey. This method was chosen as it provided easy access to team leaders since the email address of all team leaders was known by their college representative. All college representatives stated that this was a major means of communication within their college, and it was unlikely to exclude participation in the survey. The method had clear advantages. It maintained anonymity of the respondents, and allowed voluntary participation in the survey. Respondents could opt out at any point and the survey itself made few demands on the respondents. Piloting the survey suggested that it took no longer than ten minutes to complete.

Participating colleges were consulted about the appropriateness of the questions, with particular reference to the use of language and terminology that might be specific to their own context. The survey went live at the beginning of December 2007 and remained open until 31st January. Two reminders were sent to team leaders. This resulted in 162 responses as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>% of all project responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>College A</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College B</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College C</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College D</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No claims can be made that this sample is representative beyond the participating colleges, nor is it possible to provide response rates since the total number of team leaders in each participating college is not known. Responses are weighted towards the largest college (College D). Each college received its own data set. The data was not shared between colleges, although obviously College D had access to the data from each college.

1 Throughout this report percentage figures have been rounded up or down using normal rounding conventions.
Two further research activities took place within the lead college. A web based survey of curriculum middle managers, followed by face to face interviews with a sample of middle managers. These two activities followed up issues arising from the team leader survey. The web-based survey was used for the same reasons as identified for the team leader survey. It was completed by 18 curriculum middle managers (a 56% response rate). A 50% sample of curriculum middle managers was invited to be interviewed and ten took up this invitation. This represented 28% of all curriculum middle managers and 56% response rate to the invitation.

Research Findings

The team leader survey

The following table shows the profile of all respondents to the team leader survey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Percentage of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-29 years old</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years old</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 years old</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 years old</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+ years old</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Team leaders were asked what their job involved and were given a list of activities which had been devised from previous research work (Barker 2006) and supplemented with data from short interviews with team leaders and all college representatives. The following table shows the top five most frequently identified activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Percentage responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing course materials and handouts</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual programme or course review</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading a team of teachers</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation and administration</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal verification</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Team leaders were least likely to be involved with college finances (9% of respondents) and conduct career planning with teachers. There was little difference between the colleges in terms of the importance of these activities. Of the team leaders, 16% did not consider themselves to be leaders.

Of the team leaders in all colleges, 81% had ten or less staff in their team. However, this figure drops to 56% if the data from College D is excluded. Team leaders from this college had smaller teams than in the remaining colleges. Of the respondents from College D, 9% had 11 or more people in their team, compared with 19% in the remaining colleges.

Team leaders were asked what percentage of their staff were full time. The following table shows their responses:

**Proportion of full-time staff**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0%-20%</th>
<th>21%-40%</th>
<th>41%-60%</th>
<th>61%-80%</th>
<th>81%-100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All colleges</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College D</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining colleges</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Across all colleges, 43% of respondents stated that 20% or less of their staff were full-time. However, there were differences between colleges. For College D, the figure was 50% of respondents, and for the remaining colleges, the figure was 30%. This suggests that the largest college engages more part-time staff than the other colleges. Similarly, 21% of respondents from the largest college had 80% or more full-time staff, compared with 30% for the other colleges. For all colleges, 24% had 80% or more full-time staff.

A further question concerned the number of hours a week spent teaching or preparing to teach. Across all colleges, 55% spent 26 hours or more on this activity. However, again there were significant differences between College D and the remaining colleges. In College D this figure was 63%, compared with 38% in the remaining colleges.
There was less difference between colleges in terms of the amount of time spent by team leaders in their co-ordinating and organising role. 30% of all respondents stated between five and nine hours per week. In College D the figure was 31%. However, 31% of College D respondents stated they spent between 10 and 15 hours per week co-ordinating and organising. In other colleges, the figure was 13%.

Respondents were also asked how far they agreed with a set of statements which concerned leadership. These statements were drawn from a number of different sources. The following table shows the percentage responses to the six most frequently referred to statements. Setting an example to their staff showed the greatest significance to team leaders in all colleges. Motivating staff was seen as less important in College D than in the remaining colleges.

Agreement with leadership statements
Earlier research (Barker 2006) had identified factors which attracted middle managers to their posts. Team leaders were asked which of these factors would attract them to a middle management role. The following table shows the responses:

**What attracts you to a middle manager’s role?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>All colleges</th>
<th>College D</th>
<th>Excluding College D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Getting to see the “bigger picture”</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in control</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representing dept, faculty or college</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A stepping stone to greater things</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High status and respect</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking important decisions</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Team leaders were also provided with a list of issues that might put them off seeking promotion to a middle management role. This list had been developed from earlier research (Barker 2006). The following table shows the five factors most frequently referred to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>% of all respondents referring to this</th>
<th>% of College D respondents only</th>
<th>% of respondents excluding College D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Losing touch with students</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in relationship with colleagues and friends</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having to work longer hours</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money would not compensate for the new challenges</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconciling the needs of senior managers and my team</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There appears to be little difference between College D and the remaining colleges except for concerns about working longer hours and lack of monetary compensation in College D.
A further question asked how respondents would like to finish their career. The following table shows the responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How would you like to finish your career?</th>
<th>% of all respondents referring to this</th>
<th>% of College D respondents only</th>
<th>% of respondents excluding College D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Head of school</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle manager</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of faculty</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College principal</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I expect to leave FE before I retire</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents from colleges A, B, and C appear to have greater ambitions than those in College D. This may be the result of higher average age of respondents in College D. College D respondents were also more likely to expect to leave further education before they retired.

The middle managers’ survey

The middle managers’ survey was conducted only in College D\(^2\). Its questions reflected those used in the team leader survey. Of the 18 responses received, 10 (55%) were female and 14 (78%) were between 50 and 59 years old. They were provided with the same list of activities that team leaders might do that was used in the team leader survey. They were asked how important they considered these to be in the role of team leader.

Curriculum middle managers had very similar perceptions of the team leader role to the team leaders themselves. All middle managers rated the following activities either very important or fairly important:

- Organisation and administration;
- Leading a team of teachers;
- Annual programme or course review;
- Writing course materials and handouts;
- Internal verification;
- Communication skills;
- Curriculum planning and development.

\(^2\) Where comparisons are made with team leader responses, only the responses from College D team leaders have been used.
Whilst these activities were identical to the top eight activities identified by College D team leaders, 88% of middle managers also rated working with college data systems as very or fairly important. This was relatively high compared with the 70% of team leaders from College D who stated that their job involved working with college data systems. In addition, 50% of middle managers stated career planning with teachers was important in the team leader role, but only 10% of team leaders stated they do this.

Middle managers were also asked how important they considered leadership activities to be in the role of team leaders. The same list of activities was used as in the team leaders’ survey. Middle managers’ expectations and team leaders’ views were then compared. Since the middle managers’ survey only took place in College D, only the responses from team leaders in College D were used. The following table shows the percentage difference between the team leaders’ views and the middle managers’ expectations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>% Team leaders (n=96)</th>
<th>% Middle managers (n=18)</th>
<th>% Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring a team</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving information</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading PT staff</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking important decisions</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influencing what goes on in college</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>-73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching &amp; mentoring new staff</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>-24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows the greatest difference between middle managers’ expectations and the views of team leaders about the ability to influence what goes on in college. Middle managers have far higher expectations of team leaders to do this than team leaders.

**Interviews with curriculum middle managers**

Ten middle managers from eight different faculties were interviewed. One was in the dual role of centre manager and programme co-ordinator, so the questions were adapted to suit her roles. The interviews took between 30 minutes and one hour.

**Leadership skills that middle managers felt were key to their own performance**

Two key themes stood out when middle managers discussed their own leadership skills: good communication, and setting an example. Communication included a
range of linked skills: explaining, listening, responding and persuading.
Communicating with team leaders one to one was seen as desirable by many
managers, though it was not physically possible for all of them. One middle manager
tried to manage with regular meetings and informal one to one sessions,

"I send my diary round each week, so that people can grab me. We do a
lot of walking and talking – I never have a coffee or a lunch break, people
can grab me at those times."

Explaining was important for taking people with you,

"You have to fully explain why we do it like this. Consistency is crucially
important. You need to re-cap lots of times and introduce ideas slowly so
that people have time to get used to them."

Listening was about respect for the individual and a key to taking action, being
responsive. Listening and persuading were closely linked. Sometimes team leaders
had to do tasks which they were not happy about, but listening and responding was
the key to taking people along,

"Listening. People are happier to come along, even if the answer is ‘No.’
It’s important to feel respected."

Setting an example for team leaders was mentioned by most of the middle
managers. By this they meant doing the tasks that the team leaders or teachers had
to do, although it was not part of their role,

"Teaching adds credibility. I can do whatever I ask anyone else to do. I used
to do evenings. I used to make a point – if I can do it, so can you – rather
than say ‘It’s in your contract’.

Maintaining expertise was also part of leadership and was connected with setting
an example,

"The minute you stop teaching (names type of) learners, you forget how
difficult they are. I have to stay in touch with that to advise my staff. I have
subject expertise; the team will ask me about (legal) issues. Experience in
the real world is important. It’s very important for our tutors."

Other key aspects to leadership mentioned by one or two managers each were:

- Giving guidance and support;
- ‘Growing’ the team leaders, or empowering them;
- Being available/approachable;
- Setting values;
- Inspiring.
The key skills valued in middle managers’ own leaders

Communication, in its many aspects, was the skill most frequently valued by middle managers in their own leaders. Analysis and explanation were valued,

“H is very good at analysing the national situation. H is good at explaining – gives a good analysis of where we are going and what we need to do.”

Listening was mentioned even more frequently, often in relation to the managers’ own sense of being valued or respected,

“S really values us – it’s not like a hierarchy. I never feel I’m not listened to. S takes ideas from us and moves it forward.”

“Feeling respected, being listened to and being respected, feeling your talents are recognised and used.”

Other skills valued in their leaders included:

- Motivation;
- Persuasion;
- Inspiration;
- Being given freedom, backed with resources;
- Setting expectations;
- Supporting you to develop.

Three middle managers did not see their Heads of Faculty as the person who provided their leadership. They looked to the Executive team (Principal and Vice Principals) for analysis, strategy and the vision for the future.

Do team leaders really lead?

Middle managers did not see team leaders consistently exercising leadership. Only two out of the ten managers said that they saw all their team leaders actually leading. Four said that some of them did. The following quote shows how one middle manager saw a team leader as a monitoring activity, rather than leading,

“X is the programme leader for 5 sites. I’ve implemented a change to pick up students not performing. X should have got tutors to identify students below 80% attendance, not on target. X is beginning to look at the role of team leader.”

Middle managers saw the process of becoming a team leader as problematic. Three of the managers talked about the slow process of engaging the team leaders with their new responsibilities. Some team leaders were continuing to behave as though the new role had simply given them a pay rise,
“More and more we try to say to team leaders, this is part of your role, you need to do this. You just have to keep on delegating, making them take responsibility – in the nicest possible way!”

Two, whose faculties worked on a matrix system where team leaders were in teams run by others, said that they did not act as leaders in that situation, one categorising them as “organisers”.

How can team leaders be helped to lead?

There was little consensus about improving the leadership skills of team leaders. Three managers described how they felt they mentored the new team leaders, and one of them clearly found it very rewarding,

“I’ve been able to grow A into the role – she’s almost working alongside of me. She is a natural progressor. She was a grade 1 tutor, and she’s fallen into this team leader role.”

Another believed in the power of clarity of purpose,

“They want to see a reason for doing things – value to the students. Whatever I do, setting success targets, stats, or things a lot of them are not good at, then there’s complete buy-in.”

Another described the initial process which her faculty had been through with the new team leaders, to establish the role clearly at the start. They had talked through the role,

“It was started by the curriculum middle manager, and the rest of us followed.”

However, she too went on to say that there were still people in her faculty who,

“don’t acknowledge what their role is … I suspect that’s because it’s not convenient.”

Two managers would like to see a change in the training offered,

“Their problem isn’t in the day-to-day running of programmes; we have to train them for strategic thinking. We have to have a continual training situation.”

Managers tried to set an example through their own practice, however as one pointed out, it was hard to monitor their success,

“You can’t be watching them communicating with their staff all the time.”
Will team leaders’ experience of leadership make it more likely that they become managers?

On the whole, few managers expected that their team leaders would wish to pursue higher levels of leadership. Only four identified individuals who might want to progress, and of them, only one manager was really positive,

“N realised the job satisfaction she got from being a team leader, there’s always something going on. She says her next step will be to be a manager.”

The other six were more doubtful. Four cited the high expectations of middle managers and the constant pressure they work under. One said

“I have only one team leader who has her eyes on climbing the ladder. It’s her observation of what I have to do that troubles her.”

This manager went on to describe his work: people issues, work across three or four centres, travel, parking, being late for meetings, not being able to give people the time they needed.

Four managers stressed the benefits of staying in a predominantly teaching role. One said that the team leaders felt they “made a difference” in their current role, and therefore did not want to leave it. Another, in the creative arts, said,

“A lot of staff in (this faculty) are still very much in love with their subject area.”

He implied that they would not swap their work for a life of managing people and data. The other two emphasised that even in their new role, team leaders really wanted to teach,

“They just want to be teachers. We’ve handed down responsibilities to them, but if they could just come and teach they would.”

Why do middle managers think that so many team leaders expect to leave FE?

Few middle managers were surprised by the finding that 39% of team leaders in College D expected to leave FE before reaching retirement. These are the reasons they gave, in rank order:

- The pressure and volume of work as team leader was demanding and had increased. Typical comments on this included,

  “It’s not a nice job like it was. Students are far more difficult. Team leaders have to deal with that all the time.”

  “They feel that the pressure is constant and relentless. It is difficult to complete or achieve anything.”
Long hours and pressure of work in middle manager roles meant that team leaders did not aspire to rise in management.

"I get comments like 'I wouldn’t want to do your job'."

The status of FE.

"FE is not a priority – it’s the Cinderella service. We are constantly mopping up the failures of schools and social issues."

Pay and conditions.

Conclusions

The findings from this project have implications for the research questions which it addressed, as well as raising wider questions concerning middle leadership in the LSS.

1. How can we support the succession of FE teachers to middle management positions?

It is clear that the ambitions of team leaders to become middle managers are relatively low. Although 84% stated they were 40 years old or more, 30% of team leader respondents expected to leave the FE sector before they retire. Interestingly their most frequently mentioned reason for not seeking promotion was losing touch with students. This was referred to by 77% of respondents. This far outweighed other possible reasons for not seeking promotion, with the next most frequent response being a change in their relationship with colleagues (41%).

Attractions to the role of middle manager were most frequently the result of being able to represent their department, faculty or college (68%) followed by getting to see the “bigger picture” (59%). Only 19% referred to having greater status and respect from others. 33% referred to becoming a middle manager as a stepping stone to greater things. This suggests that motivation to become a middle manager rests on an individual’s interest and desire for responsibility.

2. Does giving FE teachers a defined leadership role affect their likelihood of wanting to progress to middle management roles?

There is little evidence to show that being a team leader increases an individual’s motivation to become a middle manager. A key issue for team leaders in all colleges was their unwillingness to lose contact with students. Whilst this has been found in earlier research work (Barker 2006; Fletcher-Campbell 2003), it is particularly marked in this study. A further issue raised in both the team leader and middle manager data concerns the importance of being seen as a subject expert and setting an example to staff. If middle managers no longer teach students, they may feel divorced from their subject, and unable to show their expertise as a teacher. As middle managers, their expertise will lie in being a leader and a manager. This underlines the importance of recognising and understanding the significance of changes in team leaders’ identities as they might move to middle management. It also emphasises the need for support in this process, perhaps through a well developed mentoring process.
3. How and in what ways is leadership important to FE teachers and their managers?

Whilst middle managers clearly saw leadership as important to the team leader role, 16% of team leaders did not see this to be the case. Very few of the middle managers interviewed saw team leaders acting consistently as leaders. In this sense, leadership is more important to middle managers than to team leaders. Moreover, they do not see leadership being practised by their team leaders, suggesting the need for additional support in the development of leadership skills and a stronger reference to leadership in the appointment of team leaders. Only 29% of all college team leaders felt they could influence what goes on in college, yet in College D, 93% of middle managers thought that team leaders had this capacity.

4. What are FE teachers’ perceptions of leadership?

Although 84% of team leaders see leading their team as important, their understanding of what constitutes leadership raises some anomalies. Whilst 90% of team leaders from all colleges encourage staff to decide what they will do (i.e. leading by consensus), 97% of team leaders try to provide direction for their team. At the same time 88% of team leaders let their staff get on with their jobs. In this sense, team leaders may be striving to perform activities which are at times incompatible. This is reminiscent of the work of Collinson and Collinson (2005) who referred to the multi-faceted and sometimes conflicting demands made by FE teachers of their leaders. The team leaders in this study may be attempting to respond to these demands. This suggests that team leaders do not have a consistent pattern of leadership behaviours and may use different approaches in different contexts. Whilst this reflects the situational nature of leadership it also suggests the tensions inherent in being a team leader.

Further discussion

Analysis of these findings raises further questions for research into middle leadership. Clear differences have emerged between the participating colleges. Whilst this may be inevitable due to local economic and social trends and features, these differences may impact on the forms of leadership that are appropriate and the capacity of team leaders to lead. A number of questions are raised:

- Is there a relationship between the age profile of team leaders and leadership style?
- How does the size of an organisation affect team leaders and middle leadership?
- Does leading a large team of part-time staff mean that team leaders become over burdened with administrative chores? Does this detract from their capacity to motivate, inspire, and lead teachers to teach their best?
How important is coaching and mentoring to team leaders, both in supporting their staff, and for their own development? Although 100% of middle managers saw these activities as important, only 77% of team leaders said they actually do this with their teachers. This needs to be seen not just in the context of acquiring leadership skills, but also in terms of adapting to changes in their personal role and identity.

What is the impact of leadership development?

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References


A Job Worth Having? 
Succession planning for principals in the Further Education Sector

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Executive Summary

This report examines succession planning and how this can help sustain the quality of leaders and senior managers in the FE sector. Based on interviews with eight Principals, the research found that their dominant career path was through a teaching/lecturing route. Supportive relationships both in their organisation and outside were significant in assisting their careers. Hence, in terms of career pathways, this research suggests that there are common features to becoming a Principal but that there are also important differences which may have an important impact on succession planning. Research findings also indicate that the sector is now effectively addressing the issue of succession, and doing this predominantly through talent management systems. It found that all the colleges had developed systems designed to identify talented individuals and to mentor and coach them. These practices are laying the foundations for a whole college approach to leadership and management and therefore producing a coherent conveyor belt of talented individuals.

Introduction

In September 2003, The Independent published an article entitled ‘A Distinct Lack of Principals’, which reported on the worrying conjunction of more Principals retiring early and fewer applications for those vacancies. The article asked:

“Just where is the next generation of college leaders going to come from? That is the billion-dollar question taxing the further education community. Fewer and fewer college managers nowadays aspire to be Principals. A few years ago there were up to 60 applicants for each post. Now there may be only five or six, and their quality is not necessarily high...In the trades jargon, this is being dubbed ‘a succession planning problem’.”

This concern with leadership succession was a prime rationale for the formation of CEL, and its introduction of programmes around leadership and management in the FE sector, culminating in the Principal's qualification. The two researchers of this project have been through a succession process over the last year, with one taking early retirement and the other being appointed to a Principal’s post and we wished to compare and contrast these personal journeys with a wider experience of how
individuals become Principals of FE colleges, what role or not succession planning plays in this process, and what role, if any, the acquisition of management and leadership qualifications play in this process.

This project therefore aimed to add to the existing literature on the subject of the journey to Principalship and to see whether there were recognised pathways to this role. In addition, we aimed to look at how this fitted in with manpower planning in relation to staffing areas of the college, in particular with regard to gender, ethnicity and age profiles and finally we looked specifically at succession planning and talent management procedures.

Research Framework

The researchers utilised a CEL (2005) publication entitled “Career Paths – how individuals make it to the top in the learning and skills sector”. The key findings of the report were:

- the dominant career path for principals and chief executives was through a teaching/lecturing route.
- few principals had a vocational background.
- length of service in one institution was not found to be a barrier to progression.
- supportive relationships both in their organisation and outside were significant in assisting their careers.
- few had moved outside their particular area (eg from FE to ACL or WBL or vice versa).

These criteria were used as a very rough template on which we drew up a semi-structured questionnaire that formed the basis of an interview with a number of Principals, looking at their specific career pathways. In terms of the Principals, all apart from one were based in the North of England, and similarly only one was from a specialist college, the others being general FE colleges of varying sizes. They were primarily chosen for the varying length of service they had as Principals, ranging from 3 weeks at the time of the interview to twenty two years. Five of the Principals were female and three were male and the researchers were one male and one female. This may seem not to reflect the gender position of FE Principals generally, but in the Yorkshire and Humber region at the current time there are 14 female and 14 male Principals.

Research Methods

The researchers decided to undertake a qualitative study involving an in-depth semi-structured interview with a Principal over a two hour period. This model gave the opportunity to discuss and explore issues that emerged during the discussion. It was felt that this method afforded the opportunity for a deeper and more reflective response than might have been achieved with a questionnaire, although we
recognise that this restricted the number of Principals that could be studied. The research was fairly time consuming and was subject to the pressure of Principals' very full diaries.

The Principals of eight colleges were approached and all agreed to participate. Each Principal was asked to respond to questions about their personal journey to becoming a Principal, their institution's activity with regard to the planning of staffing and their activity with regard to succession planning and talent management. One of the researchers undertook five of the interviews and the other three interviews.

In addition, the two researchers analysed the Principalship transition within their own college. Consistency between interviews was maintained by the use of fifteen questions, six on the personal journey to becoming a Principal, with questions on factors that held back the individuals, factors that were important for achieving the role, the training undertaken as a senior manager or Principal and whether there was any succession planning involved. The second section on staff planning in the College asked whether there were recruitment difficulties at all levels in the College, whether there were imbalances in terms of age, gender and ethnicity and whether policies/procedures had been developed to deal with any of these. The third section looked at succession planning, asking whether the college engaged with it, the reason for this engagement, whether it had been useful, and whether the college embraced wider talent management procedures. Finally, it asked questions about the role and validity of formal training courses for senior leaders/principals and the validity of the work undertaken by CEL. All participants were assured that no individual or institution would be obviously identifiable.

Research Findings

COLLEGE A

College A is a small general further education college in South Yorkshire with a turnover of £10m and just over 7000 students. The Principal is a woman who has been in post for five years. The majority of her career has been spent in the FE sector, with the bulk at one college where she progressed from Lecturer to Assistant Principal. She was subsequently Vice Principal for six years at another college before taking up her current position. In terms of the factors aiding or hindering her career development she felt that there were no major factors holding her back although she restricted her job applications because of a desire not to uproot her family and for some time felt that a senior position “isn’t me”.

In terms of training she had acquired a Masters in Educational Management, but in retrospect felt an MBA would have been more useful. She had undertaken the Principal's programme (not the subsequent Principal's qualification) which she found helpful, especially with regard to networking and making connections. She felt her active involvement with the Association of College Management that was particularly helpful in terms of professional development and support. She considered management and leadership training was good for senior staff, particularly in relation to networking and the ability to reflect on practice. She felt that the training offered by CEL was of mixed quality but that coaching was excellent.
Reflecting on her motivation for becoming a Principal she said that she ‘wanted to make a difference’ and it would help ‘to have your own train set’, although recent policy changes had severely restricted an independent leadership role, confirming what we had found in earlier research, that certain aspects of college leadership were becoming branch management for the LSC.

College A had some difficulties in recruiting governors, particularly from the business community, which she judged to be because of the combination of extreme accountability with the inability to pursue fully independent policies. It had few problems with recruitment apart from in specific subject areas such as construction. The College undertook a staff profile analysis which concluded that its age and gender profile presented no difficulties. Its ethnic minority profile was very low, but reflected the very small percentage of black and ethnic minority people locally.

The College had no formal succession planning or talent management procedures in place. However, the Principal stressed that as a small college, senior managers were aware of talented individuals at all levels and training tended to be prioritized on them. As a small college, the Principal was aware that talented individuals tended to move to larger colleges which could offer higher salaries and probably more opportunities. In terms of senior managers she acknowledged that a lot of senior managers were women in their fifties which was an emerging issue. In terms of the future of the Principal’s role she was less concerned with finding enough people to undertake the post than with what the Principal of the future needed to be and the skills they needed to have, a concern which was echoed by other Principals.

**COLLEGE B**

College B is a large general further education college in Yorkshire and the Humber with a turnover of £27m and close to 10,000 students. The Principal is a man who has been in his present post for eight years and had been a Principal of other institutions from 1988, except for a short break of two years in the 1990s. He had worked throughout his career in FE moving from lecturer to senior manager in a sixth form college and then at general FE colleges.

He was appointed to his first Principalship at the age of 38, which in retrospect, he felt was too early. This quick rise to senior positions he felt was due to local circumstances (a community changing very rapidly and requiring positive interventions) and a huge amount of informal support and mentoring. He had not undertaken any specific leadership or management training and had acquired his skills on the job.

The College had no recruitment problems. Its location meant that it was always able to get suitable applicants for all of its posts. The College had undertaken staff profiling and was happy with the gender position, but had issues which needed to be addressed with regard to ethnicity and age. Although the College had a higher percentage of ethnic minority staff than its locality it had recognised that the local ethnic minority population was growing at a very fast rate from a previous low base and also the College had a rapidly increasing number of overseas students. It was
putting in place measures to increase the ethnic diversity of its staff. In addition, the age profile showed a strong skew to the late 40 and early 50 year olds which needed addressing. One issue which was identified was the existence of good young staff, but that their chances of gaining leadership/management experience was limited by older staff holding posts with those responsibilities, and who themselves were unlikely to progress.

In terms of succession planning, the College had a clear strategy for governors, with a search committee operating on an 18 month front end to find suitable governors. However, this was not mirrored amongst college staff. Rather, the College had started an embryonic talent management scheme which aimed to identify people and posts, although it was stressed that this did not mean that they necessarily got the job. In particular they had developed CPD programmes for middle managers and were increasingly trying to develop a flat rather than a hierarchical organisation with project teams incorporating all levels in the organisation. These project teams formed and disbanded on an ongoing basis.

The Principal felt that formal training for senior managers, and in particular Principals, was not necessary but could be helpful. He expressed a very real worry that leadership training courses were inculcating a management culture which was too compliant – developing a ‘conformist cadre’. He further thought consideration should be given to looking at the American Community College model with a separation between academic and administrative managers with academic managers working on a strategic rather than a management model, asking ‘the bigger questions’ at a time of fundamental change in the sector.

**COLLEGE C**

College C is a small adult education college in London with a turnover of £3m and around 6500 part-time adult students. The Principal is a woman and she has been in her present post for eighteen months, which is her first as Principal. Her career, apart from breaks whilst working in a fractional post and combining this with childcare and a secondment, had been spent in the same general further education institution in which she progressed from lecturer through to Vice Principal.

In terms of her current post she was strongly attracted by the institution, but at the same time had had a very damaging experience at her previous college where she had applied and been rejected for the post of Principal. She found the CEL Senior Development Course extremely helpful with the peer support offered by her cohort particularly invaluable, along with the self-reflective approach adopted by the course. She felt that coaching and mentoring are vital to new Principals and has undertaken intensive coaching on an individual basis and is currently working with a mentor. The factors which she felt that had held her back were single parenthood and caring responsibilities, a fear of change and for a long time happiness in her previous institution which was a good college to work for.
Her current college has looked at its staffing profile and has an issue with the age profile with all the middle managers, with one exception, being in their 50s. The college has a good gender and ethnic mix generally, but needs to look at the ethnic profile of senior staff. In her previous role she had been heavily involved in recruiting and developing staff from the BME communities and has had discussions with the black managers' network about her current college position. However, in a small college it was very difficult to change the situation unless vacancies emerge.

The Principal has adopted an explicit succession planning approach in the college. At governor level the chair is planning for succession. At staff level she requires managers to embed knowledge and awareness of process and procedures across all team members. She has buddied individuals to share skills, knowledge and understanding so that no individual is indispensable, which she sees as being significant in a small organisation. This has not been without its own problems in terms of staff ‘comfort zones’.

She thinks that CEL is correctly focusing its efforts on succession planning, and that it could become even more important as the numbers applying for Principal’s posts (she believes) will decline. This she believes is due to the increasing loss of a generation that ‘wanted to make a difference’, some poor promotions to senior positions which were not effectively supported and the low estimation in which the sector is held.

COLLEGE D

Located in the Yorkshire and Humber region, College D is a medium sized general further education college with an annual turnover of close to £16m with just over 8000 students. The Principal is a man who has been in post for six years. Previously Principal at a land-based college for five years, he has a vocational background, having been a training officer within a local authority. This was followed by fourteen years experience in land-based and general FE colleges where he moved from lecturer to Head of Department. He was appointed at his previous college as Vice Principal but was Principal within 10 months due to the dire situation at the College.

He felt that there were no factors that had held him back. Indeed, he felt that his path to a Principalship had been very rapid and reflected his strong desire to be actively involved in leadership and management throughout his career. He had undertaken a training course before the foundation of CEL but had very mixed views on formal training programmes for Principals.

The College has few difficulties in terms of recruitment except with regard to specific subject areas such as construction. It undertakes an annual staffing survey which has identified a problem around age with a large number of academic staff in their late 40s and early 50s. Although the College does not have a specified Succession Planning Policy it has a mentoring system with the Principal mentoring directors, directors mentoring heads of department and heads of departments mentoring staff. The system has had two problems. The first is raising staff expectations and the other is the time commitment that is expected from the scheme.
He has very mixed views on the role and provision offered by CEL. In particular, he would like a much closer connection to managers from an industrial/commercial background. He feels that CEL programmes are very prescribed and very much about FE rather than about general leadership and management. He is worried about the future of the sector with more and more managers not wanting the responsibility and accountability associated with the post of Principal.

COLLEGE E

College E is a medium to large sized general further education college in the Yorkshire and Humber region with an annual turnover of £23.5m and 19,000 students. The Principal is a man who has been in post for two and a half years. He was previously Deputy Principal at the College for three years. His background is in the Hotel and Catering industry, followed by a one year full-time conversion teaching certificate. He felt that the major factor holding back his progress was a lack of encouragement and the need to move to get promotions. He believed that moving colleges made you ‘more marketable’. The major factor in aiding his progress came within the first few months of his entry into FE where his Head of Department who subsequently became a Principal said that he had the potential to be a Principal and she has acted as his referee throughout much of his career.

In terms of training he did an MBA which he believed gave him academic credibility to go with his vocational background. In addition, he did the CEL Senior Leadership Development Programme which he found extremely helpful and showed him that leadership was part of his past and present life. In particular, he found the self-reflective aspects of the course brought together his thinking around leadership and confirmed his desire to be a Principal.

He felt that the previous Principal had prepared him excellently to take over as Principal and that this was an outstanding example of practical succession planning. He is currently undertaking the CEL Principal’s Qualification, but feels that time constraints are unhelpful and that in essence it is a post-qualifying programme. In contrast, with the Senior Leadership Programme which was strongly reflective and made you think, the Principal’s Programme is too diary based with too few tutors with high level experience in FE.

The College has analysed its staffing structure and suffers from difficulties in recruiting staff in vocational skills areas, in particular construction and engineering. In addition, the age profile of staff in these areas is very high with all in two areas over 55 and a number over 65. As a way of combating this, the College is making additional appointments before other staff take retirement.

The College undertakes succession planning through mentoring and individual coaching, which emerges out of performance review. It goes down through the organisation, but focuses attention on ‘rising stars’. He believes that formal training is necessary for Principals, but that the current Principal’s programme is not the answer. He feels that CEL has taken the leadership issues very seriously and the College has had a major involvement with these programmes. However, he thinks that some of
the senior leadership programmes have mopped up the talent and that some kind of screening process needs to be introduced to weed out those who are unlikely to achieve either the course outcomes or senior leadership roles in the sector. He strongly supports self-regulation and colleges collaborating together to provide the training for senior managers and leaders and has been heavily involved in local sub-regional collaborative exercises to provide leadership training for middle managers. He believes that this is the way forward for the sector.

**COLEGE F**

College F is a medium to large general FE College in the Yorkshire and Humber region with a turnover of £23m and over 10,000 students. The Principal is a woman who has been in post for ten years. She entered the sector in the late 1980s as a Vice Principal at a sixth form college and then came to her present college as Vice Principal. The College has found that over the last few years there have been increasingly fewer applications for virtually all positions, but with particular problems in areas such as construction.

The College undertakes an annual analysis of the staffing situation but struggles with increasing BME staffing levels, even though it works closely with the local BME communities. The major concern in relation to age is in Health and Social Care which has a sharply divided staff with a major bulge in 50+ year old staff and another bulge at a younger age.

The College is strongly committed to succession planning through which it identifies key posts and looks at how they might be replaced. It has in place an aspiring manager’s programme and an aspiring senior manager’s programme which are associated with personalized programmes for staff development. In this programme, features such as leadership skills and emotional intelligence, are assessed. Those on the programme work shadow in the College and in another college and they are invited to meetings of the SMT.

The Principal gives a presentation about the programme to staff, which is over-subscribed. The only criteria for acceptance is that staff have to be in the College for a certain amount of time. For those applying only a proportion are selected to go on the programme, but those failing to get on it are encouraged to continue to put themselves forward for the Aspiring Managers and Senior Managers Programmes.

The programme has been successful and the College has a long record of supplying senior leaders to other colleges. The only worries about the programme are that it does raise expectations which are difficult to satisfy in the short to medium term and there is an issue around leapfrogging – more junior staff overtaking older peers. The College feels that it invests a great deal in its staff and by doing this retains people and continuity.
The Principal does not believe that formal training programmes for Principals are necessary and takes the view that essentially leaders are born rather than made, and that training only acts to improve existing qualities. She feels that CEL has one model and that this will magically produce leaders and that they take anyone and often they are not ready. In addition, she feels that the CEL programmes are weak on values, which is at the core of the College programme. She strongly supports self-regulation and individual colleges and groups of colleges providing succession planning and leadership/management programmes. The Principal has put in place a process for her post when she retires which involves existing senior staff.

**COLLEGE G**

College G is a medium sized general further education college in the Yorkshire and Humber region with an annual turnover of close to £22m and over 8,000 students. The Principal is a woman and has been in post for two years. After a short period in school teaching she moved into FE and wanted to be a Principal from an early stage in her career. She moved upwards from lecturer to Head of Department over about 8 years. She became Director of Student Services and when the college experienced problems Director of Staff and Student Services. As she has no previous experience in Human Relations she did endless courses in this field plus an MBA. She became Director of Curriculum and Client Services, which was in essence operating at Vice Principal level. However, she was deeply unhappy with the management style of the new Principal and moved to a specialist adult college as Director of Curriculum and then Vice Principal. She felt this period gave her a real opportunity to apply leadership skills. In addition, she became an Inspector and a Chief Examiner/Moderator. She applied for a number of Principal’s posts and although she was usually interviewed she did not get posts, largely, she believed because she was working in a small specialist college. She was offered a Vice Principal’s post at her current college, where the College had appointed an interim Principal to get it through a difficult period. There was an agreement that he would be leaving that post after a number of years but he in fact went earlier and she was appointed Principal.

She felt that the only factor which might have held back her career was that she wanted to stay within a particular area for her children. She felt that the key factor in helping her was the support from other women, stemming from the Dragongate Conference which led to her being sponsored and mentored by a leading female Principal in the sector.

The College faces recruitment issues in a number of areas, partly because of the image of the town in which it is situated. The college has a problem with having a lot of staff in their late 40s and 50s with many of them having for most of their working lives worked at the College which has had an impact on holding back change and development. She has targeted younger members of staff and given them responsibility in order to change the culture of the college. She has brought in outside experts to undertake management training and thinks that this is having an impact on staff who can perceive that there is succession planning through what is a college talent management system.
The Principal felt that the CEL Induction Course for Principals was excellent but that the Principal's course was essentially a waste of time. She objected to being taught by those who had no experience of being a Principal.

**COLLEGE H**

College H is a large general FE college in the North West with an annual turnover of £34m and around 15,000 students. The Principal is a woman and had been in post for 3 weeks at the time of the interview. She always had an ambition to be a Principal from when she started in FE at the age of twenty three. She stayed at one college until five years ago when she applied and got the post of Vice Principal at her current college. She had submitted a number of applications for both Vice Principal and Principal posts before getting her Vice Principal post and subsequently the Principal's post.

She felt that the factors that held her back were first staying in one college for too long, secondly concentrating on achieving success in her current job rather than looking for the next career move and thirdly her unwillingness to move out of the area (her father had been a college Principal and they had moved every four years or so; she did not want to replicate this experience for her own family). She identified the key factors in her getting a Principal's post as having a very supportive Principal, not taking setbacks personally, having a wide range of experience and recognising the relationship between curriculum and the financial health of the college. She found acting as a training facilitator and delivering management training for college managers as a key element in her development. She found the CEL Senior Leadership Development Programme useful in terms of networking.

The College has very few problems in recruiting staff apart from those in vocational areas such as construction and electrical engineering. The workforce is ageing and the college is aware that it will need to address losing specialist skills staff.

The College has an extremely positive approach to succession planning and talent management. It undertook a CEL Gold Talent Management and Succession Planning Programme during which the College defined the strategic priorities, values and goals of the organisation and the associated competencies needed by managers to achieve these. The staff review process was changed to include leadership competencies against which all managers were assessed. Where staff were identified as having high potential and high commitment, efforts were made to offer them either opportunities for promotion or to take part in specific projects to provide challenges and extend their skills and experience. At the same time staff identified as having low potential and low commitment were encouraged to change jobs or roles. For her the key element is matching people to jobs and ‘getting the right people on the bus’.

She does not feel that the formal training is necessary for leaders and Principals and the main learning necessary for the post is through experience. However, she did feel that the CEL Principal’s Induction course was excellent as it was led by an outstanding Principal. She does agree with CEL that succession planning is a key issue for the sector but thinks that networking and mentoring may have more of an impact than formal training.
College J

College J is a small specialised adult residential college with a turnover of £6.6m and around 4000 students. This college is where the researchers conducting this research project are located and has been included as a way of utilising the personal experience of a Principal’s succession process to compare and contrast with those in the other institutions involved in the project.

The previous Principal had a career in higher education from the early 1970s through to the late 1990s, where he had specialised in research and teaching in adult continuing education. He was appointed Principal of the College in 1999 and had been Principal for eight years and recently took early retirement. The current Principal has been in post for 6 months and had worked previously at the College for 14 years in a variety of posts, culminating in the Director of Curriculum position. Previously she had worked in adult education and FE in London for 8 years. The current Principal had undertaken the CEL Senior Leadership Development Programme which she found extremely helpful and useful in terms of networking and support from other course members and in terms of its self-reflective ethos. She identifies the experience of taking this course as one of the key factors which led to her applying for the Principal’s post alongside support from the former Principal. The former Principal had had no training for the post of Principal, although he subsequently attended the non-compulsory Principal’s programme which he found useful, largely because of his lack of specific knowledge of the FE sector.

The College has a very varied position in terms of recruitment. Generally it finds it fairly easy to recruit academic staff because of its specialised nature and its high reputation for innovation and quality. It has a very limited pool of potential applicants in non-academic areas, because of its relatively isolated geographical position and has always had small numbers of applicants for senior posts because of its specialised position within the sector. It has few problems in terms of gender and ethnicity although it has an issue with age with a significant number of staff in the late 40s and early 50s.

The College has no policy for succession planning, and the process of appointing a new Principal may help to explain why this is the case. The ex-Principal announced that he intended to retire some eighteen months before the projected actual date of retirement. The two main reasons for this early announcement were because firstly, the previous appointment had required two advertisements and two interviewing panels and second, recognising the significant changes in adult funding to give the governors and senior staff a chance to look at the strategic direction of the college and for the new Principal to be involved in this process. In the event, it was probably not a good idea for a major change to be announced so early as it produced a ‘Ferguson effect’ (after Alex Ferguson’s retirement announcement at Manchester United which led to a sharp decline in the team’s fortunes and a seeming leadership void). In addition, the current Principal indicated her intention to apply for the position which produced some tension in the College supporting her application whilst retaining the governors’ desire to find the right candidate and their independent role in terms of an appointment.
The college has a very low turnover in terms of staffing and succession planning is made difficult by the paucity of jobs that become available. It has tried to combat this by devolving authority further down the organisation and giving middle managers much more independence to make decisions. However, like other organisations it has an issue with how it supports dynamic and talented younger staff and the issue of leapfrogging. Whatever strategies it develops, it constantly runs up against the size of the College and the paucity of posts available. To some extent this can be combated with multi-level project teams, but this does not hide the fact that succession planning in a small college consistently raises expectations which are highly unlikely to be satisfied.

CEL programmes have a limited relevance to the College because of its specialised nature, and whether a CEL Principal’s Programme is appropriate for the specialised colleges is a matter of dispute. The majority of candidates for senior posts are as likely to come from outside the sector as from within which makes it very different from the general FE system. It is therefore likely that a compulsory Principal’s course will be a post-qualifying award rather than a pre-qualifying qualification which is the objective in both the schools and FE sectors. The experience at the College brings to the fore the very diverse nature of the FE sector and whether ‘generic’ FE training programmes are always appropriate for those on the fringes of the sector.

Conclusions

Our research suggests that there are common features in terms of the journey to becoming a Principal but that there are also significant differences which may have an important impact on succession planning for Principals. All of the Principals in this research had embraced a teaching/lecturing route. However, it should be noted that three of the Principals had come in from a vocational background and one had come in from higher education without any further education teaching experience. In terms of length of service there were clearly differences around the idea that length of service in one institution was a barrier to progression. Three Principals strongly believed that regular movement between institutions was a key to a faster career progression, but the others were less sure of this. The strongest correlation with previous research was the critical importance of supportive relationships. In virtually every case, reference was made to an individual or groups of colleagues who had acted as a critical support both in terms of pushing individuals to aspire to be Principals and providing invaluable advice and guidance on how to deal with increasingly more senior posts. In terms of factors holding back advancement, the only factors regularly cited were those related to childcare and an unwillingness to move.

In three of the nine case studies, succession planning played an important role in becoming a Principal. In all of the cases the individual was appointed as Vice Principal in a situation where the Principal was considering retiring and therefore there was an assumption that they would be a very strong candidate to become Principal within a relatively short period. There does seem to be some strong evidence to see this very practical succession planning as being a particularly effective way to induct a new Principal, with a minimum of disruption to the organisation. However this
needs to be managed very carefully with ongoing Governor involvement so that their independent role is preserved. There is some evidence from one of the case studies that this led to one of the Principals not being initially appointed as Principal because of Governor mistrust of the process.

What is clear is that the number of candidates applying for Principals’ posts has sharply reduced over the last decade but the quality of appointments may not have fallen. All of the Principals interviewed spoke very highly of the quality of their younger staff. Candidates seem to have similar qualifications and backgrounds as their predecessors. One significant difference is the move towards more female Principals. In six of the colleges a male Principal was replaced by a female Principal, although it should be said that all but one of the nine colleges initially had a male Principal. What seems to have occurred is not a specific college wide process of succession planning but rather a process of appointing a Vice Principal at a point when the Principal is likely to leave within a short period and groom that individual to take over the post.

In terms of the staffing structure of the colleges examined there seemed to be very few differences with regard to recruitment. All colleges had problems in recruiting in some key vocational areas such as construction and technology but had few problems elsewhere in the institution. There were differences, largely depending on the quality of the local environment but on the whole there were few difficulties. Most colleges had issues about the proportion of ethnic minority staff, particularly at more senior levels and many had issues about an ageing workforce and a time bomb in terms of recruitment of staff over the next ten years. Indeed, this may be something that CEL and other organisations may want to consider, how the age gap in staff is addressed so that younger staff with leadership and management potential are fast-tracked through the system so that the conveyor belt is maintained in colleges.

At the heart of this research project is a concern with succession planning and how this can help sustain the quality of leaders and senior managers in the FE sector. It found that colleges have utilised succession planning systems, but more importantly it revealed that colleges have developed talent management systems which are concerned with the development of talent throughout all levels and in particular at middle management level. All of the colleges had developed systems to try and identify talented individuals. Although the systems vary from college to college essentially they identify talented individuals and then attach them at all levels in the college to more senior colleagues who act as a coach or mentor. In addition, many colleges have developed teams to deal with particular issues and again talented staff are used on these project teams.

The Principals who were interviewed had very varied backgrounds in terms of their qualifications and the training that they had undertaken. Of the eight Principals interviewed only two had undertaken an MBA and one had acquired a Masters in Educational Management. The three longest serving Principals had undertaken very little training with their skills being acquired on the job. Four Principals had undertaken the CEL Senior Leadership Development Programme and four were
enrolled on the new compulsory Principals' Programme. A number had undertaken the Principal's Induction Programme and two had undertaken the pre-compulsory Principal's Programme. The Senior Leadership Development Programme was rated very highly in terms of networking, but opinions varied immensely in terms of the 'navel gazing' aspects of the course. The Principal's Induction Programme was spoken of highly by all those who had participated in it. The pre-compulsory Principal's Programme received very mixed reactions, largely dependent on who led the training sessions, although again the associated benefits of networking with other Principals was cited by a number of Principals.

In terms of a compulsory qualification for Principals, the majority of respondents felt that there were major issues. The criticisms were that:

- The qualification produced a 'conformist cadre' of capable managers but that changes in the sector required more strategic thinking than managerial solutions.

- There needed to be a much greater involvement of private sector leaders and managers.

- Ongoing processes of coaching and mentoring are likely to be more useful than a training course.

- The course works on one model which will somehow magically produce leaders.

- Formal training is necessary but the current Principal's course is not the answer at the present time.

- The Principal's job is onerous and time consuming enough without having to spend time on doing a course on it.

- How relevant is a 'generic' FE qualification for the specialised institutions within the sector?

Within the interviews there was a continuing perspective that senior management and leadership training was a key element in the Self-Regulation debate. A majority of Principals saw sector collaboration in terms of:

1. Specific leadership and management training at all levels in the organisation;
2. Ongoing coaching and mentoring;
3. Work shadowing in their own and other colleges;
4. Placements in other colleges and in the private sector.

They saw these as being activities which could be organised and administered within the sector, possibly on a sub-regional or regional basis. To complement this, linkages could be made between the specialised institutions and Adult and Community
Learning Providers and Work Based Learning Providers. It was felt that this would allow colleges to determine priorities and devise systems that had a direct relationship to their particular overall college staffing needs, in relation to age, ethnicity, gender and their leadership/management requirements. This pattern of development would chime in with the recent developments in the schools system which seems to have even greater succession issues than the FE sector. Although the NCSL policy recommendations saw a major role for national leadership programmes, it stressed the critical importance of individual school activity and local/regional activity. Within the FE sector where there are far fewer institutions and these are significantly larger than schools, the role for individual colleges and for collaborative consortia of colleges would seem to imply a much greater devolvement of responsibility for succession planning.

Our research suggests that the sector does appear to be addressing the issue of succession, and doing this predominantly through talent management systems that have a wider relevance for both individual colleges and the sector as a whole. This pattern is addressing the age cohort issues within the sector and laying the foundations for a whole college approach to leadership and management and therefore producing a coherent conveyor belt of talented individuals rather than a more sterile concern with the position of Principals. In essence, it is a system which can provide the senior managers and Principals of the future from within the sector, but without an obsessive concern with one leader.

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**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 undertake to investigate and research these key themes.

We would like to engage with existing networks within the Sector and develop a wider practice-led research community contributing to current debates on leadership and other related issues.

If you would like to receive further information on the Research Programme, please contact:

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Further information is also available at:
http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk
http://www.lums.lancs.ac.uk/leadership/cel/
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