

**Modelling aspects of role among middle managers in
English Further Education colleges**

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the work of middle managers in English further education colleges holding a range of responsibilities. Middle managers occupy a pivotal role within the complex working environment of colleges, translating the purpose and vision of the college into practical activity and outcomes, yet there is little empirically-based understanding of the roles they perform.

Case study research at four colleges drew on data from senior managers, middle managers and their teams, college documents and observation of meetings. The enquiry focused upon the aspects of role performed by the managers, the environment for management within which they carry out their role, and features of the college environment which enable and impede them in their work.

Five aspects of role were identified and discussed, those of corporate agent, implementer, staff manager, liaison and leader. Analysis focused upon the managers' resolution of the tension between the mechanical need to support whole-college homogeneity, and the organic need to develop departmental specialisms and respond to the differentiated needs of staff, students and clients.

Factors within the college environment which impact positively and negatively upon the role were discussed and modelled in order to locate the key influences upon the effectiveness of the manager role, and thereby the effectiveness of the college. The emergent factors were: the college structures and territories; the design of college operational systems; the position of the manager in relation to the college structure, purpose and values; the coherence and status of the manager role; the degree of autonomy experienced by the manager, and the manager's identification with leadership.

The research generated reflection on whole-college coherence, role coherence and professionalism. Discussion throughout the investigation focused upon emerging definitions of professionalism within further education colleges, and, whilst the concept is not yet fully defined, hopefully this study will contribute to its understanding.

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ABBREVIATIONS

DfES	Department for Education and Science
FE	Further Education
FEDA	Further Education Development Agency
FEFC	Further Education Funding Council
FENTO	Further Education National Training Organisation
HoD	Head of Department
LEA	Local Education Authority
LMX	Leader-manager exchange
LSC	Learning and Skills Council
SMT	Senior Management Team

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction: setting the context

The Learning and Skills sector is the largest of the educational sectors in England, comprising work-based learning, adult and community education, and further education. The 416 colleges within the sector include general further education and tertiary colleges, sixth form colleges, adult education colleges, agriculture and horticulture colleges, art, design and performing arts colleges, and a number of 'specialist designated' colleges. Some colleges, such as land-based colleges and those offering education for people with disabilities, are residential; the majority are not. The number of colleges fluctuates from year to year, mainly as a result of mergers and other local patterns of re-organisation. Collectively, they offer full and part-time courses from basic to postgraduate level to 3.8 million students aged 14 upwards: the oldest recorded learner in 2002 was 108 years old. 64% of college students in 2000-2001 were adults in part-time education and training; colleges also provide around 27% of 16-18 year olds in England with full-time education and training, compared with around 22% of this age group who study in schools (All data from LSC, 2002). Further education colleges thus play a significant part in educational life of the country.

The management of further education colleges has been affected by extensive recent change. Firstly, the incorporation of maintained colleges which took effect in 1993 altered their system of governance and made them independent of Local Education Authority (LEA) control. Incorporation entailed the transfer of functions such as finance, estates and human resource management, formerly carried out by the LEAs, to management within colleges. At the same time, new systems of funding and external accountability were put into place under the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC), which were altered once more in 2001 when the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) took over the responsibility for post-compulsory education other than higher education. As colleges responded to the changes in external funding and accountability regimes, they restructured internally; systems were re-formed and settled into appropriate shapes to meet the current need. Lumby (2001) reports that of the 164 colleges she surveyed, 160 had restructured between 1993 and 1999, and the majority had restructured more than once: 10% had restructured over three times in six

years. Since the further changes in 2001, these temporarily settled shapes may have changed once more.

The post-incorporation convergence of college funding systems also meant reduced resource for many colleges: a source of considerable stress and turbulence in the sector. In the period 1993-1997, more than 50% of colleges were reported by the Further Education Funding Council as being financially insolvent (Gleeson, 2001). 'Top-heavy', resource-hungry management structures were brought into question; colleges forced to 'shed' staff at all levels through redundancy, early retirement and non-replacement were left re-arranging remaining staff into leaner, tighter systems. This was replicated on a larger scale through college amalgamations, where both market and financial pressures led to rationalisation of provision across urban areas, reducing the number of individual autonomous colleges.

Whilst the 1990s brought common funding mechanisms for the majority of these colleges, and inspection schemes which include an assessment of the quality of college management, the management structure within individual colleges remains as diverse as the sector itself. Local management for colleges, as for schools and universities, leaves each college free to determine how its human and financial resources are best to be deployed to carry out the functions of the institution. The internal management structures of colleges, and the college context within which managers operate, is therefore dependent upon local circumstance. One key influence is college size. The largest college in the maintained sector at the time of the research had about 8,000 full-time and 45,000 part-time students: the smallest had only 23 full-time students. The former – The Sheffield College – lists thirty-six senior managers in *The Educational Authorities Directory 2000*, based at four main teaching sites and at a college headquarters; the latter – the Textile Conservation Centre, Southampton – has just two managers. This element of complexity may be compounded by geographical location; when colleges operate on many sites, some roles are replicated at each major site, and some managers operate across a number of sites. For example, Askham Bryan College, York lists one main campus and four secondary centres in *The Educational Authorities Directory*, located in a 'circle' 150 miles in circumference. Although the secondary centres are small, with the largest catering for only 360 part-time students, the role of centre manager is replicated at

each one, whereas some curriculum and service managers may have responsibility across several sites. Many colleges also offer teaching in small outreach centres such as local libraries and schools, where responsibility for provision may be shared among managers in combination with other responsibilities. The combination of size of operation and multiplicity of location at the very least offers logistical problems of communication and liaison between managers, and the need to maintain the same standards and procedures across a diverse organisation.

A further factor affecting management structure is the range of subjects and types of programme offered. For example, a sixth form college offering predominantly full-time academic programmes requires a different management structure from that of a large general further education college which may offer courses in all the programme areas funded by the Learning and Skills Council, together with a substantial community education, higher education and full-cost business training programme. Colleges may therefore operate on multiple sites across a spectrum of subject provision, aiming to meet a wide range of academic, vocational and community needs. Lecturers may meet their students at any time of the day or evening, on a college site, in the workplace or through distance learning links. This presents logistical difficulties for managers in terms of inter- and intra-departmental liaison, monitoring the work of staff, keeping in touch with the needs of stakeholders and meeting with each other to discuss whole-college issues. Unique management structures are needed to meet the individual needs of each college.

Given the diversity of the sector, and its apparently constant state of change, any evaluation of management systems within and across the sector necessarily attempts to define a 'moving target'. Further education is little researched (Hughes *et al*, 1996, Lumby, 2001) and management in further education still less. There are therefore fewer empirically-based studies than in the school sector for college managers and researchers to consider. The diversity of the sector may at times limit colleges from imitating each other's approaches to management, yet an increased understanding of the issues which underlie, delimit and frame management practice in the sector would be valuable. Diversity does not mean incoherence. The research presented here into the activity and context of management in a sample of general further education

colleges offers some insight into issues which may frame management practice in the wider sector.

1.1 Further education: turbulence and change

The context of change described above, and the turbulence of the political and operational environments of colleges since incorporation, is mirrored in the literature, as phrases from selected titles indicate: *Crisis and change* (Elliott, 1996), *Education as commodity* (Longhurst, 1996), *Managing ambiguity* (Gleeson and Shain, 1999), *Managing under pressure* (Drodge, 2002), *Cultural transformation*, (Simkins and Lumby, 2002). Ainley and Bailey (1997) note that both structural and cultural changes were brought about in colleges by post-incorporation autonomy. Incorporation involved an increase in administrative personnel, to carry out functions which were previously the responsibility of the LEA. There were also new responsibilities for the senior management team, to plan and implement strategy, and to bring in a new culture of management by objectives and targets.

These changes led to the 'crisis' which Elliott (1996) maps out in the period immediately after incorporation. Colleges became more hierarchical and 'managerial', with a proliferation of managers who were seen as making bureaucratic, mechanistic demands on lecturers in order to satisfy the new systems of accountability. Elliott links this change of management style to the impact of competence-based assessment upon vocational education, which was also seen as mechanistic, in order to emphasise the depth and breadth of the culture shift experienced by college lecturers. The mid-1990s marks a period of anger among further education commentators, opposing the new context of incorporation, perhaps exemplified by Longhurst's (1996) politically argued account of the 'commodification' of further education.

The literature reflects the difficult political context both surrounding and within colleges, as a government-induced thrust for efficiency took hold. Elliott (2000) writes of the necessity to increase student enrolment, retention and achievement within a climate of industrial dispute over contracts and insensitive management strategies. Longhurst (1996) sums up the dominant preoccupation of college senior managers under this regime as one of maximising income and minimising costs, perhaps understandable at a time when, as Gleeson (2001) reports, more than 50% of colleges were financially

insolvent. Alongside this drive for operational efficiency was a parallel campaign for effectiveness, stimulated both by government requirements in the form of targets, and by a professional concern for educational values. As Lumby (2001: 43) observes, achieving the 'twin objectives' of reducing unit costs and increasing efficiency on the one hand, and maintaining the quality of education and the focus on learning on the other, was a central concern for college managers.

This combination of stresses, exacerbated by the industrial disputes, led to a literature presenting a polarisation of 'oppositional cultures' (Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000: 139), between lecturers and management. Lumby (2001: 4) comments that in the literature of this period, 'lecturers are often portrayed as keeping alight the flame of educational and professional values in the face of oppression by the new strain of manager.' These oppositional cultures crystallise into a debate over managerialism and professionalism, which will be discussed further in Chapter 2, Section 2.4. This debate came to prominence in a pair of papers published by Randle and Brady in 1997 which present contrasting managerial and professional paradigms. The managerial paradigm is based upon concepts of business efficiency and market demand, whereas the professional paradigm takes as its basis a concern for professional autonomy and the primacy of the needs of students (Randle and Brady, 1997a). These paradigms can be seen as an expression of contemporary political feeling. From the viewpoint of the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, the perspective changes.

The external turbulence continues, including the funding change from FEFC systems to those of the LSC, and the accompanying change in inspection and self-assessment frameworks, but the paradox of the 'business of learning' (Ainley and Bailey, 1997) is starting to be reconciled. Colleges have learned to be more businesslike, and their business is learning. A government sponsored 'functional' literature has been produced which sets out management and teaching standards and discusses their application (for example: FENTO, 1999, 2001, 2002). Similarly, there have been investigations of, and proposals for, management training in further education (for example: FEDA, 1997; DfES, 2002). All of these serve to clarify the Government 'steer' on the purpose and enactment of the 'learning business'.

The oppositional paradigms are also being reconciled. Simkins and Lumby (2002) propose that they represent different understandings of how student need should be met, and how quality of performance should be measured: in effect, different interpretations of accountability. They claim that the values and interests of different groupings of staff encompass both paradigms, and that the 'them and us' distinction between senior managers and other staff which nourished the oppositional view has become blurred. Similarly, Gleeson and Shain (1999) conclude that professionalism is interpreted differently by different people, but that there are commonly accepted core values upon which a new professionalism can be based. It is within this search for new meanings and new professionalism that the research is set. It is hoped that the examination of manager roles within their college contexts a decade after incorporation may provide insight into the ways in which managers – in particular, middle managers – now view and enact their roles.

1.2 Middle management in further education

Further education colleges represent and enact their management structures in different ways. Some may depict their management, for example, as a series of interlocking circles, as patterns of liaison and hierarchy operating on individual college sites within an over-arching college structure, or as a traditional hierarchical chart. For simplicity of presentation, a generic management structure is offered here as Figures 1.1 and 1.2. Within their chosen structure, further education colleges can be assumed to operate on a day-to-day basis through a senior management team (SMT), who, under the overall authority of the college governors, are accountable for the management of the college. This team is led by a person who may be named Principal, Chief Executive, Director, or other local variant; the size, nomenclature and composition of the team varies, but usually includes senior managers responsible for curriculum and college services.

At the base of the hierarchical structure are manual workers, administrators and lecturers who have responsibility for no-one but themselves, although their job involves liaison and co-operation with others. Between the apex and base of the triangle there are usually several 'layers' of management and responsibility. For college service functions, such as finance and estates, and for services to students, such as learning support or student services, the pattern might be as depicted in Figure 1.1.

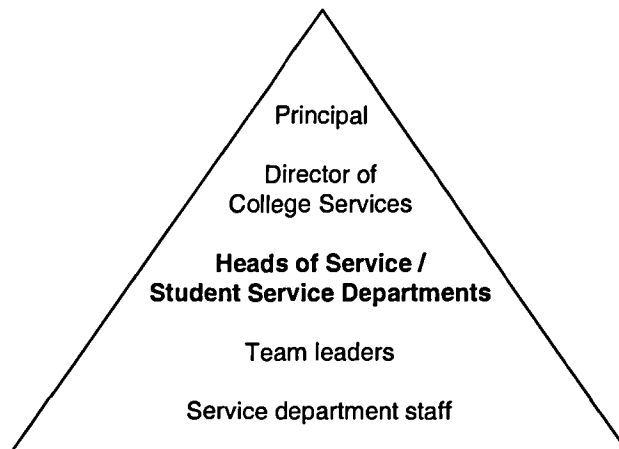


Figure 1.1 Hierarchy of roles for college services and student services

Where managing the curriculum is concerned, there are greater numbers of departments and staff involved, and management ‘lines’ may therefore be longer; the roles might be as represented in Figure 1.2.

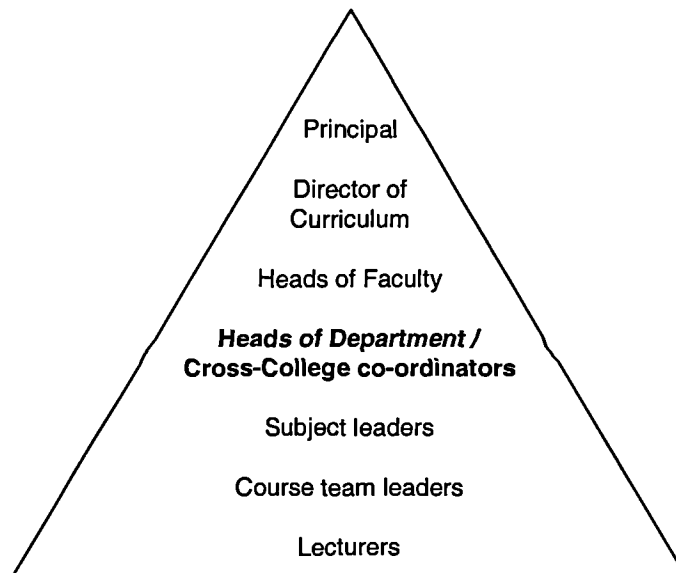


Figure 1.2 Hierarchy of roles for curriculum provision

In each college, the nomenclature and the number of ‘layers’ varies; directors may also operate as heads of faculty, and there may be further ‘director’ role-holders to whom middle managers must answer – for example, directors of quality, resources or external relations. The range of roles to be considered in this study – the roles

presented in 'bold' – lie at what is described here as 'head of department' level: the third and fourth tier respectively in the two hierarchies outlined above. They comprise:

- Heads of curriculum departments, which may comprise a range of subjects
- Managers of services to students, such as learning resources, learning support or student services
- Heads of individual service departments, such as estates, finance or personnel

This 'layer' of management includes a number of the 'new' management roles transferred to colleges at incorporation, as well as the more traditional curriculum management roles. Equidistant from the apex and base of the triangle, it is the point within the structure where the management system articulates, where strategic policy is translated into strategic practice. Middle managers may not be included on a regular basis in whole-college decision-making and policy formation, yet they are instrumental in ensuring that the decisions and policies made are carried out by their teams. The nature of their role means that they may also have considerable 'local' knowledge, power and autonomy; they may be responsible for large areas of curriculum provision, or for key departments within the college. It could be argued that management structures which enable these middle managers to work effectively are crucial to the effectiveness of the whole college, since they are the ones who, in Bennett's terms (1995: 18) 'articulate the vision': on a day-to-day basis they make the business of the college happen. It is for this reason that they have been chosen for this research.

The decision to include a range of middle manager roles in the research can be justified by consulting the hierarchy charts. Middle manager research in educational settings has largely focused upon the curriculum manager role, yet it is evident that in further education colleges, managers in a wide range of roles occupy the pivotal position of translating policy into practice. If the activities of management and the context for management are to be better understood, then a sample of all roles needs to be considered. An example may illustrate the situation. Students who are the responsibility of a particular curriculum manager are admitted to the college by means of the marketing and student services departments, occupy classrooms supplied and maintained by the estates department, and are taught by lecturers who are employed

through the human resources department and managed by the curriculum manager. Their registration, attendance and achievements are tracked and reported to the funding agencies and to the college finance office by the college management information service. They register for their examinations through an examinations office, and may receive funding for childcare or maintenance through the finance department. They make use of learning resources, information technology services and learning support services supplied by three further departments, and may receive careers or personal counselling through student services. Thus, a complex web of provision is constructed and maintained to meet the needs of each student. This research investigates not only the work of individual managers, but also how that web of provision is constructed, and what its strengths and weaknesses are.

The importance of this role is underlined by the organisational theorist Mintzberg (1990: 166) when he states: 'The strategic data bank of the organisation is not in the memory of its computers but in the minds of its managers.' The set of managers described above, when acting effectively and in liaison with each other, collectively represents and enacts the work of the college. The intuitive nature of their work is highlighted by Bennett (1995), writing in a schools context, where he proposes that middle managers make decisions based upon their individual 'assumptive world.' The assumptive world of each manager is unique; it is based on personal values and on the manager's analysis of previous experience. The models offered here by Mintzberg and Bennett are of intuitive management, based upon experience and on subconsciously developed theory. Following this line of argument, the managers investigated in this study may act in response to largely subjective judgments as to what their role constitutes, how it is to be carried out, and whether or not it is being performed effectively. The research aims to explore and understand what, generically, middle manager in further education colleges do, and how they and their role set perceive their role.

This conceptualisation and acting out of role takes place within different college contexts. The term 'environment for management' is used in this research to denote a combination of factors which impinge upon managers in role, and which affect their understanding of the role and their effectiveness in carrying it out. These factors include the underlying structures and operational systems of the college, and the

leadership context within which the managers operate, together with the attitudes, perceptions and expectations of staff at all levels of the college, which shape the role itself. Literature on middle management (for example, Mintzberg, 1990; Bennett, 1995) indicates that this working environment exerts pressures upon managers which can make it difficult for them to enact their role. Investigating the nature of the environment for management, and the pressures it produces, will therefore contribute to understanding the role.

1.3 The existing knowledge-base

Further education management

As has been implied in the section above, the principal knowledge-base for middle management in further education lies 'in the minds of its managers', as the body of published literature is small. In the past six years, Government-sponsored publications have been produced (for example: FENTO, 1999, 2001, 2002) which set out standards for management and for teaching in the sector, together with surveys and proposals concerning management training (for example: FEDA, 1997, DfES, 2002). At the time of writing, a leadership college for the post-compulsory sector is being set up, to address the needs of senior and middle managers and governors. These ventures have involved consultation with the sector, and some national surveys, but these have not been intended as objective empirical research. Their usefulness for this research is largely to represent government aspirations for the sector.

There are a number of small-scale investigations and personal research projects, to be found in what Martinez (2002) terms the 'grey' literature. These may have a better empirical foundation, but are limited in scope and not readily accessible. There is a growing number of academic papers which focus on work in the sector, encouraged by specialist journals and sector-based research groups, and a very small number of books. However, as Lumby (2003) comments, the research which they comprise is varied in focus and methodology, and, given the wide scope of the learning and skills sector, its boundaries are unclear. In recent years there have been larger-scale funded research projects, which have helped to strengthen the empirical base for understanding the work of the sector. Research into college management, however, represents a small proportion of this fragmented 'further education literature'.

Objective empirical studies of college managers, their roles and contexts for management are therefore very few, and the area is under-theorised. For theory, the researcher has to look for comparable work undertaken in other contexts. A full review of the literature is presented in Chapter 3; the main theoretical areas to be reviewed are introduced below.

Organisational theory

The consideration of organisational theory enables discussion and evaluation of the underpinning structures of further education colleges. As has been argued above, colleges are complex organisations, through which a diverse range of educational needs are met, often at a variety of locations, using various types of pedagogic practice and involving a large number of support systems. Theory which enables understanding of how the constituent parts of an organisation relate to each other is therefore important to this research. A key issue is the tension between the needs and purposes of the organisation as a whole, and the differentiated needs of its constituent parts. The college must survive and prosper as a total entity, and must present a corporate response to external pressures and directives, but it can only do so through the operation of its various sections, departments and outreach centres. The work of organisational theorists such as Burns and Stalker (1961) enables a consideration of colleges as operating through mechanical systems, which serve to unify the organisation, and organic ones, which acknowledge and enable the specialist work of the various parts. This links with the more recent discussion by Schneider (2002) of 'radix' organisations, where *lateral relationships across the functions of the organisation* are emphasised and encouraged. Drawing on research in schools, Busher and Harris (1999) invite consideration of the links between the different sections of the organisation: in a federal structure (for example, a sixth form college), the different parts would be homogeneous, in a confederate structure (for example, a general further education college), the constituent parts may have little in common. All of these theories are useful in assessing how the different parts of the college relate to each other, and how these relationships might shape the role of the middle manager.

Leadership theory

The context and practice of middle management can be further explored by considering leadership theory. Is the college led 'from the top' through transactional

leadership (Burns, 1978), by agreements with managers and staff further 'down' the structure as to what their job entails and what their rewards should be? If so, where do middle managers fit in? Are they responding to transactional leadership simply in relation to their own position, or are they negotiating and reinforcing the transactions further down the line? Alternatively, do they operate within a system of transformational leadership (Leithwood *et al*, 1999), whereby they, and in turn those they lead, are empowered to build the vision and shape the goals of the organisation? If so, do middle managers shape the goals of their own section of the college, or take part in shaping those of the whole? They may, as middle managers, operate within a system of distributed leadership (Gronn, 2000), or in a situation where leadership is dispersed through the organisation, and is embedded in the actions of individuals (Ogawa and Bossert, 1997). Consideration of the leadership context enables assessment of the autonomy which middle managers have, and need, in order to carry out their role. It also offers a further perspective upon the relationship between the whole organisation and its constituent parts, through its patterns of leadership. However, further education literature indicates that leadership is 'rarely discussed' (Lumby, 2001) in colleges; the research therefore also has to address the possibility that the term is not applicable in colleges, and that some other concept may apply.

The role of middle managers

This research draws heavily upon, and hopefully makes some contribution to, the literature on middle management. The existing literature offers a number of typologies of the middle manager role. These are based upon the types of knowledge used by the manager (Turner and Bolam, 1998); upon the managers' values and their social agency with their organisations (Brown and Rutherford, 1998); their interaction with others, including developmental roles (Mintzberg, 1990; Busher and Harris, 1999; Glover *et al*, 1998); their departmental activities (Smith, 2002; Peeke, 1997); and their handling of information (Mintzberg, 1990). Viewed through any of these 'lenses', the role is seen as pivotal, essential to the effective function of the whole institution. What the literature does not offer is an empirically based typology of middle manager roles in further education colleges; one aim of this research is to construct such a typology.

The middle manager literature also offers insight into the pressures upon middle managers. Their position in the centre of the organisation makes them subject to

expectations from others, in both vertical and lateral directions. Writers such as Gleeson and Shain (1999), Drodge, (2002) and Alexiadou (2001) emphasise that this position involves them in a 'buffering' role', mediating, translating and brokering in order to make operational sense of the range of expectations upon them. In this research the nature of these pressures, and the managers' strategies in dealing with them, are examined. The research also seeks to identify features of the college environment which support and impede the middle manager, in order to understand the whole context within which the manager works.

Role theory

The literature on role theory offers both analytical tools and a vocabulary by which to investigate and express the nature of the middle manager role and the pressures upon it. Members of the role sets (Kahn et al, 1964), who serve to shape the role, can be identified. For the middle manager roles chosen for this study, the role sets include role-holders from the apex to the base of the triangle in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 – superordinates, subordinates and fellow middle managers – as well as students and other clients of the college. This factor alone emphasises the complexity of the role. Inevitably, expectations within such a large role set differ, and role conflict (Kahn *et al*, 1964) occurs where there is incompatibility in demands or expectations upon the role-holder. This may be associated with role ambiguity, or inadequacy of role definition (Hammons, 1984), and may lead to role strain, where fulfilling the obligations of the role presents a 'felt difficulty' (Biddle and Thomas, 1966). Role status (Linton, 1936) is an important factor in the present study, as potentially the different types of manager hold different status within the college. The resulting power differential may be a further cause of role strain.

Professionalism

Discussion of the manager role, its status and purpose leads to a consideration of professionalism. As was indicated in Section 1.1, the process of incorporation led to a backlash against what were seen as bureaucratic 'managerialist' practices in colleges (Randle and Brady, 1997a). It was felt that the primary concern for students and for the value of education had gone, to be replaced by a primary concern for 'throughput' of students and input generation (Randle and Brady, 1997a). In recent years, a series of papers (Shain and Gleeson, 1999; Lumby and Tomlinson, 2000; Simkins, 2000;

Gleeson, 2001) has begun to define and debate a 'new professionalism', where a concern for business-like approaches is combined with a commitment to educational values. The term is based partly upon the emergence of 'new' professions in colleges, such as the management of finance and of support for students, and partly upon the realisation that learning can be a business, which is based upon 'democratic professionalism' (Gleeson, 2001), and does not compromise educational values. At present, professionalism may have different meanings in different contexts (Shain and Gleeson, 1999); the concept of professionalism is in the process of being re-defined and understood, and this research will offer a contribution to the debate.

1.4 Research aims

The enquiry is based upon a stance of valuing the work of further education colleges and respecting the work of college staff at all levels. It seeks to understand the working environment of managers at a time when the concept of management in colleges is still being shaped. In particular, it seeks to understand the complexity of the manager role, not simply to define it, but to understand what shapes it. Much of what shapes the role is to be found in the context of the college itself, and identifying factors within the environment for management which facilitate and impede middle management should lead to a better understanding of the workings of the college as a whole.

The research therefore seeks to investigate the role of middle managers in further education colleges, and the interaction of the role with the environment for management at the college, through the following research questions. The questions were developed through consideration of the further education context presented in this chapter, a preliminary review of the literature and a pilot investigation, which is reported in Chapter 3, Section 3.3. The first three questions seek to establish what middle managers do, and what their environment for management comprises.

- What roles do further education middle managers perform?
- What are the factors in the environment for management at the colleges which impact upon the role?
- How do members of the role set perceive that middle managers enact their role?

The next two questions consider the impact of the environment upon the role, firstly through analysis of the data, and secondly by modelling the factors which emerge from the analysis.

- How are the middle managers facilitated and impeded by factors in their environment for management?
- How can modelling be used to represent and interpret the interaction between middle managers and factors within their environment which facilitate and impede?

The last question uses the models to consider and to propose college design which may promote manager and whole-college effectiveness.

- How can the models be used for problem-solving and considering college design?

The research design and methodology are fully discussed in Chapter 3. The study adopts a mainly qualitative, interpretivist approach, based upon grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). It uses case study data from four general further education colleges, which are described in Chapter 4. The analysis is conducted through an iterative process of theory-building (Yin, 1994; Bassey, 1995), based upon a search for patterns of action and interaction within the management environment. This process enables a typology of the manager role to be presented and discussed, and the factors which support and impede managers in undertaking their role to be identified. The analysis is taken further by means of a series of models, which enable the key influential factors in the environment to be identified, and strategies for problem-solving and scenarios for future change to be considered. Finally, this examination of whole-college systems leads to a discussion of the concepts of coherence and professionalism.

It is hoped that publications emanating from this research will make a useful addition to the literature on the management of further education colleges. Literature searches have revealed no typological analysis of the role of these managers; indeed there is little discussion at all of service and student service managers in the educational management literature. Factors facilitating and impeding managers have been discussed through the consideration of changes to college culture, and through the

debate over managerialism and professionalism. However, the daily interaction of managers with their working environment is little researched. Conceptualisation of the role, and of the college environment for management, is therefore at an early stage of development, and this research aims to contribute to these areas of understanding.

The chapters which follow present the research as follows.

- Review of the literature

This section discusses the context of conceptual theory and empirical research within which the current investigation is set.

- Research methodology

A rationale is presented for the proposed methodology and issues of research ethics and reliability are discussed.

- College environment

The environment for management at each college is described and analysed, and key factors which influence the middle manager role are identified.

- Analysis
 - Middle managers: aspects of role
 - Facilitators and impediments to role

This section presents the conceptual basis for the typology of the middle manager role. The analysis then draws on the viewpoints of different members of the role set in order to depict and discuss the various aspects of the middle manager role. The final section focuses upon the ways in which factors in the environment for management facilitate and impede managers in carrying out their role.

- Modelling and discussion

A series of models is presented, which examines the underlying patterns of interaction which underpin the manager role, and offers insight into the college environment as a system. This leads to a further discussion of the themes developed through the research.

- Conclusions

The outcomes of the investigation are summarised and discussed in the context of existing research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

From the further education context presented in Chapter 1, together with a preliminary review of the literature and a pilot study which explored issues of concern to middle managers, six research questions were developed.

- What roles do further education middle managers perform?
- What are the factors in the environment for management at the colleges which impact upon the role?
- How do members of the role set perceive that middle managers enact their role?
- How are the middle managers facilitated and impeded by factors in their environment for management?
- How can modelling be used to represent and interpret the interaction between middle managers and factors within their environment which facilitate and impede?
- How can the models be used for problem-solving and considering college design?

A brief overview of the literature relating generally to the further education context was presented in Section 1.1, in order to depict the setting for the research. In Section 1.3, consideration was given to the areas of literature which would provide further insight, and the following six were discussed: further education management, organisational theory, leadership theory, the role of middle managers, role theory and professionalism. The literature on modelling, which is used as an analytical technique, is discussed in the methodology chapter, Chapter 3.

Other areas of literature were considered for review, for example those concerning the management of individual areas of responsibility, such as curriculum, finance, human resources or services to students. Whilst these would have been useful in underpinning an understanding of the manager roles, the focus of this research is

upon the generic manager role, rather than the management of particular college functions. Likewise, although some individual texts concerning higher education management have been included for comparison with the further education context, a comprehensive review was not undertaken in this area, as the focus of the research is upon colleges. However, as the literature on management of schools provides a rich source of conceptual material on topics germane to this research, it was decided that this, together with generic management literature, would provide the main source of support for the small body of further education literature.

It is acknowledged that each of the chosen areas would individually merit a full review. Understanding the complex factors which impact upon the manager role demands a broad knowledge of all of these fields, however, and key texts have therefore been selected which provide useful insight into the research context. This includes seminal texts on the main aspects of theory, and research papers which have resonance with the issues investigated. Each of the chosen areas of literature has relevance for each of the main research topics; however, the main conceptual links are presented in Table 2.1.

	Roles performed by middle managers	Environment for management	Facilitators and impediments	Modelling the role
Further education context	✓	✓		✓
Organisational theory	✓	✓	✓	✓
Leadership theory	✓	✓	✓	✓
The role of middle managers	✓		✓	✓
Management in further education	✓		✓	✓
Role theory			✓	✓
Modelling theory				✓

Table 2.1 Relationship of literature areas to research topics

The purpose of the review is fourfold: to understand the further education context within which the research takes place, to gain insight into the areas of theory which underpin the study, to consider the findings from earlier research in a range of educational contexts which are relevant to the current study, and to consider potential frameworks for analysis. The areas of theory presented below will therefore be discussed in relation to the focus of the research, which is the management of further education colleges.

2.1 Organisational theory

Organisational structures

In complex societies, which predominates: the smaller or the larger unit? What are the relationships between the units and each other, and between the units and the whole? How does each unit function internally, and how do the functions of the units collectively comprise 'whole organisation' activity? These are questions which underpin organisational theory, and which are essential to the understanding of the working environment of colleges. Discussion of these questions can be traced back to the writings of the nineteenth century social philosopher, Emile Durkheim, who proposed a system of analysing societies, based upon theories of 'mechanical' and 'organic' solidarity. The following analysis of this aspect of Durkheim's work is presented through translations by Bellah (1973) and Thompson (1985). Mechanical solidarity is based upon likeness, predicated on the belief that society is composed of homogeneous segments, held together by common beliefs and common practices. The segments may have their own distinguishing features, but the solidarity becomes 'more feeble' as the segments become more heterogeneous: the unity of the whole is exclusive of the individuality of the parts (Bellah, 1973).

Organic solidarity is based upon the conception of society being segmented; the segments, acting within their occupational environments, are seen as 'organs', each with a special role, and each made up of differentiated parts. Even complex organic societies are also 'united by ties which extend deeper' than their segmental allegiances; however, under organic solidarity, the individuality of the whole increases at the same time as the individuality of the parts (Bellah, 1973: 69-70, 111; Thompson,

1985: 48). These societal types represent the tension between the collective and the individual. Under mechanical solidarity, the collective dominates and individual deviance is punished; under organic solidarity, individual differentiation is accepted as part of the organic system, but the system still has to function as a coherent, though complex, whole.

The relevance of this tension to this research can be perceived. Under systems of collective, corporate responsibility, colleges need mechanical solidarity. A college has to present a unified response to government policy, to national trends in education and training, and to local issues affecting its work. Yet, as large organisations, colleges also need to diffuse their functions into a number of specialist departments, each with their own purpose and internal structure. They create organic systems which must function effectively both at departmental level and as a coherent whole.

Burns and Stalker (1961) apply these mechanical and organic concepts to formal organisations, drawing upon a number of writers, principally Gouldner (1958), Selznik (1948) and Waldo (1956). They propose that organisations exist for a purpose, to carry out a task; to do so, the task is divided among individuals, who agree to be used as resources, as 'means' to carry out the overall purpose. Even given that agreement, however, individuals and sub-groups spontaneously strive to control the conditions of their existence, which results in the formation of informal sub-structures (Burns and Stalker, 1961). Once again, there is a tension between the needs of the whole organisation and the local needs of its constituent parts.

Burns and Stalker (1961) discuss a classification of organisations conducted by Gouldner (1958) who contrasted rational, bureaucratic systems with 'natural systems', calling them machine models and organic models. Burns and Stalker (1961: 120-121) propose two possible models of the working organisation, the mechanistic system and the organic system. They consider that mechanistic systems are appropriate to stable conditions, and that they are identified, *inter alia* by:

- The specialised differentiation of functional tasks
- A hierarchical structure of control, authority and communication
- A tendency for interaction to be vertical
- Insistence on loyalty to the organisation and to one's superiors.

Organic systems are seen as being more appropriate to changing conditions; among their characteristics are:

- The contributive nature of special knowledge and experience to the common task
- The 'realistic' nature of the task within its environment
- A network structure of control, authority and communication
- Lateral, rather than vertical, interaction; consultation rather than command
- A stratified system, in which the head of the organisation is not seen as omniscient.

Burns and Stalker see the two forms of system as a polarity, and consider that the organisation may oscillate between them, dependent upon the degree of stability encountered. This analysis is useful, as it sets the earlier societal analysis into an organisational setting and proposes characteristics which would help to identify organisations as mechanical or organic. Whether the model has to be bi-polar, and whether the two systems operate as proposed in stable and changing conditions, are factors which will be discussed in relation to the research data.

The discussion so far has explored the question of whether the smaller or the larger unit predominates. The next question, about the relationship between the units, can be examined through key texts on organisational culture. The categorisation presented by the organisational theorist Mintzberg (1979) offers a conceptual bridge to the models discussed so far. Mintzberg proposes five categories of organisations: simple, adhocracy, machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy and divisionalised form. Simple forms are stable, with decision-making power concentrated at the centre of the organisation whereas in an adhocracy the organisation, and the relationships within it, constantly reshape according to the needs of the project or the client. Adhocracies tend to be characteristics of young organisations, which become bureaucratised over time, becoming centralised machine bureaucracies, permeated with rules and regulations and standardised procedures.

An alternative form of bureaucracy, the professionalised bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1979), is highly decentralised, with each section focused upon its 'operating core', rather than on the larger organisation. Activity is based upon the common skills and

knowledge of the people at the core: decisions are made at the point of action, shaped by the needs of the client. Mintzberg considers that professionalised bureaucracies are highly democratic, and are the dominant mode in, among others, educational organisations. The last type of structure, the divisionalised form, combines strict central control over finance and standardisation of outputs with dispersal of activity to 'quasi-autonomous entities' – the divisions – each of which addresses a particular market. In terms of the previous analysis, professionalised bureaucracies and adhocracies are the most organic in their nature, simple forms and machine bureaucracies are more mechanical. The divisionalised form appears to have characteristics of both, having central control and dispersed decision-making. However, Mintzberg maintains that decisions are not made at the point of action, but are made by those at 'headquarters' and by the heads of divisions.

Colleges can be seen as operating in modes related to more than one culture. In Mintzberg's typology, they may oscillate between professionalised and machine bureaucracies, according to the degree of conformity needed, and may also exhibit characteristics of the divisionalised form in their 'outsourcing' of operations. It is also evident that the organisational structure – the physical 'shape' of the organisation – and its organisational culture are inextricably linked. Where rigid control is needed, hierarchies are created; where the organisation depends upon dispersed expertise, a 'looser' organisational structure is developed. Schneider (2002) takes this looser structure further in her description of 'radix' organisations, which have fluid and permeable boundaries, and an emphasis on lateral relationships across functions. These make the organisation more responsive and adaptable than a hierarchy. Radix organisations make increased use of contingent workers and outsourcing, and operate through strategic alliances between organisations. All of these characteristics of radix organisations are present within further education colleges, yet they are also organisations where a certain amount of 'rigid control' is needed.

Looking further into the structure of educational organisations, Busher and Harris (1999) consider the organisation of departments in secondary schools. They offer five categories of departmental structure: federal, confederate, unitary, impacted and diffuse, of which the first two, it will be argued, have most relevance to further education colleges. Both federal and confederate departments are large. In federal

departments the constituent subjects are closely related, and the departmental culture can be seen as homogeneous; confederate departments are more of an administrative convenience, and the constituent subjects have little in common. Their cultures are likely to be heterogeneous. Unitary departments are also large, but only a single subject is taught, which has a strong influence on its culture. Impacted departments contain single 'small' subjects. They can be freestanding, but also may need to form allegiances with larger departments to gain influence. Lastly, diffuse departments occur where a subject is taught largely by staff who are affiliated to other departments; the department may therefore have no identifiable base in the school and no prevailing culture.

Applying these categories to whole-college structures, colleges may be seen as either federal or confederate. The college as a whole is unlikely to be unitary or impacted, dependent upon a single specialism, though it may display some elements of diffusion. A federal college would have stronger central control, and a more unified structure and culture; a confederate one would be more decentralised, and more strongly reflect the diversity of its subject and departmental concerns. In a multi-site college, each site might have its own specialism and culture. Once again, the relationship of the whole unit to its constituent parts is the key factor. Bennett (1995: 22) offers an important reflection here, that consideration should be given to the extent to which the organisation's structure relates to the work it has to do. He comments that 'it is easy to set up structures which do not work to the advantage of the people involved in carrying out the primary task.' In order to explore further the possible types of structure, and the purposes they serve, the review will consider three contrasting perspectives on organisational management: rational management, systems theory and the human relations approach.

Rational management

Rational management has as its goal efficient, centralised control. Its theories were devised by the engineers Taylor (1911) and Fayol (1949, first published 1915), in the context of managing the work of staff on mass production lines. Through studying the operation of the factory, and of the people within it, they developed basic principles for organising factory production, including terms of employment which would encourage maximum production, such as piece rate and productivity bonuses.

Turning to the work of managers within this context, Fayol proposed five functions for management - planning, organising, commanding, co-ordinating and controlling – from which most analyses of management derive. Planning entails studying the future and preparing plans accordingly; organising involves building up and having available the appropriate staff and materials. Commanding is making the staff do the work, whilst co-ordination involves correlating the various activities of the organisation or department. Lastly, control entails ensuring that the work is done according to the rules and instructions laid down (Gulick and Urwick, 1937). The focus of rational systems of management can here be seen as the efficient manufacture of the product, and facets of this rational approach can be seen in further education colleges in such characteristics as procedures manuals, monitoring systems and performance related pay.

Systems approach

A systems approach to management views the organisation as a complex series of inter-related and interacting parts. Two of the earliest proponents, March and Simon (1958), for example, reject the rational approach to management on the basis that managers as decision-makers are limited by their perception of the organisational and social environment in which they operate: they cannot make truly rational decisions. The limited human being must deal with complexity by simplifying both the parameters of the problem and the possible alternatives, whilst maintaining the main features of the problem. One of the outcomes of this simplification is that organisations develop systems which serve to replace routine decision-making (March and Simon, 1958). The systems are loosely coupled, and interdependent; changes in one system affect the workings of another. Under a systems approach, according to Bertalanffy (1973), once a work system is designed and initiated, it will largely run itself; the work of managers is largely to review the system from time to time and monitor it for breakdown. Morris (1975) sums up the revised role for managers under a systems approach: keeping things going (largely performed by the systems themselves); coping with breakdowns (dealing with situations outside the scope of the systems); doing new things (development activity) and keeping tasks and activities under review, resolving tensions where they occur so that the organisation functions coherently.

Cuthbert and Latcham (1979) applied a systems approach to theorising the management of colleges before incorporation. They identified the following systems within which senior and middle managers worked:

- System 1: Teaching and learning, and their attendant activities.
- System 2: Control for system 1. This consists of activities to 'keep things going', such as timetabling.
- System 3: Work to be done to cope with problems. This involves coping with breakdowns, for example providing cover for absent staff. System 3 monitors systems 1 and 2, and intervenes when necessary.
- System 4: Planning and development. This includes review of client satisfaction and work to develop new course offerings and patterns of delivery. This is seen as a senior operation, supporting systems 1, 2 and 3.
- System 5: Overarching broad policy-making level. This system marries up the demands of keeping things going day-to-day with the implications of introducing new proposals. Here senior managers decide on priorities and allocate resources accordingly.

Systems 1, 2 and 3 largely consist of maintenance; Systems 4 and 5 introduce review, development and planning activities, all undertaken by senior staff. Nevertheless, the approach as a whole still performs a largely mechanical function. This research will consider whether the role of middle managers in post-incorporation colleges is largely one of mechanical maintenance, or whether middle managers are now involved in review, development and planning, and in other, more organic functions.

The systems approach is not only used to maintain the organisation, it can also be used to resolve complex organisational problems, through considering the elements of the system which interact with a particular issue, and identifying the influence of related systems, including the external environment (Harper, 1997). Systems approaches can be used creatively to innovate through the modelling of new scenarios. The emphasis on examining the work within its dynamic context, and on maintaining awareness of the inter-relation of different systems, gives it considerable organic potential. In this research, the college systems will be modelled in order to

interpret interactions between different parts of the system, to discuss strategies for problem-solving, to consider college design, and to project future scenarios (Bytheway, 1995).

Human relations approach

The rational approach has also been modified by the concerns about the needs of individual workers offered by the human relations approach. This school of thought was led by Mayo (1933) and Follett (Metcalf and Urwick, 1942), and includes the theorising about motivation at work offered by Maslow (1943), McGregor (1970) and Herzberg (1966). The work of Adair (1983) within this school is particularly relevant to this research. He outlines the need of managers, when managing a task to be carried out by their team, to balance the needs of the individual, the team and the task. It can be seen that the needs of the task – for example, quick completion – might not be compatible with the needs of the team – for example, time to understand the task and to learn how to do it. The needs of a particular individual, perhaps for autonomy in working, might conflict with the necessity for close co-operation within the team. The manager's role is to resolve these tensions in the best way possible, in order to advance the work of all three elements: the individual, the team and the task.

This theory can be applied to this research at middle manager level, when considering the staff management aspect of the role; it also offers a further perspective on balancing the needs of the whole-college in its service to students (the task) with the needs of different departments or types of department (the team) and the needs of the individual member of staff. It proposes a balance between the mechanical needs of the task with the organic needs of the team and the individual.

Summary

This brief review of different types of organisational theory has explored a number of tensions, many of them underpinned by mechanical and organic theory. In complex organisations, choices have to be made between structures which enable centralised or decentralised control: between an emphasis on the workings of the whole as a unified system, or on the workings of the parts according to differentiated need and expertise. Rational approaches to management focus upon the efficient, mechanical performance of the task of the organisation. A systems approach can be used to

implement mechanical conformity; equally, it can be used organically to predict and innovate. Human relations approaches seek to understand the relationship between the individual and the working environment, and can be used to reconcile the needs of the individual and the team with the needs and purpose of the organisation.

The interaction between the purpose of the organisation and the leadership of the individuals within it is discussed further in the next section of the review. If the college operates through both centralised and decentralised structures, consideration should be given both to the leadership of the whole and the leadership of the parts, and to how leadership is enacted and perceived within such a complex system.

2.2 Leadership theory

The definition of leadership is arbitrary and very subjective. Some definitions are more useful than others, but there is no 'correct' definition. (Yukl, 1994: 4-5)

Leadership is a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder (Gronn, 2000: 5)

In the light of these comments, it may seem rash to offer a definition of leadership; however, the consensus of the literature indicates that leadership is a social process whereby 'intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation' (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 6). As Fullan (1991: 157-8) argues, 'leadership relates to mission, direction, inspiration,' whereas 'management involves designing and carrying out plans, getting things done, working with people.' Leadership is not necessarily a continuous activity carried out by one person: as Gronn (2000: 19) maintains, 'the potential for leadership is present in the flow of activities in which a set of organisation members find themselves enmeshed.'

The literature presents a number of models of leadership, which are addressed below. As Chapter 1 indicated, there is little research on leadership in a further education context, and only a small amount of conceptualisation of what further education

leadership may involve; in order to consider leadership within a college context, therefore, it is important to establish a broader conceptual base.

Transactional and transformational leadership

Transactional and transformational leadership, terms traditionally attributed to Burns (1978), are often discussed in contrast to each other; they will therefore be reviewed together. Transactional leadership exists where the organisational goals are carried out as a bargain – a transaction – based upon the individual interests of persons or groups (Burns, 1978). It is 'characterised by the exchange of one thing valued for another', with the leader intervening in organisational processes to monitor them and to correct mistakes (Masi and Cooke, 2000: 18). It therefore depends upon modal values, values of means, such as 'honesty, responsibility, fairness and the honouring of commitments' (Burns 1978: 426).

Transformational leadership involves the instilling in followers of 'pride, self-respect and faith in the leader... centred on the articulation and reinforcement of a vision for the organization' (Masi and Cooke, 2000: 18). It is 'concerned with end-values such as justice, liberty, equality' (Burns, 1978: 426). The contrast here is between the values of means, symbolised by the concept of transaction, and the values of ends, achieved through shared transformation. The process of transformation, according to Burns (1978: 425), has a teaching, or developmental role, where leaders 'shape and alter and elevate the motives and values and goals of the followers.' Leaders and followers may have separate interests, but are united in a goal which represents a 'collective or pooled interest' (Burns, 1978: 425-6).

Although Burns (1978: 443) concedes that leaders need to 'turn their followers into leaders,' with the effect that transformational leadership is potentially pervasive, he writes at a time when leadership is largely seen in terms of 'top leaders', powerful people at the head of organisations and political systems. Indeed, Burns sees 'true greatness in leadership' as the top leader standing on the shoulders of his (sic) transformed followers.

Moving on from this original context, the terms and definitions have been developed further. Transformational leadership becomes seen more as a tool for individual and

organisational development and less as a means whereby the 'top leaders' can shape the thinking of followers. Bass and Avolio (1994), through a study of leaders in industry and the public sector, see transformational leadership as stimulating followers to adopt new perspectives on their work, and as improving awareness of the collective vision or mission. The transformational process develops their ability and potential, and motivates them to look beyond their own interest toward those of the group. The focus here is on the development of the followers and the collective growth of the organisation. The phrases 'new perspectives' and 'looking beyond their own interest' emphasise the contrast with transactional leadership, where the motivation of followers is stimulated by their personal benefit from the leadership transaction. Transformational leaders motivate followers to do 'more than they originally intended' (Bass and Avolio, 1994: 3); transactional leaders negotiate requirements and rewards for the task which is agreed.

In Bass and Avolio's theory, transformational leaders employ one or more of the 'four i's' in their leadership activities, and these four ways of leading are seen as the most effective. Firstly, through 'idealised influence', leaders act as role models for their followers. They consider the needs of others above their own and act consistently, following high standards of ethical and moral conduct. They are admired, respected and trusted. The second 'i', 'inspirational motivation', occurs where leaders motivate and inspire others 'by providing meaning and challenge' to their work. Followers are involved in creating shared vision; they show commitment to the vision and its goals, and their own involvement in achieving them (Bass and Avolio: 1994; 3).

Through 'intellectual stimulation', the third 'i', leaders stimulate their followers to be innovative and creative, to question current assumptions and to seek new perspectives. Followers are encouraged, both to suggest new approaches and to try them out. Lastly, the fourth 'i' 'individualised consideration' is shown when leaders act as coach or mentor to address each individual's need for growth. The leader creates learning opportunities and accepts individual difference.

Bass and Avolio (1994) propose an optimal profile for leadership, where the four 'i's of transformational leadership are deemed to be most effective, and three aspects of transactional leadership are seen as progressively less effective. The most effective

form of transactional leadership is seen as 'management by contingent reward,' where the leader actively motivates the follower through systems of rewards for work done. Moving down the scale, Bass and Avolio present two forms of 'management by exception', where the leader acts upon 'exceptions', or deviances from the transaction, by the follower. In its active form, the leader actively monitors to detect deviance or 'exception'. In its passive form, management by exception involves waiting for mistakes and deviances to occur, then taking corrective action. These forms of leadership, particularly the passive form, are deemed to be ineffective, but are sometimes necessary. At the least effective end of the scale is 'laissez faire', which is an avoidance or absence of leadership, where neither transaction nor transformation is effected by the leader.

The impressions of transactional and transformational leadership offered by Bass and Avolio are congruent with the mechanical and organic structures of organisations presented in Section 2.1. Transactional leadership focuses upon the needs and goals of the whole organisation, and uses rewards and punishments to secure compliance and discourage deviance in working towards those goals. Workers or followers are means to the organisational ends. In all of these ways it reflects the mechanical solidarity of society presented by Durkheim (Bellah, 1973) and the mechanical structure of organisations described by Burns and Stalker (1961).

Transformational leadership encourages the contribution of workers and followers in creating organisational goals, and devising new systems and approaches. It offers a creative approach to leadership which accepts and makes use of difference. It is therefore a style which would be appropriate to organic systems of management. Just as Burns and Stalker (1961) present mechanical and organic organisations as a bi-polar model, with the organisation oscillating between the poles, Bass and Avolio's profile of leadership is presented as a continuum, with laissez faire and the more passive forms of transactional leadership at one extreme and the collective aspects of transformational leadership at the other. Burns and Stalker's poles are presented as equal and opposite, each suited to different organisational circumstance; for Bass and Avolio, however, one pole – the transformational – is greatly preferable to the other.

Transformational and transactional leadership are considered by Leithwood *et al* (1999: 9) in their six models of leadership in educational organisations. They consider transformational leaders to focus upon 'the commitments and capacities of organisational members.' This is carried out by 'building school vision; establishing school goals; providing intellectual stimulation; offering individualized support; modelling best practices and important organizational values; demonstrating high performance expectations; creating productive school culture; and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions' (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 9). In contrast, reflecting the rationale of transactional leadership, managerial leadership assumes that leaders focus upon the 'functions, tasks and behaviours' of the organisation being competently carried out (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 14). It acknowledges that leaders exercise their influence 'through their responses to a host of seemingly mundane tasks.'

Transactional and transformational leadership can occur concurrently in educational settings. Research on school heads carried out by Harris *et al* (2000: 15) found that the heads adopted transactional leadership in ensuring that 'systems were maintained and developed, targets were formulated and met and that their schools ran smoothly.' They were transformative in their concern to build esteem, competence, autonomy and achievement among staff and students. They achieved this by adopting an invitational, collaborative approach to leadership, which was empowering to others (Harris *et al*, 2000).

Other writers use the transactional / transformational concepts to explore related ideas about leadership. For example, Howell and Hall-Meranda (1999) bring the two concepts together through their examination of leader-member exchange (LMX). In high quality LMX relationships, followers interact frequently with their leaders and have their leaders' support and encouragement. These relationships show 'mutual trust, respect, influence and obligation.' Low quality LMX relationships are characterised by distance between leader and follower, formal role relationships and a reliance upon the formal employment contract (Howell and Hall-Meranda, 1999: 682). Howell and Hall-Meranda's research indicates that high-quality LMX leads to more positive follower outcomes.

One of the factors influencing LMX is physical distance, which 'decreases the opportunities for direct influence, and potentially the effectiveness of the working relationship' (Howell and Hall-Meranda, 1999: 683). Where physical distance is high all forms of leadership suffer: clarity of understanding and trust are harder to achieve over distance, and followers lack the necessary cues to guide their action. Howell and Hall-Meranda use this theory to explain why not only transformational leadership is effective, but also some forms of transactional leadership: management by contingent reward, and, to a certain extent, positive management by exception. In all of these forms of leadership, to varying extents, LMX is high. This theory is of particular relevance to further education colleges, where leaders at different levels in the organisation may be physically distant from their followers. Senior leaders may be distanced by their physical location on a main site or within a 'senior management area' of the college, or they may be distanced simply by their preoccupation with senior management issues. Leaders at middle management level may be responsible for staff working at a number of locations, at varying times of the day and the year. Regular face-to-face interaction with followers can therefore be difficult to achieve, and, according to Howell and Hall-Meranda, leadership may be difficult to sustain.

Distributed leadership

Theories of distributed leadership may be considered as an extrapolation of the concepts underpinning transformational leadership, and may be particularly relevant to the context of the dispersed sections within a further education college. Bass (1994) writes of the 'cascade effect' of transformational leadership, where followers are encouraged and influenced to set the pace and direction of their 'local' activity, and Yammarino (1994) considers how leadership is accrued through consecutive layers of management. Both writers consider that leadership does not exist solely 'at the top', but is in some way dispersed through the organisation. Ogawa and Bossert (1997: 9) propose that leadership 'flows through the network of roles that comprise organisations,' producing patterns of interaction and ascribing meaning to organisational events. This introduces the concept of leadership as being systemic, embedded in the actions of individuals, and in the meaning which they ascribe to their experience.

Two of the models proposed by Leithwood *et al* (1999: 8) of leadership in educational settings are types of distributed leadership. The first is instructional leadership: 'the behaviours of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students' (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 8), which acknowledges the role of teachers as leaders of pedagogy. A further dispersed style is participative leadership, where leadership acts through 'the decision-making processes of the group' (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 12). This focus may be adopted in order to enhance institutional effectiveness, or to satisfy the principles of democracy. Participative leadership is potentially available to any stakeholder, based upon their expert knowledge or their right to participate in decision-making.

Gronn (2000) takes this idea of distributed leadership further, and uses it to reconcile the transformational / transactional divide. He classifies theories of transactional leadership as concerning themselves with structure, and transformational as being based upon agency, and considers that the two are not polarised, but are intertwined: that 'the relationship between the two is always one of interplay through time' (Gronn, 2000: 2). He also considers that the effect both of agency and structure may be exaggerated, and that 'activity' is at the heart of leadership; 'activity is the bridge between agency and structure' (Gronn, 2000: 2).

Gronn cites Lakomski's (1999: 9) proposition of organisations 'constituting networks of distributed cognition,' and considers that distributed cognition is 'manifest in jointly performed activities and social relations' (Gronn, 2000: 9). In these joint activities, the distinction between leader and follower may be difficult to perceive, and Gronn concludes from this line of thought that leadership is 'fluid and emergent', rather than being a fixed phenomenon (Gronn, 2000: 11). Gronn's theories are attractive for the present research, as they both find a way of bridging the transactional / transformational divide, and open up the possibilities of situational leadership, which may pass from person to person dependent upon task and circumstance. In a college team context, for example, this could involve each member of the team offering leadership in an aspect of the department's work for which they have specialist expertise or responsibility, with the other team members taking their turn as followers.

Contingent leadership

Under distributed leadership systems, leadership may change, resting with different people at different times; contingent leadership theories suggest how the leaders themselves may change their response according to circumstance. These theories acknowledge the importance of 'how leaders respond to the unique organizational circumstance and problems that they face' (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 15). When solving problems or making decisions, for example, leaders consider the challenges facing them and invent patterns of practice which make most sense to them. Schneider (2002: 217) emphasises the complexity of the contingent leadership roles adopted in radix organisations, which work on a network structure. She underlines the cognitive complexity of leadership: 'the ability to think in a multidimensional abstract manner and to synthesise information at various levels of abstraction.' She also explores the social complexity of leadership, the ability to apply interpersonal skills in a socially appropriate manner, which reflects the leader's social perceptiveness and flexibility of response.

This process of leaders making sense of complex situations relates to a pair of concepts offered by Bennett (1995: 45-46). He writes of the 'assumptive world' which people create out of the 'facts' of a given situation, ascribing value to them and using them to relate to their understanding of the world, in order to act appropriately in relation to the world as it is seen. Bennett relates the 'assumptive world', first proposed by Young (1981), to ideas put forward by Argyris and Schon (1978) of 'espoused theory', in which the individual assembles widely shared beliefs, policies and norms in order to inform action, and of 'theory in use', which constitutes the real guiding principles behind the action taken.

These concepts can be used to explain how leaders undertake contingent leadership. If leaders respond uniquely to need and circumstance, they may make use of their 'assumptive world' and their understanding of the espoused theory relating to the context in order to devise appropriate 'theory in use.' The concepts can also be associated with ideas proposed by Bordieu of 'habitus' and 'field', where habitus is a system of 'durable transposable dispositions', acquired through experience, of principles which can be consciously adapted to their outcomes (Bordieu, 1990: 53), and the 'field' is the structured system of social positions held by people and

institutions which provides the set of power relations within which a person acts (Bordieu, 1990). This consideration of principles and of power echoes the focus of moral leadership, one of the six models proposed by Leithwood *et al* (1999:10), which views leadership through 'the values and ethics of leaders'. Moral leadership includes a consideration of the values of the leaders themselves, and of the nature of relationships and the distribution of power within the organisation.

Contingent leadership offers possibilities for understanding the 'real world' context of the other models. Individuals' assumptive worlds may be shaped by their personal understanding of what leadership is: transactional, transformational, distributed or moral. They may then act predominantly in line with one set of values, for example those of moral leadership, or they may choose the approach they consider best for the circumstance, using different leadership styles in different contexts. If the managers in this study undertake their work intuitively, working with a range of individuals on a wide variety of tasks, then contingent leadership may be an appropriate model to consider. It may also be important to reflect upon who, or what, they are leading in any given circumstance.

Leadership in further education

Sawbridge's review of leadership in further education concludes that the following leadership activities are important in colleges: developing organisational vision, values and purpose; initiating and maintaining networks and structures which facilitate the distribution of leadership; creating an organisational climate which values initiative and encourages organisational learning; providing development and support to individuals which enables high quality teaching and learning (Sawbridge, 2001). These aspirations depend largely upon aspects of transformational and distributed leadership.

Both transactional and transformational leadership are expected of colleges, with their emphasis on rational bureaucracy and efficient strategic planning on the one hand and 'achieving an envisioned, motivated staff,' on the other (Lumby, 2001: 12). In a context where the term 'leader' is rarely used (Harper, 1997), Lumby considers that the concept of dispersed or systemic leadership may be appropriate to colleges, which display conditions where leadership 'may be fragmented amongst individuals' and

assembled as parts of a holistic function (Lumby, 2001: 12). This sharing of responsibility for leadership among individuals and groups is also envisioned in a university setting by Middlehurst (1995). Similarly, Gregory (1996: 49) writes of the developmental potential for distributed leadership in colleges: 'The reservoir for critical thinking and leading ideas lies at all levels and is often located in hidden corners. Successful leadership is about finding it.' The leadership focus here is on the potential for critical thinking within the organisation as a whole rather than on the status of any individual leader. Contrary to the definition offered by Leithwood *et al* (1999), which states that leadership is intentional, Lumby maintains that leadership may be unintended and hidden, 'embodied in what people do, not what they say' (Lumby, 2001: 12): part of the assumptive world, described by Bennett (1995).

A gendered focus on leadership of post incorporation colleges is presented by, among others, Cole (2000) and Shain (2000). Both writers note the 32% 'turnover' of principals in the sector between 1993 and 1996, immediately after incorporation. This process gave space for an increase in women in senior posts – a change from 13 women principals in 1990 to 81 in 1997 – and in middle management. For a range of reasons, Shain considers that there was a concurrent move to more transformational cultures. Post-incorporation colleges depend upon external networking and collaboration, and upon a leadership style which is visible and collaborative 'binding others to corporate aims' (Shain, 2000: 221). Feminised approaches may therefore be more successful than styles adopted previously, which tended to be distant and aggressive (Shain, 2000). Deem *et al* (2000) note that some women managers are developing transformational styles based upon empowerment and social relations based upon fairness, and are challenging management by status and ego; however, Deem *et al* consider that college cultures are still aggressive and competitive, and that some women leaders choose to adopt this more masculine leadership style.

Lumby (2001) offers a different perspective on college leadership. Based upon interviews with senior and middle managers, she proposes dimensions of leadership in further education, where the leadership focus of individuals can be 'measured' along five spectra according to the type of leadership activity undertaken, as shown in Figure 2.1. She proposes that senior leaders may adopt the focus offered by the left-hand end of the spectra, which deal largely with whole-college concerns, and that middle

leaders may operate at the more 'local' focus of the right hand end, but that this is not exclusively so. Plotting the focus along each of the five spectra enables a person's individual pattern of leadership to be portrayed. The benefit of this approach is that it enables the complexity of leadership perspectives adopted by an individual to be modelled.

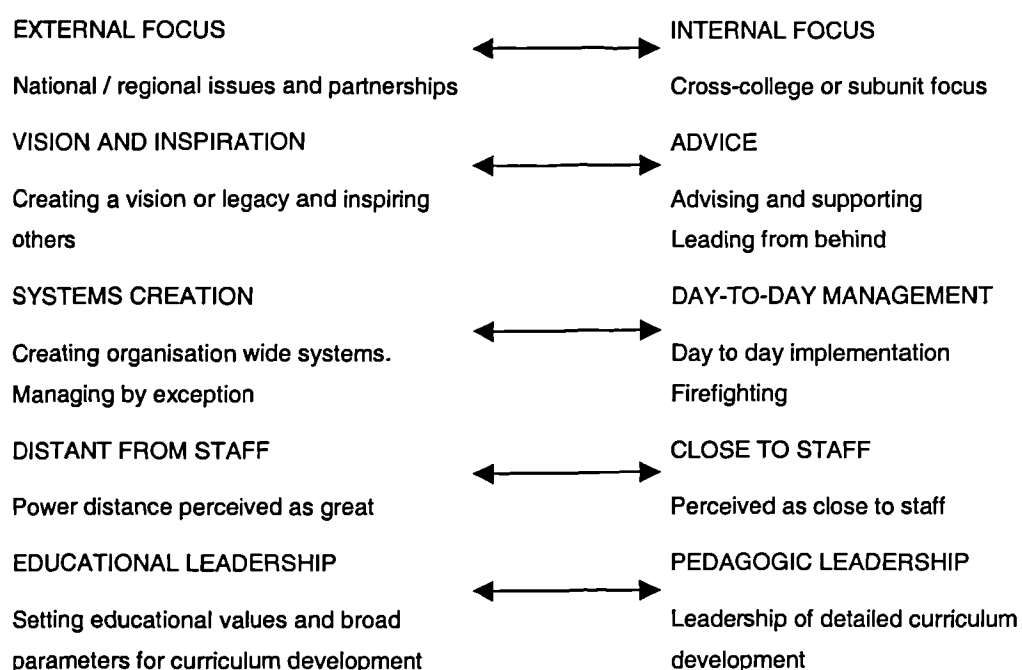


Figure 2.1 Dimensions of leadership focus (Lumby, 2001: 23)

Middle manager leadership

The variety of leadership focus (Lumby 2001) adopted by a single role-holder may be especially evident at middle manager level, where some of the manager's concerns – for example day-to-day implementation – may be very 'local', and some may have a whole-college or national focus, according to the person's role and range of interest. In universities, Smith (2002) found a range of perspectives among the academic heads of department surveyed; collectively they were divided as to where their first loyalty lay, to the institution or to the department. The majority were equally focused upon academic leadership and line management of staff. Their leadership foci for different aspects of their role would vary from the left hand to the right hand ends of Lumby's model.

Middle management is, however, often considered in relation to the local, internal activity of team leadership. Atwater and Bass (1994: 208), writing in the context of leading teams, emphasise the importance of encouraging the team, whilst taking account of their diversity of views, needs and aspirations. 'Keeping the team on track', focused on a central mission, is seen as an important function for team leaders. Waldman (1994) points out that this function is more difficult when leading multifunctional teams, which cut across structural 'line authority.' Witziers *et al* (1999) report on team leadership in schools in the Netherlands, where leadership is dispersed among the team, with middle management responsibility held by the team as a whole. Under this model, departments are cohesive entities, making consensual decisions, and departmental heads have little authority of their own. This extent of collaboration is not evident in UK based research, but Busher and Harris (1999: 312) maintain that collaborative departmental culture is indicative of healthy departments and of improving schools. They consider that this is achieved through departmental heads adopting a transformational style, creating departmental 'realms of knowledge.'

Two studies by Glover *et al* (1998; 1999) on middle leadership in schools are useful to this research as they have implications for other educational settings. The first paper concludes that middle manager leadership depends upon the ability to motivate and inspire, and to support teams of staff (Glover *et al*, 1998). The findings are that middle manager leadership is intuitive, and is shaped by four concerns: shaping and sharing the vision; acting according to the maturity of subordinates; involving staff in participatory activities and supporting people and achieving results. In the second paper, Glover *et al* (1999) consider factors governing the effectiveness of departmental leadership. They conclude that successful departments occur where subject leaders recognise the need to balance the authoritarian and the collegial, recognise the difference between transformational and transactional approaches, and have developed wisdom in handling personalities and situations. Together, the papers suggest a contingent, intuitive approach to leadership, shaped by an understanding of, and ability to use, a range of leadership styles. This contingent approach is underpinned by a set of values, which concern both the nature of education and the support and development of staff. This array of values, and the type of leadership activity described in these two papers, is likely to be relevant at middle management

level in further education colleges, where managers have to be responsive to a range of circumstances and individuals in situations where they are guided by their own values and professional beliefs.

Summary

The models of leadership reviewed through the literature all have relevance for the research context. Both transactional and transformational styles are appropriate in different ways to the leadership of incorporated colleges, which have strong corporate accountability and encompass a wide range of differentiated functions. The professional specialism of college departments suggests that it is also appropriate to consider whether leadership is dispersed and, in a context where leadership is rarely discussed, whether it is hidden and systemic, fragmented among individuals and groups.

The models offered from the school and further educational sector indicate that leadership in colleges will be based upon vision and values, upon motivating and supporting people and achieving results. At middle manager level, leadership is likely to be collaborative, based upon models of team leadership, with the leader setting the pace and direction of the team. Leadership is likely to be intuitive, using a range of styles contingent upon circumstance, dependent upon the accumulated experience and value-base of the leader. The range of activities undertaken by middle managers is considered in the next section.

2.3 The role of middle managers

Management consists of a mass of fragmented and disjointed activities, constant interruption, pressure for immediate answers to questions or solutions to problems, and a heavy reliance on word of mouth messages rather than measured and considered memoranda. (Mintzberg 1990, summarised by Bennett, 1995: 30)

Mintzberg is here referring to management in general, in business settings, but the description is particularly appropriate to middle managers in education. As Lumby (1997) points out, managers in further education (as in schools) perform a dual role, of

teaching and management. Inevitably the management process becomes disjointed, and usually their role set is so large that there are infinite possibilities for pressure and interruption.

Mintzberg (1990) refutes the rational, systematic view of management which underlies many of the organisational theories presented in Section 2.1. He sees management as a process involving judgment and negotiation, dependent upon networks of support and information handling. Based upon his observation of managers in business and public service settings, he proposes ten managerial roles, which are based upon their authority and status in heading a unit of the organisation. These ten roles, grouped by Mintzberg under three headings, form part of a complex and inter-related whole: effective performance of one aspect of role depends upon the manager's competence in carrying out the others. The first three roles are interpersonal: figurehead, leader and liaison. These cover the managers' formal and ceremonial tasks, their direct and indirect influence over others and the contacts upon which their management work depends. The majority of these contacts are outside their work unit, and are used to build up the 'soft' information needed for decision-making.

The next three roles are informational, comprising the monitor, the disseminator and the spokesperson. Mintzberg places importance upon the possession and handling of information by the manager, commenting that 'the strategic data bank of the organisation is not in the memory of its computers but in the minds of its managers' (Mintzberg, 1990: 166). *Through their management of information, they can monitor the work of their unit, disseminate information into it and beyond it, and act as spokesperson for it.* The last set of roles are decision roles: entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator. Through these roles they can initiate change, solve problems, allocate both physical resources and work roles to promote the smooth running of the unit, and negotiate both inside and outside the unit to implement effective management. This analysis highlights the pivotal nature of the middle manager role. Managers obtain and filter information, use it to create priorities, and pass it on. In the colleges investigated in this research, they may, as Bennett (1995) proposes, be expected to form a bridge between those who generate the vision, plan and create systems for the organisation, and those who perform the tasks of the organisation.

Middle managers in schools

Heads of departments in schools have been referred to as the 'kingpins', 'the boiler house', 'the engine room', 'the hub of the school' (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell, 1989), underlining the pivotal role established above. The informational role valued by Mintzberg is also emphasised, with managers being seen as a channel of information, communicating staff views into a whole-school planning process. The process of communication is developed further, into the 'bridging and brokering' role for middle managers, where information handling is combined with interpretation and negotiation (Glover *et al* 1998: 281). Bennett (1995) observes that the term 'middle management' implies a hierarchy, where authority is devolved from above, given by position or role, or given by those 'below' as an acknowledgment of worthiness. He considers management as a two-way process, whereby a downward flow of authority is coupled with an upward transmission of information. If middle managers are brokers of information, they occupy a powerful position, with potential to act as entrepreneurs and agents of change and improvement (Earley and Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Busher and Harris, 1999).

A number of typologies of the middle manager role are offered in the literature. Busher and Harris (1999) see four dimensions to head of department work in schools: translation, which involves bridging and brokering; fostering collegiality by enabling shared vision; improving staff and student performance; and a liaison or representative role. These roles largely focus upon information handling, and supporting and developing the work of staff and students. Glover *et al* (1998) also consider 'translation' as an important part of the role, with middle managers being seen as 'translators and mediators, rather than as originators of policy and culture.' They may work to 'translate' whole school policies and cultures into ones which are acceptable to the department (Glover *et al*, 1998: 286). In considering the role of developing the work of staff and students, Glover *et al* note that many managers wish to minimise administration in order to lead teaching, although some take refuge in a cult of 'busyness.' They are seen as reluctant to judge the work of colleagues, preferring informal methods of monitoring, although Wise (1999) notes that heads of school departments now see responsibility for staff performance as part of their role. Heads of

Department are, however, aware of their role changing from one of management to that of leadership (Glover *et al* 1998)

The head of department role is seen more in terms of social agency by Brown and Rutherford (1998). Acknowledging the work of Murphy (1992), they see the role in terms of servant leader, organisational architect, moral educator, social architect and leading professional. These activities are largely organic and decentralised, controlled by the manager's professionalism, and by a concern for building relationships. Servant leaders lead with people, rather than through them. Their influence is based upon professional expertise and they lead through a process of empowerment. The organisational architect creates new organic forms of departmental structure; this leads to a greater degree of ownership, and influences school improvement (Brown and Rutherford, 1998). Heads of department who are moral educators are motivated by a set of deep personal values and beliefs, and those who act as social architects develop integrated partnerships to support children and their learning in worsening times. Lastly, the leading professional adopts a developmental role to improve teaching, learning and achievement (Brown and Rutherford, 1998). This typology emphasises the values which underpin the head of department role: empowerment, ownership and partnership; belief in education and the value of learning.

These values could be seen as guiding the knowledge which the middle manager applies to the role. Turner and Bolam (1998), drawing on the work of Eraut (1994), analyse the professional knowledge of heads of department, proposing a six-fold typology. The first type, knowledge of people, where 'people' are members of staff working within or for the department, is largely acquired as a by-product of other encounters, but could be reinforced by such activities as team teaching and classroom observation. Situational knowledge, about both the school and departmental environments, comprises a working understanding of the context of the role. Knowledge of educational practice is seen as analogous to the 'leading professional' role discussed above; in the head of department this would be based upon subject and pedagogic expertise. To this can be added conceptual knowledge: the store of theories acquired over time, which can be used to analyse issues and problems. Process knowledge is the understanding of what has to be done, and the practical

knowledge of how to do it. The final type, control knowledge, logically encompasses all of the others as it includes knowledge of one's own knowledge and skills, including their strengths and limitations (Turner and Bolam, 1998).

These various analyses and typologies firstly offer a range of frameworks for analysing the role of middle managers; importantly, they also demonstrate that there is no single 'right way' of delineating the role. The typology developed for this study, which is presented in Chapter 5, Section 5.1, has been influenced by the frameworks presented here, notably those of Mintzberg (1990), Brown and Rutherford (1998), Busher and Harris (1999), and of Peeke (1997) and Smith (2002), discussed in the section below. The newly devised typology will depend both upon the nature of the role as revealed by the respondents and perceived by the analyst, and upon the chosen focus for the analysis, just as the earlier typologies represent a focus upon systems or values, knowledge or social interaction. It will also be based upon existing knowledge about the role in further and higher education settings.

Middle managers in further and higher education

Recent government interest in setting standards for further education has resulted in a series of publications of 'standards' for management, and for teaching and learning. The FENTO (2001) standards for middle managers, developed after extensive consultation with the sector, are built around four areas of manager activity: developing strategic practice; developing and sustaining learning and the learning environment; lead teams and the individual; managing resources. The phrase 'develop strategic practice' is well chosen, as it implies that the manager is involved in devising ways of implementing strategy, rather than being principally involved in making it; likewise 'sustain learning and the learning environment' comprehensively includes service and student service roles as well as those directly involved with curriculum delivery. The final two categories are uncontentious; the combined focus on teams and the individual echoes Adair's (1983) three-fold role of managing the task, the team and the individual. Managing resources may be interpreted broadly: all the managers in this study managed staff as a resource and managed tangible resources, but not all had a budget of their own.

Earley (1998), quoting a personal communication from Peeke (1997), offers a more detailed breakdown of the role, and one which is more focused upon curriculum managers: servicing college bureaucracy, leading curriculum development, quality assurance, external liaison, managing people, managing resources, and development – academic leadership. In this typology, the whole-college role of the manager is seen in terms of quality assurance and of servicing bureaucracy. At their best, both of these activities enhance the effectiveness of the department in relation to the whole purpose of the college; at their worst, both are seen as irksome chores which are undertaken mechanistically, without engagement in their underlying purpose. This typology also looks outwards from the college, acknowledging the external liaison role of the manager, and introduces the concept of leadership: reflecting the 'leading professional' role of Brown and Rutherford (1998).

An investigation by Smith (2002: 302) of the work of heads of academic departments in UK higher education found that they perceive 'governing the department' as their most important role: an activity which includes establishing and implementing goals, preparing the department for evaluation, establishing committees and conducting meetings. Managing personnel is also considered high in importance as, in statutory universities, is managing resources. 'Representing the department' – the liaison role foregrounded in other analyses – is the sixth priority out of eight, and leadership, other than as an underlying factor, is not considered.

The liaison and leadership roles identified by Peeke (1997) are emphasised in research by Drodge (2002) into the management of vocational education in the British, Dutch and French systems. Drodge found that in all three systems, managers are seen as educators, as managing boundaries and as providing personal leadership. Drodge comments (2002: 39) that managers 'are exhorted to lead,' but that, in reality, their leadership roles are circumscribed. He considers that the concept of personal leadership is closely tied to the notion of professionalism. Drodge sees the managers' main task as preserving for themselves and others the space in which to develop local ideas, geared to locally defined priorities. On managing boundaries, he comments that: 'the most exciting work is where colleges can collaborate with community groups or employers ... to provide for particular groups or types of learners' (Drodge, 2002: 39).

From these various studies and observations, it can be seen that, in supporting the 'basic' work of the manager such as implementing strategy, carrying out activities to develop and support learning, managing – or perhaps leading – staff, the role of liaison emerges as important. Studies of further education middle management, both in the UK and in the USA, bring this aspect of role to the fore in the form of translation and brokering activities. Gleeson and Shain (1999: 461-462) see academic middle managers as 'mediators of change', as an 'ideological buffer.' They are seen as translating policy into practice by managing consent, brokering materiality and meaning: 'constructing the art of the possible in translating policy into practice in ways which are acceptable and make sense to both groups [i.e. senior managers and team members].' In doing so, they 'filter change in both directions' (Gleeson and Shain, 1999: 470-471). This activity demands liaison skills, interpersonal skills and a keen appreciation of the professional needs and value base of the people concerned.

Adopting a 'buffering role' may present problems for both the manager and the team, as noted by Drodge (2002) and by Leathwood (2000), who discuss paternalistic and maternalistic approaches to leadership, which respectively exclude and protect staff from whole-college concerns. These writers consider that protective approaches can disempower team members, as they may be prevented from understanding their working context clearly, and may become over-dependent upon the manager.

Alexiadou (2001: 417) emphasises the pragmatism with which the 'responsive manager' in further education undertakes the activities of mediating change and constructing what is possible. She writes of managers' decisions being made within the range of what is 'affordable', based upon educational values, concern for community and collegiality. She considers that responsive middle managers are willing to absorb much of the impact of change, and to generate structures which accommodate new realities. Gillett-Karam (1999: 5-6), reporting on US community colleges, makes very similar observations: that midlevel managers are 'the buffer between faculty and administration' – that is, between teaching staff and senior management – and that they act as conduits, as mediators, communicators and facilitators. She comments that 'leading from the middle is no easy task.' In both

studies significant features of the middle manager role are mediation, translation, constructing the art of the possible.

Leading from the middle

Leading from the middle can involve not only occupying a role in the middle of the institution, but leading from the middle of a team. For curriculum managers, being part of the team involves them in a 'dual role' of both teaching and managing. This is generally acknowledged to put pressure on the manager, limiting the time available for management; the situation is noted *inter alia* by Lumby (1997) in a further education context, and by Wise and Bush (1997) in a school context. Lumby (1997: 350) considers that in colleges the dual role has encouraged an 'amateur approach to management', which is no longer applicable.

Being part of the team also subjects the manager to 'the powerful influence of colleagues within subject departments,' as noted by Wise and Bush in schools (1999: 193). They consider that departmental colleagues have a substantial effect on every aspect of the subject leader role, and note that subject leaders increasingly have to deal with issues of staff performance. Pritchard (2000: 151) writes about middle managers in further education having difficulty in line-managing people with whom they have worked on an equal basis, and having to implement post-incorporation 'surveillance and enforcement practices.' In a higher education context, Smith (1996; 2002) points out the tensions inherent in being both an academic leader and a line manager. He notes (2002: 305) that 'staffing issues' are deemed the most difficult things an academic head of department has to deal with. This point is underlined by Bolton (2000: 62), also in a higher education context 'What do you do with difficult staff? This is one of the most contentious issues which a new HoD will have to face.' Tranter (2000: 24) puts this staffing dilemma into focus for subject leaders in schools, noting that when they try to preserve both professionalism and collegiality, role conflict can result: 'Some have seen themselves as the "first among equals" but are now being required to act as line managers.' He considers that teacher professionalism does not fit within a hierarchical system, and that all teachers 'consider that they should have a say in both the policy and practice of school management and leadership' (Tranter, 2000: 23). This is echoed by Hellowell and Hancock (2001) in a higher education setting, observing that, although collegiality can be tedious and time-consuming,

academics would resist and undermine any other sort of professional control. They point out, however, that collegiality offers limited control over staff who underperform.

These examples from the research literature illustrate the uneasy tensions which 'leading from the middle' creates. Firstly, the dual role of teaching and managing not only places the manager firmly 'within' the team, but also restricts the amount of time available to undertake management responsibilities at a departmental or whole-institution level. Secondly, the manager is dealing with professional colleagues, who might not wish to be 'managed' in a hierarchical way. This can lead to problems for both the manager and team members over monitoring performance and addressing underperformance.

Middle manager involvement in strategy

One question frequently posed through research is the extent to which middle managers are involved in whole-institution strategy and decision-making. Brown *et al* (1999: 320) claim that, in schools, 'data on shared decision-making are fragmented and fragile.' A study into strategic planning in three further education colleges by Drodge and Cooper (1997) found firstly that it is difficult for colleges to devise and accept a single meaningful common mission. Secondly, in considering whole-college decision-making, middle manager involvement is seen as important, though the degree of devolution and participation varies. Thirdly, the leadership style of the Chief Executive is influential in shaping other's experience of college planning.

All the colleges in Drodge and Cooper's study adopt a structured approach to making and implementing planning decisions: corporate objectives are formulated, goals and targets are set and a monitoring process put in place, all with the Chief Executive as the leader of the process. The differences in the depth of manager involvement in planning lie in the nature of the consultation, the degree of freedom of the participants, whether there is commitment to personal growth and whether commitment to the plan is encouraged or compliance is imposed (Drodge and Cooper, 1997).

These findings largely concur with those of Brown *et al* (1999) in schools. They found that shared decision-making is enabled where school structures give regular, formal opportunities for collaboration across departments and where head teachers see

middle managers as having a whole-school development role. Likewise, Earley (1998) found that middle manager involvement in strategy depends on the flatness of the management structure, the management style of senior staff, the culture of the organisation, both the encouragement to become involved and the individual's willingness to be involved, and lastly, the time and opportunity for involvement.

All three studies emphasise the importance of the structure of the organisation in enabling collaboration, and the need for willingness among senior and middle managers for middle managers to be involved in shared decision-making. The emphasis placed by colleges upon planning which underlies Drodge and Cooper's survey is noted elsewhere in the literature. Simkins (2000: 326) comments that, in further education, 'plans and planning seem to be major expressions of organisational culture,' and he appears to share the opinion of a college principal quoted by Lumby that, in instituting strategic planning, the FEFC had 'forced colleges kicking and screaming into better practice' (Lumby, 1999: 91).

This all serves to indicate that middle managers in further education colleges are likely to be involved in some way in strategic activity. Lumby (1999) found that colleges vary as to the extent of collegiality and collaboration in devising plans; they tend towards collaboration, as the extent of the colleges' external commitment makes internal development of plans problematical. Even more problematical is the unimportance of the emergent plan, which in a rapidly changing environment is felt to be redundant as soon as it is produced. *What Lumby's respondents see as important is taking part in the process; as one principal puts it: 'you have to say things to yourself and to each other if you are to be able to act purposefully' (Lumby, 1999: 75).* In a small-scale study undertaken by Powell (2001: 29), there is indication that college middle managers are more effective as managers when they can see the 'big picture': the whole-college view. Their responses indicate that they are impeded in their work by not being able to share senior manager ideals, by poor communication and tokenistic consultation. The kind of discussions referred to in Lumby's study above would help to relieve these impediments. The message for this research is that, although middle managers will vary in their involvement in formulating strategic plans, all are likely to be involved in implementation. Whether, in the turbulent environment of further education, they are able to implement flexibly and appropriately and with authority,

depends on the extent to which they have been enabled to internalise the underlying purposes of the plan.

Differential authority in role

Quinley *et al* (1995), writing about midlevel managers in US community colleges, comment that managers often lack the authority to carry out their role. One concern of this research is whether the different types of manager have differential authority, perhaps linked, as above, to their understanding of whole-college issues, and perhaps because of the degree of status inherent in their role. Lumby (2001) detects a change in the status accorded to manager roles, with 'support' staff acquiring new status due to their professionalised function, but comments that status is elusive, and is usually accorded to someone other than the speaker. Palfreyman and Warner (1996), in a study of higher education managers, consider that a 'them' and 'us' mentality is commonly found in organisations where there is a bureaucracy that must interact with professionals. They consider that this can lead to conflict, but that the difference can be mutually beneficial, provided that 'management' earns the respect of the academics it supports. They point to Mintzberg's (1979) professionalised bureaucracies, where the professional administrators serve key roles in managing internal structures and relationships with partners external to the institution. From these insights it appears that different, but equal, status is possible for managers occupying different roles.

The contemporary reality may be somewhat different. Lumby (2001: 35), in her survey of (mainly) senior managers in further education colleges, asked whether they felt that the college had achieved, or wished to achieve, 'one staff' where notions of 'academic' and 'support' staff had been dismantled. Whilst 78% of respondents felt that some progress had been made, only 12% felt 'one staff' had been achieved, and 1% did not see it as a goal for their college. It is likely, therefore, that the managers in the current study will to some extent work in situations where, to quote one of Lumby's respondents, academic staff 'are the important ones and the rest are just servants' (2001: 37).

Summary

Both research and conceptual literature suggest that there are different approaches to analysing the middle manager role, which vary according to the viewpoint of the

observer and the perceptions of role of the respondents. Typologies based upon manager functions, organisational culture and underlying value-bases have been considered. Some typologies are holistic, presenting interdependent parts; some imply that managers may perform some functions and not others. The research literature enables the reader to see the theoretical role in its setting: how varying structures and leadership cultures encourage or suppress different aspects of the middle manager role. It also indicates that managers have preferences as to which parts of the role they undertake, and which they minimise.

From the analyses of role in further and higher education, a pattern emerges. Managers of different types of college function, for example managing curriculum, college services and services to students, may have differential authority in role. However, middle managers are involved to a varying degree in whole-college activities such as devising strategy, which give them a sense of corporate agency, and the extent of their knowledge of corporate management may affect the operation of other aspects of their role. They implement institutional strategy and policy at a local level, through managing people and resources to develop, provide and support learning activities. They may have 'creative space' in which to develop provision geared to local priorities, which may offer them a dispersed leadership role. Their liaison activities are evident, and this includes a 'translation' or 'buffering' function, usually operating between the senior managers and their teams. At present there is no empirically-based analysis of middle manager roles in further education colleges, and the five main functions outlined here – corporate agency, implementation, staff management, liaison and leadership – will form the basis for the typology presented in Chapter 5.

2.4 Management in Further Education

In addition to considering the nature of the manager role in further education, it is useful also to examine the changing conceptual context of the role, starting with the 'oppositional cultures' noted by Lumby and Tomlinson (2000: 139) as evident in the literature of further education. These cultures are a consequence of the political, cultural and structural changes outlined in Chapter 1, Section 1.1 and based on an assumption of conflict between 'professional lecturers' and 'managerialist' management. They are also part of a wider public sector debate. Pollitt (1990),

quoted in Randle and Brady (1997b: 125), outlines a 'new managerialism' for the public sector, based upon strict financial controls, the efficient use of resources, the discipline of the market, the extensive use of performance criteria, and the 'assertion of managerial control and the managers' right to manage.' Many of these principles can be seen as underpinning the activities of the Further Education Funding Council, and therefore colleges, subsequent to incorporation.

It is worth considering in this context the accountability framework under which the colleges operate: the model offered by Scott (1989) is an appropriate one. Colleges experience political accountability, in that they are accountable for the best use of public funds, and they have market accountability, being answerable to their customers, partners and stakeholders. Both of these facets of accountability can be seen within the managerialist principles outlined above by Pollitt (1990). Further, they have a professional accountability for maintaining the highest possible standards of teaching and training, and they have a cultural accountability to foster new insights, knowledge and understanding. These last two factors may be observed in the oppositional culture to managerialism – professionalism - which Randle and Brady (1997b: 127) claim is based upon a 'student-centred pedagogic culture.'

It is argued by Randle and Brady (1997a and b) that a paradigm shift has occurred from a 'professional' system based upon the primacy of student learning, concern for academic standards, a collegial 'community of practice' and professional autonomy, to a 'managerial' one based upon primacy of student through-put and income generation, concern for efficiency and effectiveness, control by managers and the market and a surveillance culture based upon measurement against performance indicators. Allegiance, they claim, has shifted from loyalty to students and colleagues to loyalty to the organisation (Randle and Brady, 1997a). The underlying shift from professional accountability to market accountability is evident; what is also apparent from this last statement is that this shift produces tension between the 'organic' pressure to provide according to differentiated student need and the 'mechanical' pressure to address the needs of the organisation as a whole.

It seems to observers such as Randle and Brady, writing at a time of sector turbulence and industrial conflict, that the 'new' type of manager, influenced by the market

ideology, has a different set of values from that of the academic staff, who represent 'public sector professionalism.' An alternative contemporary perspective is offered by Hewitt and Crawford (1997), based not on values but upon levels of understanding. They comment that, whereas senior managers at this time were very concerned to ensure the survival of the college, lecturers appeared not to understand the financial framework within which post-incorporation colleges operated.

A number of writers, including Lumby and Tomlinson, have disputed Randle and Brady's schismatic view. Lumby and Tomlinson (2000) carried out research with college principals at the supposed height of managerialism, and found that the principals' main concern was to serve students and the community. This is reinforced in a survey conducted by Lumby (2001) with managers occupying a range of roles, which concluded that students are the most important priority, and that adopting a business-like approach to planning and resources is part of achieving the best experience for students (Lumby, 2001). Lumby and Tomlinson (2000) propose that the disagreement is not about values in themselves, but about how they are enacted: the changing context of further education in the past decade has forced a change of 'enactment.' They also consider that there may be an element of self-interest on the part of lecturers in the 'professionalism' argument, combined with fear and resistance to the change process. Whether there ever was a 'golden age' of primacy of student learning may be open to debate.

A comparison of managerialism with bureau-professionalism, which demonstrates an attachment to 'client-centred, professional, public service values,' is developed by Simkins (2000: 321). In bureau-professionalism, bureaucratic rules and professional discretion and judgment are combined in order to effect decision-making, and agendas are based upon the needs of individual clients as interpreted by professionals. In managerialism, decisions are entrusted to those holding clearly identified managerial roles, using specialist management techniques. The focus of managerialism is on the achievement of organisational objectives and outcomes. Once again, the tension is between the corporate role and the focus upon the individual, and Simkins comments (2000: 323) that 'schizoid organisations' may be in evidence, as institutions try to maintain a corporate relationship with the community whilst retaining concern with the individual learner: the aim espoused by college principals in Lumby and Tomlinson's

(2000) survey. He concludes that there is evidence of bureau-professionalism and managerialism in both colleges and schools, and that there is growing tension between them, as different value systems and interests compete for influence.

A further perspective is offered by Gleeson (2001) who considers that the professional responsibilities of senior managers include interpreting national policy and making it meaningful to staff on the ground, a role similar to the internal 'brokering' role discussed in relation to middle managers. As part of this process, they may have a role to coach middle managers in taking on responsibility and accepting their 'right to manage' (Gleeson, 2001: 186). This can be seen as part of the 're-professionalisation' of further education, which in effect is a new approach to 'old' values. Gleeson observes that colleges are concerned to be more 'business-like' in a number of ways, but that their business is to address the learning needs of students. Progress towards this has been painful, as it has taken place alongside an imperative upon lecturers to work longer, more 'flexible' hours under conditions of overall reduced resource for colleges (Shain and Gleeson, 1999).

A parallel trend towards professionalisation can be seen in the areas of college management which were new at incorporation: those functions such as personnel, estates and finance which had formerly been the concern of the LEA. Initially, at incorporation, many colleges appointed academic members of staff to lead these departments, but during the 1990s the increasing practice of recruiting service managers with a background in business and commerce has resulted in these areas being managed on a professional basis. Gleeson (2001) notes that this trend coincided with the height of the industrial unrest in colleges, and that, due to the nature of their roles, these managers would tend to be associated pejoratively with 'managerialist' values. In the era of 're-professionalism', the application of business-like approaches to performing the educational purpose of the college, the professionalism of these managers may be seen more positively as contributing to the professionalism of the college as a whole.

Both of these trends are concurrent with changes in senior leadership in the sector, and with an influx of lecturers who did not work in colleges before incorporation. Research indicates that senior managers may increasingly be working within the

concepts of 'democratic professionalism,' based on sharing, co-operation and inclusivity, in order to engage staff in the business of learning (Gleeson, 2001: 194). This trend is noted in the gender-based literature on leadership, where the influx of more women into senior roles in the post-incorporation decade has been associated with a move towards more collegial styles of management in both male and female leaders (Shain, 2000; Deem *et al*, 2000).

The new lecturers are more willing to accept conditions as they are, and indeed to question the 'golden age' of student centred learning claimed by Randle and Brady (1997a and b). Shain and Gleeson (1999) note that both lecturers and managers comply either willingly or strategically with new practice within colleges, filtering the process of reform through their professional ideologies. 'Newer' managers, they observe, retain commitment to educational values and operate strategically to comply with the new regime without compromising their own values and standards. This set of trends, Shain and Gleeson argue, constitutes a strong re-professionalising agenda for colleges. They maintain that new professional identities are arising from the earlier 'ambiguities and contradictions.' They propose (Shain and Gleeson, 1999: 460) that professionalism has 'different meanings in different contexts' for different people, but that there appear to be core values which guide college practices, from which a new professionalism can be constructed.

Summary

This consideration of the changing conceptual context of further education indicates that management as an activity has been the subject of intense critical debate during the post-incorporation decade. Management, in the form of managerialism, having been viewed as the rational, mechanistic 'enemy' of professional values, is becoming a more familiar element of the new context of public and market accountability in the sector. Professionalism has moved from being a concept applied retrospectively to some 'golden age' before incorporation, and is also gradually being re-defined. Its new definitions depend upon a re-stating of the educational values of the institution within its new context of operation, and a response to the professional and cultural accountability of the college. They also depend on a recognition of the concepts of professionalism offered by the service departments of the college, and an adaptation to the necessary aspects of managerialism. The examination and re-definition of

professionalism is currently under discussion, and this research, through analysing the roles both of curriculum and service managers, potentially offers further insight into the debate. Some of the conflicts and ambiguities produced by the shifting of both context and concepts can be explored through the use of role theory.

2.5 Role theory

Maynard (1994: 56), writing soon after incorporation, identifies a number of stress factors for those working in further education. These include the conflicting demands of management and teaching, the need for new skills such as financial management, a reduction in resources and an increase in the demands placed on the profession. If this research is to examine the work of managers within a context which is stressful and is changing in fundamental ways, then a consideration of role theory will enable key influences upon the managers to be identified, and their effects to be understood. Smith (1996), in his study of academic heads of departments in universities, makes extensive use of role theory in order to identify the pressures at work in the university system. The current research adopts a different approach to analysis; nevertheless the concepts and terminology of role theory are useful in underpinning understanding of the interactions between the manager and the working environment.

Role may be seen as a 'defined social position' (Jackson, 1972: 3), in which the role-holder is the subject of the expectations of others and themselves. Role theory enables examination of the effect of changing, or ambiguous expectations, as well as the effect of overload produced by an excess of expectation, all of which are implied in the situation described by Maynard (1994) above. In this study, the review of role theory is confined to a consideration of definitions which can be used to identify the types of pressure upon the middle manager role.

To explore the terminology: Kahn *et al* (1964), having defined a person's 'office' as their 'position in terms of its relationship to others and the system as a whole,' explain that role is the set of activities associated with each office, which are defined as potential behaviours. 'These activities constitute the role to be performed, approximately, by anyone holding that office' (Kahn *et al*, 1964: 13). Burnham (1969: 73) substituting the term 'position' for 'office' clarifies thus: 'one might say that a person occupies a position, but performs a role.... A role is a dynamic aspect of a position.'

The role is defined by the role set, sometimes called role senders, who have a stake in the performance of the role (Katz and Kahn, 1966). These are principally those whose 'offices' impact upon the role-holder through being adjacent in the organisational structure or hierarchy, but can include anyone inside or outside the organisation who is connected with the role-holder's behaviour (Kahn *et al* 1964). The role-holder is a member of the role set. All of the members of the role set develop beliefs about what the role-holder should and should not do. These expectations reflect their conceptions of the office, and of the role-holder's abilities. Collectively they both define and evaluate the person in role (Katz and Kahn, 1966). The communicated role expectations comprise the sent role (Kahn *et al*, 1964), and the role-holder's perceptions and understanding of what was sent constitute the received role (Kahn *et al*, 1966).

From these basic definitions, potential problems can be perceived. The role is based upon the perceptions, understandings and values of a number of people, including the role-holder, and inevitably there will be differences to be reconciled. Also, members of the role set each have a stake in the role: their own role, or their well-being, in some way depends upon their perception of the role being carried out. These complexities can lead to a number of conflict situations. Firstly, they can lead to role pressure, where one or more members of the role set attempts to assure conformity with their expectations. The pressure may or may not be legitimate (Kahn *et al*, 1964) and may become a cause of role strain: 'the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations' (Goode, 1960: 483). Pressure may not come from one source or in one direction; where there is a 'simultaneous occurrence of two or more role expectations such that compliance with one would make compliance with the other more difficult' (Katz and Kahn, 1966: 204) the result is sent role conflict. In some situations, a single role sender may be inconsistent in the demands made upon the role-holder, leading to intra-sender conflict (Kahn *et al*, 1964); in others, role requirements may violate moral values, causing person-role conflict (Kahn *et al*, 1964).

Lastly, two major categories of role conflict are to be considered: role ambiguity and role overload. Under conditions of role ambiguity, the role-holder does not know what to do, either through lack of information, or lack of understanding of how to comply.

Some people have a higher tolerance of ambiguity than others; nevertheless, clear and consistent feedback on performance is necessary if the role-holder is to establish a 'meaningful and satisfying self identity' within the role (Kahn *et al*, 1966). Role ambiguity can also occur where there is an imbalance between what role-holders have authority to do, and those activities for which they have responsibility (Hammons, 1984). Role overload, as the term suggests, occurs when it is impossible for the person to complete all aspects of the sent roles within the time and resources available (Kahn *et al*, 1964).

Summary

The above terminology is useful when examining the complex interactions upon the middle manager's role in further education. For example, it has already been seen that the 'buffering role' of the head of department could be a source of sent role conflict, as the manager tries to reconcile the demands of senior managers with the needs and expectations of the department. In a quickly moving, turbulent environment, it is likely that the role-holder will experience role ambiguity: the role may have 'moved on' without the role-holder being fully aware of the new expectations. The conflicting paradigms of professionalism and managerialism provide a good example of managers being in situations where they feel that their moral values are under threat, thus experiencing person-role conflict. Above all, in a situation of reduced resource and increased levels of accountability, managers are likely to experience role overload: they may understand the role to a reasonable extent, they may agree with what is to be performed, but they may simply not have the time or resources to carry it out.

2.6 Conclusions

This review has provided insight into how the complexity experienced within the world of further education management may be conceptualised and analysed. One consistent thread of discussion is based upon the tension between the needs of the whole organisation and the activities of its constituent parts. This has been explored through organisational theory, principally that concerning mechanical and organic systems: systems which aim at homogeneous conformity or which depend upon the heterogeneous development of their inter-related parts. It underpins the distinction

between transactional leadership, which aims at compliance and transformational, dispersed and systemic forms of leadership, which take account of the contribution of individuals within the differentiated parts of the organisation. It re-appears in the conflicting paradigms of managerialism and professionalism: the concern for efficient systems and the concern to address the differentiated needs of learners. The tension can be seen within the changing and stressful context of further education, presented in Chapter 1, Section 1.1 and its effects can be explored using role terminology examined in this chapter, in Section 2.5.

In each case, whilst the tensions between the 'ideal types' presented in the theory have been apparent, examination of the research literature has started to reveal the shifting complexities of the situation as lived and enacted. Within complex organisations such as colleges, the extremes may exist, but the manager is likely to inhabit a world which is mixed. It may be partly mechanical, partly organic, according to the predominant accountabilities and value-sets in operation. Managers may employ and experience leadership styles which veer towards the transactional or the transformational according to context and need; they may carry out a mixture of roles, some managerial, some professional, or they may be able to reconcile the two in a personal model of the 'new professionalism.' As all the members of their role sets inhabit the same mixed and turbulent world, managers are likely to experience different kinds of role strain, role ambiguity and overload.

Considering the middle manager role itself, the literature has shown that analysis of aspects of role depends upon the concerns and perceptions of the analyst and the observed role-holder. The role can be viewed from a number of standpoints: of values, knowledge and patterns of manager activity. For this study, based upon the literature from further and higher education, a typology of middle manager activities is likely to include a consideration of their contribution to, and understanding of, whole college activities; their implementation of college functions to provide or support student learning; managing staff to effect this implementation; liaison activities which include a translation or buffering function; and finally their contribution to the leadership of the college.

In analysing the environment for management, the literature which presents the context of further education and further education management will be borne in mind, and the organisational and leadership theories will provide a framework of theory within which the environments at the different colleges can be discussed. The analysis of the complex interaction of the environment with the role will explore the various tensions referred to here, the possibilities for the middle manager to keep them in balance and reconcile them, and the resultant impact when resolution is not achieved.

Overall, the analysis will not seek to test out the data against 'given' typologies from the literature. It will draw upon a number of theorists, and reflect against a number of published research outcomes. Two threads will be consistent, however. The first is the focus upon the interaction of the pairs of structures, styles and systems summarised in this section, and the exploration of the territory inhabited by the manager within them. The second is the emergent typology of the middle manager role, also summarised in this section, which will form the basis of the analysis of the various aspects of the role. Discussion of both of these themes, together with examination of issues emergent from the analysis, will hopefully enable a new contribution to the literature of further education management.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The literature review has provided insight into the research questions, presented below.

- What roles do further education middle managers perform?
- What are the factors in the environment for management at the colleges which impact upon the role?
- How do members of the role set perceive that middle managers enact their role?
- How are the middle managers facilitated and impeded by factors in their environment for management?
- How can modelling be used to represent and interpret the interaction between middle managers and factors within their environment which facilitate and impede?
- How can the models be used for problem-solving and considering college design?

The literature on *organisational theory in particular supports an understanding of the college environment within which the managers work, and the expectations upon their role which the environment provokes. Leadership theory, whilst enabling consideration of whether middle managers are leaders, also gives insight into the ways managers enact their role, and the influence which other college leaders may have upon them. The various analyses of the middle manager role offered in the literature enable a typology to be constructed for the roles in question, and support understanding of how the roles are enacted. Role theory provides a conceptual vocabulary for analysing both the cause and effect of factors which facilitate and impede managers in carrying out their role. Finally, and importantly, the literature which depicts and analyses further education colleges and their management enables the work to be considered in its own particular educational context. All of these*

strands of thinking from earlier conceptual and empirical work contribute to the process of modelling and discussion which completes the research analysis.

The research seeks to extend this knowledge, within the context of further education colleges, through the collection and analysis of empirical data. This enquiry is based upon respect for the managers investigated, their teams and their senior colleagues, and profound interest in, and regard for, the educational work of further education colleges. The research questions are posed through a concern that, in complex organisations such as colleges, the work of the organisation as a whole, and of individuals in particular, may be impeded by inherent features of the organisation itself. Better understanding of these features may at some future time lead to enhanced outcomes, for the managers, the colleges and the students.

3.1 Research rationale

Research into the questions posed above could have been conducted in a number of ways, depending firstly upon the ontology underpinning the research (Morrison, 2002): the researcher's perceptions about the nature of reality. A positivist approach would assume that there are rational realities to be sought out, and verifiable facts which can be observed and measured (Morrison, 2002). Following this perception of reality, hypotheses could be set up concerning the research questions posed, which could be tested against assembled 'facts', either through qualitative or quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The epistemology of positivist research – its stance as to how knowledge can be acquired and communicated – assumes that knowledge of 'how things really are' and 'how things really work' can be gained and transmitted through objectively detached, value-free investigation (Guba and Lincoln, 1998). Positivist research does not lend itself to the investigation of feelings and perceptions, and requires that researchers 'purge' themselves of values which may impair their objectivity and undermine their research (Bryman, 1988).

An interpretive approach would acknowledge the ontological concept that reality is not 'out there' as an amalgam of verifiable facts, but that people experience and construe reality in different ways; in other words, that there are multiple realities (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998a). It would also be based upon an epistemology which considers knowledge to be found in 'the complex world of lived experience', seen from 'the point

of view of those who live it' (Schwandt, 1998: 221). Interpretive researchers construct a reading of the meanings offered to them by those whom they study (Schwandt, 1998). In doing so, 'interpretive researchers also recognise that they are a part of, rather than separate from, the research topics they investigate' (Morrison, 2002: 18).

An interpretive approach is more conducive to the research undertaken for this study. The stance of the researcher is that the phenomena under investigation are complex, and that they are experienced and interpreted differently by the participants: the respondents' 'knowledge' of the situation will vary according to their unique experience. It is hoped that theories can be built from the patterns of knowledge perceived, but these will be influenced by the understanding and viewpoint both of the researcher and the participants, and do not constitute a definitive 'reality'. It is also acknowledged that, however objective a stance is adopted, the researcher's own understanding of further education colleges will affect the conduct of the research and the interpretation of the results. As Lincoln and Guba (1998: 200) note, in qualitative research: 'findings are created by the interaction of inquirer and phenomenon', rather than by the enquirer 'standing behind a one-way mirror' and viewing and recording phenomena objectively.

The identification of patterns of knowledge within the data will lead to the construction of grounded theory, the generation of theory from the data collected. Glaser and Strauss (1967: 6) propose that: 'hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research.' This process involves an iterative process of checking theories against findings, and a refinement of the theories during the process of the research. This method of operation is consistent with adopting a search for meanings within the patterns presented by the data. However, the researcher's construct of reality is also influenced by the theories and experiences presented in the literature, as outlined above. This affects the research at a number of points: the development of theories, the selection of data codes and the analysis of the data.

A further choice occurs between quantitative and qualitative research. Whilst following an interpretive approach, quantitative research could be carried out. Within this paradigm, there would be a concern for investigating causality, through a process of

concept formation, observation and measurement (Morrison, 2002). This might, for example, involve multi-dimensional analysis of social episodes encountered by the subjects of the research (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Quantitative research could be adopted as part of a 'mixed approach' to the study, perhaps to compare evidence obtained through individual case study with findings from a broad national survey, in order to detect consistent factors. In the current study, the main concern is to gather rich data from a small number of sites. It did not seem possible to gain the same quality of insight into the research questions from a broad survey, and this approach was not adopted. A small amount of statistical analysis was undertaken as part of research, but this is not a major feature of the research design.

A qualitative approach was felt to fit better with the interpretive stance of this research. In the overview of qualitative research types (Tesch, 1990) presented in Miles and Huberman (1994: 7), the interest for the present research can be identified firstly as the 'discerning of patterns', which can lead to conceptualisation. Secondly, the research interest lies in 'the discovery of regularities', which involves the 'identification (and categorisation) of elements and exploration of their connections, potentially leading to the formation of grounded theory.' In terms of this research, the study seeks to find common factors which encapsulate the role of middle managers, and which facilitate and impede them, and to identify discrete features which differ between roles or between college environments, causing differential impact on effectiveness. It is upon these phenomena that the theory is grounded.

Qualitative research 'takes the subject's perspective as central' and the understanding of those perspectives as critical (Morrison, 2002:19). In this study, the central focus is the collective perspective from within the colleges of the middle manager role. This focus is particularly important to the current study, as like investigations are not to be found in the further education literature. Consideration is given in qualitative research to the 'holistic picture within which the research is embedded' (Morrison, 2002: 20): in this research design, the working environment at the colleges forms part of the subject of the research. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998a: 10) comment, qualitative researchers are more likely than quantitative to 'confront the constraints of the everyday social world. They see this world in action and embed their findings in it.' Lastly, in congruence with the qualitative paradigm, there was a reluctance to impose prior

theoretical frameworks to the data (Morrison, 2002): the theories presented emerge from an iterative process of analysing the data and considering the literature, which is presented in Figure 3.1.

Having chosen to follow the interpretive, qualitative paradigms, the next choice is of the overall research approach: whether, for example, a survey, action research or case study approach would be appropriate, or a research design based upon documentary analysis. The focus of the research is upon current phenomena – or at least those current at the time of data collection – so a purely documentary approach, which deals mainly with things past, would not be appropriate. There is also the practical restriction that there would be few appropriate documents through which to investigate the chosen phenomena. Likewise, an action research approach would be an inappropriate choice; the researcher has no means to influence and evaluate future developments at the colleges investigated. The stance of this research is to investigate in order to understand, and to develop theory about the phenomena under review. The theory may in time have practical outcomes, but the purpose is not in the first instance to effect and evaluate change.

The main choices, therefore, are between a survey approach and that of case study. The survey approach was seriously considered at the research design stage; the national surveys conducted into related manager issues in higher education by Smith (1996; 2002) and in further education by Lumby (2001), both yielded useful data. When the design for this research was considered further, however, the main concerns were with understanding and analysing the complexity, both of the manager role itself, and the environment in which it is situated. This complexity would not be uncovered easily by means of a survey, even one which included a range of interviews with managers at sampled colleges.

3.2 Case study

A case study approach was therefore chosen because of its appropriateness in exploring the complexity of a chosen situation, through the collection of data in close proximity to its natural context (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Case studies use multiple sources of evidence, which enable particular attention to be paid to 'the subtleties and complexity of the case in its own right' (Adelman *et al*, 1980: 59-60). This approach

recognises 'the complexity and "embeddedness" of social truths' (Adelman *et al*, 1980: 59), and seeks to understand and explore them, embracing the paradoxes inherent in the people, events and sites studied (Simons, 1996).

Case studies primarily illuminate the 'case' itself – they describe and examine the phenomenon within its local setting. They can also be used instrumentally, as Stake asserts (1995: 16): 'We will have a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that we may gain insight by studying a particular case.' Where case studies are appropriately designed and conducted, therefore, the insights gained can be used for generalisation, application and theory building (Stenhouse, 1985; Adelman *et al*, 1980). It is this use of the insight gained through detailed study of cases, in order to build theory and suggest application, which is the intention of this research.

It was further decided that generalisation and theory-building would be strengthened if a multiple case study was conducted, to enable the data to be seen through the 'multiple lenses' (Eisenhardt, 2002: 7) of four different college environments. Yin (1989) proposes that in multiple case design, each case serves a specific purpose within the overall framework of the enquiry; it should be selected either to produce similar results or to produce contrary results for predictable reasons. Stake (1998) contends that it may or may not be known in advance whether individual cases in the case study collection manifest a common characteristic. They are chosen because understanding each case, whether similar or dissimilar, may lead to better understanding and theorising about a still larger number of cases. As will be argued below, in this study elements of both potential sameness and difference were sought through the choice of each case. As far as was practical, the study was replicated at each of the different locations, as suggested by Yin (1989).

Case studies have been categorised in a number of different ways. This review will mainly address one set of categories, the one proposed by Bassey (1999), as his discussion of theory-building through case study is important to the research. Firstly there are Bassey's 'story-telling and picture-drawing' case studies, called by Yin (1989: 16) 'descriptive case study.' Both are analytical accounts; story-telling is a predominantly narrative account of the exploration and analysis of the case, set

against a time-line. Picture drawing is a descriptive account which draws together the results of the exploration and the analysis of the case (Bassey, 1999). Both enable a detailed portrayal of an event, project, programme or system within its natural setting. An evaluative case study would take this portrayal one step further; it would be designed to explore the event, project, programme or system 'in order to focus on its worthwhileness' (Bassey, 1999: 63).

Finally, there are theory-seeking and theory-testing case studies, respectively called by Yin (1989: 16) 'exploratory' and 'explanatory' case studies; this is the conceptual area in which the present study lies. Bassey (1999: 62) considers these studies to be 'particular studies of general issues,' where a singularity is chosen because it is expected to be in some way typical of something more general. The case is examined in order to construct or test theory, the outcome of which according to Bassey (1999: 51) can be 'fuzzy generalisations' – generalisations which have built-in uncertainty. This approach may serve to answer to some extent the criticism that case study contains little basis for scientific generalisation (Yin, 1989). It does not aim at scientific, or rational, generalisation, but it does seek insight which may be applicable elsewhere. As has already been stated, it is hoped that the use of multiple case studies will enhance generalisability.

3.3 Defining the case

Stake (1998) notes that intrinsic casework starts with the cases pre-specified: the doctor and the social worker do not choose their cases, they receive them. The social scientist, and within social science the educational researcher, is presented with a broad field of potential cases from which to choose. Bassey (1999) offers a multi-part definition of case study, which will be used here to frame the decisions made concerning the case and its investigation. The enquiry should be into 'interesting aspects of an educational activity, or programme, or institution, or system' (Bassey, 1999: 58). (All underlinings in this section are the present author's.) It was a concern of this study that the aspects under scrutiny should be of interest, not only to the researcher, but to the participants, and thereby, hopefully, to subsequent users of the research within the sector.

A pilot study was therefore carried out in the autumn of 1999, by means of semi-structured telephone interviews with a convenience sample of thirteen curriculum managers at five general further education colleges, to enable the researcher to determine a framework for the research, or as Yin (1989: 80) puts it, 'to develop relevant lines of questions.' Telephone interviews, pre-arranged with individuals occupying target roles at a range of colleges, enabled a quickly obtained response from a 'scatter' of colleges, to gather information about the role, and to probe matters of concern to the managers. This study has been reported in Briggs (2001), and is included as Appendix 12. The conclusions of the study identified a number of factors which enable the managers to lead their departments effectively, largely emanating from the structures and systems of the college, the support of the role set and the degree of respect accorded to the role-holder. A number of negative factors also concerned the respondents, including the lack of clarity and degree of complexity of their role, and the extent of their authority.

The limited nature of the pilot study did not allow inclusion of middle managers occupying service and student service roles. Consideration of the literature revealed a startling lack of research on middle managers occupying non-curriculum roles, yet it is felt by the researcher that the articulation of college management systems depends upon the work of all 'types' of middle manager. The main study was therefore designed to encompass all three types of role: firstly heads of curriculum departments, sections of college provision which may comprise one or more subjects; secondly managers of services to students, for example: heads of learning resources, learning support or student services; and thirdly heads of individual service departments, for example: estates, finance and personnel managers. The curriculum heads were normally at a level below 'Head of Faculty', as heads of faculty often form part of the senior management of the college; they were therefore managers at the fourth tier of the hierarchy presented in Figure 1.2. The service and student service heads, being part of smaller systems, were generally managers at the third tier (See Figure 1.1).

Further reading of the literature, bearing in mind the issues identified through the pilot study, enabled the range of questions presented in Section 3.0 to be devised. These concern the nature of the middle manager role in colleges, the factors inherent in the college environment which enable and impede it, differences between types of role

and types of college environment, and ways in which the findings may be conceptualised and modelled. These issues comprise the 'interesting aspects' of the case study investigation: primarily of interest because they have not previously been investigated in published work.

The second criterion to be addressed is that case study 'is conducted within a localised boundary of space and time' (Bassey, 1999: 58). In this study, four general further education colleges were chosen, partly for their range of characteristics, and partly because of their availability: their principals were willing for the research to take place. Two (College A and College C) were identified through the pilot study as having features which might be relevant to the main study. Both are large and multi-site; College A is smaller than College C, and was formed by amalgamation ten years prior to the research. College C at the time of the research was of relatively recent formation. Two other, smaller colleges were added from among a number of 'volunteers' responding to an invitation to be included in the research posted on the network of FE college principals. One, College B, is large and has its provision mainly on one site; the other, College D, is medium-sized and single site. Within the constraints of accessibility, this sample could be described as purposive (Fogelman, 2002). The four colleges were chosen because they potentially offered features which would replicate across the case study, producing similar results, and features which would differ, producing contrary results for predictable reasons (Yin, 1989).

The number of colleges chosen was pragmatic: a total of four offered the possibility of considering contrasting pairs, and four colleges was the maximum which was judged manageable for a single-handed researcher. For convenience, colleges were chosen from the East and West Midlands, and from London. All colleges had received at least grade three for management at their most recent inspection. This indicated that strengths and weaknesses in management were evenly balanced in the case of the 'grade three' college, or that strengths outweighed weaknesses in the case of the other three colleges. The colleges therefore potentially offered reasonably positive conditions under which the middle managers might operate. The time-boundary of the case was intended to be the late spring and summer of 2001, and most of the data collection was carried out in this period. Difficulties of access to respondents at two of the colleges meant that two supplementary visits were made later in 2001.

Thirdly, Bassey (1999: 58) proposes that case study research should be conducted 'mainly in its natural context, and within an ethic of respect for persons.' Preliminary visits were therefore made to each college, to discuss the nature of the research with a contact person designated by the college. A protocol for the research (Appendix 1) was presented and agreed, and was disseminated to respondents before they became involved in the research, thus forming the basis for a research contract (Blaxter *et al*, 1996). The preliminary discussion enabled potential respondents to be identified, such that they satisfied the needs of the research, but did not expose any manager who was insecure in post. As members of the managers' role set were to be contacted, it was deemed unethical to include managers known to be experiencing difficulties, even though it was not the intention of the research to offer a critique of individual managers. Therefore, just as the choice of college offered reasonable conditions under which the middle managers might operate, the choice of manager was such that they were deemed to be reasonably successful. This approach would minimise the chance of causing harm to participants (Busher, 2002), and be consistent with the overall research design. The decision was made to study the role under optimal conditions for management, whilst acknowledging the turbulent nature of the sector and the constantly changing fortunes of colleges. It was felt that under optimal conditions, facilitators and impediments would be more easily identified than in conditions where the college, or the manager, was deemed to be failing.

The 'study in its natural context' was conducted over four non-consecutive days at each college. Advocates of interpretive approaches in general, and of case study in particular, advocate 'immersion' in the study environment (Morrison, 2002: 20). However, practical factors – of access to sites and to people, and of availability of researcher time – also shape the research process. Within the time and access available, it was possible to collect sufficient data for 'significant features of the case' to be explored and interpreted (Bassey, 1999: 47). Spending non-consecutive days, which is a potential barrier to immersion, in practice enabled comparisons to be made of the colleges as the researcher moved between them during data collection, and this facilitated early theory-building.

3.4 Research design

The research has a dual focus: upon the collective role of middle managers, and upon the environment within which management takes place. A 360° investigation of the role was conducted through a survey which comprised individual interviews with four senior managers, including the principal at each college; focus group interviews with heads of curriculum areas, heads of college services and heads of college services to students; and questionnaire survey of a sample of team members of the managers interviewed in the focus groups. This approach was taken in order to view the middle manager role from as many perspectives as possible, increasing the opportunity to see and report the situation through the eyes of the participants (Morrison, 2002). Multiple sources of evidence were also needed in order to assist triangulation (Bush, 2002) and to increase the soundness of construct validity (Yin, 1989). In addition to the three types of survey, analysis was also undertaken of a range of college documents which depict the working context of each college and offer illustrations of the management structures. Lists of the documents studied at each college are presented as Appendix 2. The environment for management was also observed in practice through attendance at meetings at which a range of senior and middle managers were present. The observation proforma is included as Appendix 8 and observation reports as Appendix 15.

Questioning patterns at all three layers of the survey were based upon the perceived role of middle managers, including ways of judging effectiveness; factors within the environment for management which support and impede middle managers in role; and perceptions of the management style of the college overall, and of the respondents' management area. Senior and middle managers were also asked about their perceptions and expectations of the roles of the different types of middle managers, and how well they worked together.

All of the survey tools were piloted through the co-operation of managers at a local general further education college, which had not been chosen for case study. The main changes made were to the questionnaire proformas, following advice received about the range of understanding of team members of the issues discussed. Interview and questionnaire proformas are enclosed as Appendices 3, 4 and 7.

Individual interviews

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the tool to survey senior staff, as these 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1988: 137) are appropriate for eliciting data which deal with topics in depth and in detail. Using a semi-structured format, the interviewer may alter the question sequence and probe for more information, adapting the interview to the level of articulacy and the thought-flow of the respondent (Fielding and Thomas, 2001). Cohen and Manion (1994: 272) offer insight into interviews, saying that they provide access to what is 'inside a person's head', making it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes and dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs). All three of these areas of thought were sought from respondents.

Forty-minute interviews were 'booked' with each senior manager, through the agency of the local contact, to be held in their own office (the 'natural context'), with extraneous distractions such as phone calls and visitors prevented. (For sampling methods, see Section 3.5 below.) Following the protocol, the interviews were tape-recorded and transcriptions of the raw data were sent to the respondent for amendment and verification, as recommended *inter alia* by Fielding and Thomas, (2001). They were then agreed as data 'belonging' to this research, which would be treated with confidentiality and used anonymously. The same question areas were covered with each senior manager, but according to the trains of thought pursued, they were not always covered in the same order. Respondents were given copies of the interview schedule at the outset of the interview, and questions from the interviewer normally took the form of prompts towards a particular question, rather than repeating the question itself. This was done in an attempt to produce a naturalistic flow of discussion: a 'two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer' (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 271), or perhaps more accurately a 'one-way pseudoconversation' (Fontana and Frey, 1998: 64), during which depth of thought and insight could be achieved.

The interviewer identified with the respondent which manager roles were under discussion, by means of a diagram in the interview pack (Appendix 3) and through management structure charts provided by the college. Interview questions then invited comment on the function of middle managers at the college, and whether this function

was actually carried out. Respondents considered whether there were differences in role, expectation or regard between the different types of middle manager. They were asked about features of the college culture and structure which support and impede managers in their work, and whether they were enabled to work together. They were invited to gauge the management culture at the college, and to explore predominant leadership styles by means of a tool provided in the pack. In this way, the first four research questions (see Section 3.0) were addressed at a senior level in each college.

Group interviews

Group interviews were the chosen research tool to draw out the perceptions of the middle managers themselves. Group interviews, or focus groups, lack the individual, personal nature of the single interview encounter (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). However, they are increasingly used as a tool for gauging consensus and for gaining access to group meanings and norms (Bloor *et al*, 2001). They are 'data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding, and cumulative and elaborative over and above individual responses' (Fontana and Frey, 1998: 55). The 'teasing out' of meaning within the group may provoke dispute and leave areas of ambiguity (Bloor *et al*, 2001). This is not necessarily a disadvantage, as the researcher has insight into both group norms and areas of group ambiguity. It was important for the purpose of this research to judge generically 'what middle managers think', whilst offering the opportunity for a range of views to surface, provoked by the managers' joint engagement with the topic.

After initial discussion with the college contact to identify appropriate groups of managers (see Section 3.5 below), forty-minute interviews were arranged by the contact at times of mutual availability in meeting rooms at the college. The aim was to assemble generically coherent groups of people, at a time which was convenient to them, in a setting with which they were familiar. As with the individual interviews, respondents were given copies of the protocol in advance, had the research explained to them by the interviewer at the outset of the interview, and had copies of the interview schedule for their own use during the session. Group transcripts were sent to each member of the group for verification before being acknowledged as data 'owned' by the research; individual speakers are not identified on the transcripts, and the data have been treated confidentially.

The questions (see Appendix 4) were set out in the form of key issues (printed in bold), and supplementary questions and prompts which could be explored if necessary. Questions were not replicated exactly from the senior manager schedule, but covered the same generic areas. They were adapted to include issues of concern to the managers themselves, using insight gained from the pilot study and from the literature. The areas covered were the middle manager role itself, including the FENTO (2001) summary of the role, the managers' assessment of their own level of authority and ways in which they judged their own effectiveness. Managers were also asked about factors at the college which enable and impede them in role, including questions exploring role strain and role ambiguity. The senior manager question about college leadership styles was replicated at middle manager level, and the schedule included a number of short questions to be answered on paper, to assess the level of whole-college participation of the manager, and to invite them to sum up their role against categories elicited from the literature. The final question, 'If you could change up to three things to make your role as a manager easier, what would they be?' was on each occasion opened for discussion, forming a lively 'endpiece' to the encounter. The interview schedule had space for managers to record their own thoughts during the session if they wished. Once again, the first three research questions were addressed, this time at middle manager level.

Questionnaires

Questionnaires were selected as the research tool for obtaining response from the managers' teams (for proforma, see Appendix 7). Questionnaires offer access to structured data, can be completed at a time convenient to the respondent, and can be designed for speedy analysis (Simmons, 2001). This was partly a practical approach, to reach a sufficient number of team members whilst minimising disturbance to college life. Another practical concern was that, whilst managers generally had college 'meeting slots' which could be used for group interviews, this did not apply to team members, who might moreover be employed at varying times of the day and evening, at a range of sites. Questionnaires were therefore judged to be the best way of obtaining a 'broad brush' of opinion with minimal intrusion and disturbance. Following conventional research ethics (Bell, 2002), respondents were informed of the purpose

of the survey, and were free to respond or not, as they wished; their replies were treated anonymously. The sampling design is discussed in Section 3.5.

Despite the attractiveness of questionnaires in potentially supplying standardised, codable answers (Simmons, 2001), it was decided to include a range of 'open' questions to respondents, which matched the areas of open discussion covered by the interviews. These covered the team members' perception of their managers' role, ways in which they would judge manager effectiveness, and factors which they judged helpful or impeding to their manager in role. In addition, they were asked three 'closed' questions, one which replicated at a team level the college leadership styles question asked to all other respondents, and two questions on perceived categories of role, upon which middle managers had been questioned. In this way, the questionnaire was designed to enable comparison of team members' responses with those of senior and middle managers, thus enabling triangulation.

Observation

In order to view a sample of managers within one aspect of their 'naturalistic environment', it was decided to attend, as a non-participant observer, one meeting at each college at which both middle and senior managers were present. Observation is a powerful research tool, which seeks explicit evidence through the eyes of the researcher (Moyle, 2002); this approach would therefore add a further dimension to the researcher's view of the managers' work. Within the constraints of time and access, only one meeting observation per college was feasible. It is therefore acknowledged that observation of a single meeting, with only restricted feedback as to whether this meeting was representative of normal working practice, is of limited value. It was, however, enlightening to use the meeting observation, together with field notes, to gauge the working environment of managers at the different colleges. The field notes (Fielding, 2001) added an element of unstructured observation to the data set, and together the structured and unstructured observations served to illustrate and interpret comments made during the senior and middle manager interviews. Both the meeting observation and the unstructured observation of the college contexts were conducted as non-participant observer (Moyle, 2002). However, the fact that the researcher had worked for some time in further education was made known to participants. This enabled acceptance of the researcher, and lessened the self-

consciousness of those being observed, thus increasing the likelihood of 'natural' behaviour (Delamont, 1992).

An observation schedule was used (Appendix 8) to enable systematic recording at the meetings (Moyle, 2002). This included data which enabled identification of the number and gender of senior and middle managers present. Space was available to record the number and type of contribution made by the chair, by senior and middle managers for each item on the agenda. A tally was added to the proforma to judge how many managers, of which level and gender, participated in each section of the discussion. Notes were made as to the nature of contributions, under six main headings: commanding, selling, advisory, negotiating, problem-solving and support, and field notes of a more general nature were also made. The meeting agenda, together with any supplementary documents, was attached to the completed schedule as part of the case study record. These records, together with field notes, formed part of the data available for analysis of the environment for management at each college.

Documentary analysis

Further access to data concerning the environment for management was obtained through scrutiny of college documents. One drawback of research through existing documents is that they are not designed for the purpose of the research, and are affected by the social constructs of the writer (Denscombe, 1998). These factors can, however, be seen as an attraction. The documents are products of the system being investigated, within which they are 'defined and made meaningful' (Manning and Cullum-Swan (1998). They constitute 'texts', or units of meaning produced by or about the college, following certain styles and conventions, which can be 'read' and interpreted in order to analyse the social phenomena which they portray (Cortazzi, 2002). As such, they contribute to the researcher's aim to represent reality (Hammersley, 2002). Analysing a range of documents, portraying the college from a number of viewpoints, coloured by a range of 'agendas', enabled the researcher to build a mental picture of each college as it 'sees itself.'

A number of documents were requested from each college, such as portrayals of the management structures, meetings schedules and communication grids, generic and specific job descriptions for managers, staff handbooks and relevant college policies,

for example the equal opportunities policy, information for applicants to posts at the college, and a recent self-assessment report. College inspection reports, prospectuses, newsletters and websites were also accessed. Together, they offer a range of perspectives on the college, written for a variety of purposes: evaluative, persuasive, informational, descriptive. The types of document provided at each college were not identical: lists of those received are recorded in Appendix 2. The documents were used to provide data for the analysis of the environment for management, presented in Chapter 4. They also served to support the understanding and interpretation of comments made during the interviews.

3.5 Sampling

Sampling of colleges

The process for selecting the colleges has been described in Section 3.3. It should be noted here that this research would not have got under way without the direct advocacy of the principal of College A, who was known to the researcher. Letters and phone calls from the researcher to senior staff at a number of colleges deemed suitable for the research had yielded no response, other than from College A. This principal offered to solicit help by means of an email to members of the FE college principals' network, which briefly commended the worthiness of the research and the probity of the researcher. This produced 20 responses within 24 hours, including a response from College C, which had originally been selected and approached. This enabled sampling choices to be made.

The sample of colleges selected was not intended to be representative of general further education colleges, either through being a significant proportion of the total number, or through offering regional representation. As they were to be used for theory-building, colleges were chosen for theoretical, not statistical reasons (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). To some extent, the sample is one of convenience: four was a manageable number of studies to be undertaken, and the colleges had to be accessible to the researcher. Within these constraints, some choice was possible, and colleges were chosen purposively (Fogelman, 2002), offering a range of college locations, sizes and numbers of sites, and colleges which had recently or historically amalgamated, or where amalgamation had not been a factor. All are colleges which

offer a wide range of subjects and levels of study, and where management was deemed in inspection reports to be reasonably sound, potentially offering optimal conditions for managers. This provided a range of case study locations where there were features which were replicated across all colleges and features which would differ, with each case serving a specific purpose within the enquiry (Yin, 1989).

Sampling of senior managers

Sampling within the college was undertaken with the agreement of, and sometimes following suggestions from, the principal; choices were made through discussion with a senior manager in each case, who acted as the college contact. Busher (2002: 76) comments that 'senior staff, who can control access to institutions for researchers, may restrict or select the range of participants with whom researchers can work.' This comment applies both to the sampling of colleges, as shown above, and to the sampling within colleges. Research activity is an intrusion into college life, and the researcher was willing to agree to some restrictions. Moreover, in cases where the suggested sample was not adequate for the research, appropriate adjustments were made by the college without objection.

Three senior staff were chosen, in addition to the principal, who collectively had responsibility for middle managers occupying a range of roles. This was therefore a purposive sample of senior staff who might be expected to relate to the range of roles and circumstances of the managers under scrutiny. Where possible, there was a balance of male and female respondents, but area of responsibility was deemed to be more important to the research than gender. Interviews were arranged, and achieved with all the senior managers chosen, a total of 16 in all.

Sampling of middle managers

In the case of senior manager sampling, the intended and the achieved sample (Fogelman, 2002) were the same. In the case of middle managers, it was not. Access was requested at each college to three groups of 'around six' managers; one group each of curriculum managers, service managers and managers of services to students. As the colleges vary in size, six was taken, not as a particular proportion of the manager roll, but as a convenient number for managing discussion: a group size deemed by Cronin (2001) as providing effective focus group communication. It was

anticipated – with justification – that it would be difficult to assemble groups at a time which was mutually convenient for the managers; the number of groups requested was therefore restricted to three to prevent undue pressure on the college contact.

In each generic group, managers occupying a range of roles were requested: for example, there should not be a predominance of managers from one curriculum area or from one college site. In practice, the groups were assembled from whichever managers were available and willing to attend – a factor which may have biased the sample towards those with more available time, or those who wished most to discuss their role – and in the case of curriculum managers at Colleges A and C, these were based at one site. On two occasions, the researcher arrived to find that it had not been possible to convene the group, and on several occasions the group was smaller than anticipated. At College B, this resulted in a fourth group being convened, and at Colleges C and D in interviews being undertaken beyond the anticipated timescale of the data collection. At College D, two of the focus groups were mixed, containing both service and student service managers. What had set out to be a purposive sample had become one of convenience; it must be noted, however, that all the managers interviewed occupied roles which were appropriate to the research. In all, 45 middle managers were interviewed, just over 60% of the hoped-for number. The achieved samples are listed in Appendix 5.

Fogelman (2002: 106) comments encouragingly regarding the intended and achieved sample: 'No researcher will be penalised for having had to accept the inevitable limitations and practical problems which arise in studying real-life situations.' It was anticipated that the intended samples for middle managers and team members might not be achieved, due to the day-to-day pressures upon managers and team members. The test of probity for the sample is taken from Bassey (1999: 47), 'that sufficient data are collected for researchers to be able to explore significant features of the case and to put forward interpretations of what is observed.' In this case, the range of data, and its richness, was taken to be sufficient for purpose.

Sampling of team members

Sampling for the questionnaires was aimed at a general 'snapshot' of opinion from team members, and was chosen for simplicity of operation, bearing in mind that

distribution of questionnaires would fall to focus group respondents. Quota sampling was used, to try to elicit opinion from a range of full and part-time staff. Managers attending focus groups were asked to pass on survey forms to up to six men and six women who fell into particular employment categories (see Appendix 6 for the specification). Not all managers had twelve people who could be sampled and surveyed: the number of respondents per focus group was therefore variable.

As part of the commitment to confidentiality, it was made clear to the middle managers that although questionnaires were to be returned directly by respondents to the researcher, generic questionnaire forms were being issued which prevented the researcher from 'tying' team responses to particular managers. It was emphasised that the research was not a critique of individual managers; it was hoped that this strategy would not only respect the self-esteem of the managers, but would encourage them to distribute the forms. A total of 288 forms was distributed, with 112 returned, an overall return rate of 39%, with a range of 36% - 42% return rate between the colleges. There was no practical way of repeating the survey to achieve further returns.

3.6 Reliability, validity and trustworthiness

The above discussion of intended and achieved samples leads appropriately to a consideration of validity, reliability and trustworthiness of data. Reliability is variously defined, but is generally considered to be the extent to which repeating the research procedure would produce similar results (Bush, 2002). One test of this is provided in the current research by the validation of interview transcripts. Respondents were not only invited to check transcripts for accuracy, but also to annotate if they felt that a true representation of their situation and opinions had not been given. One respondent, who during her interview had been distressed about events at the college, made alterations to substantial sections of her interview transcript; other respondents largely confined themselves to altering errors of fact. This indicates that, on the whole, the respondents were happy that the transcripts represented their situation and opinions. Within-college coherence of results, obtained by triangulating the various sources of data at a single college, is a good indicator of reliability, and this was achieved, as is demonstrated in Chapter 4. A further test of the reliability of the current research, following the rationale offered by Yin (1989), is the extent of the similarity of outcomes

from the four colleges, in situations where differences at the colleges could not account for difference in data. However, when considering both within-college analysis and between-college analysis, the researcher must be aware of the 'holistic fallacy', where events are interpreted as more patterned and congruent than they really are (Cohen *et al*, 2000).

One of the objects of the research is to gather a range of perceptions and concepts of reality, a 'rich picture' of the managers' world at the four colleges. This approach should serve to enhance the validity of the research, validity being the extent to which the research accurately describes the phenomenon under scrutiny (Bush, 2002). Yin (1989) comments that 'construct validity' is increased by using multiple sources of evidence in a manner encouraging convergent enquiry. The research methods in this study have been designed with construct validity in mind, focusing a number of different data sets in a convergent manner upon the subject of the enquiry: the role of the middle manager within its working environment. Triangulation of the various sources of evidence used in this enquiry, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, should therefore increase construct validity. In addition, if external validity is the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings (Bush, 2002), then, according to Yin (1994) the problem of generalisation can be minimised by replicating the study in another similar setting. Replicating the study in four settings may therefore provide a test for both the reliability of the research tools and the validity of the findings.

Bassey (1999) proposes the concept of 'trustworthiness' as an appropriate alternative to reliability and validity when conducting case studies. The first four of his eight tests of trustworthiness are appropriate at this point. They invite the researcher to question the length of engagement with the data sources, the persistence of observation of emerging issues, the checking of raw data with their sources and the triangulation of data leading to analytical statements. Within the acknowledged restrictions on the length of engagement with the data sources, all four questions have been addressed in the design and conduct of this research. *The colleges were visited during an intensive data collection period, documentary evidence was available for consultation during and after this time, and respondents were accessible for verification and queries. Raw data were checked with their sources, iterative analysis of the various data sets was used to devise and refine analytical statements. Data were analysed in*

a number of different ways, paying regard to the role of the respondent, the different college environments and the type of role and aspect of role of the middle manager. From these various analyses, the emergent theories were built. Figure 3.1, at the end of this chapter, offers evidence of this process.

3.7 Analytical techniques

Data analysis consists of examining, categorising, tabulating or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial propositions of the study. (Yin, 1994: 105)

Senior and middle manager interview data

Analysis of qualitative data was undertaken using a system of structuring and coding, as recommended by *inter alia* by Watling (2002) and Silverman (2000). This enabled the interview transcripts and qualitative questionnaire data to be put into a manageable format, and preliminary analysis undertaken through the allocation of concept codes. Each of the transcripts was divided into small sections, or utterances, which comprised either a question from the interviewer, a short answer, or a sub-section of an answer addressing one topic. The utterances were transferred from a table in Microsoft Word to a Microsoft Excel chart. Identifiers were placed in the left-hand columns of the charts, to locate each utterance securely in the transcript and in the research. As Table 3.1 demonstrates for senior manager transcripts, the college, the senior manager, the utterance and the question are all 'tagged' to each utterance.

Coll	SM	Utt	Qu	Text	Role	Fac	Imp	Env	Notes
C	2	1		<i>If you would just like to introduce yourself to the tape</i>					
C	2	2		I am one of the College Directors with specific responsibility for quality and standards.					
C	2	3	1A	<i>Just homing in on the structure of middle management what college function do you feel they perform, what should they do, why has the college got managers at this level?</i>					
C	2	4	1A	I think they are in a very difficult role in an organisation, trying to bridge the gap between strategy and operation and having to understand in some detail both elements of that, being able to ameliorate in a sense, and communicate how to achieve these strategic objectives into operational practice,	1.3		9	1	Bridging
C	2	5	1A	so I think they are a critical role, probably at the funnel of the bottle neck coming in both directions really.	1.3		9	1	Squeezed

Table 3.1 Example of opening rows of a senior manager chart

The transcripts from the middle managers are similarly arranged, as shown in Table 3.2. In this case, the college, the focus group, the type of middle manager, the utterance and the question are all tagged.

Coll	FG	MM	Utt	Qu	Text	Role	Fac	Imp	Env	Notes
A	A	C	1	A1	<i>In your roles as head of school, what do you feel that the college expects you to do? What are middle managers? What do they do here?</i>					
A	A	C	2	A1	Anything and everything I have to say at any time.	6			22	Undefined role
A	A	C	3	A1	Bridge the gap between senior management and teaching staff,	4.2	1		1	Bridging
A	A	C	4	A1	sort out course teams,	3				
A	A	C	5	A1	sort out curriculum.	2			1	
A	A	C	6	A1	I see my role as a middle manager to make sure that things get done.	2	2		1	Purposeful implementation

Table 3.2 Example of opening rows of a focus group chart

The process of checking and preparing the transcripts in this way, as well as subsequent reading, enabled the researcher to become very familiar with the text. This also facilitated the initial stages of theory building, which is discussed below and represented in Figure 3.1.

From these initial readings of the transcripts, and bearing the literature on middle manager roles in mind, a set of concept codes was constructed for activities undertaken by managers, grouped under aspects of manager role (see Appendix 9). All of the transcripts were coded from this list in the column marked 'Role' (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2), with necessary adjustments being made to codes during the process. This process was repeated for aspects of the environment for management, with the codes being entered in the column marked 'Env'. Finally, codes were devised for facilitators and impediments to role, and entered on the transcripts in the columns marked 'Fac' and 'Imp.' It should be noted that codes were attached to comments which directly addressed a concept, alluded to it, or which were relevant to the concept in some way. It was felt important to take an inclusive approach to coding at this stage, and to discard weaker evidence at a later point in the analysis. Additional thoughts on the data were entered in the column marked 'Notes.'

Using the Excel spreadsheets meant that individual transcripts could be sorted for a single column, for example 'role', to bring all comments on a particular manager

activity together. In addition, Excel allows for a three-level sort, which meant that, for example, a particular aspect of the environment for management could be examined in relation to statements about facilitators and impediments to role, in order to identify and test out relationships between the environment and the factors enabling and impeding the managers. Similarly, a single aspect of role could be examined in relation to factors which facilitate it, and in relation to the college environment. As the transcripts were mostly about eight pages long in this format, sorted transcripts from different interviews could be printed and compared 'by eye', or data for a particular aspect of role could be 'gathered' from a number of transcripts and assembled into a single document for consideration. It was through this process of coding, sorting, comparison and assembly of sub-sets of data that theories could be built.

The written data from the senior manager interviews (Question E) and from the middle manager interviews (Questions E, F and G) were entered numerically onto Excel spreadsheets for simple statistical analysis through the use of bar and pie charts. The numbers of respondents of each type are so small that no statistical validity is attached to this process. It was carried out to see whether concepts raised in the interviews were illustrated in any way by the responses to the paper-based questions.

Questionnaire data

The text data from the questionnaires were entered onto Excel spreadsheets a question at a time. Thus, all team member answers from one college to each question were assembled in a single document, and subsequently these were amalgamated into a spreadsheet for 'all colleges' for each question. The respondents were allocated college codes, and letter codes to show whether they were in curriculum, service or student service teams; respondents of each type were also allocated sequential numbers. The headings for the spreadsheet for Question I: 'What do Heads of Department do?' were therefore as follows:

College	Resp code	Question	Comment	Activity	Concept
B	C17	What do they do?	Essentially paper-pushing – ie administration	Administration	9

Table 3.3 Example of an entry from a questionnaire chart

The 'activity' column was used to generalise from the response to a type of manager activity, and the final column allowed for a concept code to be allocated. For other questions, a similar process of generalisation from the respondent comment was carried out. This layout made it a simple task to consider team responses alongside senior and middle manager responses, either through comparison 'by eye', or by assembling printouts of like data from different spreadsheets.

The answers to Questions 7, 8 and 9 were entered onto Excel spreadsheets and displayed using bar and pie charts. As in the case of the senior and middle managers, respondent numbers are relatively small, and therefore no further analysis was carried out. The charts were used as an illustration of team members' perceptions, and for comparison with senior and middle manager responses, to see whether differences in perception could be identified.

College documents

The various college documents were scrutinised, and found to offer relevant information under a range of headings, presented in Table 3.4.

<i>College profile</i>
Size
Staff / students
Generic location
No of sites
Management structure
Communications systems
Manager development systems
Ethos as displayed in literature to students and staff
Inspection report:
Grades
Key comments on management
Recent history

Table 3.4 Documentary analysis: College profile headings

Notes were made from the documentary sources under these headings. These were used to inform the analysis of the environment for management in Chapter 4, and to facilitate understanding of issues in Chapters 5 and 6.

Meeting observations

The data from each of the meeting observations were collated and summarised; reports are presented as Appendix 15. These reports were used as source material in Chapter 4, when analysing the environment for management.

From the activities of assembling and analysing the data, and from insights obtained through the literature, a process of theory-building took place, to be described in Section 3.8, which was supported by the analytical technique of modelling.

Modelling

The analysis and theory-building in this study includes the use of modelling, as a way of representing and investigating interaction between the middle manager role and factors within its environment. Modelling based upon quantitative analysis was developed in industrial and scientific contexts, to predict consequence, where experimentation with the 'real thing' would be costly and hazardous. Likewise in policy-making situations, (for example, Briggs *et al*, 2000) quantitative and qualitative modelling is used both to investigate and to predict social interaction, where once again the penalties of a poor decision would be costly in human or financial terms. Modelling is increasingly being used in the fields of operational research (for example, David, 2001) and organisational learning (for example, Fowler, 2003), where it is a particularly useful tool in what Moles (1990) calls the 'sciences of the imprecise.' As Gass and Harris, (1996: 399) explain, 'a model is an idealised representation – an abstract or simplified description – of a real-world situation that is to be studied and / or analysed.' It is, according to David (2001: 462) 'designed to help understand and to help act.' Rivett (1994) comments that a model can be used as a filter, to simplify complex situations and guide decision-making. He warns that the process is based on a number of assumptions, for example that what is being analysed is a system of causes and effects, that there is an underlying logic, and that the process of data collection does not change the data themselves. According to Fowler (2003), modelling is a means of understanding the intricacy of organisational environments,

and the dynamic complexity of their management systems. Fowler claims that modelling is an appropriate tool for enabling managers to develop a more holistic and dynamic perspective of the workings of their institution. He also considers that modelling can be used to support the integration of cross-functional activity within organisations, which is a particular concern of this research.

Pidd's (1996: 722) definition is also useful for this study, as it provokes consideration of models as an agent for change: 'a model is an external and explicit representation of a part of a reality, as it is seen by individuals who wish to use the model to understand, change, manage and control that part of reality.' Wild (1996: 10) advocates models as 'a mediating intervention between perception and action,' which provides the means to interpret, to remember and to communicate. Bytheway (1995) notes that modelling supports change through offering opportunities for innovation and for breaking out of current barriers to thinking. The process whereby this happens is explained by David (2001: 462). He points out that a model has 'two complementary indissociable functions': a function of 'abstraction, based on reality', moving from reality to the model, and a development function, a 'means of action', which moves from the model to reality. The process of constructing and considering the model – in the case of this research, of filtering data through the model – may thus offer new perspectives upon reality. As there is a tendency for models to be temporal, there must be an invitation for stakeholders to adjust and develop the model to represent subsequent circumstances (David, 2001).

There is increasing use of modelling in educational contexts: for example, Scheerens (1997) uses conceptual models to present theory on effective schooling. Lawless *et al* (1998) offer a number of uses for modelling through concept mapping, based upon its power to use visual display to investigate and represent the both the nature of concepts and the relationships between them. Turning to the current research context, Stake (1995:2) comments about case study, 'The case is an integrated system. The parts do not have to be working well, the purposes may be irrational, but it is a system.' The use of modelling enables analysis of the system. The study investigates and represents not only the constituent parts of the middle manager role, but also its purposes as perceived by the various members of the role set, and the organisational system within which the role is set. Modelling will go some way towards representing

both the integrated nature of the whole-college system and the imperfections and irrationalities of the way it impacts upon the manager role. Using this tool, it is hoped that interactions can be interpreted and insight gained, and that the models may have potential use for problem-solving, theory-building and re-considering college design.

3.8 Theory-building

Eisenhardt (2002), Bassey (1999) and Yin (1994) all describe in different ways the iterative process of theory-building from case study analysis. The process adopted uses elements of each writer's method, and pays regard to the advice of all of them, namely that the process must be a self-critical one, of iterative analysis and checking of theory against data, which demands substantial immersion in the data and in the emergent issues. The theory-building process for this study is presented in simplified form in Figure 3.1. The figure shows the main elements of the process, to which must be added the constant comparison of data, adjustment of concept codes, and seeking of insight from the literature. Watling (2002) notes that theories start to form during the process of collecting data; in the case of this research, they started earlier, through undertaking the pilot study and the initial reading for the main research, which led to the theories underpinning the research design: that characteristic features of the middle manager role and of their environment for management exist, and that the interaction of the environment on the role can be viewed in terms of facilitators and impediments.

The case study visits, which involved some degree of immersion in the natural environment of the research, allowed initial theories to be built about characteristic features of the colleges and of the role. Further reading of the literature, together with preparation of the research data informed the theorising about the contributory features of the role, which were then grouped into possible aspects of role. Analysis of transcripts and questionnaires for aspects of role not only led to adjusted conceptualisation of the aspects of role, presented in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, but anticipatory thinking about what might be the key environmental features, facilitators and impediments. Subsequent analysis enabled conceptualisation of the environment for management and of the facilitators and impediments to be further refined; these sets of concepts are presented in Chapter 4, and in Chapter 5, Section 5.3.

Theory-building

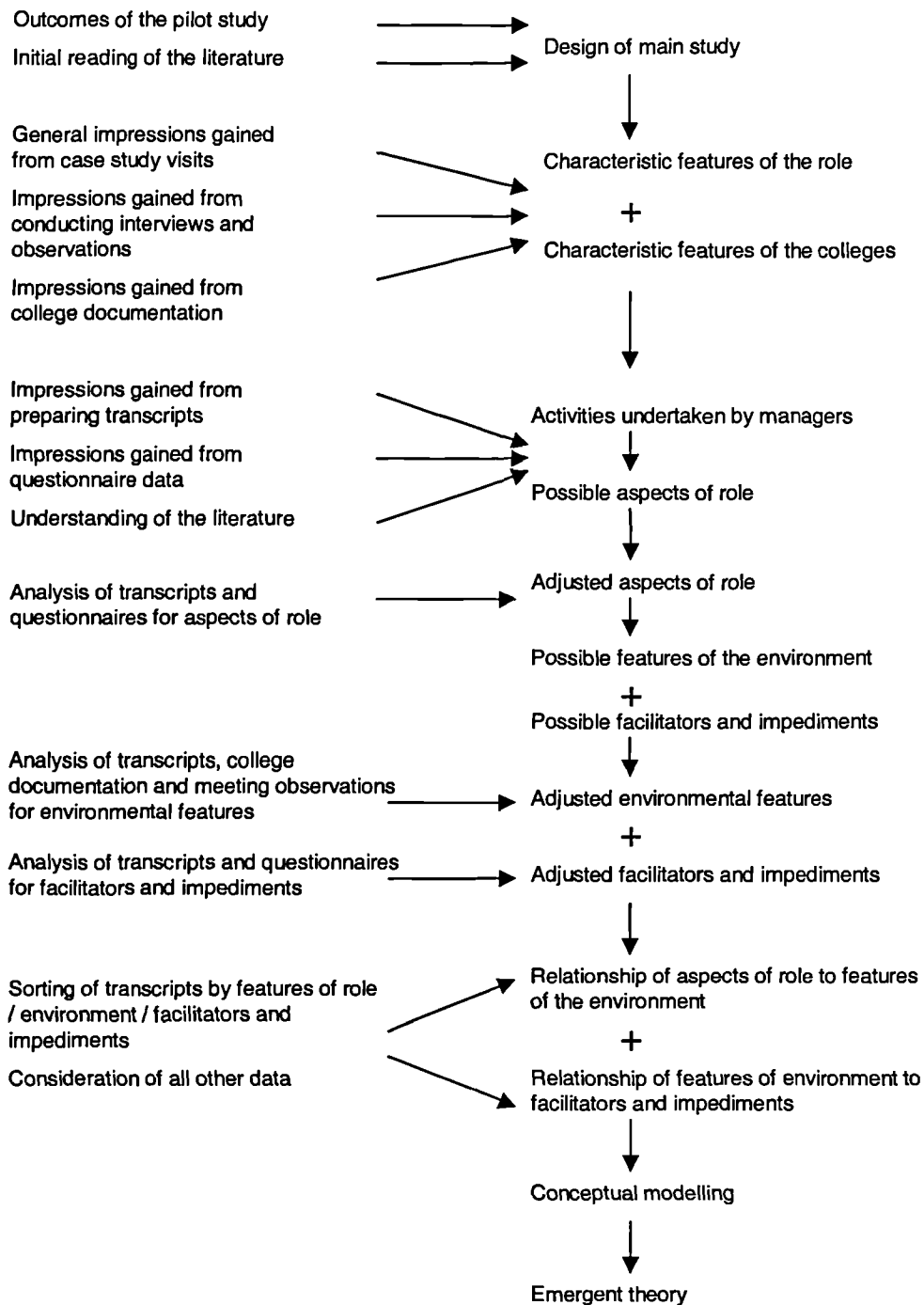


Figure 3.1 Process of theory-building

The iterative sorting of the spreadsheets described in Section 3.7, together with consideration of the other data sources, supported theorising about the relationship of aspects of role to features of the environment, and the relationship of features of the environment to facilitators and impediments, presented in Chapter 5: Section 5.2, and in Chapter 6. Chapter 6 presents models based upon various parts of the theorising, and moves on to discuss concepts emergent from the research.

3.9 Conclusions

The research methodology is built upon an interpretive framework, using largely qualitative methods of analysis. Through using four replicated case studies, each with multiple data sources, it is hoped that requirements for reliability, validity and 'trustworthiness' can be satisfied. Despite the restrictions of accessibility to respondents and of time spent on 'immersion', it is hoped that valid conclusions can be drawn about the nature of the middle manager role and the impact of the college environment upon it. Investigating the same range of roles under different college conditions should enable both differentiation of environment and impact to be analysed, and generalisation to be made, based upon commonality across the colleges and the roles. Finally, it is hoped that the additional analytical tool of modelling will enable findings to be depicted and interpreted in ways which will enhance further insight into the role and its setting.

The analysis of data from the research is presented in the following three chapters. Chapter 4 considers the college environments within which the managers work, and identifies the key influences of the college environment upon the role. Chapter 5 discusses the role itself, firstly by exploring the different aspects of the role as perceived by senior, middle managers and team members. The discussion then moves to examine the positive and negative impact of the environment upon the various aspects of role. Lastly, Chapter 6 presents modelling and examination of the emergent factors from the research, and includes discussion of the contribution of the research to the debate on professionalism.

CHAPTER 4 COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

4.0 Introduction

As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, whilst managers at all four case study colleges work within a generic further education environment, each college has a distinctive context which impacts upon the manager role. This chapter, through analyses of the four college environments investigated, presents the context at each college in which the managers carry out their role. In addition to describing the 'natural context' of management at the four colleges, the discussion explores the following research question:

- What are the factors in the environment for management at the colleges which impact upon the role?

Key aspects of the environment for management at each college are analysed, in order to understand differences between colleges, the range of conditions under which the managers work, and whether manager roles are differentially affected. The analysis is based upon senior and middle manager interview responses, team member questionnaires and the observation of meetings. Descriptive material is also derived from the most recent FEFC inspection reports at the time of the case study visits, data from the Learning and Skills Council website, college websites, college documents current at the time of the visit, and from case study notes.

Analysis of case study data is not confined to this chapter: the data are used throughout Chapters 4 and 5 to support the process of analysis and theory-building about the manager role and about the impact of the management environment upon it. Discussion of the models and theories derived from the case study analysis will be presented in Chapter 6.

Referencing

In order to enhance the 'trustworthiness' of the research (Bassey, 1999), especially in supporting generalised statements based upon data analysis, the survey responses have been coded to enable reference to the raw data. In quotations from respondents in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, the following codes have been used.

Senior managers: for example SMA1: 16

This indicates the first senior manager interviewed at College A: the 16th utterance of the interview.

Middle managers: for example DFGB: 129

This indicates College D, focus group B: the 129th utterance of the focus group. In the text, the type of middle manager is also indicated. In two focus groups at college D there were two types of manager present; they are therefore designated as 'Service / Student service manager.'

Team members: for example BS2: 1

This indicates the second student service team respondent at College B: the response to the first questionnaire question. A service team member response to the same question would be indicated as BA2: 1, and a curriculum team member as BC2: 1. The type of team is also indicated in the text.

References, whether accompanied by a quotation or not, are to specific utterances from the interviews and focus groups; where there is evidence that the factor or opinion was widely noted, the accompanying statements are generalised. Transcripts and questionnaire responses can be consulted in Appendices 16-18.

Framework for analysis

The aims of the research are to explore the impact of the internal college environment upon the middle manager role. *The insights gained from the literature review indicated* that the management context could be presented under four headings: management structure, management systems, enacting the middle manager role and leadership context. The concepts and the research findings from the literature on organisational theory, middle management, role and leadership theory, will enable understanding of the different contexts portrayed. A detailed analysis of the middle manager role itself will be presented in Chapter 5.

Comparative statistics

The comparative statistics on college size, income and inspection grades, set out in Table 4.1 below, will be referred to in each college report.

	College A	College B	College C	College D
Location	Inner city	Suburban	Urban	Provincial
Students				
Full-time 2000-1	4,044	2,373	5,588	1,860
Part-time 2000-1	11,471	25,078	23,397	5,786
% of students from disadvantaged areas	Very high	Average	High	Low
Income 2000	26,716,000	21,804,000	45,040,000	11,200,000
Staff	2000	1999	2000	1998
Direct learning contact / % permanent	351 / 74%	404 / 50%	610 / 70%	152 / 71%
Supporting direct learning contact / % permanent	44 / 77%	64 / 100%	168 / 83%	23 / 78%
Other support / % permanent	186 / 90%	332 / 88%	512 / 92%	95 / 88%
Staff totals / % permanent	581 / 81%	700 / 80%	1290 / 81%	270 / 78%
Inspection (Grade 1 = high / Grade 5 = low)	2000	1999	2000	1998
Average teaching grade	2	3	2.7	2.6
Support for students	2	2	2	2
General resources	2	2	2	3
QA	2	3	2	3
Governance	1	3	2	2
Management	1	3	2	2

Table 4.1 Case study colleges: comparative statistics

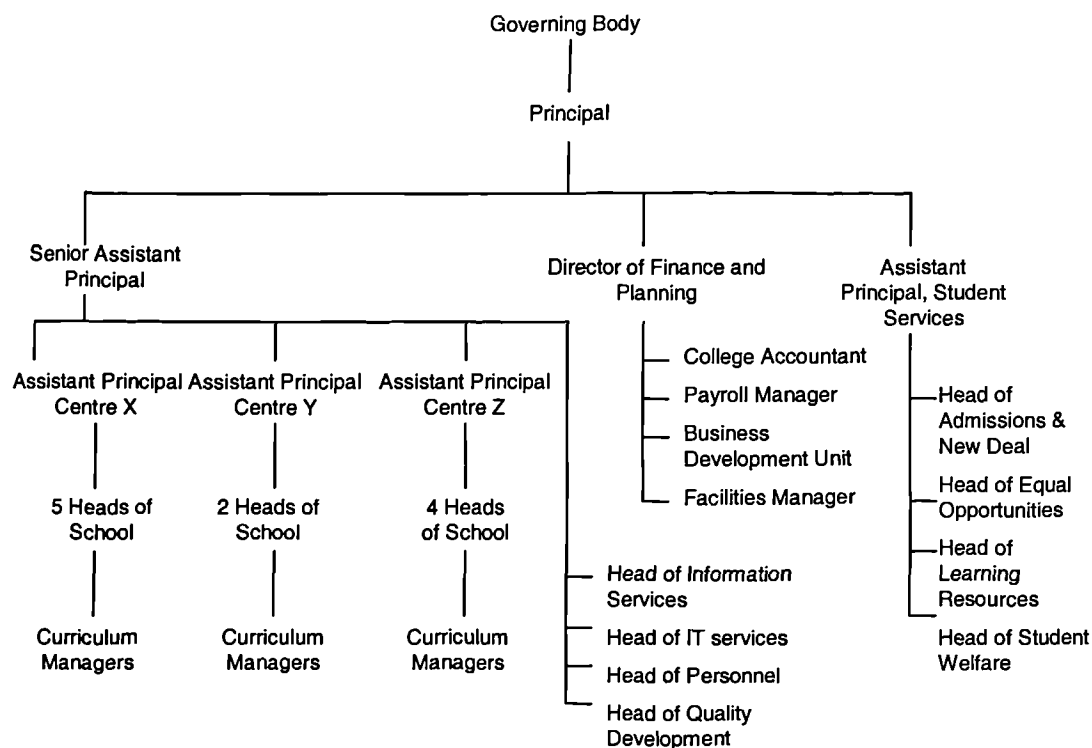
4.1 College A

College A was formed in the early 1990s from the amalgamation of three inner-city colleges in an area of 'very high' social deprivation; a large element of community education was added eight years later. At the time of amalgamation, there was a need to build a 'one college' ethos, both to replace the different styles and systems of the constituent colleges, and to secure the new college's financial situation through improving levels of student retention and achievement. The amalgamated college has four main sites and around thirty community locations. In common with the other case study colleges, provision is offered at a range of employers' premises, and there is some franchised provision. In terms of income, it is the second largest of the colleges studied. Courses range from basic to higher education, across all the programme areas funded at the time of the research by the FEFC. The proportion of its staff on permanent contracts is around 80%, in common with the other case study colleges.

The ethos of the college as displayed in literature to students and staff is one of high quality provision and inclusivity. There is evidence of a wide range of community links and of consistent encouragement for students to take part and to succeed. For example, the Annual Report, issued for the mandatory dissemination of college statistics, has as the majority of its content 'success stories' featuring a range of types of student achievement. The inspection report notes the 'extensive range of opportunities for a very diverse community', and considers that the college is 'highly successful' in widening the participation of local people in further education. The inspection grades are the best among the case study colleges, including the highest possible grade for both governance and management. College A is a Beacon College. It holds Investor in People status, and the Positive about Disabled People award.

Management structure

The management structure operates as a hierarchy, portrayed in Figure 4.1. The role of Senior Assistant Principal is a key one, as the assistant principals based at each of the four main college sites and the heads of quality, personnel, IT and information services all answer to this role-holder. The post of Assistant Principal: Student Services was removed from the structure a few months after the research visits.



Senior managers interviewed

Principal
 Senior Assistant Principal
 Assistant Principal, Student services
 Assistant Principal, Centre X

Middle manager focus group members

Head of Student Welfare Services
 Head of Learning Resources
 Head of Admissions
 Head of Personnel Services
 Head of Information Services
 Head of Quality Development
 Franchise Manager
 Head of School: Engineering
 Head of School: Creative Studies
 Head of School: English for Speakers of Other Languages
 Head of School: Construction

Figure 4.1 College A Management hierarchy chart and respondent sample

Following increasingly approving inspection reports and the improved financial position of the college, a more devolved management structure was under consideration,

based upon the four college sites (Senior managers SMA1: 2; SMA3: 61). Areas of curriculum provision would be focused as far as possible on individual sites, and each site would have its own manager responsible for services to students (Curriculum manager AFGA: 104, 155; Senior manager SMA2: 49; SMA3: 60). The services of Learning Resources, Information Technology and Facilities would continue to be managed on a cross-college basis (Senior manager SMA2: 53). This represents a more federal structure than previously, with more autonomy being offered to college sites under the responsibility of assistant principals (SMA2: 13). Senior managers see this as a significant shift in control (SMA1: 82). The new structure was proposed at the time of the visits, to general approval. Both the new and the old structures show a tension between centralised control and a dispersal of responsibility to senior managers based at college sites. The operation of service managers as a separate 'strand' of the structure, unconnected with the site-based management, potentially implies 'difference' between service managers and those managing services to students and curriculum, and indicates a greater degree of centralised control in this area of management.

The new devolved structure may increase middle managers' involvement in whole-college activity. At present, they are consulted to some extent over strategic planning, when this is felt necessary (Student service manager AFGC: 165; Senior managers SMA2: 31-2; SMA4: 4). There are moves to make the middle manager role more strategic (Senior manager SMA1: 138), to include more cross-college responsibilities (Senior manager SMA2: 90) and for curriculum managers to improve their planning skills through having more involvement in managing funding units for resource allocation (Senior manager SMA1: 50). At present, middle managers are constrained in trying out new initiatives by resource allocation being managed at senior level (Curriculum manager AFGA: 123; Senior manager SMA2: 75-6).

Management systems

College A sees itself as a 'positive college', keen to unblock and solve problems (Senior manager SMA1: 71-72). However, this is set within a culture of conformity to college systems (Curriculum manager AFGA: 35; Senior manager SMA1: 104). There are strong lines of accountability; audits of provision, led by senior managers, are carried out on all areas of middle management, as described by curriculum manager

AFGA: 91, student service manager AFGC: 64, and senior manager SMA2: 60-1, 29. There is also a strong emphasis on staff performance, referred to by senior manager SMA3: 9, 34. One senior manager admitted that the college has a culture of 'assassinating' middle managers, and 'moving people on' to other jobs or to leave the college if they do not fulfil their role (Senior manager SMA3: 26, 28).

Senior managers see the college as 'rational', and as 'incredibly tidy' in its organisational and implementation systems (Senior manager SMA3: 70, 79). They see the external drivers on college activity as being for conformity to targets rather than for development and innovation (Senior manager SMA3: 121, 134, 135). One manager reports a strongly competitive element to the achievement of targets (Curriculum manager AFGA: 92), though this view is contested by other middle managers. The latest inspection report commends the reliability and accuracy of the management information systems, and their use in producing scheduled reports to support college management. Inspectors also note that managers understand and set performance targets and make effective use of data for planning and analysis, a situation corroborated by senior manager SMA1: 66. These factors indicate the change of role of management information systems from being primarily external, producing mandatory reports for the funding body, to the internal role of harnessing college data to support effective planning and operation.

College A has the usual range of committees, for example: meetings of the Governing body and its sub-committees, the College Academic Board and its sub-committees, student affairs and audit committees, centre (site-based) meetings, course and service team meetings. The principal gives special briefings on matters of current concern and interest, which are cascaded through the organisation. All dates of scheduled meetings are presented in the College Calendar and in the Routines Schedule, and the weekly meetings of SMT are summarised in the college newsletter. The college has a meetings structure which is designed to maintain the flow of information 'upward' and 'downward' through the hierarchy, and to enable the formulation of college strategy. The inspection report comments that 'all planning involves extensive consultation with staff', and that 'the importance of teaching and learning is evident in all decision-making.'

The main communication problem is presented by multi-site management, which involves managers in excessive travel (Curriculum manager AFGA: 207), and in difficulty in establishing contact with people (Curriculum manager AFGA: 158). One student service manager (AFGC: 124) describes the idea of a single site college as 'seventh heaven!' Some service and student service heads report little operational liaison between themselves and curriculum managers (Service manager AFGB: 125; Student service manager AFGC: 118); however some student service managers have devised their own systems to enable liaison between their teams and the curriculum teams (Student service manager AFGC: 115). Liaison is enabled to some extent by the twice-termly meetings of heads of curriculum, service and student service. Initially, these were mainly used for information-giving by the principal; this culture is reported as changing, with more chance for inter-communication (Service manager AFGB: 125). Observation of this meeting indicates that both senior and middle managers make substantial contributions, both as information-givers and in discussing the implementation of proposed activities.

Enacting the middle manager role

Curriculum managers say they have reasonable clarity of role, for example over staff management (Curriculum manager AFGA: 161), although managing across sites can result in responsibilities overlapping (Curriculum manager AFGA: 158). Some service managers report the need to negotiate the boundaries of territory quite often (Service managers AFGB: 102, 165). Managers feel they have reasonable authority either through their own position or through their line manager (Curriculum manager AFGA: 118; Service manager AFGB: 137-8), and experienced managers feel that they are 'trusted to get on with things' (Curriculum manager AFGA: 13; Student service manager AFGC: 30). Some managers, however, want to be treated with more freedom and more professionalism (Curriculum manager AFGA: 2-6, 207).

One senior manager considers that the college appears to value curriculum managers more than those in other manager roles, because they have responsibility for the 'product' of the college – the students – and because the quality systems monitor them more closely than other managers (Senior manager SMA1: 25). Others comment that curriculum heads are generally perceived as powerful, but that heads of service and

student service have closer access to senior management, and some of them have very large teams and budgets. It is apparent that the principal aims at equal priority for all manager roles (Senior managers SMA3: 51-3; SMA4: 15). Training for the manager role, especially for new managers, is underdeveloped (Service manager AFGB: 178; Senior manager SMA3: 47). Senior managers are concerned at the lack of manager training both before appointment and at induction (Senior managers SMA4: 26; SMA1: 123, 127 and 129). This situation has resulted in the assistant principal role being one of mentorship and support for managers working at their college centres (Senior manager SMA1: 124).

Leadership context

When asked to rate themselves and the college along a continuum of transactional – transformational (see Figure 4.2), senior managers rate themselves and the college towards the transactional end of the scale, in line with the rational approach to management described above. Their 'preferred' scores are more transformational, consistent with their wish to devolve authority further, and to encourage creativity. However, senior managers at all colleges note that aspects of both transactional and transformational leadership are needed for the college to run effectively.

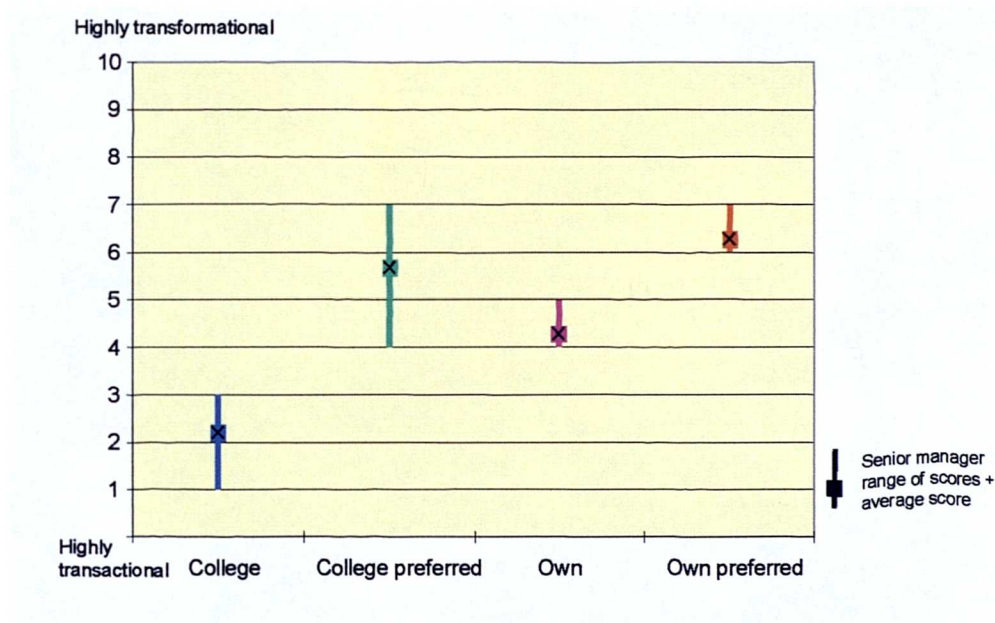


Figure 4.2 College A Senior managers' perception of leadership styles

Middle managers and their teams (Figure 4.3) also rate the college leadership style (the scores marked in blue) as being on the transactional half of the continuum. Scores given by both managers and team members for the management of the department (marked in purple) are mainly in the transformational half of the scale: the exception is among student service team members, who rate their managers' styles as transactional. In all but one of the analyses, the preferred position for the college and the department is for it to be more transformational than at present; the exception is the service managers, who wish for their departmental leadership to be marginally more transactional than at present.

The small numbers of senior managers, and of middle manager and team member respondents from any one category, mean that these results have no statistical significance. What is interesting, however, is the overall consensus that the college has a transactional style, and the overall wish for leadership styles at college and departmental level to be more transformational.

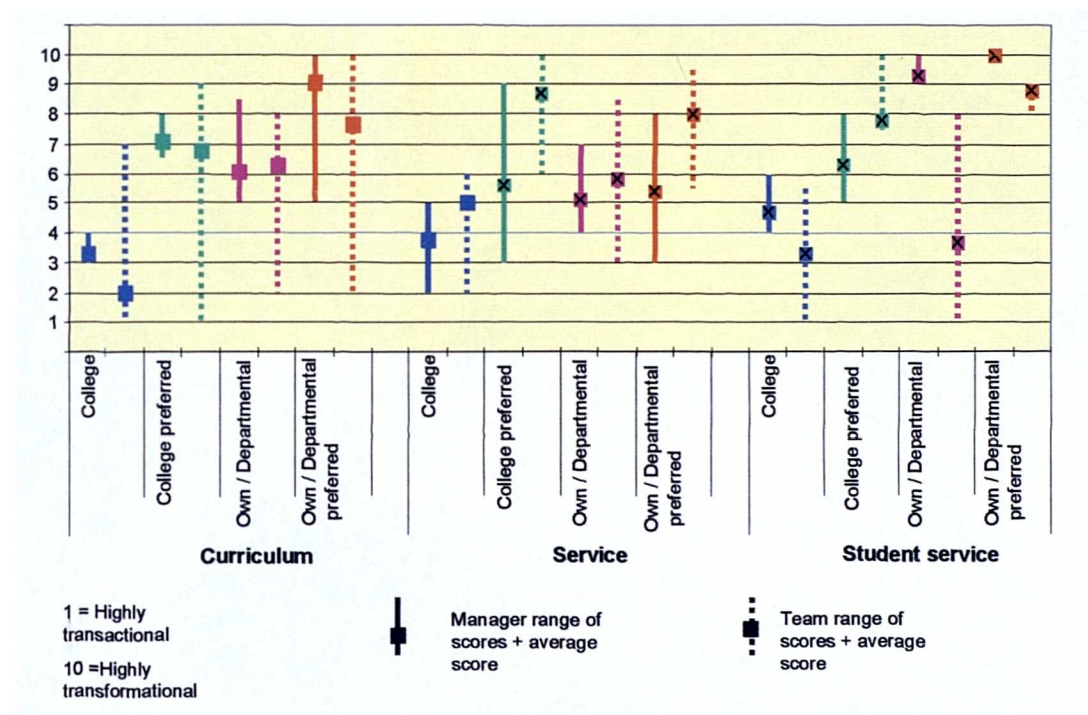


Figure 4.3 College A Managers' and teams' perceptions of leadership style

Key points

Structures and systems	Historic amalgamation: moving to decentralisation	The college had 'merged' nearly ten years previously. The college and its systems have become centralised and established. It is now time to decentralise some control to individual sites and managers.
	Multi-site	The college operates over four sites; this presents logistical problems for liaison and team management.
	Moving to site-based systems of management	Problems presented by inter-site management are being addressed through the proposed site-based structure.
	Restricted middle manager involvement in strategy	Senior managers would like middle managers to take more part in strategy and be more innovative.
	Mechanical systems	The college has secure operational and implementation systems and is 'tightly' managed.
Middle manager role	Equality of middle manager roles viewed positively	There has been a positive effort to value all manager roles equally. Whilst inequalities of regard may still exist, status-based conflicts between managers are not evident.
	Limited manager development	The college does not have a formal programme of manager development.
	Role strain	Inter-site management results in overload for managers
Leadership style	'Stratified' leadership style	Leadership at senior level is viewed as transactional: at departmental level, transformational.

Table 4.2 Environment for management: key factors in evidence at College A

The key factors affecting the environment for management at College A are presented in Table 4.2.

College A is in the process of transition. Having grown to maturity and success through a rational, centralised approach to management, it is now moving to a more devolved, 'organic' structure, based upon the federal structure offered by its four sites. There is a wish for the more transactional styles of senior management to 'loosen' also, enabling a move towards transformational styles more in keeping with devolution of responsibility. Both senior and middle managers, however, value the clarity and efficiency offered by strong centralised systems, and it is not clear how far the college will be able to move away from centralised control.

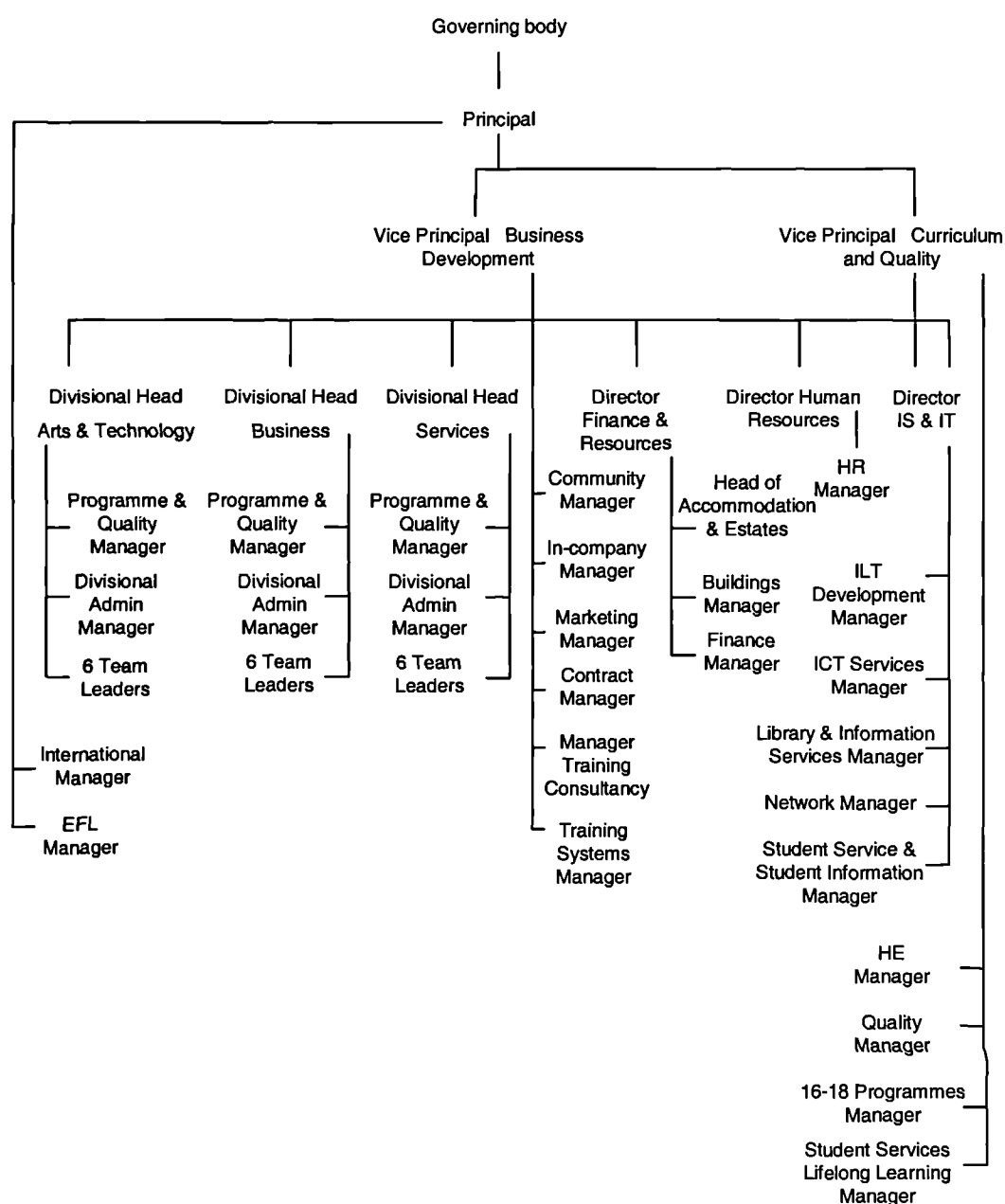
4.2 College B

College B is a large general further education college in a suburban area with 'average' levels of deprivation. There is one main and one secondary site, and provision is offered at around 30 community centres and 125 company premises. Courses are run in all of the former FEFC programme areas, at levels ranging from basic skills to higher education. In terms of income, this is the third largest of the four case study colleges.

College literature for students has a 'breezy' and informative style, emphasising the college as a 'friendly and exciting place to study,' and its excellent reputation. Documentation for staff is built upon the college code of ethics and conduct, based on the Nolan Committee's principles for standards in public life. There is, therefore, an emphasis upon openness, accountability and integrity in the conduct of college business. The college holds the Investor in People award. The proportion of staff on full-time contracts is, at 80%, similar to the other case study colleges, but for teaching staff the proportion is only 50%, far lower than in the other three colleges.

In the late 1990s, the college underwent a difficult period. It underachieved its funding targets by 90,000 units, resulting in a deficit of around £886,000. This financial crisis led to a recovery plan, which was still in operation at the time of the research visits, and 45 voluntary redundancies. Soon after the deficit was discovered, the college received a disappointing inspection report. Whilst the scores – presented in Section

4.0, Table 4.1 – are all 'average' or above, better grades had been hoped for, and the grades for governance and management are the lowest of the case study colleges. At the time of the inspection, the college was changing its approach to management in response to the financial situation; this included a major restructuring. During the case study visits, the college was still in the process of change and adjustment, and staff morale at all levels was adversely affected.



Senior managers interviewed

Principal
Vice Principal: Business Development
Vice Principal: Curriculum and Quality
Divisional Head: Business

Middle manager focus group members

Library and Information Services Manager
Student Services and Lifelong Learning Manager
16-18 Programme Manager
Marketing Manager
Head of Accommodation and Estates
ICT Services Manager
Programme / Quality Manager: Arts and Technology
Administration Manager: Services Division
Team Leader: Art and Design
Team Leader: Animal Care and Horticulture
Team Leader: Health and Social Care
Team Leader: Business, Management and Professional

Figure 4.4 College B Management hierarchy chart and respondent sample

Management structure

The college management follows a hierarchy, depicted in Figure 4.4. This places curriculum management into three divisions, with each divisional head supported by an administrative manager and responsible for six course team leaders, who each manage a broad area of provision. Service managers are grouped generically, and report to one of the three college directors, to one of the two vice-principals or to the principal. The aim of the new structure is to achieve a more directive approach, with increased senior management control, and to operate in a more businesslike way (Senior manager SMB3: 102, 124). At the time of restructuring, there was no opportunity to recruit externally (Senior manager SMB1: 20), although some key senior appointments were made later. One of these appointees feels that *her* senior colleagues are adapting to the new perspectives she can offer (Senior manager SMB2: 100-102), a viewpoint confirmed by a fellow senior manager (Senior manager SMB4: 108-9). The college has endeavoured to combine its former emphasis on the learning culture with a new systematic rigour and quality framework; these elements are not easy to reconcile (Senior manager SMB4: 139).

Devising college strategy is seen as a senior manager role (Service manager BFGB: 58), whilst the middle manager role is to implement it (Service manager BFGB: 8; Curriculum manager BFGC: 57). However, since the restructuring, middle managers feel more involved in strategic planning, taking part in regular meetings to discuss strategy (Senior manager SMB3: 59), which also help to promote understanding between middle and senior managers (Curriculum manager BFGA: 11). The inspection report notes that all staff have the opportunity to contribute to the strategic planning process. Middle managers identify targets with their teams; in one division, this is done on designated 'planning days' to encourage staff involvement. The targets are processed 'upwards' to help formulate college strategy (Senior manager SMB4: 19; Curriculum manager BFGA: 7). A senior manager confirms that middle managers are essential contributors to strategy, through being in touch with outside agencies and with issues 'on the ground' (SMB3: 9, 11).

Management systems

The senior management team, which meets fortnightly, has 14 members, and the college has a large number of steering groups and cross-college committees. The programme of college meetings is published at the beginning of the year. The various communication channels include monthly team briefing sessions, the principal's twice-yearly address to staff and the weekly briefing document issued by the senior management team. This 'newsletter' has been seen as directive; however managers say that their staff feel well informed by it (Curriculum manager BFGA: 19, 22). It is widely distributed, electronically and in print, with a modified version for students; both newsletters are available in college open access areas. The inspection team judge that 'communications are effective.' They commend the open and consultative nature of the management of the college, and note that the staff understand the college mission and share the college commitment to accessibility, openness and the achievement of excellence.

In contrast, inspectors found inadequacy in the college's management information systems (MIS). Under-investment had led to a lack of confidence in the data provided, and there was no systematic monitoring of the college's performance. There was little use of measurable objectives and targets. Improvements to the MIS started in the late 1990s, and research evidence indicates that the college is moving towards a more

target-based culture. A college calendar and a planning cycle have recently been instituted which shape the year for managers (Curriculum manager BFGA: 144; Service manager BFGB: 106). Middle managers work to a range of internal and external college deadlines and targets, and some set their own performance indicators (Curriculum managers BFGA: 35, 37, 39, 40; Service manager BFGB: 97). Senior managers speak of staff adapting to a new degree of rigour and working to clearer patterns of accountability (Senior manager SMB4: 110; Senior manager SMB2 104; Curriculum manager BFGA: 14-15; Curriculum manager BFGC: 55).

There are, however, tensions over implementation. Curriculum managers report spending time in meetings which they need for implementation: a negative 'meetings culture' (Curriculum managers BFGA: 83, 84, 105). Also, a gap of understanding is perceived between senior managers and the operational level of the college (Curriculum manager BFGA: 125). Managers refer to an ethos from the top that has not been shared (Student service manager BFGD: 121), and of operating subterfuge to give senior managers what they want (Student service manager BFGD: 37). One senior manager, showing awareness of this 'gap', would like senior and middle managers collectively to identify barriers to progress, and work to remove the problems (Senior manager SMB2: 72).

The college has other barriers to communication and liaison. One manager refers to the college as being 'departmentalised – a hierarchy within a hierarchy' (Student service manager BFGD: 92, 94), where powerful curriculum areas can challenge policy and institute changes without consultation (Student service manager BFGD: 78). Discrete areas of the college focus competitively on their own targets in an 'enterprise culture', which impedes cross-college managers from achieving a holistic approach to student provision (Student service manager BFGD: 68, 70). This illustrates the tension between the vertical lines of management, along which the lines of communication and accountability flow, and the network of student provision across the college (Service manager BFGB: 120, 218; Senior manager SMB2: 49). One result is that curriculum managers feel pulled in many directions (Curriculum manager BFGA: 57) and criticise perceived 'dictators' among the service managers (Curriculum manager BFGC: 96). However, managers see the need for effective cross-college liaison: some have set up

liaison routes with their teams (Service manager BFGB: 75) and others speak of being consulted and valued by other teams (Student service manager BFGD: 97).

Enacting the middle manager role

One senior manager considers that effective leadership is possible at middle manager level, and that middle manager roles are clear (Senior manager SMB1: 107-108). Others agree that middle manager autonomy is important, and would be increased if managers were given greater control over resources (Senior managers SMB2: 23; SMB4: 54). Middle managers generally feel that they have the authority to carry out their role (Curriculum manager BFGC: 112), although the newly flattened hierarchy has left some managers unsure about their authority for decision-making (Curriculum manager BFGC: 115). Some managers feel that the boundaries of their role are clear, others do not, and some carry out work which is beyond their role (Service managers BFGB: 143, 148).

Senior managers make a number of observations on the middle manager role. One senior manager notes the difference in perception of roles between individual managers, another their differential effectiveness (Senior managers SMB2: 30; SMB3: 20). One commends the learning-centred focus of managers who have cross-college roles (Senior manager SMB1: 34-35); this links with the observation by another (SMB3: 51) of the 'professionalisation' of service and student service roles. Another comments on the difference in the types of pressure on managers holding different roles. She feels that pressures are greater on curriculum and student service heads, in that demands on them are more immediate and more various, and that service manager roles are clearer (Senior manager SMB2: 47, 53-54). The meeting observation at College B indicates that the student service managers called to the meeting by their senior manager are not accustomed to working together. There was an underlying friction, and a confusion about the purpose of the group and of the meeting. It may be the case that, whilst the managers are accustomed to functional interaction in order to carry out their role, they are less used to working together developmentally, which was the intention of the meeting.

The new structure includes the role of divisional administrator, who helps to co-ordinate the administrative tasks for a substantial curriculum area (Curriculum

manager BFGA: 5). Nevertheless, managers feel they still have a burden of routine administrative work (Curriculum manager BFGA: 73). Also where workload includes substantial amounts of teaching, managers work long daytime and evening hours (Curriculum manager BFGC: 79). The recent redundancies have led to a general increase in workload (Student service manager BFGD: 26; Service manager BFGB: 211), and a struggle to maintain educational values, maintain staff morale, and keep the college vision and focus (Student service managers BFGD: 28, 160, 162; Senior manager SMB4: 46).

The college has a long-established management development programme, held weekly, which is not compulsory (Senior managers SMB1: 23; SMB3: 27). At the time of the research visits, there were plans to link this programme to an accredited MA, although some managers already undertake college-financed study for management qualifications (Service manager BFGB: 31, 35). Middle and senior managers feel that the college encourages both personal development and innovation (Service manager BFGB: 181; Senior manager SMB2: 77). There is personal encouragement from the college governors for curriculum managers whose programme areas are successful (Curriculum manager BFGC: 27). Middle managers also feel the appraisal system is supportive and helpful (Curriculum manager BFGC: 90), but one senior manager has concerns about how widely or effectively appraisals are carried out (Senior manager SMB4: 177, 119).

Leadership context

Middle managers comment that senior management is hierarchical – a view not shared by senior managers (Senior manager SMB2: 27) – but that middle management is more transformational, and that ideally a balance of the two is needed (Curriculum manager BFGA: 129; Student service manager BFGD: 25; Service manager BFGB: 182). Senior managers' comments are reflected in Figure 4.5, where they perceive themselves as operating, and wishing to operate, through a largely transformational style. Their preferred style for the college is, however, less transformational than at present.

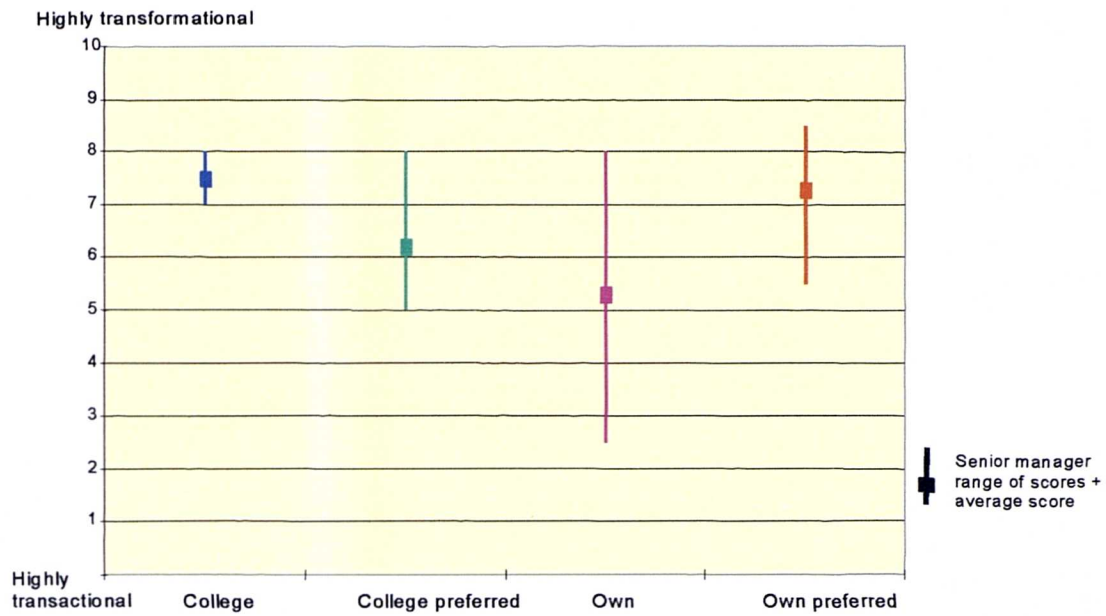


Figure 4.5 College B Senior managers' perceptions of leadership style

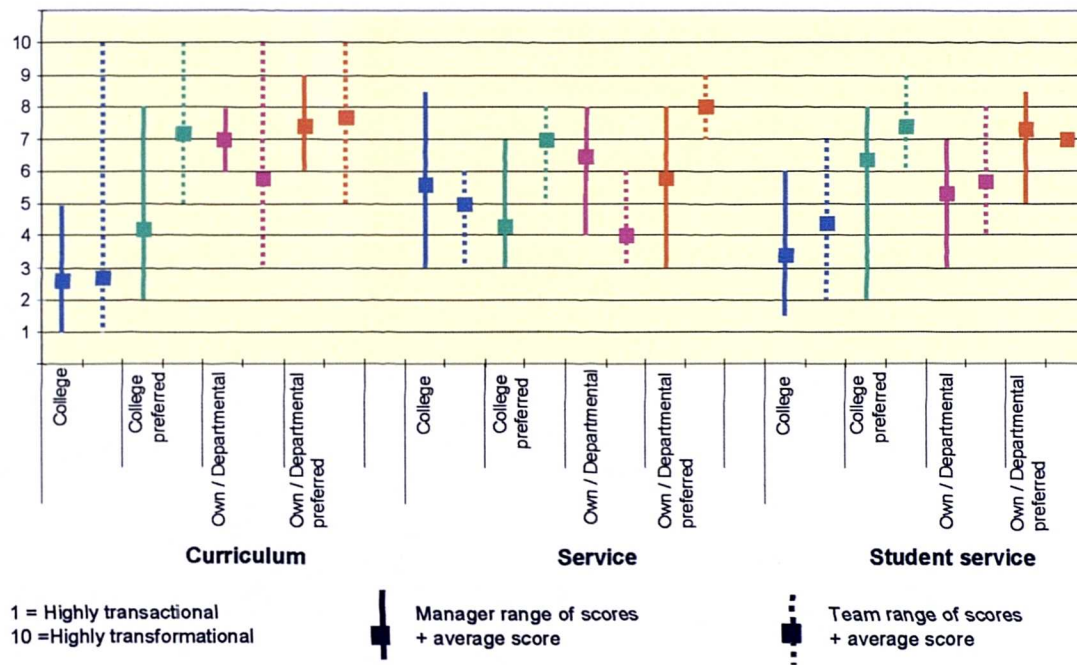


Figure 4.6 College B Managers' and teams' perceptions of leadership style

Middle manager scores (Figure 4.6), like their comments, position the college style (in blue) as transactional, with the exception of the service managers. As in College A, the service managers wish for a more transactional departmental style than at present: here in College B they also wish for a more transactional college style. All other groups wish for more transformational styles, both for the department and for the college, but overall the scores are less extreme than at College A. It could be deduced that staff at College B, having recently experienced a period of extreme instability, value the transformational style enacted previously, but are cautious about the extent to which it can be implemented. The contrasting pattern displayed at both colleges by the service managers may be an expression of the need for their work to be well delineated and systematic, in order for the college to be run efficiently.

Key points

College B is undergoing a period of extreme turbulence; it is adjusting to a more transactional leadership style in contrast to a previously transformational one. At the same time, middle managers are taking on more responsibility, principally in contributing to college strategy and in monitoring against targets. This is set against a background of increased workload and staff unease. There are 'organic' elements in evidence at the college in contrast to the new, largely mechanical, systems; innovation is still encouraged, and there is a move towards greater autonomy for middle managers, perhaps acting in tension with the strengthened central control. There is still a strong belief in educational values and a culture of learning.

The key factors affecting the environment for management at College B are presented in Table 4.3.

Structures and systems	Two sites: one dominant	The college operates largely from one site.
	College in transition	The college is in recovery after a series of crises. Senior managers are re-assessing their management style and the college management systems.
	Faculty based system of management	'Vertical' systems of management, with elements of competition between areas of the college, make cross-college liaison and provision difficult.
	Middle manager involvement in strategy	There is a framework for 'bottom-up' strategy-making, and middle managers now feel more involved in the process.
	Move towards mechanical systems	There is an attempt to combine the college's former emphasis on a learning culture with clearer, more rigorous systems of management.
Middle manager role	Differentiation of middle manager roles	There is an understanding of the different pressure on managers holding different roles; senior managers commend the learning-centred approach of managers holding cross-college roles.
	Support for innovation	There is a culture of supporting innovation at the college.
	Role strain	Staff losses, and a resultant increase in workload, have led to unhappiness among staff at all levels, and some mistrust of senior management.
Leadership style	Cautious support for transformational leadership	Managers at all levels value transformational styles of leadership; however, they are cautious in their judgments of how far this can be enacted.

Table 4.3 Environment for management: key factors in evidence at College B

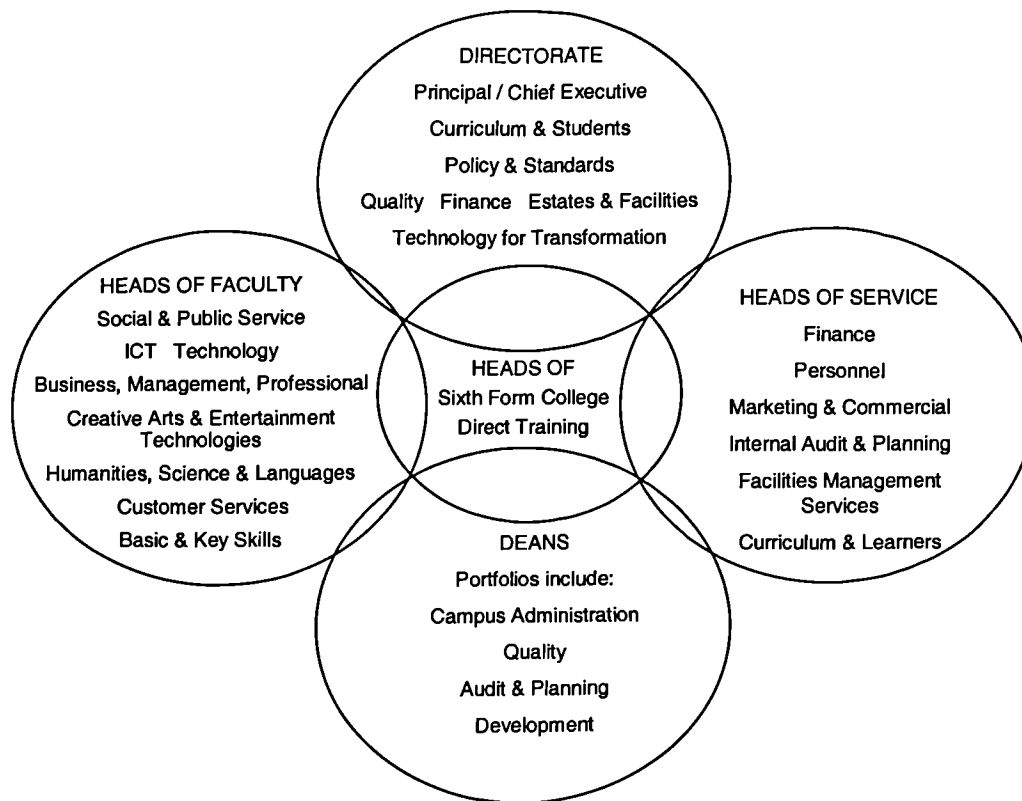
4.3 College C

College C is one of the largest colleges in the further education sector, drawing students from urban areas with high levels of deprivation. It was formed from a series of mergers from 1998 onwards, rationalising its provision to four main sites, three community centres and numerous neighbourhood and business sites. It offers provision across all programme areas on a range of courses from basic to higher education. Its inspection grades are sound, indicating strengths across all areas of college provision. In common with College B, there was a shortfall in the achievement of funding targets at the end of the 1990s, and a financial reconfiguration strategy was in operation at the time of the research. However, the research revealed no noticeable effect upon staff or college provision, and the proportion of staff on permanent contracts is the same as at the other case study colleges.

Documentation for students and staff is noticeably energetic and positive. Student success stories across a wide range of achievement are celebrated; the college 'brings out the best in everyone', so therefore (according to the transport information) 'all routes lead to us.' All of the case study colleges had undertaken building projects; in the case of College C this is expressed in terms of civic pride – putting something new and exciting into the heart of the city. Literature for staff builds upon a theme of excellence, and of the college's values: valuing people, encouraging enthusiasm, promoting professionalism and having fun. College C is a winner of the Queen's Anniversary Prize for Further and Higher Education. It holds the Investor in People and Charter Mark awards, together with the Positive about Disabled People award.

Management structure

In 2000-1, the college moved from a federal structure based upon the main college sites to a more integrated eight-faculty structure (Senior manager SMC4: 6). This rationalised course provision, and enabled services such as personnel and estates to be managed across the college. Campus deans at each main site liaise and broker to provide an effective learner experience on their campus (Senior manager SMC4: 108). One of the college sites is a sixth form centre, whose teaching staff are also members of the various faculties. There is a fifth 'campus' for managing all off-site provision (Senior manager SMC4: 95-96).



Senior managers interviewed

Principal
College Director: Quality and Standards
Campus Dean
Head of Curriculum and Learning Support

Middle manager focus group members

Learning Services Manager
Student Development Co-ordinator
Business Support and Communications Manager
ICT Manager
Buildings Manager
Personnel Services Manager
Project Manager
Programme Manager: Key Skills
Programme Manager: Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
Programme Manager: Information Technology

Figure 4.7 College C Management chart and respondent sample

The college management structure is represented non-hierarchically, as interlocking 'bubbles' (See Figure 4.7). Managers are grouped in the bubbles according to their

type of role, such as directorate, heads of faculty, heads of services and campus deans. Curriculum managers, whose provision may be largely at one site, also have cross-college student service or curriculum support roles which involve inter-site management (Curriculum manager CFGC: 6-7). Combining the faculty structure with 'portfolio' management and working in cross-college project teams offers both stability and flexibility to the manager role (Senior manager SMC2 105-6), but it can also create spaces in the structure where responsibilities are omitted (Senior manager SMC4: 78-9). Senior managers have diverse roles, and change them often (Senior manager SMC1: 6). This ensures wide contact with other staff and helps to break down academic / non-academic barriers (Senior manager SMC1: 9), but the constant changes in senior management responsibilities have caused confusion (Student service manager CFGA: 130). The FEFC inspectors, however, comment that 'staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities.'

Strategic planning is inclusive: team planning days feed into faculty planning days. Faculty proposals are then discussed at college planning days, held for middle and senior managers twice a year, where the next three to five years' strategy is developed (Senior managers SMC1: 75, 19; SMC2: 10-11). Middle managers feel that they contribute actively to this process (Curriculum manager CFGC: 68) and that they then translate strategic policy into working practice (Student service manager CFGA: 60).

Management systems

Meetings are held at team, faculty and service level, as well as in cross-college working groups; there are also 'group executive' meetings, where the directorate, heads of faculty and heads of service meet. The principal gives campus briefings at each site two to three times a year, where staff can discuss and raise issues as they wish (Senior manager SMC1: 83). Electronic communication is used extensively: email, and electronic newsletters, group discussion, folders of information and procedures all support the managers in their work (Student service manager CFGA: 117-8; Service manager SMC1: 48, 86). Sometimes, however, communication does not penetrate far enough into the college (Student service manager CFGA: 161; Service manager CFGB: 71-3).

All of the managers experience difficulty in cross-college liaison, which leads to frustration (Senior manager SMC3: 87). Communication across sites takes time, creating lengthy chains of events and excessive bureaucracy (Service manager CFGA: 120; Service manager CFGB: 114; Senior managers SMC3: 91-2; SMC1: 109). Sometimes a personal visit to discuss matters of concern is not feasible and the chance of frequent informal interaction, as might occur in a smaller college, is minimal (Student service manager CFGA: 120; Service manager CFGB: 101). Some middle managers traverse three, four or five sites in a day, and are still dissatisfied with the quality of contact achieved (Service manager CFGB: 102). Travelling around the city, and parking at other sites, presents logistical problems and is tiring (Student service manager CFGA: 124; Senior manager SMC3: 109). Attendance at cross-college meetings is not always possible (Student service manager CFGA: 127; Curriculum manager CFGC: 237). One senior manager worries that the college has created a 'meeting culture' – while people are in a meeting they are not getting their job done (Senior manager SMC2: 130). However, working with managers on other sites helps overall communication (Curriculum manager CFGC: 178).

Within the restrictions described above, interactions for management seem effective. Respondents understand that fellow-managers are subject to a range of internal and external pressures (Service manager CFGB: 13). There is appreciation of good communication and support from line managers (Curriculum manager CFGC: 38, 95). Group executive meetings enable middle managers to discuss issues and receive feedback from each other and from senior managers (Student service manager CFGA: 86; Senior manager SMC1: 84). The meeting observed at College C, of managers of services to students with their senior manager, indicates that members of this group are accustomed to working together, and are at ease with their senior manager. They undertake problem-solving and information giving, including reports from cross-college working parties, and show a collective concern, both for the needs of students and for developing effective college systems.

Managers see it as their role to ensure that quality standards are met (Curriculum manager CFGC: 187); the college aims at consistency across the sites, but sites are also allowed their individuality, in particular the sixth form college (Senior manager SMC3: 103, 61). The inspection report notes that good use is made of on-line access

to the college MIS to support decision-making and that there is a 'sophisticated system' for monitoring achievement towards targets. Various quality monitoring systems are described, mainly by service and student service managers, such as reports to external auditors and project funders; questionnaires giving internal feedback from other college managers; regular monitoring of team members against action plans; and weekly review with the line manager.

Middle managers find some college bureaucracy inhibiting, as many of them can remember simpler, single-college systems. Examples are given of needing 'too many' signatures on a form for budget expenditure (Service manager CFGB: 37), of 'horrendous' systems for employing part-time staff (Curriculum manager CFGC: 146) and complex systems of signatures for requesting a college service (Service manager CFGB: 78). This last example illustrates how bureaucracy impedes the manager who was speaking from offering the requested service.

As college size is a key factor at College C, a number of perspectives are offered here. Size can be enhancing, offering variety for staff and students (Senior manager SMC1: 148), creating sizeable outcomes, and making more things possible (Senior manager SMC3: 130, 64). However, the effective contribution of individual managers may be impeded by college size (Senior manager SMC3: 134), and single-sitedness sometimes seems very attractive (Senior manager SMC1: 147). From a middle manager perspective, sometimes the size of the organisation prevents managers from knowing where to seek support (Student service manager CFGA: 125), or even from knowing 'what is going on' (Student service manager CFGA: 115).

Enacting the middle manager role

The evolving shape and structures of the college means that manager roles are still developing. This produces mixed reaction from curriculum managers: some enjoy flexibility, others wish for more clarity (Curriculum managers CFGC: 46-48). There is a culture of encouraging creativity, of nurturing talent and evolving good practice, a culture as one that gives permission rather than blame (Student service manager CFGA: 103; Senior managers SMC2: 111; SMC4: 74; Service manager CFGB: 19).

Middle managers have been encouraged to devise operational systems and processes for the new college from scratch (Senior manager SMC2: 68). However, they report role ambiguity, through whole-college procedures not having stabilised. College agendas change often, leaving middle managers implementing outdated agendas (Service manager CFGB: 49, 122 Curriculum manager CFGC: 40). Sometimes the college does not anticipate action, or reacts too late, necessitating a rushed response (Curriculum manager CFGC: 120).

Participation by managers in cross-college project teams helps to dilute potential hierarchies between managers (Senior manager SMC1: 100). However, service heads do not have the level of accountability of faculty heads, whose roles carry responsibility for millions of pounds worth of business, and this creates hierarchies and tensions between managers (Senior managers SMC2: 33, 31; SMC1: 41). Senior managers note that curriculum heads find it difficult to release ownership, and that student service teams could be offered a more valuable role in supporting learning (Senior manager SMC2: 53-55; SMC4: 45-7, 50). The dual role of teaching and management presents logistical difficulties here, as in the other colleges; however teaching can also give stability to the manager role (Curriculum manager CFGC: 160). At the time of the research, the college proposed to allocate a minimum of 100 hours of teaching per year to all senior and middle managers – including service and student service managers – to strengthen the focus on teaching and learning issues (Senior manager SMC2: 123, 129).

Middle managers are perceived by senior managers to be of 'mixed ability', with some lacking management competencies or reluctant to accept full accountability (Senior manager SMC4 13-14; SMC4 121). However, the college is supportive of professional development (Senior manager SMC2: 75); managers' development needs are assessed through the annual professional development review (Service manager CFGB: 83), and faculty heads are also mentored by senior managers (Senior manager SMC2: 36). The college has retained a university accredited educational management programme, established at one of its constituent colleges. This leads to the award of Certificates, Masters degrees and Doctorates, and complements an internal programme on leadership development, run in conjunction with two international partners. At the time of the research, the college was creating a centre to co-ordinate

all staff development opportunities, offering programmes for leadership development, management development and general professional development (Senior managers SMC2: 115; SMC4: 59, 33, 35).

Leadership context

The principal of College C dislikes hierarchies and cross-college leadership and management are encouraged (Student service manager CFGA: 111; Senior manager SMC4: 68). One senior manager describes the culture as open and communicative, non-hierarchical (SMC1: 99). However, there is also a perception that faculty heads have differential power over other managers, and that the principal is 'at the top', giving strong direction to the college (Senior manager SMC1: 41, 45, 102). Some senior managers say that the college has to be transactional because of its size, and the need for quick response (Senior managers SMC3: 127; SMC2: 135). In situations of less urgency, the culture can be transformational (Senior manager SMC2: 136).

Middle managers report working within a system of control on the one hand and freedom on the other (Student service manager CFGA: 109), a balance of transactional and transformational leadership. One senior manager describes the tension between striving for 'deadly perfection' and supporting 'messy humanity', and declares that she would rather attempt the latter: i.e. be transformational (Senior manager SMC4: 155, 160). The transformational aspect of college leadership is demonstrated by staff having worked together to set out the values for the organisation (Senior manager SMC2: 72, 74).

The aspiration of senior managers for their own management style to be transformational is shown in Figure 4.8, where all scores are in the transformational part of the grid. The lower scores for the 'college style' could be ascribed to the need for conformity, and for some decisions to be made on a transactional basis. Whilst many of the scores given to the college leadership style by managers and their teams (Figure 4.9), fall in the transactional or central parts of the grid, they are nevertheless the highest of any of the four colleges, and in all cases, the average 'preferred' score is more transformational than the score for the current situation. The wish of senior managers, particularly the principal, for a transformational college culture would seem to be having an influence.

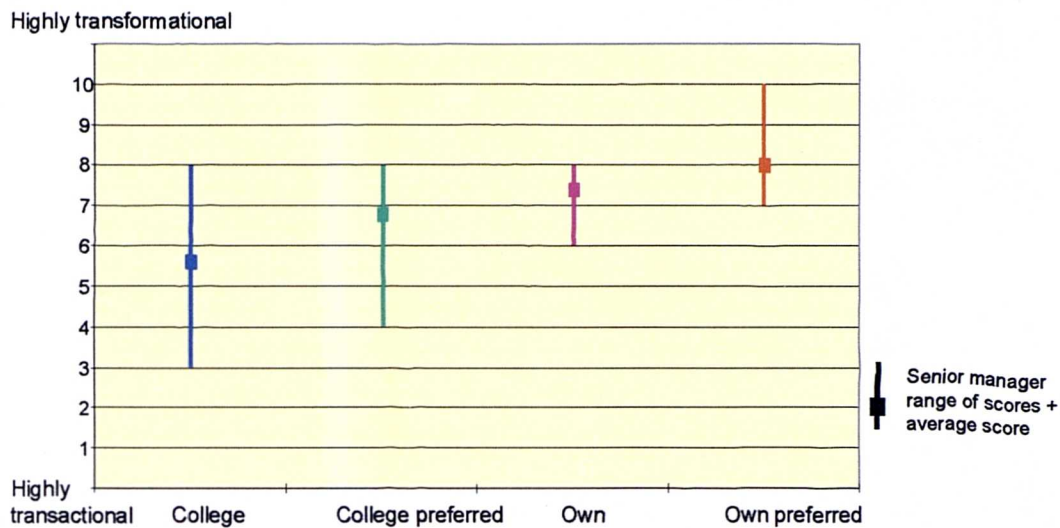


Figure 4.8 College C Senior managers' perceptions of leadership style

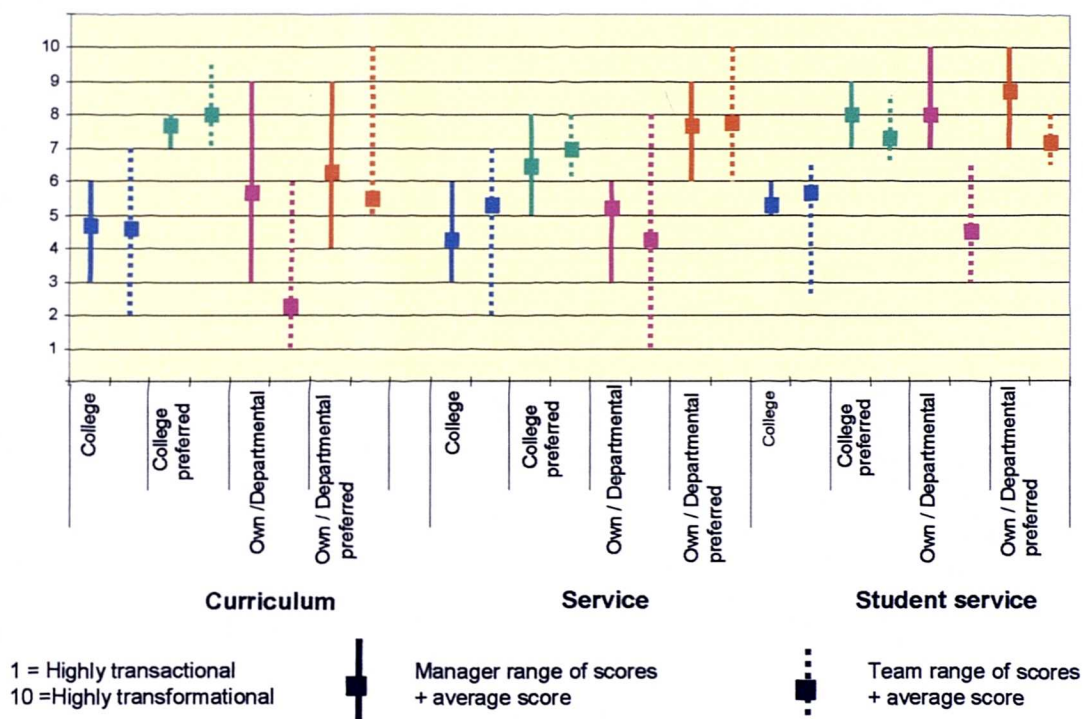


Figure 4.9 College C Managers' and teams' perceptions of leadership style

Key points

Structures and systems	Large / multi-site	Cross-college networks are difficult to manage, involving managers in a tiring amount of inter-site travel, and difficulty in locating personnel.
	Recent amalgamation: structures still settling	This is the largest of the case study colleges: merger at this college took place three years prior to the research.
	Lateral structures	Both senior and middle managers carry cross-college responsibilities in addition to their main role.
	Middle manager involvement in strategy	There is a framework for 'bottom up' strategic management.
	Bureaucratic systems	College bureaucracy is seen as inhibiting, and is exacerbated by the size of the college.
Middle manager role	'Hybrid' middle manager roles emerging	Concern for lateral liaison, and for keeping all managers in touch with teaching and learning is leading to the evolution of 'hybrid' roles.
	Support for innovation	There is a culture of creativity and of a reasonable amount of authority for middle managers.
	Role ambiguity	<i>The college is responsive to circumstance, and changes quickly; this is a commendable asset, but it can also cause role ambiguity.</i>
Leadership styles	Transformational leadership	The college has aspirations towards transformational leadership; this is borne out by the perceptions of managers and their teams.

Table 4.4 Environment for management: key factors in evidence at College C

The key factors affecting the environment for management at College C are presented in Table 4.4.

Two key features of College C are its newness and its size; both factors have an impact on middle management. The newness means that systems have yet to settle,

and may seem unwieldy; the size presents both logistical problems for inter-site management and a tendency towards bureaucracy. In some respects College C is a mirror image of College A: whilst College A established a directive, transactional approach at amalgamation, College C adopted the opposite stance, with a strong drive towards non-hierarchical, transformational leadership. The result is tension between the college's open, transformative culture and the need for efficient operational systems across a large multiple site.

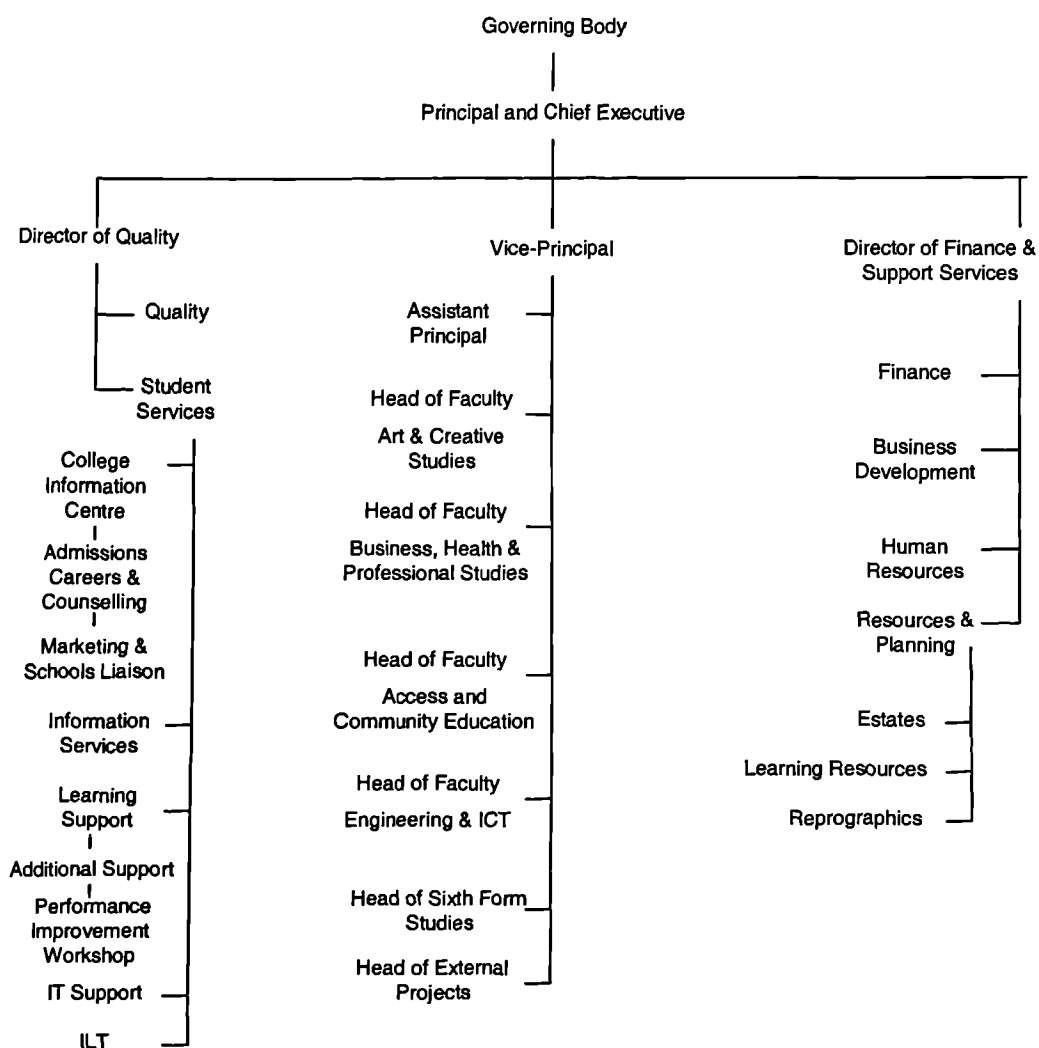
4.4 College D

College D is a medium-sized general further education college, serving a provincial town and surrounding areas, where the relative deprivation is low. It is the smallest case study college, operating on a single site which includes a purpose built sixth form centre. Provision is offered on employers' premises, at an IT learning centre and a number of neighbourhood centres. Courses are provided in nine of the ten former FEFC programme areas, from basic level to higher education.

The college holds the Charter Mark award, and documentation for staff and students is based upon clarity of understanding, with staff and student charters setting out values and responsibilities. Clear objectives and mutual responsibilities are set out for each area of college provision. The annual report celebrates both staff and student achievements. The college holds the Positive about Disabled People award and the Investor in People award. At 78%, it has the lowest proportion of permanent staff among the case study colleges.

Management structure

The management structure is hierarchical, as shown in Figure 4.10. The principal is supported by two directors, who oversee the service and student service functions, and by the vice principal and assistant principal, responsible for curriculum. Curriculum provision is managed by four heads of faculty, a head of sixth form studies and a head of external projects. Heads of faculty, considered in this college as senior managers, are regarded as key people, and service areas have become more subsidiary (Senior manager SMD1: 15). This has caused some resentment, both



Senior managers interviewed

Principal
 Director of Quality
 Head of Faculty, Business, Health and Professional Studies
 Head of Sixth Form Studies

Middle manager focus group members

Information Services Manager
 Head of Resources and Planning
 Quality Improvement Manager
 Head of Learning Support
 Head of School Liaison and Customer Services
 Head of Department: Entry Level
 Head of Department: Art and Design
 Head of Department: Health and Food
 Head of Department: Community Education
 Head of Department: Business and Office Technology
 Head of Department: Language, Leisure, PE / Sport

Figure 4.10 College D Management hierarchy chart and respondent sample

among service heads and some faculty heads (Senior manager SMD4: 45-48). However, a wide range of services which impact upon the student – learning support services – are to be integrated under one manager, which should enable these services to have greater impact (Senior manager SMD3: 25).

Faculties are becoming centralised onto 'home bases' (Senior manager SMD1: 69), which at the time of the research included faculty-based student support services (Senior manager SMD4: 6). They each have different cultures and different allocations of responsibility (Senior manager SMD4: 116-117). Because of the focal role of the faculty heads, there appears to be little or no middle manager input into whole-college strategy, although managers develop strategic practice for their own area (Service / Student service managers DFGB: 11, 50). The last inspection report – in 1998 – comments that staff have clear line management responsibilities, and that strategic planning involves wide consultation with staff, reviewed by middle senior management.

Management systems

The senior management team meet each week, producing a 'brief' which is disseminated to faculty and service teams through meetings and the intranet. As at College B, there is concern that this can seem 'like a diktat' (Senior manager SMD4: 43). There is also a rolling three-week programme of senior and middle manager meetings to discuss curriculum, finance and quality, and student service agendas. Faculty and service teams meet regularly, some on a weekly basis; the size of the college and the location of staffrooms in generic working areas also facilitate informal communication.

At the time of the last inspection, not all managers had access to the on-line MIS systems. Curriculum managers now report that these systems have improved, providing good access to data needed for monitoring and decision-making (Curriculum manager DFGC: 130, 209; Senior manager SMD3: 23-4). One senior manager comments that once managers feel that they can trust the data, management will be simpler (Senior manager SMD2: 103-4). The college intranet is growing in use, but at the time of the research there were transition problems, in that it was assumed that all staff had access to it, which was not so (Curriculum manager DFGC: 133).

Managers report that communication is not effective enough: managers of all types agree that liaison is better between some areas of college than others (Service / student service manager DFGA: 158; Curriculum managers DFGC 129, 207, 209). Communication between faculties has improved since their number was halved, but having faculty 'home bases' can also heighten their isolation (Senior manager SMD4: 70, 77). Curriculum managers speak of being 'introduced' to middle managers from across college at faculty meetings, and agree that they need a better understanding of other areas of the college and their systems (Curriculum managers DFGC: 144 ff, 232, 234).

As in other colleges, there are complaints about bureaucracy. Form filling is perceived as tedious and as preventing effective action (Service / student service manager DFGA: 129). Curriculum managers feel burdened by unreasonable deadlines (Curriculum manager DFGC: 41); however a proposed college calendar with agreed deadlines may improve this situation (Senior manager SMD3: 150). They also complain about excessive paperwork, particularly for managing part-time contracts, and the lack of available information about the employment status of their staff (Curriculum managers DFGC: 14, 211; DFGC: 195). Nevertheless, one senior manager points out that some bureaucracy, such as completing registers and minuting meetings, is an essential part of college operation and professional behaviour, (Senior manager SMD3: 48-9).

Operational systems which are inconsistent between faculties create confusion for those working across the college, and a lack of parity between role-holders in each faculty (Curriculum managers DFGC: 203-4, 185; Service / student service manager DFGB: 131. Some curriculum managers have to meet enrolment and retention targets, some do not. Some have appraisal, some claim they do not (Curriculum managers DFGC: 91, 86). Some middle managers report not having a budget, and feel that this impacts on their professionalism. They spend money, but do not know up to what limit, which disempowers them as managers (Service/student service manager DFGA: 52-4; Curriculum manager DFGC: 50, 52, 56).

One senior manager, acknowledging the different systems in the college, feels that nevertheless there is a culture of working together (Senior manager SMD2: 118).

However, there is a perception that some managers only know 'their little system', and are not aware of the whole college picture (Service / student service manager DFGB: 186). Competition between faculties leads to competitive demands on college services and student services, a situation similar to that at College B (Service / student service manager DFGB: 124). Faculty heads are described variously as being territorial, competitive, and paternalistic, all of which impedes liaison and can lead to 'blame cultures' (Service / student service managers DFGB: 121, 122, 138, 141, 187). The meeting observed at College D, a faculty meeting, served to reinforce the impression of 'compartmentalisation' received through the other data. The meeting was good-humoured and well attended, and the majority of the contributions came from the head of faculty. There was useful clarification and discussion of procedures and issues, based on a concern that the faculty should work coherently together. The 'team spirit' engendered did, however, tend to belittle at times the work of other areas of the college, and included a concern to maintain and increase the academic territory of the faculty.

The college has recently developed its quality systems, focusing them on standards of provision for internal and external customers (Senior managers SMD3: 67; SMD2: 46). Better methods of auditing have revealed underdeveloped areas of college management, helping to indicate what action is needed (Senior manager SMD3: 73-76, 60). College objectives are used at training events to help people understand long-term aims (Senior manager SMD3: 141). Service and student service managers are measured against performance indicators and benchmarks, but falling short of a target for a justified reason is acceptable (Service / student service managers DFGB: 68-72). They receive informal feedback from clients, and regular formal feedback may be sought in future (Service / student service manager DFGB: 106). Some managers feel, however, that quality systems indicate a lack of trust and take up time in 'proof' which could be spent actually doing the job (Curriculum manager DFGB: 43; Service / student service manager DFGB: 109, 116).

Enacting the middle manager role

Curriculum managers below head of faculty level have little time allocated for management, and they feel that the sheer volume of work is too much (Curriculum manager DFGB: 78, 95; Senior manager SMD1: 53). Managers are contractually

allowed to work at home, and some do so, to avoid constant interruptions (Service / student service manager DFGA: 189). There is a lack of clerical support, and some managers feel that their salary is wasted on clerical work (Service / student service manager DFGA: 192). Service and student service managers also feel that academic managers expect them to do administrative work for them (Service / student service manager DFGA: 164).

Some service and student service managers see that their jobs have evolved in response to external pressures on the college, and they enjoy the freedom to decide on college practice (Service / student service managers (DFGB: 22-3, 43, 51-52). Service and student service managers feel that they have the authority needed for their role, but that 'the edges are blurred' (Service / student service manager DFGA: 135, 148, 150). Sometimes they have to draw upon the authority of their line manager, to show that they are working with senior manager support (Service / student service manager DFGB: 96). As in College C, they sometimes lack current information (Service / student service manager DFGA: 149), and feel that there are hidden agendas which hamper their work: 'gone up the wing and there we are – the goalposts have gone!' (Service manager DFGB: 171-172).

There are different expectations on different types of manager, which are not always mutually understood (Senior manager SMD3: 43). One senior manager feels that there has been a culture of 'teaching staff versus support staff', and that efforts are being made to break this down (Senior manager SMD3: 40-41). However, another considers it natural to place more importance on the curriculum areas, given the educational purpose of the college (Senior manager SMD2: 40). Cross-college managers are perceived to need different skills from curriculum managers, having to win the co-operation of others for liaison (Service / student service manager DFGB: 130, 143; Senior manager SMD3: 35). They have to be negotiators and influencers, as they do not have the power to 'issue instructions' (Senior manager SMD3: 30). One senior manager observes that service and student service staff may come into college employment with aspirations for management, but that this is less likely for teaching staff (Senior manager SMD2: 35).

In considering manager development, the low turnover of staff is perceived as limiting new insights. Some managers are perceptive in learning their role, others have become managers by default and may be less effective; some have been in the same role for many years, which can hinder lateral thinking (Senior manager SMD2: 162,159, 168, 149). Managers are supported in taking secondments, and bringing new insights back into the college (Senior manager SMD3: 113). Managers are seen as learning the role through experience, but there is also a development programme, which is under review, and access to a university diploma in educational management, with time allocated for study (Senior manager SMD2: 30-32). Take-up for the diploma programme is reported as 'sporadic' (Senior manager SMD4: 65-66).

Leadership context

Senior managers report an 'open door' style of leadership, underpinned by a culture of tackling problems, and that managers can ask for help and training (Senior managers SMD3: 100-3; SMD2: 53-4). Curriculum managers agree that most senior managers are approachable (Curriculum manager DFGC: 103). Both senior and middle managers observe that the college is moving from a very participative management style to a more directive one (Senior manager SMD4: 127-8; Service / student service manager DFGA: 34). However, one senior manager wants the college to become more directive (Senior manager SMD1: 123). He seeks a balance between engaging in consultation when the opportunity arises, and making and communicating decisions when this is more appropriate (Senior manager SMD1: 116, 126). This type of transactional / transformational balance is advocated by another senior manager, who feels that the college could be efficient in meeting targets whilst giving space for innovation and debate (Senior manager SMD4: 166).

Senior managers' perceptions of the college's transactional / transformational mix of styles is mirrored in their scores for college leadership (See Figure 4.11). Whilst largely occupying the transformational part of the grid, they show a more ambivalent response than at College C, where aspirations to transformational leadership appear stronger. Middle managers and their teams (Figure 4.12) judge the college leadership to be largely transactional, and on the whole wish for it to be much more transformational. Scores for departmental leadership indicate that a transformational style is in operation, and is wished for. The exception once more is the group of

service managers, who wish for more transactional styles than the other managers or their teams.

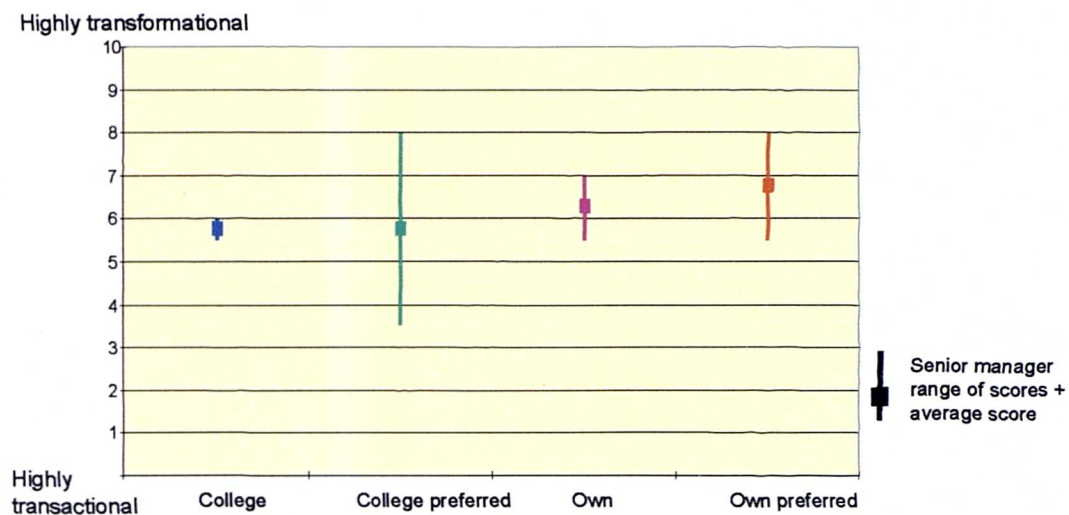


Figure 4.11 College D Senior managers' perceptions of leadership style

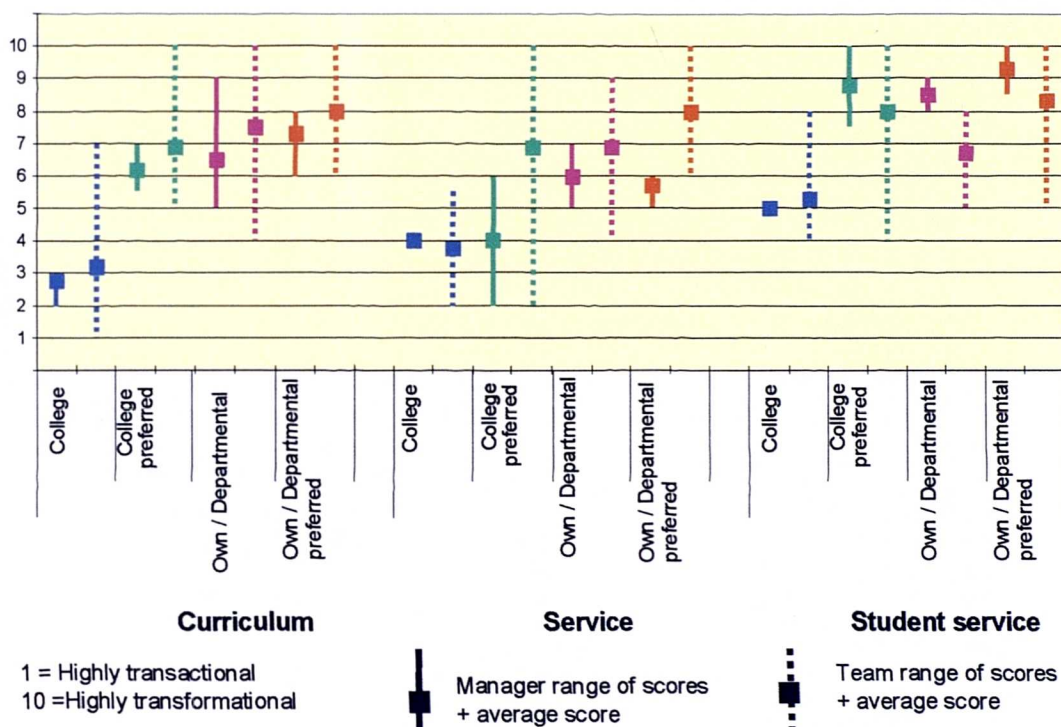


Figure 4.12 College D Managers' and teams' perceptions of leadership style

Key points

Structures and systems	Small / single site	The smallest of the case study colleges: it operates on a single site.
	Movement towards change	The college has developed its quality systems in recent years: this activity has revealed areas for development.
	Faculty based system of management	The college is strongly faculty based.
	Little middle manager involvement in strategy	There is largely a 'top down' approach to strategy formation.
	Bureaucratic systems	Managers have difficulties with the level of bureaucracy at the college.
Middle manager role	Differential value of middle manager roles	Whilst middle managers are all valued for their different input by senior managers, status-based impediments exist for service and student service managers.
	Support for innovation	Some managers have evolved their roles in response to college need; this kind of creativity is appreciated.
	Role conflict	Implementation systems are not consistent between faculties, creating difficulties for cross-college managers.
Leadership styles	Support for transformational leadership	Transformational styles of leadership are wished for at all levels of the college. They are present at departmental level; senior managers judge them to be present at a whole-college level.

Table 4.5 Environment for management: key factors in evidence at College D

The key factors affecting the environment for management at College D are presented in Table 4.5.

In recent times, College D has experienced less change and turbulence than the other three colleges. As a result, it may have been slower to re-think and reform its management practice. The new quality systems are exposing areas for development, and there is some unease at middle manager level with the differential practice between the faculties. At present, senior managers seem happy to let each faculty go its own way, but it is likely that the 'territorial' nature of the faculties will eventually impede effective whole-college working.

As at the other colleges, tensions are evident: there is a genuine culture of 'openness' among senior managers, coupled with a move towards more directive management at senior level. There is a willingness among many middle managers to learn more about each other's practice, and to liaise more, whilst in other ways the management structures are very territorial. Of all of the colleges, service and student service managers here are treated least equitably, in spite of senior managers commending their worth.

4.5 Conclusions

Through comparing the four college environments for management presented above, conclusions can be drawn about the patterns of interaction which they present. Each college is a complex working environment, and between them, the four colleges demonstrate a range of structures, styles and attitudes to the middle manager role. In the discussion below, *their likenesses and differences will be explored, and key factors* in the environment for management at the colleges will be summarised for incorporation in further analysis, principally in the modelling activity presented in Chapter 6.

Systems and structures

The college environments presented above illustrate some of the tensions presented in the literature. All of the colleges demonstrate the uneasy balance between the whole-college environment and the differentiated parts. College A has emphasised the 'whole-college' perspective, demonstrating the most mechanical systems of the four colleges, but now sees the need for a more organic approach, with greater autonomy for the constituent parts. College B, having valued professional autonomy

underpinned by educational values, now needs a more unified, directive approach, and College D may be moving in the same direction. College C, with the same 'unifying' task to accomplish as College A had ten years earlier, has chosen an 'organic' perspective from the start, albeit with strong directional influence from the principal, and extensive inter-site management to draw the constituent parts together.

From the very small sample presented here, it would seem that sub-groups within colleges create their own 'territories'. In a multi-site college, the territory is likely to be the site. For people based largely at one college site, a 'home territory' is created, an organic section of the college to which people relate, and which may develop its own ethos and practices. For people working across college sites, access and influence have to be earned at all sites, and 'local customs' accommodated. The same can be true of strong faculty divisions; faculties have positional power through enacting the educational purpose of the college and, like sites, may develop their own practices. They are a 'home base' for curriculum managers and staff, and for some technicians and administrators. Unlike sites, however, they largely exclude staff who are outside the faculty system, and potentially create hierarchies between 'curriculum staff' and 'other staff'. Taking the organic model further, therefore, it appears that large organisations (and even the smallest college, with 270 staff and 7,600 students, is a large organisation) may tend to split into organic parts to which its members can relate. Where the parts are sites, physical, logistical barriers of liaison are presented; where they are faculties, political barriers can grow, which may act to exclude managers and staff who work outside the faculty system.

Leadership styles

Consideration of leadership styles alongside college systems throws up an interesting correlation. The two colleges – Colleges C and D – where there is most frustration with mechanical, bureaucratic systems are the ones where senior managers most strongly espouse transformational leadership. Any complex organisation needs bureaucracy to some extent, but it seems to be less well tolerated where the value-system of the college is seen as transformational. At College C, the factors of size, multiple sites and recency of amalgamation may require bureaucratic systems, in spite of the aspirations for transformational leadership, and the college may serve to demonstrate an uneasy compatibility between the two. College A is most internally

coherent in this respect: transactional senior leadership and mechanical whole-college systems predominate, and both are largely well tolerated. College B retains cautious support for transformational leadership, but recent experience has led the college to become more transactional, and the newly instituted systems of operation and accountability are therefore seen as necessary.

Three of the colleges appear to support creativity and innovation in their middle managers: at College A there had been little space for innovation in its transactionally-based creation of a financially stable and successful 'one college'. This is consistent with College A's lack of involvement of middle managers in strategy-making, although College D, which espoused creativity and transformational leadership, also has little middle manager involvement in strategy.

In all of the colleges there is an acceptance that transactional and transformational leadership have to be combined. Conformity to college – and government – directives through agreed systems of practice require the 'functions, tasks and behaviours' of the organisation to be competently carried out,' (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 14) in return for contingent reward. At the same time, the transformational activities of establishing goals, providing intellectual stimulation, modelling important educational values, and creating a productive college culture (Leithwood *et al*, 1999: 9) are seen as necessary for developing staff potential, and determining student success.

Managerialism and professionalism

Similar tensions can be seen between managerialism and professionalism. Where the college funding system is based upon student recruitment, retention and achievement, managerial systems are needed to set targets and monitor activity, and to ensure accurate collection and presentation of data. Likewise, a professional approach to students, which takes account of them as individual learners, and integrates college systems in order to support them through to achievement, is also necessary. This justifiable focus upon the learner can lead to power systems which favour the curriculum manager, as at College D, and to some extent at College C. At its extreme, this type of system acknowledges 'professionalism' only in those involved in teaching, creating a gulf between these staff and managers and those carrying out the 'managerial' functions of the college, such as admissions or finance. Concurrently,

college service and student service functions are becoming 'professionalised', with manager posts being allocated to specialists in these areas, as is the case at Colleges A and B. The extent to which professionalism is acknowledged affects the value accorded to manager roles of different types. College A has probably made most progress towards equality of roles, and College D the least, although senior managers at College D express respect for managers of all types. Managers at College B appear to accept a differentiated view of the different roles, and at College C a 'hybrid' approach to role is emerging.

Role

Managers express varying degrees of clarity concerning their role and of authority in carrying it out; curriculum managers are the most likely to perceive that they have both clarity and authority. In all of the colleges, role strain is evident among the middle managers, created by the size of the workload, the scarcity of resources for staffing and, at Colleges A and C, multi-site working. Role conflict can occur where managers have differential understanding of whole-college needs or of student need, as at College B, or where differential value is placed upon different manager roles, as at College D. At Colleges C and D role ambiguity is evident, for example when college 'direction' changes without managers being fully informed

Enacting the role is influenced by the relative stability of the college. In multi-site colleges, the length of time since amalgamation may be significant; stability is also affected by unanticipated crises, such as those experienced at College B. As the overall external environment for colleges is turbulent, internal stability is valued. It can, however, create an environment where problems are unnoticed and unaddressed, as has been the case at College B, and is present to some extent at College D.

Summary of key points

In the figures at the end of each college section, key factors have been identified as important from amongst those discussed at each college. These factors are now gathered into Table 4.6, compiled from the four college summaries, with emergent concepts presented in the final column. It is important to note that the comparative simplicity of this figure both clarifies and masks the complexity of the environment at each college. It clarifies through selecting key elements which offer useful points for

comparison and analysis; it masks because the complexity is lost. In Chapter 5, where the facilitators and impediments to role are discussed, this complexity will be re-considered, and in Chapter 6 the simplified elements in the table, together with the emergent concepts generated in the final column of the table, will be used for modelling the middle manager role in its college context.

	College A	College B	College C	College D	
Structures and systems	Multi-site	Two sites: one dominant	Large / multi-site	Small / single site	Size and sites
	Historic amalgamation-moving to decentralised structure	College in transition	Recent amalgamation-structures still settling	Movement towards change	Turbulence
	Moving to site-based systems of management	Faculty based system of management	Lateral structures	Faculty based system of management	Management structures
	Restricted middle manager involvement in strategy	Middle manager involvement in strategy	Middle manager involvement in strategy	Little middle manager involvement in strategy	Middle manager involvement in strategy
	Mechanical systems	Move towards mechanical systems	Bureaucratic systems	Bureaucratic systems	College systems
Middle manager role	Equality of middle manager roles viewed positively	Differentiation of middle manager roles	'Hybrid' middle manager roles emerging	Differential value of middle manager roles	Status of manager roles
	Limited manager development	Support for innovation	Support for innovation	Support for innovation	Support for innovation
	Role strain	Role strain	Role ambiguity	Role conflict	Role coherence
Leadership styles	'Stratified' leadership style	Cautious support for transformational leadership	Transformational leadership	Support for transformational leadership	Leadership context

Table 4.6 Comparison of key factors in the environment for management

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

5.0 Introduction

From the college contexts presented in Chapter 4, it can be seen that middle managers occupy a central role within a complex college environment. College strategy is transformed into practice through their agency in all the various areas of college activity. In this chapter, Section 5.1 presents the conceptual basis for the analysis of the middle manager role. This section opens up the discussion of the first research question:

- What roles do further education middle managers perform?

This research question is further discussed in Section 5.2, which draws on the viewpoints of members of the role set – teams members, middle managers and senior managers – in order to depict and analyse the various aspects of the middle manager role. This analysis therefore also addresses the third research question:

- How do members of the role set perceive that middle managers enact their role?

In the third section, 5.3, discussion focuses upon the ways in which factors in the environment for management, identified in Chapter 4, facilitate and impede managers in carrying out their role. This section responds to the question:

- How are the middle managers facilitated and impeded by factors in their environment for management?

The analysis indicates that managers often appear to be placed between sets of pressures which flex and change, and one interest of this research is to explore this complexity of interaction and response. The chapter as a whole draws upon the depiction of the management environments presented in Chapter 4, and contributes to the modelling and further discussion of the manager role within its environment which will be presented in Chapter 6. Underpinning the whole of the analysis is the examination of the organic and mechanical dimensions of the middle manager role, which is discussed below.

5.1 Conceptual basis for the analysis

Organic and mechanical dimensions of role

In the literature review, the concepts of organic and mechanical systems of organisation were traced back to Durkheim's mechanical and organic solidarity, where mechanical solidarity assumes likeness and conformity, 'a collective or common consciousness' (Thompson, 1985: 39), whilst under organic solidarity, society is seen as an organic whole, formed of differentiated parts (Thompson, 1985: 48). Burns and Stalker (1961) applying this societal analysis to organisations, propose that mechanical organisations operate through systems which are largely uniform, and display a hierarchical structure of control, authority and communication, together with an insistence on loyalty to the organisation and to one's superiors. Organic systems are more diverse, characterised by the contribution of specialist knowledge and experience to the common task and the tendency to focus on management within its 'realistic' context. The hierarchical structures of mechanical organisations are replaced in organic systems by a network structure of control, authority and communication. Burns and Stalker (1961: 122) claim that 'the two forms of system represent a polarity', with mechanical systems being more appropriate to more stable conditions, and proposing that organisations oscillate between the two poles, dependent upon the degree of stability encountered.

As the literature review has argued, the mechanical dimension can be associated with transactional leadership, and a focus upon conformity to systems, whereas the organic dimension becomes associated with transformational leadership and a focus upon the differentiated needs of people. In the analysis presented here, these pairs of concepts are not seen as bipolar, but as dimensions in relation to which manager activities and their contexts may be placed. Managers work within a range of contexts, where they have to reconcile and balance systemic and people-based demands; this analysis therefore aims to explore the complexity of the area between the two dimensions.

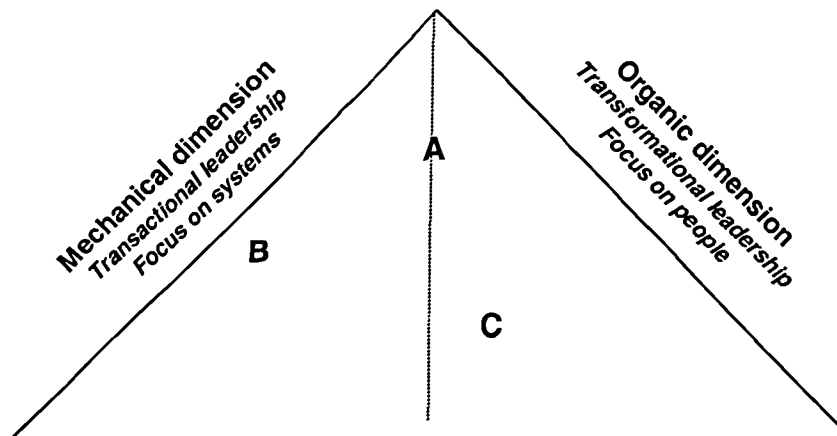


Figure 5.1 Mechanical and organic dimensions

In Figure 5.1, the mechanical and organic dimensions are presented conventionally at right angles to each other, but unconventionally in an 'arrow-head' position. This position enables an equal consideration of both dimensions, as 'mirror images' of each other, and the convergence of the dimensions at the head of the arrow enables the viewer to consider the potential of the dimensions to converge and work together. Moreover, the linear, bipolar extremes of Burns and Stalker are conceptually replaced by a two-dimensional space within which different types of activity take place, and different levels of influence of the mechanical and organic can be represented. As the analysis will show, no manager role is enacted solely in relation to one dimension; within each aspect of role there are mechanical and organic elements which fluctuate according to circumstance, but which also have characteristic levels of influence. This framework can therefore be used to locate and classify aspects of role.

An aspect of role located in this figure at A is equally affected by organic and mechanical factors; its enactment is influenced by both dimensions. An aspect of role located at B is strongly influenced by mechanical factors, while the aspect of role located at C is strongly organic, but has noticeable mechanical features. Throughout this analysis, an indication is given of the location of the managers' work in relation to the mechanical and organic dimensions. This is not with the intention to simplify the complexity of the role, but rather to point out the tensions and relationships between mechanical and organic, systems and people, which inhabit all aspects of the role.

The aspects of role to be discussed, derived from a consideration of the typologies from the literature and the data collected, are considered below.

Typologies of middle management

As described in Chapter 3, and set out in Figure 3.1, this research has been based upon an iterative process of theory-building. The construction of the typology for the study started from the analysis of the literature, which indicated potential frameworks of categorisation for the middle manager role. The literature on middle management, as discussed in Chapter 2, presents a number of typologies for the role. Each is influenced by the concerns and perceptions of both researcher and the role-holder; typologies can therefore be based upon such frameworks as sets of values, types of knowledge or patterns of activity. The research reported here seeks to examine the impact of the internal college environment upon the manager role. Whilst both systems of values and types of manager knowledge contribute to an understanding of the role, the main focus is upon manager activity: what managers do, and how it is enabled or impeded by the surrounding environment. A typology with this basis is therefore sought.

In Table 5.1, key frameworks discussed in the literature review are summarised: those of Mintzberg (1990) which relates to managers in a range of organisations, those of Brown and Rutherford (1998) and Busher and Harris (1999) which relate to middle managers in schools, Peeke's (1997) consideration of middle manager roles in colleges and Smith's (2002) analysis of the roles of departmental heads in universities. These sets of concepts were identified and borne in mind during the coding of the respondent data. The data were coded using labels which were primarily based upon the manager activities indicated by respondents. Clusters of activities were then grouped under more generalised concepts, as shown in Appendix 9. The concepts which were then adopted were thus influenced by the frameworks found in the literature, but were grounded in the data, and designed to represent as accurately as possible the categories of response offered. The final column of Figure 5.1 presents the typology adopted for this research, and its relationship with earlier frameworks is discussed below.

Mintzberg (1990)	Brown and Rutherford (1998)	Busher and Harris (1999)	Peeke (1997)	Smith (2002)	This study
Figurehead	Organisational architect		Servicing college bureaucracy	Preparing for the QA	Corporate agent
Spokesperson			Quality assurance	Personal research	
Entrepreneur	Organisational architect	Translation: bridging / brokering	Leading curriculum development	Governing the department	Implementer
Disturbance handler	Leading professional	Improving staff and student performance	Managing resources	Managing resources	
Resource allocator				Teaching / supervision	
Monitor				Student issues	
Leader	Servant leader	Improving staff and student performance	Managing people	Managing personnel	Staff manager
Disseminator	Leading professional	Foster collegiality / shape and establish shared vision			
Liaison		Liaison / representative role	External liaison	Representing the department	Liaison
Spokesperson		Translation: bridging / brokering			
Negotiator					
Leader	Servant leader		Development activity - academic leadership		Leader
	Leading professional				

Table 5.1 Typologies of manager roles

All the typologies presented here, except that of Busher and Harris, include some type of corporate role: in terms of this research, a whole-college responsibility which involves middle managers in making whole-college decisions, or in using their understanding of the values, purpose and direction of the whole institution to manage the constituent parts. Examination of the data indicates that this role goes further than Peeke's (1997) 'servicing college bureaucracy' and 'quality assurance'; these are aspects of the corporate role, but do not cover the scope of the evidence presented here. Smith (2002), in universities, considers this aspect of role through specific personal and departmental activities which are focused on corporate aims, rather than through an involvement in, and commitment to, whole-institutional activity. In his earlier study, however, Smith (1996) found that there was an expectation for heads of department to have a corporate perspective. Brown and Rutherford's (1998) 'organisational architect', creating new departmental structures to develop the work of the institution, comes near to the concept of corporate agency indicated by the current data. Mintzberg's (1990) 'figurehead' and spokesperson' acknowledge the formal and ceremonial aspects of the corporate role, but do not encompass the role as evidenced here.

Each typology identifies the role of 'making things happen' – the implementer – which is at the heart of the middle manager function. For Smith (2002), this is encapsulated in 'governing the department', and collectively the typologies encompass the day-to-day management activities of managing resources, developing the curriculum and the way it is taught, and monitoring the work of the department. This day-to-day function is an active one, requiring interventions to 'handle disturbance' (Mintzberg, 1990), to improve staff and student performance (Busher and Harris, 1999), and to shape creatively the work of the department (Brown and Rutherford, 1998).

Collective implementation requires the organisation of staff activities, and the typologies are variously angled towards leading (Mintzberg, 1990; Brown and Rutherford, 1998), managing (Peeke, 1997; Smith 2002) and working collaboratively with departmental staff (Busher and Harris, 1999). It will be argued in this research that further education middle managers lead, albeit ambivalently, and a section of the proposed typology acknowledges this. The data also indicate that they both manage

and work collaboratively with staff, and both of these functions are therefore acknowledged in the proposed designation of 'staff manager'.

Most of the typologies place emphasis upon the liaison role of the middle manager: this is a strong feature of the middle management literature as a whole. Smith (2002), Busher and Harris (1999) and Mintzberg (1990) see liaison from the viewpoint of representing, or speaking for, the department; another layer of liaison is added by Busher and Harris (1999) and Mintzberg (1990), that of negotiation. Busher and Harris describe the bridging and brokering which has to be undertaken to enable a 'fit' between the work of the department and other areas of the organisation, or with the organisation as a whole. In departmentalised organisations such as colleges, liaison is an essential and sometimes complex activity, and – as Peeke (1997) notes – also involves liaison outside the college.

The role of 'leading professional', identified by Brown and Rutherford (1988) and alluded to by Peeke (1997), highlights the debate presented in the literature review as to whether leadership is dispersed within organisations. Neither Smith (2002) nor Busher and Harris (1999) include 'leader' in their typologies of middle management, and respondents to this research were collectively uncertain about the term. However, if a key question for the research is 'What do middle managers do?', reading of the current literature indicates that the investigation should consider whether or not they lead. 'Leader' is therefore included in the proposed typology.

None of the studies referred to here includes explicit consideration of middle manager roles in education other than curriculum managers. Such roles are only recently emergent in schools, and have been largely overlooked in further education management research, with the notable exception of Lumby (2001), whose analysis of data from a range of service managers has provided a useful reference point for this study. In higher education, where administrative roles are longer established, management of academic areas tends to be considered separately from the management of university administration.

Further education middle manager: typology of role

Whilst these typologies, together with other concepts from the literature, are useful in examining and defining manager activities, they do not individually offer a 'fit' with the data as analysed. This is perhaps not surprising, as there is no published definition of the middle manager role in further education encompassing the range of roles considered here. It was therefore necessary to construct a typology, based upon the data analysis, which takes account of published work, but more nearly reflects the manager role explored here. As indicated above, the proposed aspects of the middle manager role are: corporate agent, implementer, staff manager, liaison and leader. These categories are not mutually exclusive, and individual comments often indicate an awareness of more than one activity; they will therefore be referred to as 'aspects' of the total middle manager role, rather than individual 'roles'. The first four aspects are referred to directly by respondents, using a range of terminology; the role of leader emerges indirectly, largely from perceptions of the ways in which the other roles are enacted. The five aspects of role are defined below, and related to the underpinning framework of the organic and mechanical dimensions. Their position relative to each other and to the two dimensions is represented in Figure 5.2.

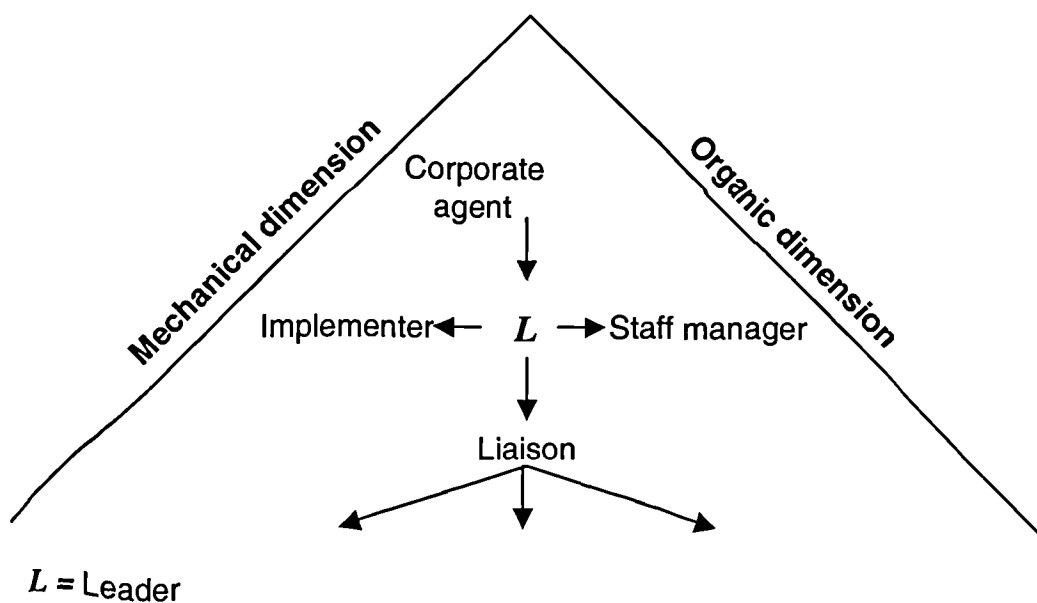


Figure 5.2 **Dynamic representation of aspects of role**

The role is shaped by the manager's understanding of what it is to be a **corporate agent**, an influence shown here as coming 'from the top', from where the organic and mechanical dimensions converge to represent the whole purpose and trajectory of the college. This aspect of role can be defined as the conscious contribution of middle managers to carrying out the whole work of the college. It has both mechanical and organic features; from the data considered here, it may be seen as strongly mechanical, with its emphasis on loyalty to the organisation and to one's superiors, and its dependence upon the hierarchical structures of the college. However, as corporate agency is mainly enacted through departmental activity, influenced by local context and specialist knowledge, this aspect of role is also to a certain extent organic. Understanding of corporate agency influences both the implementer and staff manager aspects of role placed beneath it in the Figure, and the effectiveness of the managers' liaison.

The **implementer** aspect, where the manager 'makes things happen', is largely enacted mechanically, using the homogeneous systems of the college in order to carry out a particular college function. Effectiveness is judged through the extent to which these functions do, or do not, happen, and through the efficiency of the processes by which they happen. Managers do not implement alone, and the **staff manager** is a necessary complement to the implementer aspect of role, as role-holders interact with their teams to effect implementation. This is a largely organic activity, characterised by the tendency to focus on the 'realistic' context of management, and the application of the specialist knowledge and experience of the team to the common task. Effectiveness here is achieved through a collaborative process, by which team members are enabled, through the direction, support and development of the manager, to carry out their roles. It appears from responses that implementation and staff management are central to the middle manager role; they are therefore placed centrally in the Figure and interlinked.

Both implementation and staff management are enabled by effective **liaison** in all directions, internally and externally to the college. This aspect of role involves the manager in interactions with other managers and staff over whom they do not have direct authority, in order to carry out cross-college or departmental management activities. Effective liaison is mainly evident in the smooth interaction of the different

functions of the college to offer coherent provision for students. Liaison involves a facility in managing within the influence of both dimensions. It depends upon an organic network structure of control, authority and communication within a presumed community of interest, yet it is carried out within an environment of hierarchical control and specialised differentiation of college functions.

The **leader** aspect of role is considered last, not because it is least important, but because it is problematical. In carrying out the other aspects of role, the middle managers in this study show consistent evidence of leadership, principally through their concern for values, for shaping the work of the department and enabling the work of their team. They also largely encounter the respect, trust and authority which enable them to carry out a leadership role. The leader aspect of role is strongly organic, focusing on both contingent and transformational leadership, which set the task within its environment. However, since leadership in this research is displayed through the enactment of the other aspects of role, it is placed here at the centre of the role, and of the Figure.

This representation offered in Figure 5.2 implies a static situation, with aspects of role occupying fixed places in the model. However as managers operate within a turbulent environment, both the nature of, and the pressure upon, these aspects of role flex and change. Sections 5.2 and 5.3 will explore the complexity of the role, and of its interaction with the college environment, using the aspects of role presented above as its framework.

Section 5.2 presents the aspects of role as perceived by three 'layers' of the manager role set: managers' team members, the managers themselves and the senior managers. No distinction is made between the roles held by the senior manager respondents; these are identified in the management charts presented in Chapter 4, and cover a range of senior management responsibilities. This decision is partly one of confidentiality: the colleges are identifiable through their statistical data, and therefore senior manager responses could be directly attributable to individuals. The rationale is also methodological; the research purpose is to identify generic features of the middle manager roles and the environments in which they operate, rather than to investigate individual senior–middle manager relationships existing at the colleges.

It was originally thought that different aspects of role might be undertaken differentially by different types of manager. For example, service managers might be more concerned with implementation, or curriculum managers might be more involved with corporate policy, or that those managing services to students might principally undertake liaison roles. The data, however, suggest that all the aspects of role discussed in this section are undertaken by all types of manager, and the citations illustrate this finding. In considering the generic aspects of role, therefore, 'sameness' has emerged as being more important than 'difference'.

5.2 Middle managers: aspects of role

(a) *Corporate agent*

The corporate agent aspect of role focuses on the middle managers' understanding of their role in carrying out the whole work of the college, as identified by Powell (2001). It involves an awareness of college values, of the internal and external working environment of the college and of its strategic activities in response to factors within its environment. It involves an understanding of the framework of accountability of the college, and the manager's obligations within it. The role of 'organisational architect' (Brown and Rutherford, 1998) is related to this aspect of role: the organisational architect creates new organic forms of departmental structure which serve to support and improve the work of the institution.

Team member perspective

Team members see their manager's role largely in terms of implementation, staffing and liaison activities, categories to be discussed in later sections. There is, however, an awareness of how the manager's 'local' role fits into the corporate picture:

They ask the questions and ensure that the college functions (Student service team member, AS5: 1)

Manage and co-ordinate all day-to-day functions of the college (Service team member, DA1: 1)

These descriptions are reminiscent of the 'kingpin' role quoted by Earley and Fletcher Campbell (1989: 102). One response also shows an awareness of the political arena in which the college and its managers operate:

Co-ordinate lecturing and support staff in order to maximise college statistics for funding and political purposes. (Curriculum team member AC12: 1)

However, the role is sometimes seen, not in terms of fulfilling the systemic needs of the college, but more as interpreting and implementing the desires of the senior management team (Curriculum team member AC1: 1) or as 'essentially paper-pushing: administration' (Curriculum team member BC17: 1). These activities may be seen as mechanical – servicing the needs of the college – but there is also acknowledgment of the organic function of interpreting ideas and providing linkage and articulation between differing sets of people. This awareness is shown through team members indicating that middle managers find practical ways to implement college policy and strategic plans (Student service team member BS2: 1), deal with management initiatives (Curriculum team member BC7: 1) and perform strategic and operational planning at a local level (Student service team member AS9: 1). Responses such as these indicate a perception of the manager carrying out a corporate role through activity at a departmental level.

Middle manager perspective

Middle managers perceive the corporate aspect of role as having 'an input into everything that goes on in the college' (Curriculum manager DFGC: 66). For one manager this provokes an image of 'links in a chain' from the principal through to the part-time cleaner, with many links between: 'a chain of command' in which the manager participates (Service / Student Service manager DFGB: 5). The 'chain' is seen as operating hierarchically, as a line of accountability or of communication. It can function upwards or downwards, as the following two quotations demonstrate, illustrating the 'bottom up' and 'top down' approaches to planning at Colleges B and D.

We do this [planning] by identifying college targets with our teams. This links into whole College development which in turn links into the strategic planning process. It is done from the floor up. (Service manager BFGC: 7)

Decisions that get made at a management team level don't actually translate themselves to action unless there are people like us to allocate tasks and oversee them and make it happen. (Curriculum manager DFGC: 10)

Gleeson and Shain (1999: 471) observe that middle managers 'filter change in both directions.' In both of these colleges, managers also discuss their role of passing information both 'up' and 'down', and of translating it to suit the needs of the recipient (Curriculum managers BFGA: 15-17; DFGC: 11-13).

Lumby (2001) emphasises the turbulence of the external environment within which colleges operate, and the consequent need for responsiveness in college structures and systems. Middle managers acknowledge that, as corporate agents, they are subject to external pressures, which influence and alter the nature of their role. 'We are the ... people the nature of whose job will change' (Service / Student service manager DFGB: 29-31). The following two quotations illustrate the perceptions of managers in colleges reacting to turbulent situations, where change within the college affects the middle manager's corporate role.

I think it's a difficult position to be in ... This organization ...seems to move extremely quickly, not necessarily in the same direction at the same time, so you have a lot of agendas on the go at once. (Service manager CFGB: 52-53)

We have to regard ourselves as a business, and we have to be accountable for our funding and so we can't always plan. So if a crisis does come about we have to react and try to solve that crisis. (Student service manager BFGD: 18-19)

The first quotation indicates that the manager is trying to 'keep up' with the college's fast moving proactive agenda; the second implies a reactive approach by the college to an unforeseen crisis. Both corporate scenarios result in instability and confusion for the middle manager, stretching their organic adaptability beyond its limits.

Carrying out a corporate role is often equated with involvement in strategy-making; indeed Simkins (2000: 326) suggests that plans and planning in further education colleges may be 'major expressions of organisational culture.' Middle managers contribute to a varying extent at the different colleges to whole-college strategy, and implement it through devising local strategy and systems for their own departments, enacting Busher and Harris's (1999) 'translation' role and Brown and Rutherford's (1998) 'organisational architect' role. The consensus of middle manager opinion is that it is senior managers who devise strategy: 'There is a certain level of consultation,

but those objectives are actually set by the senior managers and the governors' (Service manager AFGB: 49). There is some indication that local strategy and corporate strategy are sometimes in conflict, but on the whole the intention is to create a local element of a coherent whole-college picture: 'If there is a policy produced, we try to adhere to it' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 55).

Senior manager perspective

Senior managers are concerned that middle managers should understand the corporate direction of the college. This is achieved through ensuring mutual understanding of values, which provide a foundation for locally differentiated organic activity in the different departments. In one college, this was achieved through collaborative shaping of college values, 'The managers came up with the values of this organisation' (Senior manager SMC2: 72). One senior manager defines the whole-college value-base as being support for learning, a perception borne out by middle manager responses:

All of these jobs are still about learning, whether you're sites or whether you're exams or student services or finance or staff services: I think one of the things that is very positive in the college is a very strong commitment to ...learning.
(Senior manager SMB1: 34)

The corporate role within its working environment is also perceived mechanically, in terms of the functional systems of the college. One senior manager summarises middle managers' roles in mechanical terms related to the efficiency of college 'output':

Their main functions are to ensure the day-to-day delivery of college services to the standards and volumes and budgets required. (Senior manager SMA3: 4)

Some managers offer an acknowledgment of the pivotal nature of the middle manager role: 'Well I think they actually run the college... they are absolutely key' (Senior manager SMB1: 3), or 'They have a vital role to play' (Senior manager SMD2: 4). Comments such as these place middle manager roles at the heart of college activity.

This activity involves implementing college strategy. Gleeson and Shain (1999: 471) see middle managers as 'constructing the art of the possible' in translating policy into

acceptable practice. One senior manager in the present study acknowledges this difficulty as follows:

I think they are in a very difficult role... trying to bridge the gap between strategy and operation ... being able to ameliorate ... and communicate how to achieve these strategic objectives in operational practice. (Senior manager SMC2: 4)

The mediating aspect of the corporate role is touched upon here: the strategy, which may be seen as the mechanical embodiment of the purpose of the college, has to be translated into activities which make sense to the teams carrying them out. The manager role involves the organic function of adapting and communicating the ideas presented in the strategy, to enable meaningful implementation. However, this mediating activity is not always acknowledged: a senior manager at College D sees strategy implementation in much more mechanistic terms:

'Helps establish long term goals.' Well we are certainly very clear about the strategic objectives of the college and we tend to post them up on the walls in just about every room. (Senior manager SMD3: 140)

This is not a chance comment: in this college, strategy was largely 'given' for middle managers and teams to implement.

Middle managers acknowledge being part of a chain of accountability. The following quotation shows a growing awareness of the impact of accountability on a previous college culture:

There has been a culture that things weren't getting through, people haven't had to be that accountable ... that is what the [reorganisation] was intended to bring. (Senior manager SMB4: 110-111)

Many senior and middle managers describe ways in which middle managers contribute to the college's quality procedures, which provide operational evidence of accountability, for example through the production of Self Assessment Reports (Senior manager SMA2: 29) and through adherence (or otherwise) to college protocols on the supply and management of data (Senior manager SMD3: 55-56). These protocols and procedures provide the mechanical structure within which political accountability is enacted.

There is also a concern for the systems to be organic, adaptable to need and to the 'local' environment. For example, in a multi-site college, where simple line management may not be feasible, different patterns of accountability and levels of responsibility may be tried out:

As [college] centres develop more confidence, they get given more autonomy, but we're all going in the same direction. ... I mean it is very, very difficult to keep a college of this size running with everything coming from the main site.
(Senior manager SMA1: 9-10)

The last two quotations show that, although the mechanical corporate responsibility encapsulated in the statement, 'ensure the day-to-day delivery of college services to the standards and volumes and budgets required,' may change little, the way in which accountability for the role is understood and enacted may be subject to organic change.

Summary

The corporate aspect of role, therefore, encompasses a concern for whole-college values, an understanding of the internal and external environment of the college linked with effective participation in strategy, and an awareness of patterns of accountability. Awareness of this aspect of role is strongest among the senior and middle managers, but there is good indication that teams are aware of the whole-college context of their manager's work. This aspect of role demonstrates strongly the delicate balance between mechanical and organic pressures: for example the meditating of whole-college strategy for implementation at a 'local' level, and the translation of the 'required standard and volumes' of college service into meaningful learning activities for individuals and groups. Corporate agency is built upon commonly-held values, whole-college structures and systems and lines of accountability which enable effectively differentiated implementation at a local level. In order to carry this out, the manager must understand the systems themselves and the people who are to implement them: factors which are explored in the two sub-sections below.

(b) Implementer

The implementer aspect of role entails carrying out college policy, with a focus on the purposeful and effective organisation of departmental activities. It relates to the

concepts of the 'leading professional' and 'organisational architect' (Brown and Rutherford, 1998) and 'governing the department' (Smith, 2002), in that it draws upon the professional values and expertise of the manager, and applies them to the creation of local structures which contribute to effective outcomes for the organisation. In terms of the FENTO (2001) standards for further education management it includes the responsibility to 'manage and sustain learning and the learning environment' and 'manage resources.' Implementation is not always straightforward: this aspect of role includes activities such as problem solving and disturbance handling. Compared with the complementary role of 'staff manager', the implementer role may be seen as relating more closely to the mechanical functions of the college.

Team member perspective

From a team perspective, implementation comprises the 'smooth running' of the department, and it is team members who provide most detail of their managers' activities. Most of the team references are to a multitude of routine operational tasks, reminiscent of Leithwood *et al*'s (1999) depiction of transactional leadership, and indicative of the mechanical nature of this aspect of role: managing learning resources, finance, space and staff (Student service team member AS8: 1), booking rooms, planning programmes, attending meetings, balancing budgets (Curriculum team member BC10: 1).

There is recognition of the proactive, creative aspects of implementation, with references to managers organising departmental work, developing curriculum areas, planning ahead and taking the lead on new ventures (Curriculum team member AC16: 1; Service team member DA2: 1). The team member questionnaire invited respondents to identify their manager's most important role from a list of descriptors derived from the literature, and the results are presented in Figure 5.3. 12% of team respondents consider that the most important manager role is to 'turn vision into action,' which implies a transformative leadership function. 11% consider that their manager should be a 'source of specialist expertise', the 'leading professional' role discussed by Brown and Rutherford (1998), which indicates an organic facet to this largely mechanical activity.

Implementation involves responsibility for the quality of what is carried out, enacting roles of professional and political accountability (Scott, 1989). This involves establishing and maintaining agreed standards of work:

Set up service standards and policies in consultation with other members of the service. (Student service team member AS4: 1)

Ensure all standards of quality are met, and any changes of procedures are passed on promptly. (Curriculum team member DC6: 1)

Team members recognise that managers take decisions on behalf of staff and students (Curriculum team member DC12: 1), and occasionally 'take the rap!' (Student service team member BS2: 1). As Figure 5.3 shows, team members value most the aspects of role where managers act on their behalf, either through bridging and brokering activities, or as leaders. These factors will be discussed below under 'Liaison' and 'Leader'.

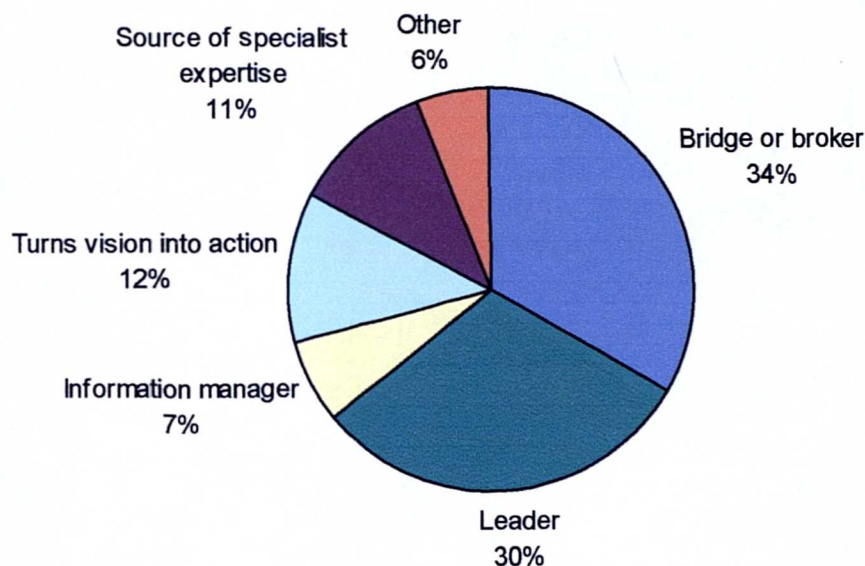


Figure 5.3 Team perception of manager's most important role

Middle manager perspective

In paper responses during the focus groups, middle managers were asked to indicate as many descriptors of their role as they wished, using the same list as was offered to team members. As Figure 5.4 indicates, managers subscribe to all of the descriptors,

with the concept of turning vision into action being least favoured. This is interesting, as the focus group discussions indicate that middle managers are very concerned about implementation. They may not primarily see implementation as turning vision into action: their verbal responses indicate that they see it largely as making sure that 'things get done' (Curriculum manager AFGA: 6), in terms of carrying out 'the day to day organisational management of the college' (Service manager CFGB: 2), descriptors which support the 'mechanical' nature of this aspect of role.

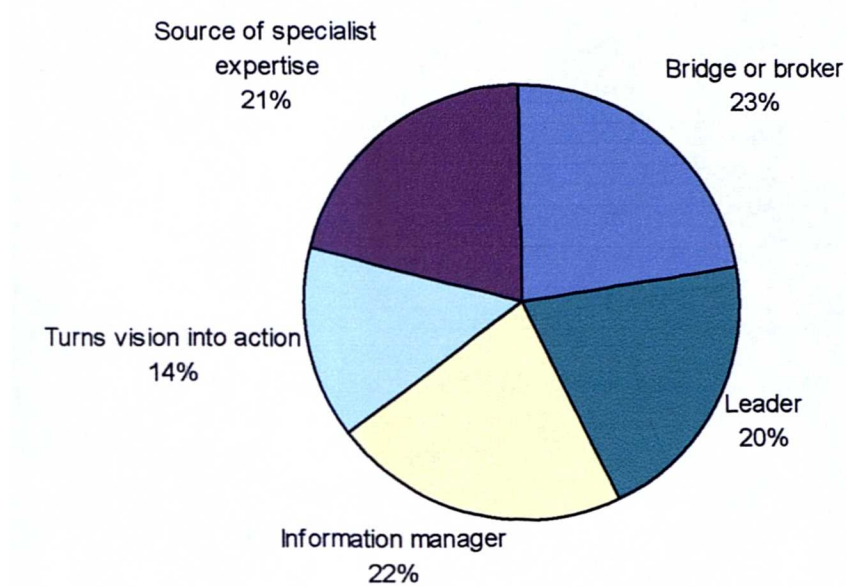


Figure 5.4 Middle managers' perception of own role

Implementation is essentially about 'making things work': this can be perceived as a departmental responsibility, as in the first quotation below, or in relation to the purpose of the college, as in the second:

I assure that the tasks that our teams need to complete happen at the times they are meant to happen and in the way they are meant to happen. (Service manager, BFGB: 7)

All our support services to a lesser or greater extent are actually about supporting learners, and if they are not then they shouldn't really be here. (Student service manager CFGA: 71)

The twin strands of accountability and values, noted in the corporate role, are in evidence here: the accountability of the team and its leader for enacting their role and the educational values which underpin what they do.

Implementation is also viewed organically, as the fulfilment of student needs (Curriculum manager BFGA: 30). In order to maintain their professional accountability, and develop the activities of the department, managers have to enhance their specialist knowledge, in such areas as: 'funding changes, new legislation ... government changes to benefit law' (Student service manager AFGA: 32). This specialist knowledge forms a basis for proactive implementation, the 'leading professional' function (Brown and Rutherford, 1998):

We also have a duty ...to be moving the service forward ... because we are the specialists, senior management aren't. (Student service manager AFGA: 17)

In contrast, some managers show dissatisfaction at being unable to adopt this proactive stance:

It's a constant frustration ... that one can't spend enough time being proactive and planning and putting strategies into place, because one is spending too much time reacting. Firefighting. (Student service manager BFGD: 12)

Managers of all types experience frustration and overload in trying to enact their implementer role, factors which will be discussed in Section 5.3 (b). There is often a feeling of the managers struggling to succeed, trying to keep sight of the task:

On a good week you would have an overview of all that is going on and try and anticipate part of it - on a good week (laughter). (Curriculum manager DFGC: 30)

Managing implementation calls for flexibility and inventiveness on an individual level. Many of the middle managers speak of having a creative element to their role, of operating willingly outside their job specification, of having roles which they have evolved, or which have changed in response to college needs. Variety of role is appreciated:

It is lovely to work in an area where the job changes and you aren't stuck in a rut. (Service / Student service manager DFGA: 40)

For some managers, responsiveness is fuelled by an appreciation of the working context of education: 'I think it is a privilege to work in education' (Student service

manager CFGA: 93). For others an understanding of educational values provides a hallmark for their role:

You can take all the personal qualities of integrity ... what you stand for, your qualifications and all that sort of thing, but at the end of the day it's about knowing the business, it's about knowing about what makes education tick.
(Service manager BFGB: 45)

Senior manager perspective

Senior managers view implementation mainly in terms of middle manager accountability for a range of functions, such as: 'curriculum management, financial management, marketing, people management, pastoral care of students' (Senior manager SMC4: 16). Implementation is described in terms of enacting the purpose of the college, either from a functional perspective, as in the first quotation below, or a value perspective, as in the second:

They have to enrol the students, retain the students, ensure that there is a high quality of delivery to those students and make sure that they achieve.
(Senior manager SMA1: 14)

Enabling students to learn and to achieve and have a good experience: I think that our managers are really committed to that. (Senior manager SMB1: 74)

It may also be seen from in budgetary terms (Senior manager SMB4: 9) or in terms of operational accountability (Senior manager SMC4: 2)

With their respective emphasis on college function, values, finance and accountability, these responses map out the territory of implementation. 'The manager's right to manage' quoted *inter alia* by Gleeson and Shain (1999: 465) is seen here in its working context: middle managers have an obligation to manage, over a wide range of responsibilities, and to a large extent this is uncontested by the managers and their teams in this study. Carrying out implementation involves sustaining a sense of purpose and direction; one senior manager (SMB4: 36) speaks in transformational terms of middle managers creating 'a vision and an identity for their area of work.'

On a logistical level, implementation may involve further delegation, as noted by a senior manager at College D (SMD2: 72). It certainly involves middle managers in

combining their management role with an operational role, such as teaching, supporting students or data handling. Senior managers express concern about optimising the balance between management and teaching duties: no similar concern is expressed about service or student service managers. Concerns over the dual role of teaching and management abound in the school management literature, discussed *inter alia* by Earley and Fletcher Campbell (1989) and Wise and Bush (1999). They are discussed further in this study in Section 5.3 (b): put simply, a dual role can potentially be both a facilitator and an impediment.

In considering how implementation can be enacted more effectively, senior managers at College B are concerned to 'professionalise' the service and student service functions, acknowledging and developing the specialist expertise of managers. A different perspective on professionalism is being demonstrated at College C, through the introduction of an allocation of teaching for all senior and middle managers, whatever their role, to bring them into closer contact with students through enacting the professional function of the college. This pair of initiatives, which will be discussed further in Section 5.3 (b), illustrates the indication by Gleeson and Shain (1999: 467) of 'a struggle over meaning and identity of professionals in the reconstruction of the FE workforce.'

Summary

For many of the managers and team members, implementation is the most visible aspect of the middle manager role: if it is not performed, the resulting lack of action is noticeable. This leads to a feeling of pressure upon many of the managers, recognised by their team members: a feeling that there is simply too much to do, and that this aspect of role is being performed inadequately. The largely mechanical 'managerial' nature of the activities is also a disincentive to effective implementation: some managers express enthusiasm for setting up and operating systems, but for many it is either a chore or logistically difficult. However, the middle manager and team responses show opportunities for organically based creativity and flexibility which are appreciated by managers, and a satisfaction with successful outcomes which sustains their self-image as professional educators. In this aspect of role, the debate over managerialism and professionalism, particularly in terms of moving towards a new professionalism, starts to take shape.

(c) Staff manager

The staff manager aspect of role is complementary to that of 'implementer': together they enable middle managers to carry out their corporate function. If the implementer role is largely mechanical, dealing with the systems of the college, staff management focuses upon the more organic function of managing people. In further education, middle managers are used as 'the focus of the staff management' (Senior manager SMA3: 9). Peeke (1997) and Smith (2002) recognise this element of role through including 'managing people' and 'managing personnel' in their lists of manager functions for further and higher education, and Busher and Harris (1999) focus on the developmental aspect of staff management in schools through their role descriptor: 'improving staff and student performance.'

Team member perspective

Questionnaire responses from team members underline the importance of the staffing manager role, and their main points are summarised here. For the team, this aspect of role has ten elements:

- Sharing information with staff
- Directing, guiding, co-ordinating the team
- Listening to, and understanding staff: knowing their staff
- Delegating to staff
- Maintaining good teamworking / effective working relationships
- Monitoring the work of the team
- Dealing with inadequate staff
- Valuing staff
- Having the respect of staff
- Supporting staff

These elements offer a useful indication of the scope of staff management, ranging from informational and instructional functions, through elements which emphasise collegiality, support and mutual respect, through to an acknowledgement that middle managers must delegate to staff, monitor their work and if necessary, discipline them. According to the team members, these activities demand a range of interpersonal skills, together with 'personality, commitment and experience' (Curriculum team

member BC2: 4). The importance for the manager of receiving support from the team in undertaking this role is also emphasised.

Middle manager perspective

The middle managers speak at length about this aspect of their role, as one which they feel is important, but find difficult. This matches Smith's (2002) finding from heads of department in universities, that 'staffing issues' are the most difficult thing heads have to deal with. Some of the managers in the present study feel that they have a natural affinity with managing people, 'the human side of things' (Service / Student service manager DFGA: 37), which is seen as an 'antidote' to servicing bureaucracy. Those who are more doubtful of their capabilities nevertheless feel an obligation to act responsively towards staff problems, even when 'part of me says, "I wish that person would disappear and take their problem somewhere else"' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 129).

The role draws upon a range of skills, 'Mentoring, counselling, negotiating, facilitating' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 24), learned 'over the years' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 127). Managers tend to adopt a contingent approach, using different styles to manage different people or situations:

There are those who need the functional, directional, those who are far happier with the transformational and the creative as well. (Service manager CFGA: 28)

This indicates that managers are operating in response to the organic dimension of their role, adapting to the needs of individuals and groups, being directive or transformative in response to context and need. The potential effectiveness of this approach is emphasised by Glover *et al* (1999: 332-3) who identify successful middle managers in schools as those who use 'best fit' approaches, and 'make use of contingency theory when working with individuals.'

Middle managers depend upon specialist expertise from their team in areas which are beyond their own range. This leads to the adoption of what one manager (Service / student service manager DFGA: 18) describes as a 'democratic' style, in which team members take responsibility for work within their specialism, (Service manager BFGA: 185) and for the updating of knowledge within that area:

Staff are proactive in terms of identifying when they themselves need to be updated. ... they get publications, they keep aware of changes and relevant training. (Service manager AFGC: 100)

Teamwork such as this has similarities with the departmental teams in the Netherlands reported by Witziers *et al* (1999) where mutual specialist expertise is recognised, and responsibility is held by the team as a whole, with the departmental head holding little authority. One difference in the UK context of this research is that the head of department would still be accountable for the work of the team.

There is a tension between the managers' desire to protect the team from excessive workloads and the need to delegate work to them. One curriculum manager comments: 'I think there are a lot of skills to learn and one of them is being able to delegate' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 46), and there are many examples of responsibilities being spread around the team. Delegation not only spreads the load and potentially disperses leadership further into the organisation; it also develops team members' awareness of the working context of the department.

Delegation contrasts with the protective approach of the manager who aims to 'buffer' the team from 'paperwork from above' which would add to their already heavy workload (Curriculum manager DFGC: 28), or who tries to prevent overload on a recently depleted team:

We've got less people now than we had three years ago, yet we've got more students. And we're the ones in the middle that have to make the two bits match - or not as the case may be. (Student Service manager BFGD: 44)

These two examples have resonance with observations on the role of the midlevel manager in US community colleges, made by Gillett-Karam (1999: 5); she describes the role as one of mediation and facilitation, a 'buffer between faculty and administration.' The potential problems of adopting a 'buffering role' are noted by Drodge (2002) and by Leathwood (2000), both of whom consider that team members who are protected in this way may be prevented from understanding situations clearly, and may become over-dependent upon the manager.

Maintaining a balance of work within the team may involve monitoring both the team members' work and their well-being, by regulating the level of pressure upon them.

Monitoring work, through customer surveys, classroom observation of teaching and checking the work of service and student service team against service standards, has been common practice in colleges since 1997, when annual self-assessment reports were instituted. Monitoring the 'operational health' of the team is a much more intuitive aspect of staff management:

I have to maintain a team of people, and that means checking that they are actually OK as well as the fact that they are doing their job. (Student service manager CFGA: 43/46)

It also entails stepping in to do the work of the team when necessary, being the 'servant leader' (Brown and Rutherford, 1998):

We have to be part of a team in order to be able to step in and do the teaching. (Curriculum manager CFGC: 34)

Concern for the team, and support of them, is a key part of the manager's role: one which needs a careful approach to prevent overload for the manager. Giving support is important in establishing a positive relationship with team members; managers speak of obtaining improved access to photocopying or water supplies for their teams, as well as offering time and concern to those who need it (Curriculum manager BFGC: 125). Social bonding with team members can, however, cause problems for managers, especially when they share a staff room or have worked with them as colleagues before promotion. One manager realised that she had to deliver the message that, 'Just because I am sitting at my desk it doesn't mean you can come to me with "trivia"' (Curriculum manager CFGC: 192). This manager is not alone in expressing the tension between her own need to work more efficiently as a manager uncluttered by 'trivia' – to work more effectively in response to the mechanical requirements of the college – and the needs of her team which impel her to respond and react in too strongly organic a manner. Tranter (2000: 24) observes that trying to preserve both professionalism and collegiality can lead to role conflict: 'Some have seen themselves as the "first among equals" but are now being required to act as line managers.' This is confirmed by a curriculum manager in the following way: 'You are not quite in management with a capital M, you are also with the teaching staff ...it is a curious sort of path that you tread really' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 11).

Senior manager perspective

I think there is a particularly crucial role about managing staff. If you look at the technology of further education, it is still very heavily staff centred.

(Senior manager SMA3: 7-8)

This senior manager is not alone in emphasising the importance to the college of staff management; however this aspect of role does not feature prominently in senior manager interviews. One comment relates to the 'first among equals' role referred to above:

They are having to manage and having to be part of the team. You know, the 'first amongst equals' kind of thing, it's just uncomfortable. (Senior manager SMB3: 74-75)

Many of the middle managers have been promoted from within their team, and one principal spoke of the rarity of being able to make external appointments at middle manager level: managing staff who have recently been colleagues is therefore a feature of middle manager experience in the case study colleges. The difficulty of this situation is reflected in a comment from another senior manager: 'The things that the managers find complicated, especially when new in role, are managing performance and managing conflict' (Senior manager SMA1: 133). The 'human side of things' may be more difficult than some managers anticipate.

Summary

For many of the middle managers, the activity of managing staff is intuitive, and for some, therein lies its difficulty. Given the many other demands of their role, and the pressure of work among those whom they manage, simply following a pattern of instinctive social response is not enough. Managers speak of having to 'draw back' and to adopt a more rational approach to the role, as well as having to cope with its associated bureaucratic demands. Having a supportive team is essential to the manager's effectiveness and, for some, to their personal well-being, but in managing the team they not only have to draw upon a full range of interpersonal skills, they have to keep this organic aspect of their role in balance with other demands on their time and expertise. This may require them to become more detached from those whom they manage and rely upon; judging and maintaining the appropriate distance may not be easy.

(d) *Liaison*

Liaison, like implementation and staff management, is a means of carrying out the corporate role. Colleges as large organisations have to split their functions, allocating them to a 'jigsaw' of different departments, types of manager and team member. For the student to have a successful educational experience, the jigsaw has to be reassembled and work as a coherent whole, and this involves managers in liaison activities with each other. It involves the manager in interactions with other managers, staff and external agents over whom they do not have direct authority.

Busher and Harris (1999), considering the liaison or representative role of school managers, emphasise both the need for external and internal liaison and for vertical and lateral interaction within the school. In colleges, Peeke (1997) identifies external liaison as important, whilst Lumby (2001) indicates a range of potential liaison routes in her discussion of management structures and roles. Mintzberg (1990) perceives liaison from a number of perspectives, including spokesperson and negotiator. Liaison involves an understanding of the systems and communication routes of the organisation, as well as skills in negotiation with groups and individuals: it is thus influenced by both mechanical and organic dimensions.

Team member perspective

Team members refer most often to vertical liaison, but some are also aware of the importance of liaison with outside agencies, and of lateral liaison within the college: 'Provide a gateway to all levels in the organization' (Service team member CA2: 1). The middle manager is seen as acting both as a mechanical conduit for information (Curriculum team member AC13: 1; Service team member CA3: 1) and as an organic mediator: 'Staff have the certainty of knowing ... that their concerns are made known to senior managers (Student service team member AS7: 1).

A brokering function is also evident in team responses: 34% of team members consider that bridging and brokering is their manager's most important activity (see Figure 5.3, above). Team members rely on their manager 'to fight their corner' (Service team member CA1: 1), or to 'argue our corner and achieve stuff for us' (Curriculum team member AC14: 2). This respondent also describes the micropolitical

context of the role in terms reminiscent of the 'ideological buffer' described by Gleeson and Shain (1999: 462):

Mediate between the people who actually do the work and those who institute unworkable policies and deal shiftily and inscrutably with budgets. (Curriculum team member AC14: 1)

All of these responses illustrate a team dependence upon the manager's effectiveness in both the transmission of information and views, and in negotiation on the team's behalf.

Middle manager perspective

Middle managers speak of the difficulties and pressures of liaison, subscribing to the definition of their role offered by one senior manager: 'that layer in the middle where it's coming down and it's going up and there is a crunch point in the middle' (Senior manager SMB2: 32). Different managers use similar language to describe the pressures from senior managers and their team: 'piggy in the middle', 'buffered from both sides', 'pressurised' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 5); 'a buffer', 'an arbiter between those two pressures' (Student service manager BFGD: 29). This situation is an example of sent role conflict, described by Kahn *et al* (1964), with managers caught between multiple sets of pressures. One student service manager identifies these pressures by taking the idea of 'middleness' still further. She perceives the position of their service as being at the crossing point of both the vertical and lateral structures of the college, mediating between senior managers and team members, curriculum and college service functions: 'Thinking about it that way I suppose perhaps we more than anybody are in the middle' (Student service manager DFGB: 33). A student service manager at a different college expresses the intensity of this situation: 'It is like everybody else in the organisation is after you' (Student service manager AFGC: 148). This comment echoes Mintzberg's (1990) depiction of management as one of constant interruption, and pressure for immediate answers to questions or solutions to problems.

This middle role involves both bridging and brokering. Bridging, noted among school managers by Glover *et al* (1998) and in colleges by Alexiadou (2001), involves the manager acting as an active conduit for views and information:

Listening to what course teams say at the different centres and taking [it] forward ... to my manager with ideas of how we can achieve it. (Curriculum manager AFGA: 194)

Push those problems upwards so senior managers see them. (Student service manager BFGD: 41)

Conceptually, the phrase: 'Bridge the gap between senior management and teaching staff' (Curriculum manager AFGA: 3) implies a social, political or linguistic gulf between the senior managers and team members, to be spanned by the activities of the middle manager. An intensification of this 'bridging' aspect of liaison is 'brokering', the micropolitical function described by Busher and Harris (1999). Brokering – the 'wheeling and dealing' necessary in order to progress the work of the department – is less in evidence in this study than bridging, but there are examples. One student service manager speaks about acting as a 'salesman' in his cross-college liaison role, having to 'drag out the benefits of what you want to do, and make sure they understand that the benefit's all theirs' (Student service manager DFGB: 130). Another speaks of brokering between senior managers and his team:

Trying to learn to give senior managers what they are looking for, what they need – or just enough of that – involves all kinds of ... manipulation, subterfuge. (Student service manager: BFGD: 37)

This quotation illustrates the art of strategic compliance, described by Gleeson and Shain (1999: 482), as an 'artful pragmatism, which reconciles professional and managerial interests.'

Vertical liaison is complemented by lateral liaison, which involves spanning gaps between the mechanical systems and structures of the college. Difficulties in working 'against the grain' of the mechanical college structures are discussed in Section 5.3 (d). Some service and student managers have created their own systems for inter-departmental liaison, linking their team members with curriculum teams to promote collaborative management of tasks such as providing learning resources (Student service manager: AFGC: 155) and managing student admissions (Student service manager AFGC: 112). In the absence of such structures, regular, meaningful interaction between college teams most often occurs between personnel based at the same college site. Surprisingly, lateral liaison is not a large feature of some managers' roles. Some of managers at College A do not have the time or opportunity

to liaise, unless a specific task needs to be carried out with another manager, for example:

I see other heads of school and service in the heads of school and service meetings but unless I am working on a particular case with a particular manager, there isn't an awful lot [of liaison]. (Service manager AFGB: 125)

Opportunities for liaison exist through the meetings structure, but through lack of time and perceived necessity, liaison does not generally occur.

Senior manager perspective

Senior managers emphasise the importance of cross-college liaison, of trying to avoid a 'silo mentality' (Senior manager SMC3: 42). They speak of 'trying to foster' liaison through the organisation of college management, for example on a centre basis (Senior manager SMA1: 77) or on a non-hierarchical basis (Senior manager SMC1: 44), or by bringing managers with different roles into meetings together and valuing them equally (Senior manager SMC2: 60). They also see it as their role to 'unblock' problems of liaison (Senior manager SMA1: 11). One senior manager observes the importance of cross-college liaison in enabling colleges to be responsive:

The nimble organisation has got these cross-routes of communication ... because you get things done by removing those barriers. (Senior manager SMB2: 59)

This senior manager also describes how the various patterns of liaison experienced by middle managers help them to understand and shape their role, in effect illustrating the impact of the role set upon the manager:

When I'm talking about communication, I don't just mean their talking, it is information they get ...the people they communicate to and with on a regular basis ...I think if anything that shapes a person's role. (Senior manager SMB2: 22)

Meaningful communication is being used at College C to address the 'bouncing ball' syndrome, where a problem is passed on without managers addressing it properly themselves:

It's very easy just to bounce the ball between finance, personnel, head of faculty and then back; and while that's happening nothing's moving. (Senior manager SMC2: 98)

This echoes a comment of Burns and Stalker (1961:124): 'You get tennis games played with the responsibility for anything that goes wrong,' which they describe as a tendency of organic systems. As senior managers at College C are concerned that the college should be non-hierarchical, it seems that they have identified a potential weakness of their more organic systems of liaison and accountability. In similar terms, one senior manager at College A speaks of the progress that has been made from a previous culture in which:

in the end of the year reviews, people would write down jobs for the Heads of Services ... there's great long lists of jobs for other people to do. (Senior manager SMA2: 47)

Both of the senior managers quoted above feel that these negative cultures have been addressed through fostering effective liaison and a stronger culture of accountability.

Sometimes working together is simply seen as common sense:

A head of school would have no problems in picking up a phone to a head of service. (Senior manager SMA1: 44)

I encourage this layer to speak to the head of human resources and the head of resources ... there's no point them coming to me and me talking to them and then it's coming round in circles. (Senior manager SMD4: 52)

This resonates with the analysis of 'radix organisations' presented by Schneider (2002), where there are fluid and permeable boundaries and an emphasis upon lateral relationships across functions. Whilst there are aspirations to these kinds of networks and relationships, the middle manager responses have indicated that successful operation on this basis is difficult to sustain.

Summary

In summary, lateral liaison involves a balance of people and systems. The mechanical structures of the college do not always promote lateral liaison, and people have to find ways to meet, work together, build mutual trust and create effective patterns of liaison. Vertical liaison is easier to achieve, as it flows with the structures of the college; problems occur here when there are excessive demands from both 'below' and 'above'. Although liaison is difficult to achieve, and is impeded at times by both systems and by people, most respondents see it as essential to the coherent function

of the college, the presentation of the 'whole jigsaw' of provision to the individual student.

(e) Leader

The final category of role is potentially the most problematical. This is not least because the term 'leader' is little used in FE colleges, except for the first line manager role of team leader. Leadership as a concept is simply not on the agenda. As Lumby (2001: 13) comments:

The current climate where the role of manager is often not viewed positively and leadership is rarely discussed, makes the interpretation of the role of leader / manager in the sector more difficult.

On the other hand, the size and complexity of further education colleges would seem to necessitate a system of dispersed leadership, where middle managers can lead substantial areas of provision, and delegate leadership still further to leaders of operational teams. Lumby (2001: 22) argues that 'the evidence suggests that leadership in colleges is indeed systemic,' and refers to the image offered by Ogawa and Bossert (1997: 9) of leadership 'flowing' through the network of roles that characterise organisations. Glover *et al* (1998: 285-6), when considering patterns of leadership emerging in schools, note as two of their features a 'concern for supporting people and achieving results' and a 'concern for shaping and sharing the vision.' Both Lumby and Glover *et al* see leadership as emergent and developing among middle managers, though not always recognised by the managers themselves.

Middle manager and team perspective

Middle managers are cautious about the term 'leader'. They respond positively to the term, 'lead teams and the individual', quoted from the FENTO management standards, perhaps because it echoes the familiar term 'team leader'. Sometimes the response takes the form of a simple evaluative statement about the importance of leading teams and developing individuals (Student service manager AFGC: 50; Service manager CFGB: 34). Other respondents relate their role to aspects of transformational leadership:

Your enthusiasm, your strategic thinking about the place – you're bringing people with you to make that happen. (Curriculum manager AFGA: 189)

One manager uses the language of dispersed leadership, which supports the professional accountability of the college, speaking of middle managers as 'experts in their own field or area,' who develop their area of college provision on behalf of the senior management (Service manager AFGB: 11-13). For others, however, the term 'leader' is problematical. Having described her liaison role in relating the work of her team to that of the college, one manager comments:

I shy away from describing myself as a leader ... I'm seen not as a leader, but as someone who works with [the team]. (Curriculum manager AFGA: 184)

This statement correlates with the phenomenon discussed earlier: leading the team whilst still being part of it. A curriculum manager at another college handles the leadership terminology quite succinctly: 'I provide the lead, but I'm not a leader' (Curriculum manager CFGC: 31).

In paper responses to proposed descriptors of their role, 20% of middle manager respondents include leadership as a descriptor (See Figure 5.4, above). On the other hand, when team respondents were asked their manager's most important role, 30% responded 'Leader', collectively placing it second to 'bridging and brokering' in terms of importance (See Figure 5.3, above). When asked to make a 'snap judgment' on aspects of role, leadership is certainly an acceptable option for managers, and in particular for their teams. The team members' perceptions of their managers as leaders are highlighted in a discussion in one focus group on the influence of their team on the manager's role:

- I'm not sure how much choice you have about that, if the staff see you as that...[ie leader]
 - Yes
 - I quite like that though. I think that's a big motivator for me that you want to set the pace and set the direction of your School...
 - But it can be quite intimidating, though
- (Curriculum managers AFGA: 185-8)

Managers accept that other people see them as leaders, but the managers themselves are ambivalent about this nomenclature. The team leadership role described by Atwater and Bass (1994: 208) as 'keeping the team on track', 'aligning a diverse set of views, needs and aspirations around a central mission,' is described by a number of

managers in terms of 'setting the pace' and the direction for the team, being 'the person who has got to make sure that you get to where the strategic plan is leading you' (Service manager BFGB: 17).

The creative element of leadership is also recognised by the managers. Although it is constrained by time and working pressures, it is fulfilled by some, and aspired to by others:

It's about being innovative. It is about being creative as to how those outcomes are to be achieved. (Service manager CFGB: 19)

It is sometimes quite frustrating when you have particular ideas ... [for] curriculum development, and because of the restraints from other quarters within the college you're not able to do that. (Curriculum manager AFGA: 121)

This last comment encapsulates one of the major difficulties of dispersed leadership within a large and complex organisation. Leadership is both shaped and constrained by the manager's multi-faceted liaison role. As one student service manager comments: 'We don't work in our nice little boxes ... there is a tension from other people in the organisation whose targets you are affecting' (Student service manager AFGC: 141).

Leadership involves shaping and sharing values within the team; middle managers in this study show a strong concern for educational values, which underpin their daily work with their teams:

Teaching and learning, students' experience, trying to protect that and trying to enable staff to make a positive contribution to that. (Student service manager BFGD: 30)

We have got a shared – is the word 'vision' – with the kind of students we deal with and the kinds of experience we want them to have and it is pretty solid from the top to the bottom...the students come first. (Curriculum manager DFGC: 107)

No matter what we do around this table it's what we give to those kids out there and how we bring them on and make them better people in society, and that's what it's about. (Service manager BFGB 45-46)

It is important to note that the values of sustaining teaching and learning, and focusing on the primacy of the student learning experience, are consistent across the roles of the managers represented: for example, the last comment about bringing students on and making them 'better people in society' comes from an accommodation manager.

If leadership is enabled by establishing and working to shared values, it is maintained through the trust, respect and authority accorded by the leader's fellow workers. Middle managers in this study are collectively ambivalent about all three of these factors, but there are strong positive instances of managers having the trust, respect and authority by which to lead. Comments from all three types of manager show their awareness of these issues. One curriculum manager (BFGC: 110-112), having emphasised that respect is necessary to support authority, says: 'I do feel that I have the authority, and people do listen to us.' Likewise, a service / student service manager (DFGB: 87) refers to the 'measure of respect' he needs from his colleagues: 'You have an instinctive feeling ... you know if you have that.' A service manager (AFGB: 134) talks of having 'the authority to persuade', and that 'you feel confident that most of the time you are trusted enough to be able to persuade.' These managers are saying that the role-given, mechanically based, authority is not enough; the individually given, organically based respect of one's colleagues is also needed in order to carry out the role.

Senior manager perspective

It is only in College C that senior managers address the leadership role of their middle managers; their thoughts are expressed in aspirational terms, which reflect Lumby's (2001) vision of dispersed, systemic leadership:

Effective organisations in the twenty-first century need effective leadership at all levels, they need more than management competence. (Senior manager SMC4: 40-41)

The larger the organisation, ... the role starts to change from management to leadership, and how they provide that leadership, and how they allow other people to be leaders in the organisation. (Senior manager SMC2: 114)

This college is developing a programme for its managers entitled 'from management to leadership' and the above comments are consistent with this philosophy. Two issues

underlie these comments, firstly senior managers at College C are trying to sustain a non-hierarchical culture, which encourages the ethos of sustaining leadership at all levels. Secondly, the areas of provision for which the middle managers are accountable are substantial and diverse: a system of dispersed leadership would therefore seem an appropriate option for sustaining professional accountability.

Summary

Leadership is, as Gronn (2000: 5) observes, a phenomenon in the eye of the beholder, and the middle managers show consistent evidence of leadership in how they enact their role, principally through their concern for values, for shaping the work of the department and enabling the work of their team. To a degree, they also encounter the respect, trust and authority which enable them to carry out a leadership role. They thus display three of the five structural relations described by Gronn (2000) as being significant features of dispersed leadership: authority, values and personal factors. They operate transactionally in response to the mechanical dimension when shaping systems, and transformationally in response to the organic dimension when enabling the work of their team. They also attempt to 'blend' the two, acknowledging that it is impossible to achieve the transactional without acting transformationally.

Considering all the aspects of role discussed in this section, middle managers operate along a span of locations on Lumby's (2001) five spectra of leadership. In their corporate and implementer roles, managers display a range of external and internal foci for their work; they offer both vision in their leadership role and advice when operating as staff managers; as corporate agents, they create systems to enable the work of their departments and as implementers are often enmeshed in day-to-day management; in their staff manager role, they are generally close to the staff they manage, but also attempt to maintain distance; as leaders their values are based upon a range of educational and pedagogic principles.

For some, however, being a manager is seen in terms of 'taking the king's shilling' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 37), and to contemplate leadership is out of the question. Whatever the individual attitude of the manager to leadership, their role is probably too constrained by operational activities and by the need for their actions to 'mesh' with others', for them to have an unequivocal feeling of leadership. However, as Lumby

(2001: 12) notes: 'leadership may be embodied in what people do, not what they say.' It may be 'fragmented among individuals', and evidence presented here suggests that middle managers both individually and collectively contribute to the whole leadership of the college.

Conclusions

Perspectives on role

The responses from senior and middle managers and from team members indicate different perspectives on the middle manager role. Senior managers appear to be largely concerned with mechanical aspects of role, particularly in the emphasis laid upon the manager's corporate and implementer roles. Their responses focus upon college targets, college structures and systems, the handling of data and the implementation of quality procedures, whilst acknowledging the more organic need for professionalism, autonomy and creativity in enacting the role. Middle managers are involved in organic and mechanical activity in all aspects of their role. Their responses indicate a concern for clarity and authority, having the support of both senior managers and team, having the time and administrative support to service the college bureaucracy, and having the space to shape their role according to 'local' need and professional values. Team members, whilst understanding the bureaucratic burden which their managers carry, are most concerned that they should respond appropriately and knowledgeably to people and situations, and establish good working relationships with their team and senior managers. Their responses focus upon organic concerns, particularly the 'people centred' aspects of the staff manager role. These issues are explored in an earlier analysis of data from College A in Briggs (2002) included here as Appendix 13.

Balancing the role

The aspects of role presented in this section are interdependent. Even a routine task such as curriculum timetabling, providing an accommodation service or arranging learner support involves specialist knowledge of how the task will be implemented, understanding of how it conforms to college policy or purpose, awareness of staffing strengths and capabilities in carrying it out, liaison to 'fit' the task to the needs of other managers and teams, and a degree of leadership to shape the outcome and carry it through. Balance between these interdependent parts may be difficult to achieve: the

purpose and the intended outcome of the task may be clear, but the level of staffing expertise or the necessary liaison may be lacking. The 'local' parameters for the timetable, the accommodation or the support may run counter to some aspect of college policy or strategy, or the task may not be achievable within the college resource. Balance between aspects of role may therefore be hard to maintain.

It is also apparent that there are tensions and pressures within particular aspects of role: between the mechanical and organically-based activities, between conformity to systems and response to differentiated need. In analysing the implementer aspect of role, for example, it is clear that mechanical compliance to systems and procedures is necessary, but it is not enough: managers also need organic freedom and innovation in order to carry out the work of their specialist area. In staff management, the differentiated organic response to the needs of the team and the individual can potentially produce role strain; the manager has to act rationally – even mechanically – to focus also on the task, and to keep the whole role in balance.

Pressures are inherent in the size and complexity of the organisation: it is debatable whether college structures can accommodate both the necessary support for each segment of the college and effective channels for liaison across the 'segments.' They are also inherent in the role itself: if middle managers are 'active conduits' for information and opinion, then they will find themselves overloaded with information and having to reconcile opposing views and agendas. If they are the means whereby strategy is translated into action, this assumes that strategy and action are compatible: if they are not, the middle manager has to find a solution. In each of these examples, a local, differentiated response must be found to compensate for the discrepancies and shortcomings of the whole-college system.

Managers therefore have to be skilled in keeping the whole role in balance, in balancing pressures within individual aspects of role, and in compensating for the deficits and difficulties inherent in the system. In response to their professional accountability, they develop and provide the specialist service of their department; in response to their political accountability, they take their part in the operation of whole-college systems. Section 5.3 explores these issues further, through examining the

features of the environment for management which facilitate and impede middle managers in the various aspects of their role.

5.3 Facilitators and impediments to role

Introduction

This section starts with a general consideration of how managers assess their effectiveness, and moves into a detailed examination of the factors in their environment for management which facilitate and impede their effectiveness in role. Each of the case study colleges offers a different environment for management, as discussed in Chapter 4, and there are also generic similarities between them. Potentially, each college environment has differential impact on the various types of manager, as their roles operate in different ways and do not necessarily have the same status. Through examining the impact of the college environments upon the role, and taking into account difference between role, patterns of facilitation and impediment can be discerned. The interplay of environment and role is discussed within the framework of the five aspects of role discussed in Section 5.2. Before considering how the managers' effectiveness is assisted and impaired, however, it is necessary to understand, in general terms, how their effectiveness is assessed.

Evaluating effectiveness

Undertaking any aspect of the middle manager role depends upon the managers being able to assess their performance. Managers draw upon their professional understanding; they also depend upon formal and informal feedback. As one service manager (AFGB: 92), comments: 'Everybody makes a noise if things are not right,' and when asked how they know when they were doing the job well, most managers say that the 'silence', or lack of complaints, indicates satisfaction. Complaints, however, are welcomed as being developmental by more than one manager: 'I always look on complaints as positive things. ...I think what worries me is if the service is so awful that people don't bother to put in complaints' (Student service manager AFGC: 177). Managers carry out checks on effectiveness with their role set (Curriculum manager CFGC: 95, 97 and 99); they receive positive, as well as negative feedback from their colleagues, and feel that this is a good motivator for themselves and their teams.

The informal feedback, adapted to circumstance and dependent upon contiguity, can be regarded as organic in nature. Complementary to this is a range of formal, mechanical, systems, which are also welcomed by managers as giving 'evidence' against the corporate targets which they are required to meet. Many managers set their own targets and devise performance indicators for their area of work: one estates manager described these as a form of protection: 'If we've got performance indicators there's none of this nonsense of 'I like it' or 'I don't like it.' ...I can judge it on that and it is measurable' (Service manager BFGB: 97). All the colleges have formal systems of feedback from students as part of the colleges' mandatory annual Self Assessment Report. Most also have 'internal customer' surveys, although these tend to report upon service or student service areas rather than curriculum.

Appraisal, which is part of the formal systems of the college, may also be seen as a mechanical means of assessing effectiveness, but its individual nature and the focus upon the particular circumstances of the role means that it has strong organic qualities. Managers are able to assess themselves when appraising others, as well as when being appraised themselves. On the whole, appraisal was felt to be a positive and informative experience. There are some exceptions however, mainly among curriculum managers. One at College D claimed not to have had an appraisal, one at College C complained that he only heard negative comment from his senior manager, and some curriculum managers at College A and C felt that they did not have a clear idea of what their senior manager thought of them. Kahn *et al* (1964: 25) emphasise the need for 'clear and consistent feedback' in order to establish a 'meaningful and satisfying self identity,' otherwise the resulting ambiguity leads to role-holder uncertainty about the role and its performance.

Although managers receive formal and informal feedback upon their role, both their performance of the role and their evaluation of performance are largely intuitive, as some of the above comments indicate. As managers in different roles, in different circumstances, need to be effective in different ways, defining and assessing overall manager effectiveness is therefore difficult. However, the rest of Chapter 5 discusses ways in which managers are facilitated and impeded, and Chapter 6 demonstrates how understanding of these facilitators and impediments within the college

environment can lead to ways of analysing whole-college coherence. These types of analysis can, in turn, lead to a further understanding of effectiveness.

The impact of the college environment upon the various aspects of the middle manager role is discussed in sections (a) to (e) which follow.

(a) Corporate agent

In Section 2 (a), the corporate agent was identified as having knowledge of the 'big picture': an understanding of whole-college issues and of the external contexts of the college. This knowledge is supported by awareness of college values and of systems of accountability. The corporate agent at middle manager level has some involvement in strategy-making, and has the task of adapting and communicating college strategy for action, activities which are then played out in the implementer, staff manager and liaison aspects of role.

Understanding the whole-college picture

A strong adherence to educational values was seen in Section 5.2 in all the middle manager roles: 'At the end of the day it's about knowing the business, it's about knowing about what makes education tick' (Service manager BFGB: 45). These values underpin many of the middle manager aspects of role, but in particular, they facilitate the managers' understanding of their corporate function.

The managers are also facilitated by their awareness of the internal and external contexts of their work, acquired through their involvement in strategy-making, and through their liaison activities across the college and externally to it. It also comes from an ability to interpret events at the college on a 'macro' level, and to apply that knowledge subsequently (Service manager AFGB: 64). Having a role which demands cross-college networking helps understanding of corporate issues, as it involves the manager in comprehending and interacting with a range of college agendas. Managers occupying service and student service roles feel that they have an advantage here, having a 'wider perspective' (Service manager CFGB: 5), and seeing whole college benefits 'better than the heads of faculty do' (Service / student service manager DFGB: 136). In College C, curriculum managers have a number of diverse roles which demand cross-college interaction; this offers them 'a useful view of the

whole college and how it fits together' (Senior manager SMC1: 9), and facilitates corporate understanding.

However, the position of 'middleness' means that the managers are not in control of changes in college direction, are placed in a reactive situation, and can sometimes find themselves impeded by being ill informed. One manager at College C, which is noted for its rapid changes, gives the example of working on a project specification, only to find 'that the agenda has changed. It is definitely what was wanted, but it isn't where the college is going now' (Service manager CFGB: 49).

Accountability

Understanding the context of accountability enables the corporate aspect of role to be performed. Accountability for middle managers follows the pattern of corporate, political accountability, which itself depends mainly upon mechanical conformity. As one senior manager puts it:

You've got inspection, you're being audited non-stop, there's no choice here, you have to set the standards, you have to monitor the performance. (Senior manager SMA2: 103)

She continues: 'But your job as leader – as manager – is to put the human face on it,' (Senior manager SMA2: 105) neatly demonstrating the balance of the transactional and transformational, the mechanical and organic. The middle managers mainly refer to the mechanical side of accountability: 'Some things are checkable, aren't they? It's February – have you got the retention figures?' (Curriculum manager AFGA: 193). Their concern for students, however, shows their professional accountability, which has a context-driven, organic focus on the learner:

That's what we are about ... if we are not getting it right for the students, we should go home. (Student service manager AFGC: 60)

The first of these two quotations reflects Scott's (1989) political component of accountability through its concern to demonstrate that public funding is being effectively used; the second reflects Scott's professional and market accountabilities – responsibilities to the customer and to education as a profession.

As colleges work to rigid structures of external accountability, managers at all levels say that they are facilitated in their role by internal operational systems which are clear

and consistent. As Chapter 4 revealed, both the clarity and the systems vary between colleges. College A has the longest established and 'tightest' whole-college systems; at College D the systems are inconsistent between faculties. At the time of the research, College B was in transition from looser value-based systems into clearer frameworks of accountability and at College C, whilst some systems were secure, others were in a state of flux following the college merger and subsequent restructuring activities.

Senior managers at College A feel that there have been gains from having a centralised and controlled structure (Senior manager SMA3: 83), although they are ready to make a move away from central control. At College D, the accountability structure is felt to reach through to the classroom teacher: 'That level of accountability has gone down to the classroom ... for retention and achievement' (Senior manager SMD4: 106), thus making the role of the middle manager easier to carry out. At College B, there is an attempt at balancing the people-based values of the previous system of accountability with more 'hard edged' quality systems, another model for transactional / transformational equilibrium:

We've got more hard edges, but we still try to keep the feeling that we are a learning organisation... allowing people to grow and develop and be supportive. (Senior manager SMB4: 107)

At the time of the research visits, this balance was an uneasy one, and the college was moving towards more transactional systems.

For middle managers, accountability is impaired by 'not having full control' (Curriculum manager BFGA: 55). In Chapter 4, it was noted that managers in Colleges C and D are hampered by imperfect communication of the colleges' changing agendas, and senior managers at College B admit that 'we are constantly having to change our own direction... there hasn't been much consistency' (Senior manager SMB3: 35). Powell (2001) observes that the further education middle managers in his research were hampered by poor communication, especially from senior managers, and lack of time for response to new initiatives. As middle managers do not have responsibility for planning whole-college strategy, or for devising shorter-term response to external pressures, the need here is for effective communication from senior management.

An issue for senior managers is the balance to be struck between empowering middle managers to carry out their role and monitoring their work for compliance to college strategy (Senior manager SMB1: 14). As some managers do not 'take ownership of what they should,' (Service manager CFGB: 104) the monitoring role is necessary. However monitoring can seem to the middle manager like a lack of trust:

We are no longer trustworthy, we need to provide proof because otherwise of course we just sit around and smoke cigarettes and talk all day. (Service / Student service manager DFGA: 116)

Accountability thus inhabits an uneasy territory between the mechanical need for compliance to systems and the organic issues of manager autonomy and trustworthiness.

Strategy

The corporate role includes involvement in strategy-making and implementation. As has been seen in Chapter 4, managers at three of the colleges report being involved to some extent in strategy making and all are to a large extent involved in its implementation. Contribution to strategy is facilitated by regular strategic discussion, and by networks of departmental and whole-college planning days, both in evidence at Colleges B and C. At College A, middle managers report that they are consulted about strategy:

We feed back into the strategic plan, but we also provide information in that various areas feed into the planning process. (Student service manager AFGC: 165)

At College D, strategy is largely 'given' to be implemented, and although managers report clarity over what is to be implemented, the lack of consistent operational systems creates difficulties: 'Six different faculties are all going in different directions' (Service / Student service manager DFGB: 131). Arguably, collective manager discussions about strategy, such as those recently instituted at College B, could serve to erode these faculty-based barriers.

Summary

Analysis of the data therefore suggests that the corporate agency is facilitated by the manager's understanding of whole-college values and by their contribution to whole-college strategy. Managers are enabled to interpret events which have impacted upon

the college, and to apply the knowledge gained to their current management situation. This understanding is aided by cross-college networking. College structures which encourage networking are therefore beneficial, and managers in student service and service roles, or 'hybrid' roles which involve cross-college liaison, are best placed to gain whole-college understanding. Working within the corporate setting involves understanding the mechanical patterns of accountability, and applying them to one's own and others' role in a local context, thereby creating organic structures within the department which are coherent with the college as a whole. Consistency and clarity of the internal systems at work in the college also enable effective corporate activity.

The positioning of the managers in the middle of the college structure, located within one organic 'section' of the college, can prevent them from having foresight and from seeing the whole picture. They are impeded in their corporate aspect of role by having little understanding of college strategy, perhaps by having strategy imposed upon them. Poor intra-college communication, and the lack of time to absorb and apply communication, impedes the managers' capacity to grasp whole-college issues. The managers' perception of their accountability within the college system is critical: they may be reluctant to accept the mechanical need for compliance to systems, and may feel that accountability erodes their professional need to be treated as autonomous and trustworthy. Difficulty in understanding whole-college issues may impact upon the next aspect of role to be considered: that of implementation.

(b) *Implementer*

Implementation uses knowledge gained from the corporate aspect of role. Implementers are accountable for the enactment of college systems and operations, addressing at a departmental level a key element of student need. To do this, they draw on their own professional values and specialist knowledge, whilst sustaining college purpose and direction at a local level. This can result in tensions between managerialism and professionalism, which can significantly affect this aspect of role. The visibility of implementation, combined with pressures of time and expectations, makes it an aspect of role about which middle managers are particularly concerned.

Systems and structures

Implementation depends upon the manager's ability to navigate the college networks and structures, and to work within, and contribute to, its operational systems. It also depends upon the quality of the systems themselves, and the clarity of the role which they are trying to implement. Systems which are hard to comprehend (as is sometimes the case at College C), or are inconsistent across the college (as at College D), are criticised, as they erode managers' time, and offer less opportunity for creative and locally differentiated activities. Whilst rejecting excessive bureaucracy, the managers in the case study colleges welcome systems which are standard and coherent. Not only does this help them to understand their accountability, as seen in the previous section, it enables them to implement the mechanical aspects of their role more easily.

The things that have to be standard across everyone are. We know that we need to conform to the requirements ... at the time stated, so that shapes what you are doing. (Curriculum manager AFGA: 35)

Implementing some systems for the first time, for example quality systems, can reveal aspects of professional practice which 'have been left fallow for umpteen years', and need to be improved or developed (Senior manager SMD3: 72-3). One of the criticisms of managerialism (Randle and Brady 1997a) is that the mechanical imperative to conform to systems is deemed to reduce professional control. Systems which enable implementation to be carried out efficiently, however, can result in increased professionalism. Formal and informal systems of feedback, as discussed in 'Evaluating effectiveness' above, enable the managers – and their role set – to evaluate the quality of their implementation, and to identify areas for improvement.

Systems are difficult to operate across a large college where communication lines are stretched, or across a college which is strongly compartmentalised. Electronic communication has brought benefits, but even at College C, which perhaps due to its size has invested most in electronic resources to support staff, senior managers admit that staff do *not always access and read the necessary folders on the intranet* (Senior manager SMC1: 48), and managers complain that communication does not reach far enough (CFGA: 161). A 'communication gap' is perceptible here, possibly caused both by an overload of information and the lack of time, perceived necessity and motivation to access it.

Bureaucracy

There is a fine balance between systems which, through their clarity and predictability, make the manager role quicker and easier to implement and those which, through their impenetrability and lengthiness, produce slowness of response and frustration for the manager. The latter type is inevitably labelled pejoratively by the manager as bureaucracy. In Smith's (2002: 305) study of Higher Education heads of department, bureaucracy was high in the list of 'most difficult things heads have to deal with,' second only to staffing issues. Managers are scornful about systems which take up time, when time is what they lack:

If I'm asked to complete Form SBS/2, I would say that prevents me from doing it [my job] (Service / Student service manager DFGA: 129 and 132)

Bureaucracy can not only seem lengthy, it can also seem pointless, a barrier to professionalism, as indicated by the three comments below. The first is not simply questioning the absurdity of the college's quality procedures, he is questioning the validity of the evaluation tool used by the college.

I think you can do too much navel contemplation in finding out how satisfied people are, whether they are 'very', 'mildly', or just 'moderately' satisfied, and I would question the validity of such data. (Service / Student service manager DFGA: 111)

The second speaker notes the deterioration in both efficiency and effectiveness brought about by the cumbersome systems of the newly amalgamated college:

They don't feel they are able to do their job, because they are being hindered by the fact that they've got to [seek central authority] all the time whereas they used to be able to do it themselves. (Senior manager SMC3: 87)

This last respondent points out how even a centralised, standardised system can be inappropriate; systems sometimes need to be organically adaptable to local circumstances.

I think it is unnecessarily burdened by paperwork, and I don't think our senior Management team assist things by insisting on a set format, because very often a set format is not applicable for all areas. (Curriculum manager DFGC: 14)

Within an organisation of the size and complexity of any of these colleges, it is difficult to conceive of a bureaucracy which would suit all needs. The main messages which the research data convey are that the manager must be able to understand and relate to the rationale for the procedure, have the time and clarity of instruction to carry it out, and feel that the procedure exists to help them as manager to implement something efficiently. The colleges where managers appear most frustrated by bureaucracy are the largest (College C) and the smallest (College D): level of bureaucracy in this case does not seem to correlate with size. College A has the most mechanically-based structures, and it appears that these structures and systems are clear enough to avoid complaints of excessive bureaucracy; College B is moving from a very organic, values-based system towards more mechanical structures, and it appears that managers value the increased clarity of the new systems.

The problems experienced by colleges display a tension between Mintzberg's (1979) 'machine bureaucracies', which are permeated by rules and regulations, with little freedom of action for managers, and his 'professionalised bureaucracies', where decisions are made at the point of action. Both types of bureaucracy appear to be required in colleges: the need for cohesion means that managers cannot make every decision at the point of action, but the range of circumstances under which they are working also necessitates freedom from absolute conformity.

Resources

Implementing management action requires resources, and there were very few positive remarks about resources, either from middle or senior managers. Senior managers tend to talk in aspirational terms about enabling managers to manage resources better (Senior manager SMB4: 14), and the need to communicate reasons for lack of resource more clearly (Senior manager SMA2: 75). Hewitt and Crawford in their research on further education (1997: 118-9, 125) speak of senior managers 'who were very concerned with the survival of their college' contrasting with lecturers who seemed to have no understanding of the financial framework within which senior managers operated. There are elements of this situation at the case study colleges. Largely the middle managers understand that there are externally imposed resource restraints, 'We're cut to the bone everywhere' (Service manager AFGB: 182). However, they lack essential knowledge about how resources are allocated internally,

'running into a kind of brick wall about putting [strategies] into place because of the allocation of resources at senior level' (Curriculum manager AFGA: 123). Some managers do not have a budget of their own, as was seen in College D in Chapter 4, and feel disempowered by this situation.

Resource restraint for middle managers is mainly equated with poor staffing levels, and a lack of access to administrative and technician support. They wish for money to be spent upon improving teaching and office environments (Curriculum manager DFGC: 229-30; Service / student service manager DFGA: 187), but mainly they wish for it to be spent upon increasing staffing levels. At College B in particular, the effect of recent redundancies means that departments, coping with a growing student population, are under-resourced compared with earlier times, and at College C, there is an issue about the non-replacement of staff who have left (Student service manager BFGD: 44; Curriculum manager CFGC: 125). Managers and their teams feel the impact of the systemic resource deprivation: resources are not being withheld for personal reasons, they simply do not exist to a great enough degree within the system. Middle managers, who have not been part of the decision-making process in managing the reduced resource, see themselves as the 'victims' of change, rather than as being the informed agents of change

The shortage of resources, and therefore of staff, impacts directly upon the managers themselves, causing role strain. Curriculum managers are over-stretched between teaching and management, student service managers are dealing with a high level of student demand, and service managers have to undertake substantial operational duties (Curriculum manager BFGA: 58; Student service manager AFGC: 29; Service manager CFGB: 113). Delegation of duties to an over-stretched staff becomes a problem (Curriculum manager BFGA: 72). The problem not only becomes logistical; it conflicts with the managers' professional values and judgment.

I don't think the number of staff that we have reflects the amount of students that we have in the college. ... If we have more staff to work, of course our service to the students could be much more effective. (Student service manager AFGC: 87-88)

The manager is unable to provide the necessary working conditions for themselves, their team or their students: the differentiated needs of the organic system are being 'starved'.

The impediments of a lack of resource, and of the sector focus on efficiency rather than effectiveness (Simkins, 2000), can only be resolved at a government level. At a college level they can be mediated by good communication about resourcing parameters, and by discussion based upon agreed values when resource decisions are to be made, in order to secure the best possible 'fit' between the resource available in the system and the differentiated needs which have to be met.

Overload

The most visible effect of a lack of resource is overload – simply having too many things to implement within the time and resources available – leading to role strain. It can also result from an imbalance of demand from either the organic or mechanical dimensions. Overload of role is recognised by both senior and middle managers and their teams:

I think that the workload is such that it is very, very hard to do more than deliver. (Senior manager SMB3: 12)

The restraints placed upon you are really quite heavy in terms of curriculum, and you may not deliver all those expectations. (Service manager BFGB: 156)

Too big a workload. (Service team member CA5: 5)

These types of comment are replicated at all colleges, and the situation puts particular pressure on managers, who feel that they will be judged negatively if they do not succeed in 'delivering all those expectations.' Their resulting anxiety is symptomatic of role overload in which Khan *et al* (1964: 25) comment, the manager 'may be taxed beyond the limit of his abilities':

Its sheer volume sometimes means that to be effective can be very difficult. I really feel quite strongly that the sheer volume of work is overpowering. (Curriculum manager DFGC: 78)

Managers are impeded in their work by the seeming urgency of other people's needs, by trying to operate responsively in unrealistic circumstances. One senior manager

speaks of her middle managers belatedly receiving information about classes being held at the weekend at a college site which was not planned to be open on that day:

You're immediately expected to provide the service that those students then need. So that's where the tension arises: lack of communication. (Senior manager SMC1: 67)

Frustratingly, the needs of people 'get in the way' of the manager's neat plans for implementation:

The phone just needs to ring, or you get an email and it all goes out of the window ... or you're transferring those onto your list. (Student service manager AFGC: 155)

Managers can be torn, by other people's needs, between one aspect of their role and another:

They can't teach properly because every ten minutes they are being called out of the classroom to manage a crisis. (Senior manager SMB2: 40)

In the three quotations above, the organic aspects of role are seen as being out of control, resulting in *sent* role conflict. The managers cannot respond flexibly and contingently to the mass of demands which they face, and their responses echo Mintzberg's comments (1990) about the fragmented activities, the constant interruption and pressure for immediate solutions to problems which make up management.

One senior manager relates this organic pressure to the managers' relative nearness to students. He comments that managers performing curriculum or student service roles have less control of their workload, and more demands on their flexibility, than those whose roles have less direct interaction with students:

They have different problems... It's the ones that touch students and the ones who don't, because the ones that don't have larger amounts of control over their jobs as opposed to the ones that touch students. (Senior manager SMB2: 51)

This constant need for responsiveness and flexibility links with comments from a senior manager at College C, in relation to the people-centred role of colleges:

I honestly believe that colleges really more than any other part of the education system are about that kind of huge mass of diverse messy humanity. (Senior manager SMC4: 154)

For this senior manager, a transformational approach to leadership, which allows for a flexible, organic response to the 'messiness' of human interaction, is the answer.

Specialist knowledge and expertise

Implementation is facilitated by specialist knowledge and experience. This affects not only the effectiveness of the managers' actions and decisions, but the respect which others have for them in their role. Questionnaire responses indicate that teams expect their managers to be knowledgeable, and possess specialist expertise. Team members value in their managers: 'good knowledge of the curriculum' (Curriculum team member DC11: 4), 'in depth knowledge of all procedures' (Student service team member CS1: 4), 'a thorough understanding of the job' (Service team member AA3: 4), 'good management skills' (Service team member BA1: 4) and 'a good understanding of the service offered' (Curriculum team member AC10: 4), as well as expertise in managing people, which will be discussed under 'staff manager'.

Managers speak of working organically, drawing upon the specialisms of their team in order to 'pool' expertise (Service / student service manager DFGA: 18; Service manager AFGC: 100), as managers cannot be expert across the range of roles and functions they manage. However, the specialisms listed above include both subject knowledge and management skills, and in the latter area the manager may have less expertise to draw upon. Senior managers at all the colleges speak about the 'mixed ability' of their managers, and of management posts sometimes being a 'reward' for good service in teaching or in some specialist aspect of service or student service, rather than being offered on the basis of management skills or professional potential.

Management and professionalism

One of the dilemmas expressed by Glover *et al* (1998: 280) in their research on middle managers in secondary schools is that reskilling is needed for managers to understand professionalism in its new context. Lumby (1997: 350) notes that post-incorporation further education managers accept that 'the amateur approach is no longer applicable.' This provokes a debate in the context of this research as to what the new professionalism consists of, and what the barriers to 'reskilling' might be. The colleges differ widely in their approach to management development programmes, as has been seen in Chapter 4. At the time of the research visits these were not compulsory at any of the colleges and were not offered at one (College A). Reluctant managers (Service / student service manager DFGA: 32; Curriculum manager BFGC:

37) may feel that their profession is to be a teacher or to provide a service to students, and in their eyes being a manager is a different type of profession, to which they may not aspire.

In their interviews, some senior managers 'think aloud' about the issue of the professionalism of their managers. At College D, one senior manager starts to identify the dilemma: 'Middle managers ... I said they were the important ones, and it is for that reason that they give the greatest cause for concern' (Senior manager SMD2: 146). In other words, if middle managers occupy a pivotal role, they can impede the work of the college through not having the right expertise. A senior manager at another college takes the debate further:

What colleges have had to do ... is realise that we needed to professionalise some of the services that we offer, like Finance, like Human Resources, like Estates. (Senior manager SMB3: 51)

Interestingly, he chooses among his examples manager roles most easily associated with the mechanical activities of managerialism, where efficiency is the goal. He speaks of previous customary practice, where a 'semi-redundant head of department' would have been 'converted' into these roles, and comments that this was a desperately bad mistake, an un-professional approach to managing the college. He then adds:

Maybe there is the same lesson to be learned about the way in which we organise the administration for the college in order to service the needs of students and the needs of the teaching departments. (Senior manager SMB3: 55)

He sees the need for management of services to students and of curriculum departments to have the same professional status as that recently achieved in his college by the service departments, but does not define what this professionalism comprises. At the time of the research, his college (College B) was moving towards more business-centred styles of management, whilst trying to maintain a focus on the underpinning values of education, and this thinking may underlie the new approach. This would match the observations by Shain and Gleeson (1999) and Gleeson (2001) that the new professionalism in colleges encompasses the notion of being 'businesslike', alongside a concentration on its 'business', which is satisfying the learning needs of students.

This type of debate was also current at College C at the time of the research visits, with the planning of a management development programme for middle managers which was to be compulsory. The professionalisation of managers at College C is intended to develop them, not simply as managers, but leaders. At both of these colleges (B and C) there are echoes of Shain and Gleeson's (1999) debate; the rational mechanical aspects of 'being a manager' are being blended with an organic understanding of values and of leadership. A final insight into professionalism is offered by three managers at College A: in Randle and Brady's (1997a) terms the most 'managerial' of the four colleges.

One of the most important things to do as a manager is to **carve out the space**, define it, know it well and make sure that other people appreciate that and ... actually work with it. (Service manager, AFGB: 95)

We all of us have different **professional standards**. I know what a library should be like in terms of how it looks, the stock, how the stock should interact with users etc. (Student service manager, AFGC: 62)

There is a certain amount of **respect** now for the ability of heads of school to determine what the curriculum should be.... There are, if you like, very broad strategies or targets set up, and how you make it happen is up to you. (Curriculum manager AFGA: 12)

All three quotations show the speaker's confidence in the implementation of their role: by 'carving out the space' to enact the role, by applying professional standards to the task, by implementing college strategy effectively within their specialist area, with the result that they earn respect from others.

Summary

The implementer role is therefore facilitated by managers being well enough placed within the mechanical systems and structures of the college to use them effectively, in order to carry out the organic, personal interaction necessary to the role. This 'placing' can include ready access to electronic communication and data systems. The managers need to be able to understand and relate to the rationale of the college's bureaucratic systems, including the rationale for resource allocation, thereby understanding the mechanical framework which governs their own mechanical and organic activities.

Conversely, managers also value the 'organic' opportunity to shape and define their role, and to receive respect in doing so. This transformational environment allows for creativity in implementation, and for managers to access and use others' specialist knowledge in addition to their own, in order to implement the work of the department effectively. Implementation depends upon managers working within a context which enables them to reconcile managerial and professional demands, and to work towards a 'new professionalism.' The definition of professionalism is likely to vary between the three roles considered here. Curriculum managers are likely to see their professionalism as being rooted in their subject area, rather than in their management skills, whereas increasingly for service and student service managers there is a perception of professionalism as being rooted both in their service and in how it is managed.

The implementer aspect of role is impeded by cumbersome college systems which take up time that managers feel could be spent on more organic activities. Two key factors here are large college size and multi-sitedness, where an excessive amount of time and effort may be spent on navigation. Another notable hindrance is excessive bureaucracy, which erodes both the efficiency and the effectiveness of the college manager.

Resource restraint, and a lack of understanding of how resources are allocated, impedes the implementer. Lack of resource can lead to constraints on staffing, which in turn results in role overload for the manager and team. For curriculum managers, overload is likely to include an increase in their teaching allocation, which impacts upon the time available for management; for service and student service managers it is likely to lead to an increase in the operational aspects of their role, with similar consequences for management.

These pressures impact upon both organic and mechanical activities; both the people-focused and systems-focused aspects of the managers' work are affected by overload. Likewise, managers experience both people-centred pressure and system-centred pressure in their attempts to deal with the overload. Their efforts may be hampered by

a lack of management expertise and lack of time to manage, which may increase any pre-existing resistance to management.

The staff-related aspects of implementation are considered further in the following section.

(c) Staff manager

The staff manager aspect of role was presented in Section 5.2 (c) as being complementary to that of implementer. Middle managers work with their teams in order to implement a particular aspect of the college's function; both the implementer and the staff manager aspects enable middle managers to carry out their corporate responsibility.

Valuing staff

The organic nature of their staff manager role is important to many of the middle managers; it is noticeable that many of the facilitators discussed below are rooted in the manager's own interpersonal skills, rather than in the college environment. They enjoy 'working with people', and speak warmly of the support which they receive from their team. They enjoy relative autonomy in the way they deal with staff (Senior manager SMA1: 27). For some, the main motivation for their work comes through this aspect of their role; some say that they would have given up their job if it were not for the willingness of their team.

If it hadn't been for [the team] and their support I could well have 'chucked in the towel'. ... a lot of staff in this site do a lot more work than they really ought to be doing, and do it with a good grace. [The college] is run on good will.

(Curriculum manager, CFGC: 153-155)

One message conveyed here is the increasing difficulty of working in further education, and of the increasing dependence upon staff to work beyond what might be seen as their contract. Staff with specialist expertise could seek alternative employment: 'I know my employees could be paid a lot more elsewhere and it's not easy' (Service manager BFGB: 224). The manager's skill in maintaining goodwill, and the staff's willingness to offer it, are therefore important factors in carrying out this aspect of role.

Evidence presented in Section 5.2 indicated that it was essential for the manager to harness the range of expertise in their teams. This is clearly necessary where a curriculum manager is responsible for a wide range of subjects, but it applies also to service and student service managers. One marketing manager notes the different specialisms within her team, including schools liaison, journalism and graphic design (Service manager BFGB: 183), and a student service manager speaks of managing: 'welfare officers, careers advisors, youth workers, ... they update me on issues that need to be addressed' (Student service manager AFGC: 97). The degree of autonomy of specialist staff can mean that they are potentially 'unmanageable', and skill from the manager is needed to channel their energy and commitment into teamwork:

My staff ...are not pussy-cats. ... But when we do something, boy they are good. (Student service manager AFGC: 95-96)

They are very lively, they're not easy people to manage, they are not 'yes' people by any means, but very mutually supportive and I should add, supportive of me. (Service / Student service manager DFGA: 69)

One way in which this aspect of role is facilitated is for managers to value their staff, and the quotations above show not just a token acknowledgement of worth, but a real warmth and admiration for their teams' approach and achievements. Questionnaire responses indicate that team members show appreciation of managers who attempt to understand staff, who support the people in their teams, value them and have their respect.

Staff management systems

The mechanical systems for employing staff, particularly those on temporary or part-time contracts, are seen by both managers and their teams as over-bureaucratic, as undervaluing the staff concerned, and as impediments to the role. Sometimes the manager is unaware of the system to be implemented:

I was told that we didn't get some member of staff because I hadn't filled in the request form by a specific date. Well I never have done, is that my role?

Is that what I am supposed to be doing? If it is, fine, I will do it. (CFGC: 139)

Procedures for appointment can involve: 'Six signatures I think it is you have to get, one of them being yours' (Curriculum manager CFGC: 134), and systems for issuing part-time contracts are seen as unwieldy: 'The whole part time contract, it creates a

huge workload at every level – and it is unworkable’ (Curriculum manager DFGC: 211).

Managing part-time staff

Curriculum managers are most likely to be managing staff on part-time contracts who may be employed for short periods of the week, at a time or a place where the manager is not present. Other than expressing frustration over contracts, and the difficulties of locating people for whom they are responsible, the managers themselves do not single this out as a problem, perhaps because managing part-time staff is a ‘fact of life’ for curriculum managers. Team responses, however, indicate a difficulty. The only team respondents who are ignorant of what departmental managers do are curriculum team members BC1: 1 and DC2: 1, who say, respectively: ‘I don’t know what she does. She has no understanding for the courses I teach,’ and ‘I’ve no idea, other than to restate the job title ... I’ve never met one.’ These respondents have fractional contracts; the first works half time and the second for two hours per week. These, and other responses in their questionnaires, indicate that they feel neither known nor valued by their manager.

Underperformance of staff

Underperformance of staff is an important impediment to the manager’s role, not least because the systems for dealing with it are lengthy and unwieldy. Typically, an underperforming member of staff is ‘inherited’ when the manager is appointed, and has been in post for a considerable number of years. In all cases cited, the member of staff has left the college, but the process of achieving this is ‘a long term activity’ (Curriculum manager BFGC: 82), in which initially, according to one manager, ‘nobody would do anything’ (Curriculum manager DFGC: 171).

Poor staff performance affects the department’s achievement of college targets, and thus impacts upon the effectiveness and perceived professionalism of the manager. ‘What do you do with difficult staff? This is one of the most contentious issues which a new HoD will have to face,’ comments Bolton (2000: 62) about heads of department in higher education. As one manager in this study points out: ‘That individual may actually be preventing us from carrying out our overall role as manager effectively ...

we all know what a bad member of staff can do to a programme' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 83).

Communication and shared understanding

The managers' communication skills, together with good college channels of communication, are essential in their role of managing staff. Team members from all the colleges value managers who maintain good communication with staff in every direction, with students and external bodies, in order to keep their team well informed. This includes having regular, efficiently run team meetings where information is shared. Through being properly informed, team members understand the context of their work better: senior staff also speak of the importance of establishing shared understanding in 'trying to let staff know why it is, where we need to go' (Senior manager SMD3: 199).

A senior manager at College A touches on the professionalism needed when managing staff, which includes a clear understanding of the team's role: 'Good management of staff is not about everyone being chummy and going down to the pub. It's about achieving the unit costs or the pass rate or the retention or the curriculum development that you want to achieve' (Senior manager SMA3: 33-4). He tempers this 'mechanical' statement by acknowledging that a purely transactional approach to team leadership would not be appropriate. However, the message is that the impulse to make friends with the team, and to make allowance for failure and underperformance, is to the detriment of the college and is not professional practice. This situation may be compounded when managing from within the team, as was seen in Section 5.2 (c), where managers feel the need to work organically from within the team, yet need to distance themselves from team members in order to carry out the role. A manager activity as 'organic' as managing and motivating people needs to be perceived and enacted within the whole-college 'mechanical' framework of corporate aims and targets, and of the college's application of contract law. This issue could be seen as a further contributory factor in the 'new professionalism' discussed above.

Inter-site management

Managers at all colleges value face-to-face contact in developing trust and ensuring the mutual understanding needed for managing the team effectively. Their experience

supports the view of Howell and Hall-Meranda (1999: 683) that 'physical distance decreases the opportunities for direct influence and potentially the effectiveness of the working relationship between leader and follower.' As a result, at the two multi-site colleges, A and C, managers spend a lot of time travelling from site to site, with detriment to their health and effectiveness: 'At the end of the day you are knackered and don't feel that you have really achieved anything apart from bouncing around' (Student service manager CFGA: 123).

Curriculum managers are most likely to have their staff on one site, although this is not always the case. Subjects such as adult basic skills or English for speakers of other languages might be taught at a number of main sites and also at community outreach centres. Whilst service managers and their teams may all be based together at one site, their role – for example marketing or estates – entails the manager and team members travelling to other sites to carry out their work. The work of the various services to students – for example, admissions, library services, learning support – is enacted on every college site. Colleges A and C are both experimenting with site-based or faculty-based staffing for some of these services, in order to minimise travel and to enable more effective management.

Responding to staff need

The organic, people-centred aspects of the role, which are valued by many of the managers, can themselves involve such a high level of demand upon the manager's time and skills that they become impediments. Impediments to effectiveness can arise from the unpredictable nature and complexity of staff needs: 'Three teams of people with different problems and expectations and you are trying to deal with them all' (Curriculum manager BFGA: 142), or from staff aggression in asserting their needs: 'You felt like you were dropped into an aquarium of piranha fish' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 120). In these situations, the manager is experiencing role strain through an excess of people-centred demands. Conversely, spending too little time considering and meeting staff needs can make the manager feel guilty and unprofessional: 'I don't have enough time to develop individuals, and I am very aware sometimes that development is necessary' (Student service manager BFGD: 52). Striking the right balance between supporting staff and carrying out other aspects of role is a difficult task.

Summary

It can thus be seen that the staff manager aspect of role is facilitated by the managers' interpersonal skills, and by their ability to harness the support of the team. It also depends upon access to good college channels of information and data, which can be passed on to the team to enable clarification of their role. It is important that the college structures enable face-to-face contact with the staff being managed. These last two statements demonstrate how mechanical features of the college environment enable the largely organic activity of staff management to take place. It is also important that the manager is aware of the mechanical dimension when managing staff, as the team's contribution and conformity to college purposes and systems is taken as a measure of the manager's effectiveness.

Staff management becomes difficult when managers feel the need to protect staff from overload, and worry about the risk of losing them and their specialist expertise. College systems for recruiting, contracting and releasing staff are all seen as unwieldy. Dealing with underperforming staff is also difficult, especially where staff may work on a different site. Inter-site management of staff is a demanding activity; paradoxically, managing from within a close-knit team can also present problems. Above all, the manager is buffeted by the complexity of staff needs, each of which demands a differentiated, organic response. Managers who are responsible for staff with a high level of student interaction, such as *curriculum managers and many of the student service managers*, have to mediate for their teams and for themselves the stress produced by intensive student need. Curriculum managers and some student service managers are also likely to have large teams to manage, which likewise increases the difficulty for them of this aspect of role.

(d) *Liaison*

If implementation and staff management are at the core of the middle manager role, liaison is a key means by which it is carried out, within the context of whole-college activity. Because liaison involves managers in interactions with managers and staff over whom they do not have direct authority, this brings into play issues of power, status and territoriality between managers occupying different roles. This can be a

highly political arena where other people's agendas and assumptions must be understood and dealt with in order to manage effectively.

Many middle managers work with other teams on a regular basis, either to implement curriculum provision: 'All the links I've got with vocational teams, about how to make the curriculum work in that particular area' (Curriculum manager CFGC: 72), or to integrate college services to support the curriculum:

You go to somebody and say what do you want? And then you go to other middle managers..., and we interpret that [in terms of accommodation and IT provision] so the dialogue between middle managers again is crucial. (Service manager BFGB: 27)

This last quotation illustrates the organic nature of the departmental structure of the college. As the manager above illustrates, in order for the student to have a successful educational experience, the various college functions have to fit together and work as a coherent organic whole.

College structures

A concern with addressing the 'whole needs' of the student has led to experimentation with organisational structures to enable liaison and shared understanding. Whereas many managers have relatively clear-cut responsibilities for implementing curriculum or service or student service functions, some have roles which are to a certain extent 'mixed'. Curriculum manager roles have been integrated with an element of service or student service management, both at College C where this strategy also facilitates site-based management, and at College D, which operates strongly faculty-based management. At College C this strategy, described as an attempt to produce an organic rather than a hierarchy-based structure, helps to facilitate liaison, particularly between managers at different sites. At College D, however, it tends to reinforce the isolation of faculties and to impede liaison between faculty and service managers.

At Colleges B and D, inter-site working is less of a problem, but there is strong vertical demarcation between faculties, and working with a manager outside one's own area can be culturally or logistically difficult. Managers speak of having to 'knock on doors and get across' the structure of the college (Student service manager, College D), sometimes without any feeling of authority: 'You may be dealing with your peers ...

you haven't necessarily got the authority to influence them.' (Service manager CFGB: 44) Where faculty heads have strong institutional power, other managers may come up against the question posed by Schneider (2002: 209): can the manager's power extend to those outside their hierarchical domain? As the demarcation at these colleges is based upon curriculum areas, curriculum heads hold the power. Implementation is therefore most difficult for those with service and student service functions, as they have to negotiate the co-operation of each faculty separately. They are striving to negotiate organically-based differentiated relationships, which are impeded by the compartmentalised structure of the college.

Liaison is aided by proximal location to other managers and team members. In a multi-site college, liaison is easiest within sites: 'They tend to work as a centre cluster' (Senior manager SMA3: 56). Where the faculty structure is chosen as the basis for college management, as at College D, liaison within faculties is facilitated by staff being located in the same part of the building. Liaison is also enhanced by positive experience of working together:

If they get good service from another manager...they are more likely to work better with them the next time. (Senior manager SMD2: 113)

Managers at Colleges A and C speak of this relationship of trust persisting when they move to other college sites; the previous experience of working together holds the key to new patterns of liaison.

From these examples a dilemma may be perceived: whereas management structures effectively disperse college functions organically into differentiated sections, whether these are faculties or sites or services, they do not always facilitate the re-assembling of the coherent organic whole. The sections inevitably – and appropriately – create their own working environments, which can be difficult for others to penetrate. Ease of inter-section working is lost, and with it the vehicle for creating effective whole-college provision.

Influence of senior managers

Senior managers can be influential in enabling middle manager liaison, especially where there are territorial or power issues. As one curriculum manager pointed out, liaison between senior managers can help to bridge the gap:

If you have got a good relationship with your manager and your management team, you know your life is made a lot easier ... if the communications are good between them as well. (Curriculum manager BFGA: 77)

The perceived power of senior managers gives added support to the activities of the middle manager; the proposed action is seen as being for the good of the college. Other staff know that 'it's not just you on a power trip' (Service / Student service manager DFGB: 96). One service manager (AFGB: 169) refers to needing a champion at senior manager level to make things happen, and a service / student service manager (DFGB: 168) speaks of the 'game' he plays when sending memos to other managers, of putting 'copied to' a senior manager, whether he actually copies the memo or not. Liaison with the supporting power of a senior manager is more effective.

Effective 'upwards and downwards' liaison for the middle manager also depends upon good relationships with their senior manager. Having a busy, or particularly powerful, senior manager can lead to overload, however: 'I think one of the barriers to my effectiveness is actually the workload of the person who manages me' (Service manager AFGB: 109). A busy senior manager is less accessible for liaison, and the middle manager is faced with excessive expectations from 'above', which then have to be mediated with the team. This leads to the 'piggy in the middle' situation of sent role conflict (Kahn *et al*, 1964), which has been discussed in Section 5.2 (d).

Blame cultures

Lack of knowledge of others' working environments within the differentiated sections of the college can lead to blame cultures. Key college services tend to be singled out for criticism, as their perceived malfunction can have an impact right across the college. There is usually a valid reason for the initial concern; the situation then escalates until the manager or department is blamed automatically, whatever the circumstances. For example, at College A and College D, managers report that there have been concerns about Management Information Services, which since incorporation have provided data externally to the funding bodies and which in more recent years have provided data internally to college managers to enable their planning, monitoring and evaluation activities. At both colleges the position has improved after a review of the service and modification of the data systems to make them more accessible for managers. The

valid reason for blame has been removed, and managers now largely commend the new service.

A concern current at College B at the time of the research is the way that accommodation decisions are handled: both curriculum and student service managers complain about low levels of consultation and about having to work in unsuitably refurbished environments (Curriculum manager BFGC: 96, Student service manager BFGD: 99). Any frustration and irritation with inappropriate accommodation is felt on a daily basis: however, the accommodation officer is eloquent in his description of his methods of consultation (Service manager BFGB: 19-27). It appears that that his perception of liaison and those of his internal clients differ, and that better levels of communication and understanding need to be achieved if the blame culture is to be avoided. If he is simply 'constructing the art of the possible' (Gleeson and Shain, 1999: 471) within the constraints of his role, the other managers need to know more clearly what the constraints are.

Status and territory

It has been seen in the 'Implementer' section above that curriculum managers, who carry responsibility for the fundamental activities of teaching and learning, are perceived to hold superior status, unless the college makes proactive efforts to redress the balance. Comments about lack of authority in role and an undervaluing of their professionalism tend to come from service and student service managers (for example, Student service managers AFGC: 168 and BFGD: 103; Service manager CFGB: 77), and it is managers in these roles who report most difficulty in liaison. Waldman (1994) notes that managers working in multifunctional teams where their responsibilities cut across the traditional lines of authority have to develop new strategies to manage in these situations. Paradoxically, because they have responsibility for a particular curriculum area, curriculum managers are often perceived as having less of a 'whole-college' view than their colleagues in service or student service roles, unless efforts are made to give them a cross-college function, as at College C. A competitive approach to target-setting and to the allocation of resources, as at Colleges B and D and to a lesser extent at College A, also serves to 'compartmentalise' the college along faculty lines, which makes liaison across the

various faculty boundaries difficult. At colleges B and D, this approach also results in competitive demands upon service and student service manager time.

In part, this difficulty of liaison between different types of manager is perceived as 'historical', perhaps dating back to pre-incorporation, when colleges carried out fewer of their own administrative functions, and the role of administrative staff was seen as less important.

But there's always a tension between – and a failure of communication between - subject people and administrative people. (Senior manager SMB3: 49)

The difficulty is compounded by the growing 'professionalisation' of service and student service functions. Colleges are increasingly likely to appoint people with professional experience in these roles, or to encourage role holders in developing professional expertise. Moreover, in College A, Senior Manager SMA3: 53 points out that managers holding service and student service responsibilities are actually 'nearer' to the senior management team in their lines of communication and accountability than curriculum heads. The potential for authority in role for service and student service managers has therefore been growing, and has been recognised by senior managers (for example, SMD3: 29 and SMC1: 38). This results in additional frustration when curriculum managers do not recognise their new and growing status.

A graphic illustration of this situation is offered at College D where a senior manager, a head of faculty, says that he encourages his middle managers to come to him for advice on financial matters, rather than to the head of finance: 'because I'm very good at it' (Senior manager SMD1: 26). Together with other comments in his interview, and observation of a faculty meeting, this indicates that he wishes to keep control of as many functions as possible within his faculty. However, this may not have been the best option for the college as a whole, as other middle and senior managers complain of his territorialism and one senior manager comments that this particular faculty is 'in a mess financially' (Senior manager SMD4: 121). Although the head of faculty himself liaises with the head of finance, the faculty and its middle managers do not get the benefit of professional financial expertise.

College C has attempted to break down barriers and to enhance college-wide understanding and liaison for curriculum managers at College C by giving them cross-college roles. However, there is some evidence that this strategy may also have reinforced the perception of inappropriate 'ownership' on the part of curriculum managers:

We still have curriculum people who want to own everything, they want to own interviews, they want to own the tutorial process and counselling, advice and guidance, and careers. (Senior manager SMC2: 53)

The functions listed here are in fact the type of cross-college roles which have been formally allocated to curriculum heads. This has resulted in role ambiguity (Kahn *et al*, 1964); as the following comment shows, managers are no longer clear as to what their role encompasses in relation to the roles of others:

I think that there is a lack of clarity, in terms of what is expected of curriculum teams and what is expected of student support teams. Not just lack of clarity, I think that there may be a competition: I don't know. (Student service manager CFGA: 143-5)

Not only is it unclear what curriculum heads and student support teams should and should not do, there also appears from this comment that there is a power struggle over the territory involved.

This situation may be compounded further, as service and student service heads were in the process of being allocated small-scale teaching roles at College C at the time of the research. It appears that the college is attempting to produce a 'hybrid' model, where managers have their own head of department specialism, but cross the academic / service divide to carry out other aspects of their role. This should increase managers' understanding of other college functions, which in turn should facilitate liaison. Success will depend upon the potential for role ambiguity to be addressed and reduced; assessment of this hybrid model would entail research at a later date once the new systems have become established.

Summary

The liaison aspect of role is facilitated by the college's ability to work as a coherent whole, optimised by an inbuilt facility for joining together the college's differentiated parts. This facility may exist mechanically, in the form of college structures and

location of staff; it may exist organically through a mutual respect and valuing of the roles of others within the common purpose of the college. Liaison is therefore enabled by role allocation which enables understanding of others and proximal location for the manager to their own team and also to other key managers. Where proximity is not possible, liaison is enabled by the managers' location within whole-college working teams. Senior managers are key agents in promoting inter-manager liaison.

Liaison is impeded by physical and personal territoriality – multiple sites and strong power bases – where the manager finds it hard to gain access and respect. Although differentiation of systems between territories may strengthen the individual identity of the site or the faculty, it is not helpful for managers who encounter different systems in different locations. Managers may also experience role conflict as a result of competing demands for their services. Blame cultures are both an effect and a cause of poor liaison; the source of the blame needs to be identified and addressed before effective liaison can be established.

Managers may be also impeded in liaison by poor 'whole college' understanding on the part of those with whom they try to liaise, and by a lack of acknowledgment of managers' professional status. Although liaison might be regarded as a largely mechanical activity, where the manager uses college structures and systems to undertake collaborative activity, many of the impediments to liaison are organic, and stem from the attitudes, value systems and scope for understanding of the other managers in the system. The difference in difficulty experienced by different types of manager is most evident in this aspect of role. Student service and service managers are most likely to be involved in cross-college liaison, yet the structures and power-bases of the college, based upon curriculum areas or sites, do not usually favour managers in these roles. Their roles are sometimes seen as having lesser status than those of curriculum managers, which also impedes equitable liaison.

(e) Leader

It was noted in Section 5.2 (e) that discussion of leadership among further education managers is problematical, as managers are reluctant to consider themselves as leaders. However, the managers in this study undertake leadership activities such as shaping and sharing values within the team, 'bringing people with you' to make college

functions happen, and setting the pace and direction of the team, all of which are activities noted by Sawbridge (2001) as important to leadership in further education. Leadership, where it occurs, is systemic and delegated, and is seen by managers as requiring a blend of transformational and transactional activities.

Impediments to leadership

It might be argued that the main impediment to leadership among middle managers is their reluctance to acknowledge and grasp leadership, to reconcile the term to their own perception of their role: 'I would class myself as a facilitator, rather than a leader' (Curriculum manager CFGC: 27). Their own sense of authority in role is also an influential factor. One service manager (CFG: 136) comments: 'Sometimes I feel as though I have enough authority and then sometimes I don't.' This uncertainty can be exacerbated by role pressure through the attitude of senior managers: 'If something is going wrong, then you have the ton weight of senior management asking why' (Curriculum manager BFGC: 24). It can also be intensified by ambiguity over their received role: 'I'm in a team where there are three co-ordinators and I think our roles get mixed up by other people' (Student service manager CFGA: 141).

In none of the situations quoted above are the managers in a position to assert themselves as leaders: the first does not wish to lead, the second is uncertain about the areas in which it is appropriate to lead, the third may fear to lead, and the last is uncertain as to who will follow. If leadership is, as Quinley *et al* (1995) suggest, the action of using power to influence others in the accomplishment of important organisational objectives, these managers are, by their own assessment of the situation, not equipped to lead.

Clarity of role and a wish to lead may be important facilitators for leadership, but as one senior manager (SMB2: 23) points out, 'Power and autonomy is frequently dictated by the resources [you] have control over... That's what gives you the clout.' At the same college, another senior manager (SMB4: 54) speaks of giving middle managers 'the autonomy and resources that they need to do the job.' As was noted when discussing the implementer role, some managers lack budgets and adequate staffing, while others, as seen in discussion of the liaison role, lack authority over the

areas in which they need to work. If middle managers are to take on dispersed leadership roles, these issues need to be addressed.

Styles of leadership

Where leadership is espoused by middle manager respondents, they favour contingent styles, which are appropriate to circumstance. The first reason for this is expressed by one of the senior managers (SMB1: 104), who says: 'Your style has got to be something that really is your style, not something you have read about in a book.' If leadership is a state to which managers are reluctant to aspire, then the style adopted has to suit their own personality and ways of interacting. Secondly, managers are perceptive in seeing that different leadership styles suit different followers: 'There are those who need the functional, directional and those who are far happier with the transformational and the creative' (Service manager CFGB: 128). As a senior manager (SMC2: 144) comments: 'one of the skills ... is to decide when a particular style is necessary.' This is supported by a student service manager's observation (CFGA: 22), 'You can't write a guide book on how people are going to react to you sometimes.' As Glover *et al* (1999) conclude about subject leaders in schools: successful departments occur when leaders recognise the difference between the transactional and the transformational, and have developed wisdom in handling personalities and situations.

The picture which is built up, therefore, is of managers having the capacity and perception to use a range of leadership styles, within limits in which they feel comfortable and in accordance with values which they espouse, choosing according to circumstance the style which will best produce the desired effect. They follow the patterns of activity indicated by 'habitus': the 'feel for the game' (Bordieu, 1990, 63), using 'dispositions acquired through experience, variable from place to place and time to time.' (Bordieu, 1990: 9). This is an organic approach to leadership, where the manager does not necessarily choose the style prevalent at the college, but the one best suited to their contextual need.

Facilitators to leadership

In the section above, lack of clarity of role was identified as a barrier to leadership. Many of the respondents, however, are clear about their role, and as one senior

manager (SMB1: 107) comments: 'If you are very clear about why you are there, and the importance of the staff you are working with, and what as a team you want to achieve, I believe you can be very effective.' Within those clear boundaries, some managers speak with enthusiasm about shared vision within the team (Curriculum manager DFGC: 107), setting the pace and direction of the team (Curriculum manager AFGA: 187) and using their enthusiasm to bring people with them (Curriculum manager AFGA: 189), all of which are important enablers of leadership. In Section 5.2 it was seen that managers of all types are concerned to relate their work to educational values and to professionalism; together these patterns of response resonate with Drodge's (2002) concept of personal leadership, which is based on notions of professionalism.

In three of the colleges, B, C and D, senior and middle managers speak of there being support for creativity and innovation. At College D, innovative leadership of new areas of provision is encouraged, with managers being seconded to develop and lead new initiatives (Senior Manager SMD3: 112 and 146). At College B, a senior manager (SMB2: 76-7) observes that, 'people here are encouraged to think out of boxes and develop and create,' and that the traditionally non-hierarchical culture at the college encourages this. A student service manager at College C (CFGGA: 103) celebrates the culture at this newly established college of 'allowing people to be creative ... which means that some really good things have been developed,' and a senior manager at the same college (SMC2: 111) speaks of trying to 'nurture talent, spot talent.' Whether the creators and innovators see themselves as leaders or not, these comments certainly indicate that there is an environment which encourages dispersed leadership at these colleges.

It is interesting therefore to consider the situation at College A. The college at the time of the research visits had least evidence of dispersed leadership, and had a largely transactional senior management style. The college has not encouraged innovation; in fact a senior manager (SMA3: 135) comments that the college was not funded for innovation. To enable more effective management of the college, however, senior managers wish to move the college to a more devolved leadership style, to involve middle managers more in strategy making, and to encourage creativity and devolved decision-making. It may be that the strong 'whole college' culture apparent at the time

of the visits will enable clarity of dispersed leadership, encouraging a coherent organic structure based upon known college values and purpose. On the other hand, managers who are accustomed to a mechanically-based transactional style might find it difficult to take on the mantle of this newly dispersed leadership, and members of their role set might not accept them as leaders.

Summary

From this discussion it is evident that leadership is enhanced where the leadership role conforms to the manager's value system, and the manager is able to relate to the underlying principles and practice of leadership within the working context. It is also facilitated by the manager's ability to understand and choose appropriate leadership styles in an organic, contingent manner. It depends upon whether the manager is working within a transformational context, having the support of the college for creativity and innovation and the freedom and ability to set the pace and direction of the team.

Leadership is impeded by the managers' reluctance to acknowledge both the term and the concept as applied to themselves and their activities, a reluctance which may be induced by a lack of college discussion of leadership in the context of middle management and a lack of authority in role. Among the different types of manager role, the curriculum manager is most likely to experience conditions favourable to leadership. Service and student service managers, whilst they may enact leadership, are more likely to see themselves as 'team leaders' than as offering leadership for a function of the college.

Conclusions

The various aspects of the middle manager role have here been considered in relation to factors which facilitate and impede them. Some of these factors, for example resource restraint, impact across the range of roles and across all the colleges. Some, like the acknowledgement of the manager's professional status, operate differentially in the different roles, and some such as multi-site working only relate to particular colleges.

Facilitators and impediments may be produced by both the organic and mechanical dimensions of college life. It is easy to see that the mechanical aspects of bureaucracy are debilitating and frustrating, whereas the organic, creative activities of successful teamworking can provide welcome motivation. Equally, clear transactional systems may enable the managers' understanding of accountability, and thereby their grasp of the whole-college picture, and a differentiated, organic approach to managing staff may result in manager overload and exhaustion. The pattern that emerges in each aspect of role is one of striving for balance: of mediating mechanical needs through organic activities, and vice-versa. Each aspect of role, and the environments which it occupies, differs in the extent to which it is mechanical or organic, and this may vary from college to college and role to role.

In the next section, the complexity of the interaction of facilitators and impediments on different aspects of role will be simplified through modelling. This is not to disregard the complexity presented here, but to enable clarity of expression of the underlying processes at work. The processes themselves will then be represented in a series of models, in order to depict and interpret the organic and mechanical systems explored in Chapters 4 and 5, followed by a discussion of the issues emergent from the research.

CHAPTER 6

MODELLING AND DISCUSSION

6.0 Introduction

This chapter moves through a process of modelling the outcomes of the study, to a discussion of the emergent themes of the research. In the previous chapter a typology of role for middle managers in further education was proposed and discussed. The typology was then used to analyse the interaction of the various aspects of role, and the roles of different managers, with the college environments presented in Chapter 4. The discussion explored the complexity of these interactions, and identified key factors within the college environment which facilitate and impede each aspect of role. In Chapter 6, these factors are examined through a series of models, in order to seek the underlying systems and patterns of response which underpin the manager role. Interpretation of the models includes a consideration of their use for analysing the college environment and for problem solving. This leads to a further discussion of the themes developed through the research: whole-college coherence and professionalism. The research question initially under discussion are:

- How can modelling be used to represent and interpret the interaction between middle managers and factors within their environment which facilitate and impede?
- How can the models be used for problem-solving and considering college design?

The final section of discussion addresses themes arising out of all the research questions.

Modelling

In this section, modelling is used to represent and investigate interaction between the middle manager role and factors within its environment. Models, which present an abstract or simplified description of a real-world situation (Gass and Harris, 1996), are increasingly being used in the fields of operational research and organisational learning in order to support both understanding and action (David, 2001). They can be used as a filter to simplify complex situations and to guide decision-making (Rivett, 1994). Importantly for this research, models are a potential means of understanding the intricacy of organisational environments and their management systems (Fowler,

2003). Fowler claims that modelling can be used to enable managers to develop a more holistic and dynamic perspective of the way their organisation works, and that this understanding can support cross-functional activity within institutions, which is a particular concern of this research.

A model can be used as an agent for change, to mediate between perception and action (Pidd, 1996; Wild: 1996) by offering opportunities for innovation and for breaking out of current barriers to thinking (Bytheway, 1995). In educational research, modelling is applied to aspects of school improvement (Scheerens, 1997), and in this study aspects of college improvement are addressed through the modelling process. Modelling is used here as the final stage of analysis of the qualitative data, in order to represent and discuss the underlying patterns of interaction which affect the manager role, to clarify the factors at work, and to offer strategies for addressing problems concerning the role. Using the insight gained, the models have potential use for problem-solving and for considering the effects of college design.

Modelling aspects of the manager role

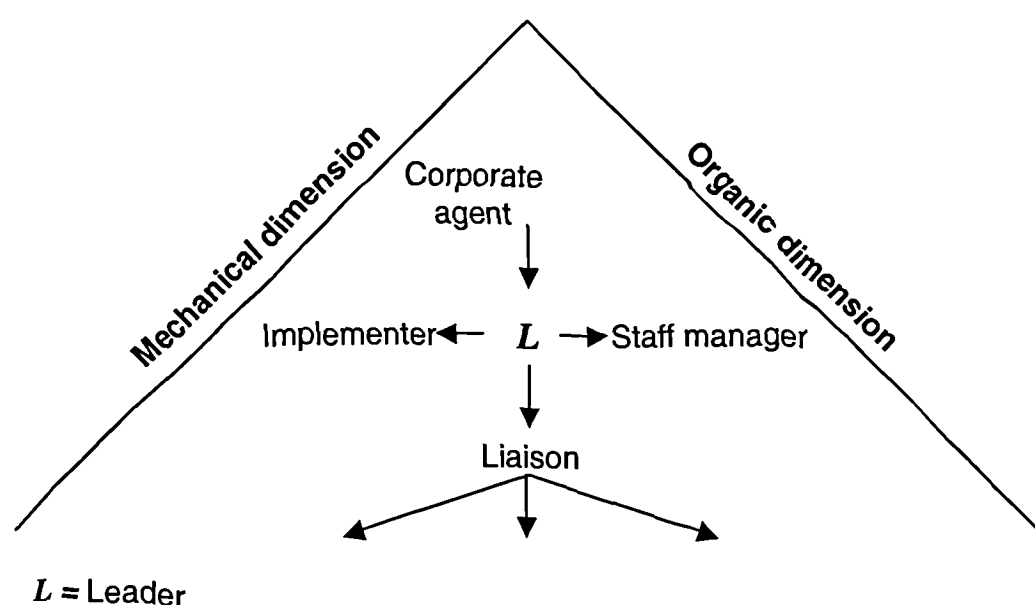


Figure 6.1 **Dynamic representation of aspects of role**

The five aspects of role, presented in a new typology through this research, represent the generic activities of the full range of further education middle managers: managers of curriculum, of college services and of services to students. The relationship of the aspects of role to each other, and their approximate relationship to the mechanical and organic dimensions, was presented in Chapter 5 and is reproduced here as Figure 6.1. In Chapter 5, the generic location of each aspect of role in relation to the organic and mechanical dimensions was proposed and discussed (as in Figure 6.1). This discussion revealed the complexity of the mechanical and organic pressures upon the role, and ways in which their influence might fluctuate and be moderated by the manager. It was also proposed, as in Figure 6.1, that the five aspects of role are interdependent. For the purpose of modelling the interactions of environment upon role, each aspect of role is initially examined in turn, as part of the process of 'filtering' the data described by Rivett (1994), to enable key factors in the management environment to be identified. In each case, the facilitators and impediments which were analysed and summarised in each part of Section 5.3 are placed in the model, and links are drawn to the key features of the environment for management summarised in Table 4.6. This enables the relationship of the role to its working environment, and the blend of mechanical and organic activity within each aspect of role, to be visualised and considered. Whilst the complexity of interaction explored in Chapter 5 is lost, the comparative clarity of the models enables conceptualisation of the key factors which influence the manager role, which forms the final stage of the modelling process.

The features of the environment for management summarised in Figure 4.6 are as follows.

- Size and sites
- Turbulence
- Management structures
- Middle manager involvement in strategy
- College systems
- Status of manager roles
- Support for innovation
- Role coherence
- Leadership context

When modelling these factors, it was discovered that the various forms of turbulence – the second item in the list – act as driving forces upon the college environment as a whole. Their impact on the manager affects all aspects of their role; they do not feature strongly in any single area, but are manifested as a general malaise, or a feeling of powerlessness among managers. Turbulence will therefore be considered in the final part of the modelling process, which considers the role and the environment as a whole.

6.1 Modelling the corporate agent aspect of role

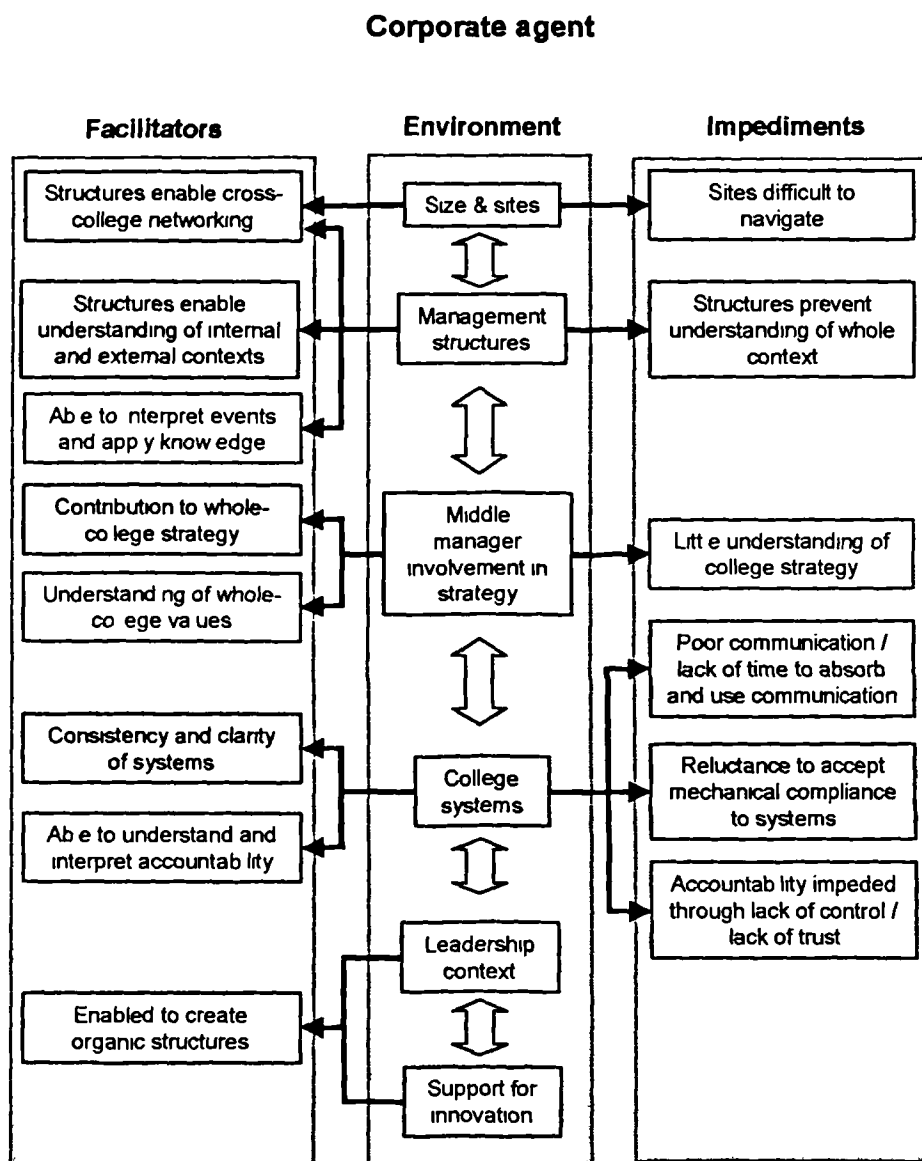


Figure 6.2 Modelling the corporate agent aspect of role

In Figure 6.2, as in the following four figures, the key features of the college environment listed above are placed in the centre of the model. They are linked together to represent an inter-related whole, and are in turn linked to the facilitators and impediments identified, discussed and summarised in Section 5.3. This process involves a choice of position for the facilitating or impeding factor. For example, poor communication is in Figure 6.2 linked with college systems; however, it could also be a feature of the management structures, or of the leadership context. It is linked here to college systems because analysis of the data suggests that this is where the deficiency is most felt. A further element of choice involves the labelling of factors as largely mechanical (blue) or largely organic (red). As the discussion in both parts of Chapter 5 has demonstrated, factors are rarely totally mechanical or totally organic. The choice is made in order to simplify, and to enable visualisation of the overall impact of each dimension on each aspect of role.

Key features supporting corporate agency, which can be identified through considering the facilitators presented in the model, are the clarity and 'usability' of college structures and systems. Factors which enable understanding – of strategy, of accountability, of college values – are also important, as are mechanisms whereby the manager is able to interpret corporate agency and apply it in the differentiated context of the department. As the model presents a whole-college system, the sets of facilitators and impediments are linked as a coherent whole. Reading the *right-hand* side of the figure sequentially, to consider impediments to corporate agency, the following pattern of cause and effect can be constructed.

If college sites are difficult to navigate, and the structures prevent understanding of the whole-college context, managers have little understanding of whole-college strategy. This lack of understanding, combined with poor communication, may lead to managers' reluctance to comply with mechanical systems, and a lack of acceptance of their corporate accountability.

This type of 'reading' of the model can help to identify where problems are located. At College D, one of the senior managers spoke of the managers' poor compliance with mechanical procedures. The 'reading' offered above would encourage the senior manager to evaluate the communication routes in the college, and to consider how the managers' understanding of whole-college strategy and purpose might be improved.

The model can thus be used to understand the supporting and impeding context of corporate agency. It can be used further for problem solving. In addition to the impediments shown here – factors which were identified from case study respondents – additional impediments can be identified by considering the opposites of the facilitators. For example, senior managers may realise that middle managers are unable to interpret corporate events and apply their knowledge appropriately. In other words, one of the facilitators (the third from the top) is missing. To investigate this problem, they could examine first the other factors which are in the same cluster (management structures), to see whether the other facilitators are present, or whether there is a strong impediment which needs to be addressed. They could then consider whether other facilitators or impediments need to be investigated: for the current example, a consideration of the managers' understanding of whole-college values might be appropriate. The model can thus be used to simplify the complexity of the college environment in order to identify areas for development and action.

The elements presented in the model can be used for problem-solving in other ways. If the sites are physically difficult to navigate, as in College C, compensating facilitators can be brought more strongly into play. At this college, management structures are already being used to facilitate cross-college networking, thereby developing the managers' understanding of internal college contexts. This does not physically enable access, but it may help the manager to make better use of the access which they have. A further example can be taken from College D, where middle managers lack understanding of whole-college strategy. If it is felt that including them more strongly in the strategic planning process would be inappropriate or logistically difficult, the college could consider ways of strengthening managers' understanding of whole-college values and purpose, so that they will better understand and apply the 'given' strategy.

The model touches on an important feature of this analysis, *in attempting to represent* the mechanical and organic dimensions within which the manager works. Just as there are 'opposites' to the facilitators and impediments which merit consideration, the choice of red or blue colouring can be used to provoke consideration of the organic elements attached to mechanical features and the mechanical framework of organic features. For example, 'Structures enable cross-college networking' is presented in blue because it is the mechanical structure of the college which is being used to facilitate the networking, through access to managers in proximal locations or through managers being positioned together in working contexts. The networking itself, once established, has organic applications. The managers, having been facilitated in their cross-college networking, can use the relationships established to solve 'local' problems in ways appropriate to their local context, hopefully within a framework of whole-college understanding.

Similarly, the features which are seen as mainly organic have mechanical elements. 'Able to understand and interpret accountability' is coloured red because it represents the managers' interpretation of corporate accountability within their own 'local' context; the application of accountability to their own roles and those of their teams. In order to apply this understanding within their own departments, they have to use mechanical systems such as monitoring against targets. Understanding accountability should enable them to use the mechanical systems more effectively.

From these last two examples, it is seen that the optimal situation is a balance of the mechanical with the organic. This balance is not a centre point, or 'golden mean'; it is the point at which the enactment of the manager activity makes sense to the manager within the college context. This can be expected to vary from college to college: in College A, which is the most strongly transactional college, the balance point may be nearer to the mechanical dimension than at College C which is striving to be transformational.

The various examples explored within this first model reveal that the models have two purposes. They simplify and clarify to enable understanding of a particular system, in this case the system supporting the corporate agent aspect of role. They can also be used to invite further exploration of the system simplified here, to understand its

underlying complexity and to conduct problem-solving. A third purpose will be demonstrated as the final stage of the modelling; they can be used to build a representation of the whole role within its college context.

6.2 Modelling the implementer aspect of role

Implementation, the core of the middle manager activity, invites consideration of a large number of facilitators and impediments, which are modelled in Figure 6.3. Key factors which are seen as influential to this aspect of role include accessibility: of data, of communication, of resources, and of people with whom interaction is needed. Understanding – of the college structures and systems, of college bureaucracy, of the role itself – is also essential to implementation. A third set of facilitators depends upon professional expertise: the managers' autonomy and skill in shaping their role, and their ability to use the expertise of the whole team to meet the differentiated needs of their clients and learners.

As with the first aspect of role, 'reading' the model can give insight into the context of this aspect of manager activity. Reading down the facilitator side of this model produces the following proposition.

If managers are well placed to navigate college systems and structures, they will be enabled in making the personal interaction necessary for the role. Access to data systems, electronic communication and feedback on their role, together with an understanding of college bureaucracy and budget systems will give them the necessary knowledge to carry out the role. The personal interaction and the necessary knowledge, together with clarity given to the role by the college, are used to create and shape the role. Success then depends upon the managers' ability to reconcile the demands placed upon them and to use their own and others' expertise, supported by the respect of others, to carry out the role effectively.

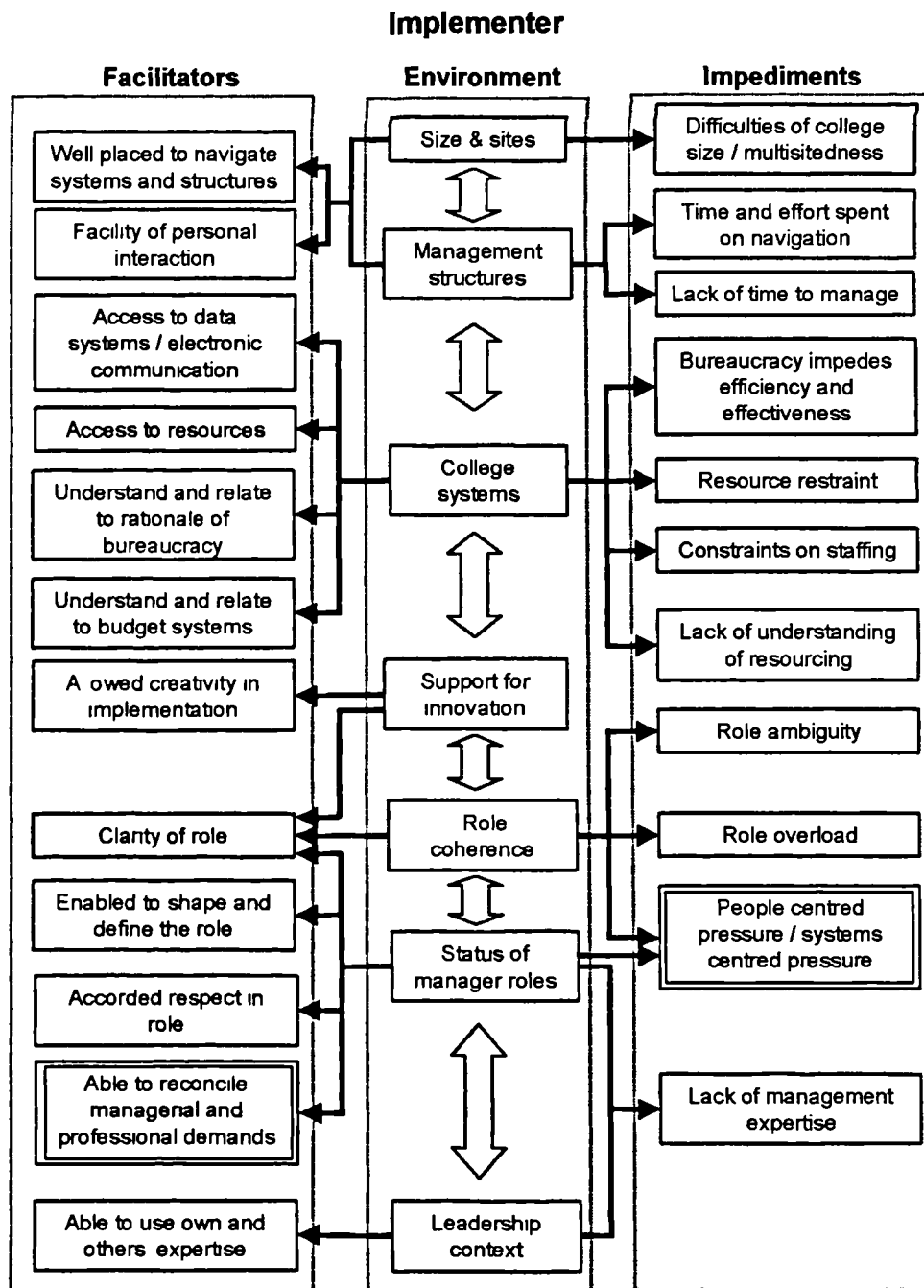


Figure 6.3 Modelling the implementer aspect of role

This reading can be used to work through an example at College B, where the strong faculty system prevents easy navigation of the college systems and structures. The effect is principally felt by service and student service managers, but also by the curriculum managers themselves, 'isolated' within their faculties. The college is also

moving from a transformational style of leadership towards a more transactional one, accompanied by turbulence within the system. The managers' clarity of role and their understanding of the amount of freedom they have to shape their role, are affected by the change of style and the instability of the college. It is likely from the above reading therefore, that middle managers are not well placed to implement effectively, as the managers lack clarity and certainty about their role, and their access to each other is impeded. Once the college has stabilised to its new style of leadership, the clarity and certainty should improve; it would be useful at that point for the college to examine the benefits and disadvantages of its faculty system in order to achieve optimal effectiveness.

In Chapter 5, implementation was presented as being the most strongly mechanical aspect of role, as it depends upon the manager's effective use of the college's management structures and operational systems. Both the model in Figure 6.3 and the above discussion of College B reveal how much this apparently mechanical activity is influenced by organic facilitators and impediments. For example, the manager needs efficient 'mechanical' access to systems, in order to obtain data, feedback and resources to enable implementation. Effective implementation depends just as strongly, however, upon the manager understanding, relating to, and applying organically within the local context the data, feedback and resources which have been obtained.

The discussion so far has shown the interaction of different elements in the model through the arguments presented in the readings, and through examining the activity within and between the clusters in the model. In some cases, individual elements can be seen to interact with the whole model. One example of this is the item: 'able to reconcile professional and managerial demands.' In Section 5.3 (b) it was argued that the implementer aspect of role depends upon the manager being able to reconcile professional and managerial demands, which in itself involves the managers in understanding both organic and mechanical dimensions of their role. In the model, this element is linked to a cluster of items concerning the clarity of the role, its position within the college, and also its status, the respect which others pay to the role, the pressures upon it, and the manager's ability to shape and define it at a local level. All of these elements support the manager's professional and managerial understanding

of implementation. This understanding can enable the manager to deal with the impediments presented in this part of the model: role ambiguity and overload, people-centred pressure and systems-centred pressure. Looking outward from this cluster of items, it can be seen that once the status of the role – not simply the political status within the college, but the status within the manager's own mind – is established, managers are better placed to reconcile the managerial and professional demands placed upon them. They are then able to benefit from other facilitators: they may be better able to understand and use the college systems and management structures in order to enact their role, and they may gain insight into how to use their expertise and creativity in effective implementation.

Managers using this model in order to reflect on their role may be able to identify the key element which for them would unlock their potential as implementers, and to see how the other elements relate to it. For some of the managers interviewed, particularly the service managers, the key element was to be accorded respect in role; for others, mainly curriculum managers working below Head of Faculty level, it was to have access to a budget and to understanding of the college financial systems. Having used the model to identify cause and effect of impediments to their role, managers can then consider the related sections of the central 'environment' column, to interpret which area of the college context needs to be addressed. As it has been established that the implementer and staff manager aspects of role are complementary, managers may also need to consider the next model when investigating problems of implementation.

6.3 Modelling the staff manager aspect of role

Figure 6.4 models the staff manager aspect of role. The interpersonal elements of the role, which depend both upon the skills of the manager and the support and professionalism of the team, are the engine which drives this aspect of role. What the model shows are the underpinning mechanical elements which support this organic operation, of which the managers are also aware. If the mechanical structures of the college are not appropriate, for example, the manager is faced with conflicting demands from the senior management and the team, the classic 'piggy in the middle' situation. As the literature indicates that this is a common problem for any middle manager, colleges might usefully seek ways of alleviating this type of conflict by

means of their management structures, through examining the relationship between the managers at different levels and the departmental teams, including their mutual expectations.

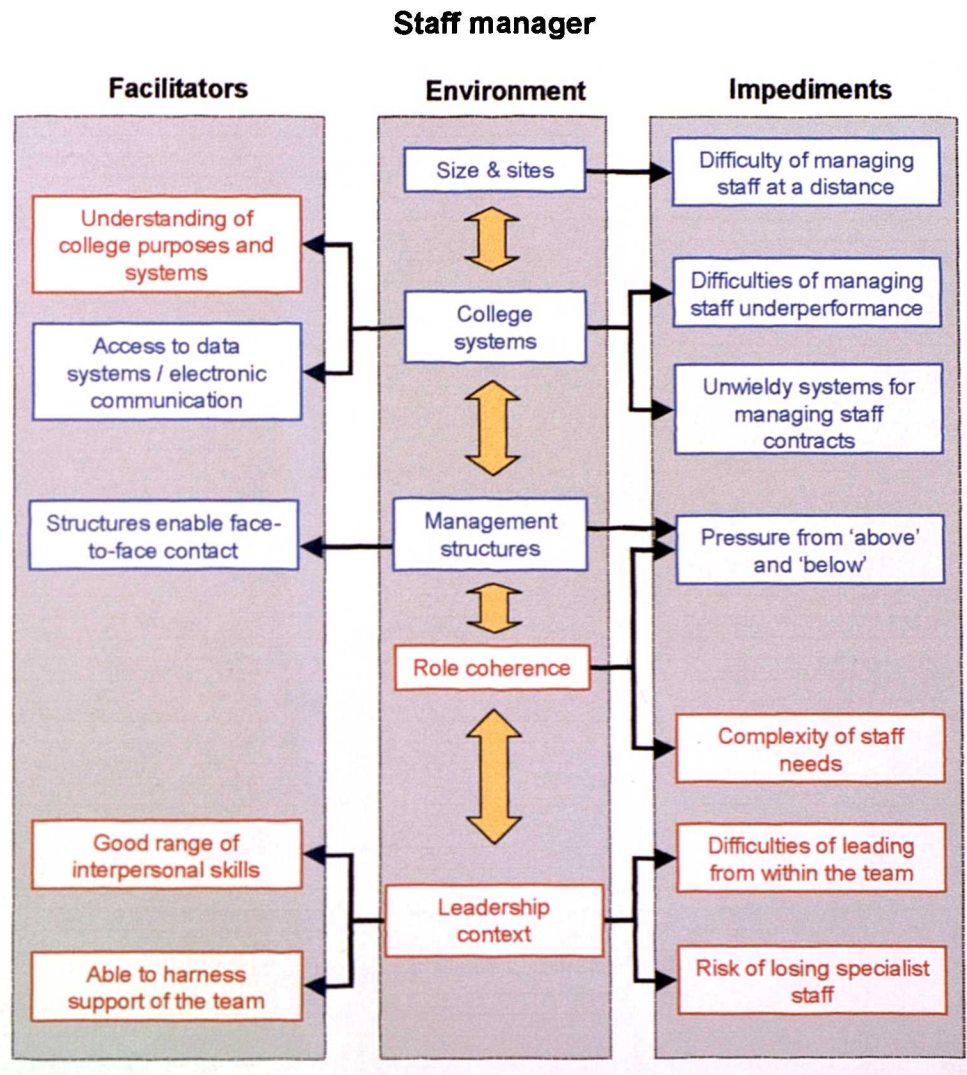


Figure 6.4 Modelling the staff manager aspect of role

Moving to the second cluster in the model, the college systems supporting staff management are mainly apparent when they malfunction and become impediments. Managers, concerned in maintaining the balance of organic relationships represented in the final cluster of the model, become frustrated when the mechanical systems fail to support them, for example over the issuing of contracts. For curriculum managers, who are most likely to manage staff on a number of types of contract, this mechanical element becomes burdensome, putting the role 'out of balance'.

A useful way of evaluating the staff manager aspect of role is to read down the facilitator side of the model.

College structures should be set up which optimise face-to-face interaction between managers and their teams, and systems be designed to provide efficient access to data and electronic communication. If the managers then have a good understanding of the college purposes and systems, and a good range of interpersonal skills, they should be able to harness the support of their team and manage staff to the benefit of the college.

If the staff manager role is largely undertaken intuitively, managers may not see that their team needs to be managed within the framework of college purposes and systems. They would probably see the need for strong interpersonal skills, but it might be harder for them to identify that they are not making best use of the communication routes available to them. A simple reading of the whole model may improve understanding of the context within which staff management is set, and help to identify areas for manager or whole-college development. These could include a sharing of managers' strategies for leading from within a team or for managing staff at a distance, an examination of the systems for employing staff and for storing and retrieving data concerning them, or a re-examination of the expectations and pressures upon middle managers.

As with the other aspects of role, examination of a single cluster of elements can also provide insight. The top cluster can be analysed in relation to College A, which is moving to a more site-based management system. Senior managers hope to achieve three objectives by this change of structure: decentralisation of college management, identification of staff with particular college centres and easier access of managers to their teams. The difficulty of managing staff at a distance will be alleviated for curriculum managers (although to a certain extent they were centre-based before the change), and for some student service managers, such as those managing student admissions, who will be responsible for services only on one site. Other student

service managers, such as the learning resources manager, will still have their team scattered among the sites. Service managers will have their teams adjacent to them, but will be providing services, such as finance and *human resources*, to all sites. The solution is thus seen as a compromise between the organic benefits gained by most managers of being adjacent to the staff they manage and the possible mechanical costs of dispersing leadership out into the college centres. As will be seen in the next model, dispersion may affect the college's ability to work as a whole.

6.4 Modelling the liaison aspect of role

Liaison is underpinned by the college's collective ability to work as a coherent whole. Managers are supported in their liaison by easy access to, and co-operation from, teams and managers across the college structure. Taken as a whole, this model (Figure 6.5) seems to indicate that, in practice, liaison is mainly facilitated by systems and impeded by people. In other words, the enabling factors which may exist in the whole-college systems can be impeded by the locally-focussed systems and purposes devised by other managers. This factor operates right across the model: for example the manager gains little benefit from proximal location to those with whom liaison is needed, if the potential partners in liaison do not trust and value the manager or their role.

A useful example can be worked through in relation to College D. At this college, the curriculum managers, placed within powerful faculties, are accorded respect and status within their role. However, the extent of their power impedes managers of other types, who have little status in the eyes of curriculum managers, and who receive conflicting, competitive demands from them. Service and student service managers are deterred by the power and territoriality of the curriculum managers, and therefore their success is impeded. There is a further danger in this situation, that the apparent ineffectiveness of the service and student service managers reinforces the curriculum managers' lack of respect for them. This could lead to an erosion of the clarity of role for the service and student service managers, as curriculum managers attempt to 'take over' some parts of their roles, producing a downward spiral of effectiveness for the college as a whole. From this discussion it can be inferred that what is needed for success are optimal conditions for all managers, rather than preferential conditions for some.

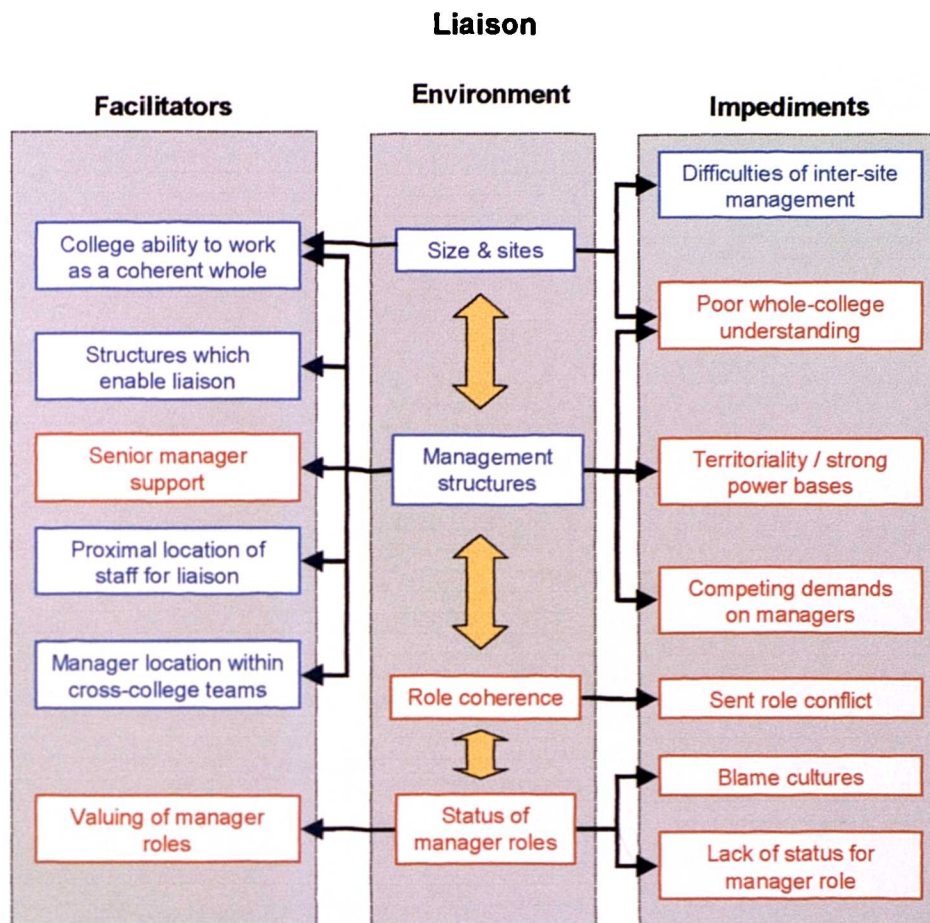


Figure 6.5 Modelling the liaison aspect of role

The environment explored here at College D can be seen in general terms through a reading of the impediments presented in the model.

Difficulty of management across the site, or between sites, compounded by attitudes of territoriality and competing demands on manager services, makes a poor basis for effective liaison. The situation may be exacerbated by poor whole-college understanding, which can lead to blame cultures and a lack of status and respect being accorded to the full range of middle managers. Liaison is thus effectively impeded.

If the faculty-based management structures are valued as a framework for the college – and given the educational purpose of the college, this is a reasonable framework to choose – the college needs to address the deficiency in whole-college understanding and the differential value placed upon manager roles which are preventing effective liaison. In the words of the first item in the model: the college needs to address how it is to work as a coherent whole.

Moving from a consideration of impediments to liaison to the factors which facilitate it, the model shows that the systemic support needed for liaison is relatively simple. Both the management structures and the college operating systems need to offer opportunities for managers to work together: laterally across the manager roles and vertically between senior managers and teams. As was seen in an earlier example at College A, choices have to be made over proximal location which will inevitably enable some liaison routes and block others. This situation can be mediated, as in College C, by managers working together on projects in cross-college, cross-functional teams. The top and bottom items in the facilitator column are crucial: there has to be a unity of college design and a mutual valuing of roles if the different aspects of college function which the various managers represent are to be enabled to work together as a coherent whole.

6.5 Modelling the leader aspect of role

The leadership aspect of role is modelled in Figure 6.6. It is strongly influenced by the attitudes of the middle managers themselves towards their own role and the role of other managers, and the attitude of senior managers towards dispersed leadership. If leadership is not acknowledged, it may be enacted, but will not be identified as such by the managers, and therefore not be carried out with any degree of focused reflection. From the Figure, the role is seen as organic, an individual aspect of managers working in their own location, rather than being undertaken on behalf of the college; as such it may be a feature observed more clearly by the 'led' than by the leader. It does not feature strongly in the mechanical structures and systems of the college, probably because it is little acknowledged. Leadership at middle manager level is more likely to be encouraged under senior manager leadership that is transformational, which encourages dispersed leadership, than in a transactional leadership environment. It is useful, therefore, to consider the contrasting situations at College A and College B.

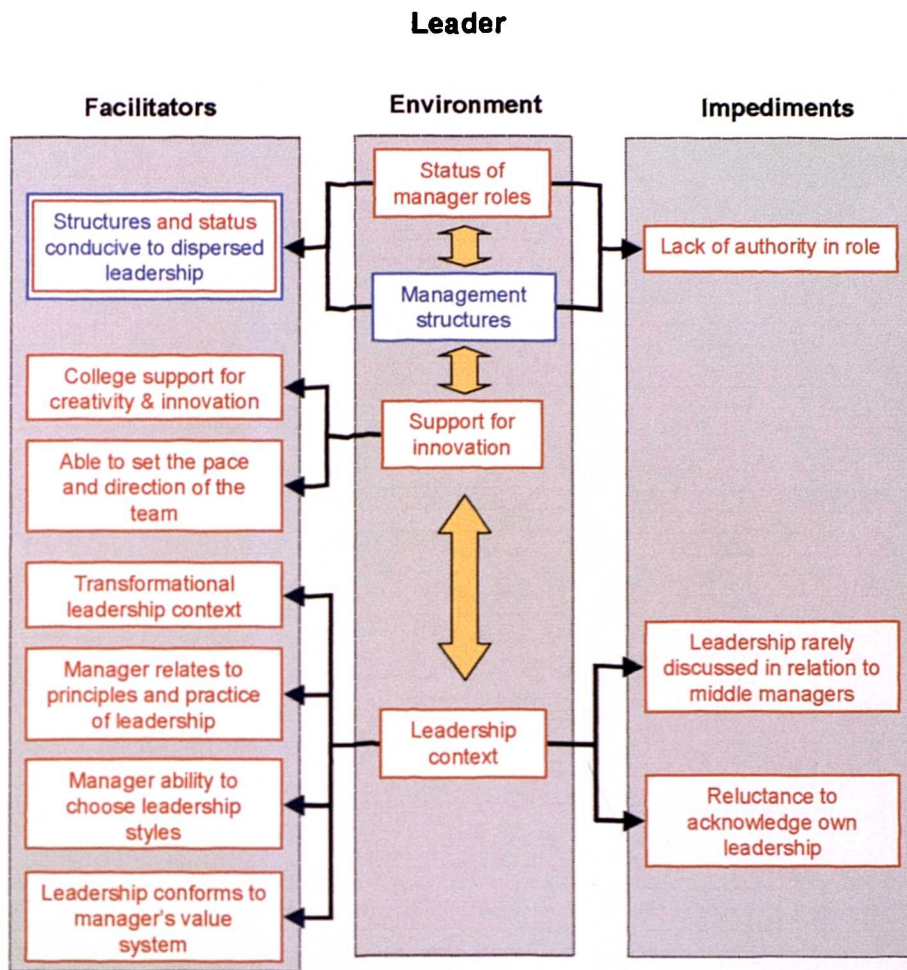


Figure 6.6 Modelling the leader aspect of role

In line with its restructuring to site-based management, College A is moving towards a more dispersed, transformational, leadership style, in contrast to the transactional style which was evident at the time of the research visits. It seems that very few of the facilitators presented in the model were strongly evident under the previous style of leadership. Under a new system, managers may relate better to the principles and practice of leadership, and they already show awareness of a range of leadership styles; however, the other facilitators may have to be developed upon a small existing base. The transformational leadership context will take time to establish and be understood, and the accompanying encouragement for creativity and innovation will need to be fostered if the managers are to accept their new roles in a more transformational system. Happily, the college currently presents a 'stratified' leadership structure, with middle managers favouring a transformational approach; this

may enable the change to be seen as offering better conformity with the managers' own value systems.

In contrast, College B is moving from a transformational approach, based upon perception of a common understanding of underpinning values, towards a more transactional approach, which offers better security for the college as a business. This move implies an increasingly insecure basis for dispersed leadership in a college where 'local' organic structures have prevailed. It may be that the strong directional leadership at present being developed to pull the college away from its various crises will be valued, and that the resulting loss of individual autonomy may be seen as a small price to pay for increased security. Once the college is secure, it may, like College A, revert to more dispersed organic systems. Contrary to the proposition of Burns and Stalker (1961), it appears from these two examples that hierarchical, directive structures are favoured in times of turbulence, and the organic, network structures in times of greater stability. For the individual manager, the turbulence is likely to impede their already tenuous perception of their own position as leaders. Their focus is more likely to fall upon their other, more visible, aspects of role, and the leadership aspect may be the last to emerge within the new college environment.

This reflection moves the analysis further to a consideration of the middle manager role as a whole. Figure 6.1, presented at the beginning of this chapter, shows the interdependency of the aspects of role, and the way in which they operate within the territory between the organic and mechanical dimensions. It is with this interdependency in mind that the systems governing the five aspects of role are identified and presented together in the next stage of the modelling process.

6.6 Modelling the middle manager role within its context

Identifying underlying concepts

This part of the modelling process uses the models presented so far to examine the whole-college context of the role, which leads to a discussion of whole-college coherence. In order to examine more closely the interaction of the whole role with the whole college environment, the full range of facilitators and impediments in the first five models were collected together, as in Figure 6.7.

Middle manager role

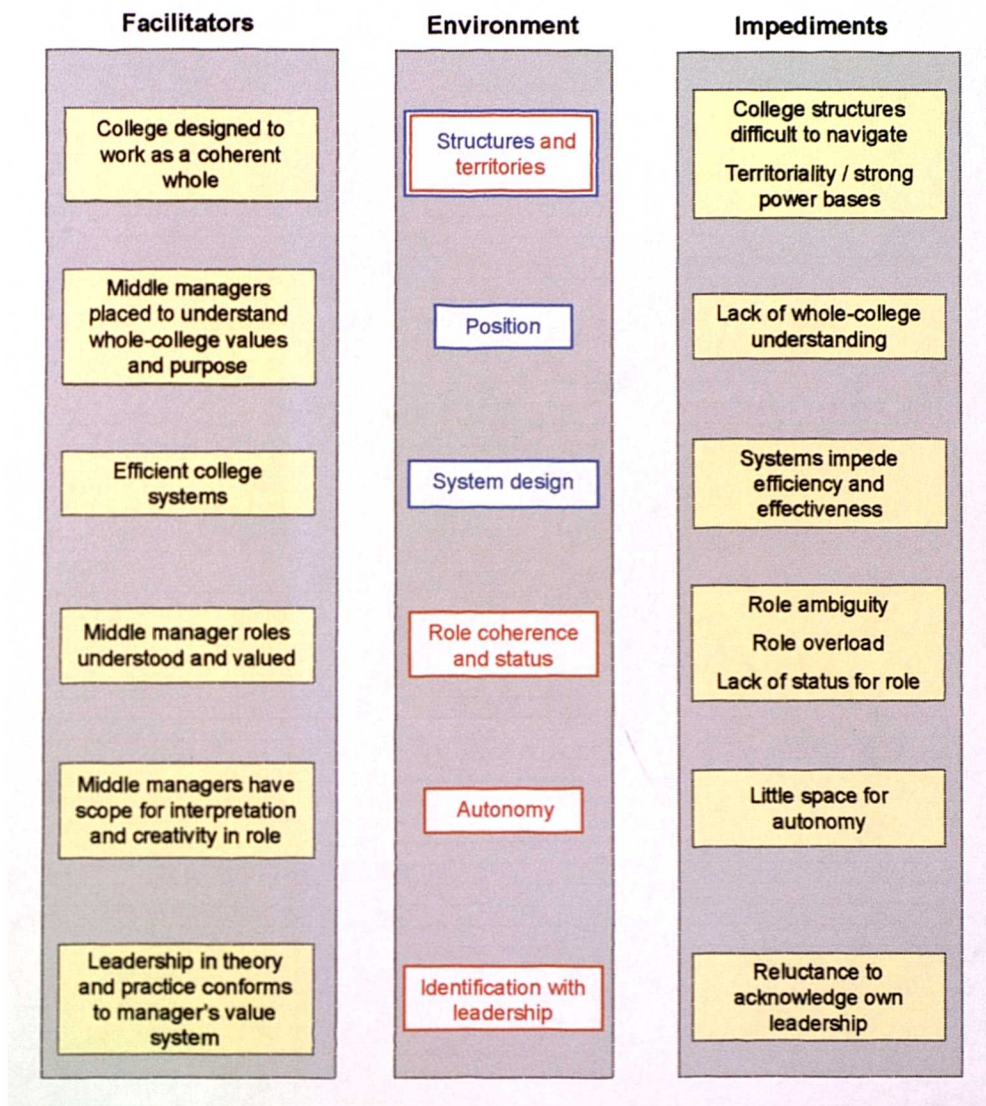


Figure 6.7 Modelling the whole role

During this process, some elements were amalgamated and expressed more concisely, for convenience. The lists of facilitators and impediments were thus 'collapsed' into the pair presented in the outer columns of Figure 6.7. Through consideration of the elements in the outer columns, underlying concepts concerning the college environment were identified which can be considered to shape the managers' work. These are presented in the middle column: structures and territories, position, system design, role coherence and status, autonomy and identification with

leadership. These partly resemble the items in the original central 'environment' column, but, as a result of the process of analysis, the emergent list more clearly conceptualises the context within which the managers are perceived to work.

Defining the emergent concepts

As will be seen in Figure 6.8, these six new concepts interlink as a system; however, they will firstly be defined in relation to the manager role.

'Structures and territories' represents the physical and management-based structures of the college, and the identification of locations within those structures as territories. Territories operate beneficially, offering a physical or work-based location within the college with which people can identify and feel 'at home', and within which the links between people are stronger. They also present barriers to people from other territories who may not understand the systems and values at work, or who may simply be unwelcome. As Burns and Stalker (1961) observe, the operation of these structures and territories can present tension between whole-organisational systems and individual or group aspirations and values.

'Position' is a concept which comprises not only the managers' location within the management structure, but also their placing in respect to understanding whole-college purpose and values. Favourable position may offer the manager access to both knowledge and status; it may also be awarded to those who have knowledge and status. Knowledge in this context comprises many of the aspects of professional knowledge, discussed by Turner and Bolam (1998), particularly situational knowledge, process knowledge and knowledge of educational practice. Status is accorded to the role, through its more or less favoured location in the structure, and to the person in response to their application of professional knowledge.

'System design' addresses the efficiency and effectiveness of the college's operational and implementation systems. Ideally, the overall design should offer optimal help to all users, and its constituent parts should operate in synchrony with each other. Given the size of the colleges, and their diversity of operation, this 'ideal' presents difficulties: of overall design, of people's understanding of the design, and of co-operation to achieve synchrony between the parts. The tension discussed by

Burns and Stalker (1961) is evident here, between systems which are predominantly mechanical, serving the corporate needs of the whole organisation, and those which are organic, differentiated to the needs of sub-sections of the organisation. In order to meet the diverse needs of the total system, and to survive, the organisation has to maintain equilibrium between them.

'Role coherence and status' comprises the balance of expectations upon the role-holder, the clarity of the role to the role set, and the extent to which the role and the role-holder are valued. Coherence depends upon the clarity of the received role, and the avoidance of role ambiguity, role overload and role conflict (Kahn *et al*, 1964). The status depends upon the role expectations (Kahn *et al*, 1964) of the role set towards both the role and the role-holder.

'Autonomy' summarises the extent to which the manager is free to interpret and enact the role, within an understanding of whole-college purpose. It is partly determined by the attitude of senior managers towards the middle manager role, and is linked with the degree of professional status which the manager feels. Gleeson and Shain (1999) consider that a loss of professional autonomy has been experienced in further education colleges through delayering and management reorganisation, whilst Drodge (2002) considers that the main task for further education managers is to preserve space in which to develop local ideas, geared to locally defined priorities. In either case, autonomy is felt to be under pressure, constrained by the mechanically-based needs of the whole organisation.

'Identification with leadership' expresses the managers' psychological and positional readiness for leadership. It depends upon the managers' acceptance of the concept and practice of leadership as applying to them, and upon the 'fit' of dispersed leadership with the prevailing leadership styles of the college. Lumby (2001) considers that leadership in further education is dispersed and systemic, but that it is under-acknowledged by managers and is fragmented. It may operate in what Gronn (2000: 14) calls a 'collectively performed activity system', where complementary specialisms are enmeshed in a flow of activity, which collectively constitutes leadership. Identification with leadership is more likely to occur in transformational leadership contexts than transactional.

Modelling the concepts

In Figure 6.8 these six concepts are placed in a systems diagram to demonstrate the working of the whole management environment in relation to the middle manager role. The concepts are placed as elements in the system to show their relationship with each other, and with the manager role. The diagram is presented as largely symmetrical for ease of representation, rather than as implying equality or symmetry of impact upon the role. The determinants of each of the elements are placed in an outer ring, next to the concept which they govern. Five of the elements impact directly upon the middle manager role: structures and territories, position, systems design, role coherence and status, and autonomy. The sixth element, identification with leadership, is governed by the way managers view their role, and the degree of autonomy which they experience. It is therefore linked to the role 'through' those elements.

Whilst all of the elements impact upon the role, they also relate to each other, principally in the manner indicated by the arrows. The top three elements are closely interlinked: college operational and implementation systems usually flow along the framework provided by the college structures. The manager's position is partly determined by the college structures, but also by the status of the role, and the manager's acceptability within the dominant college territories. The lower set of elements is likewise interlinked, and are strongly dependent upon attitudes and perceptions. The managers' role coherence and status depend upon their position within the college – thus linking with the top part of the diagram – but also upon the degree of autonomy experienced, and upon the prevailing attitudes towards leadership. Together, these three 'lower' elements provide a strongly organic influence upon the role, as they constitute the environment within which the manager 'locally' enacts the role.

Figure 6.8 thus represents the college-based context, mechanical and organic, within which the manager role is enacted. Mechanically, the role is defined and circumscribed by the college structures in which it is placed. It is served, well or badly, by the design of the systems in operation at the college, and by its position in relation to understanding the college as a whole. Organically, the role is defined by people: by

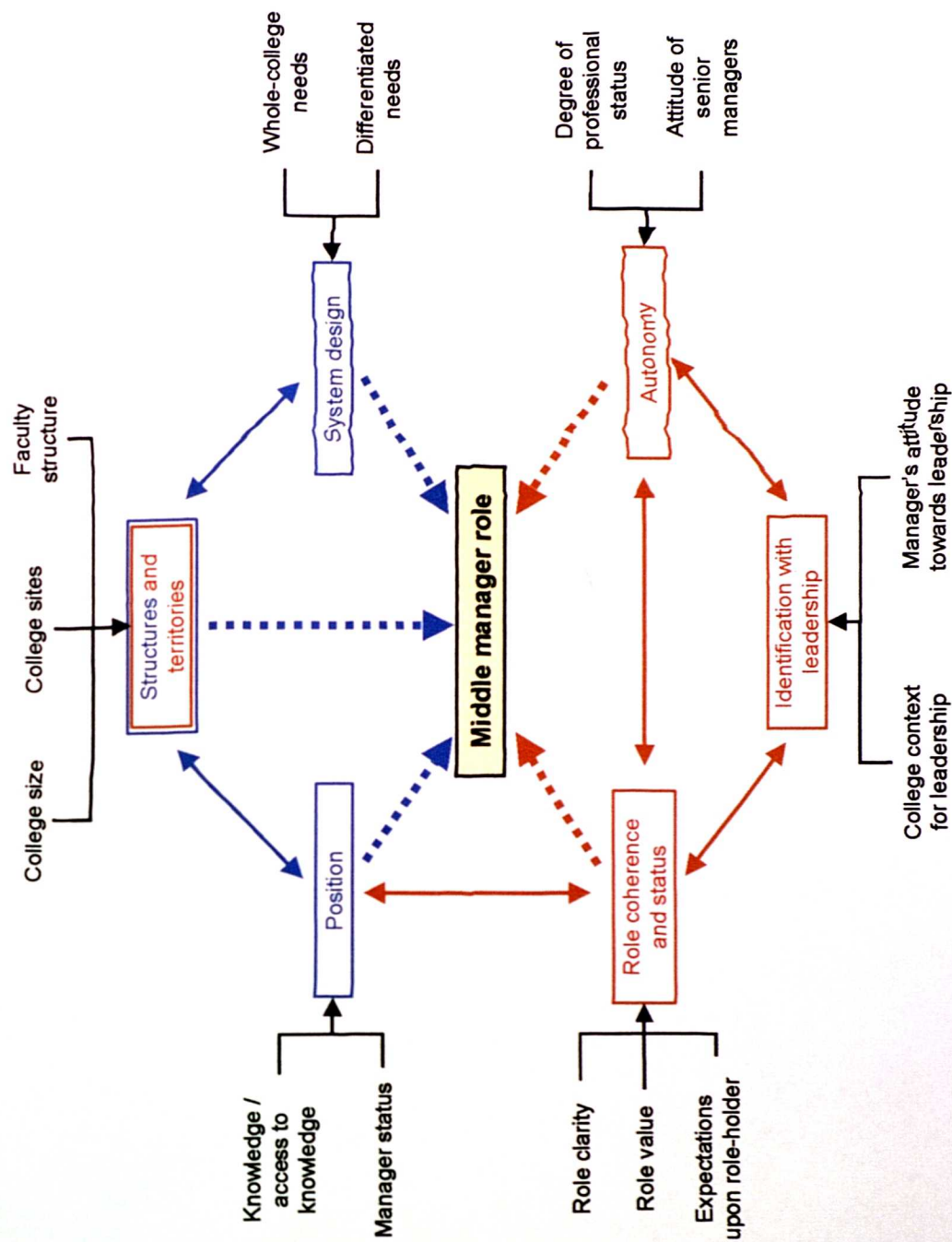


Figure 6.8 Systemic representation of the environment for management

the expectations of members of the role set, and by the value which they place upon the role. It is governed by the degree of autonomy and the extent and nature of leadership which the role-holder experiences.

The 'outer ring' of determinants not only enables understanding of the concepts to which they are linked, they also offer a means of interpreting pressures upon the role, and of solving problems concerning college design and manager interaction. Some of the determinants are obvious, some less so, and their usefulness in gaining insight into the role and into the operation of the college as a whole is presented here in a series of examples. To take the first element, Colleges A and C which operate on multiple sites are striving to find the optimum structure for operating across sites, but College B and D which are strongly faculty-based appear less concerned about the territorial barriers which their structures present. Secondly, considering system design, managers who design college operational and implementation systems may keep in mind the whole-college needs which the systems serve, but may give less consideration to the differentiated needs of the various sections of the college. At its extreme, this could result in a system of whole-college simplicity, which is unworkable on a departmental basis. It may be impossible to balance whole-college needs with the needs of the differentiated departments, but the model serves as a reminder that both sets of needs must be borne in mind.

Thirdly, reflecting on 'position', managers new to role could be encouraged to analyse their position, perhaps with a view to strengthening it. What professional knowledge and expertise do they bring to the role, and how well are they placed to learn more about the college and its purpose? How well known and well regarded is their knowledge, and how does it support their status within the college? This leads on to the fourth element, 'role coherence and status': most of the managers in this study experience some degree of role strain, which may be rooted in a lack of role coherence. An examination of the range of expectations upon middle managers and their clarity of understanding of their role might lead to the identification and alleviation of 'pressure points' for role conflict, ambiguity and overload. Fifthly, in at least one college in the present study (College A) senior managers would like middle managers to have more autonomy in role. The model indicates that they should consider the degree of professional status accorded to the role-holders, and examine their own

attitude towards the day-to-day reality of middle manager autonomy. Finally, senior managers at College C wish for more dispersed leadership within the college: their proposed staff development programme on leadership might usefully include an examination of the college context for leadership, and of the managers' attitude towards leadership in order to strengthen college-wide identification with the concept. These six examples are not intended as an exhaustive analysis, but they give some indication of how the determinants can be used to examine the 'health' of the whole system.

Turbulence

Any analysis of the whole college system would have to take account of turbulence. Turbulence can be produced by external or internal factors, but there is often a combination of the two, as the college responds internally to an external impact. Data from this study suggests that turbulence affects all aspects of the manager role; however, it is possible that some elements of the college system may be more strongly affected than others. This statement can best be analysed by comparing the situation at Colleges B and C, as these colleges were experiencing both externally and internally induced turbulence at the time of the research. College B is adjusting its management style after a series of crises, including a disappointing inspection and loss of staff through financial instability; College C is stabilising its structures and systems after a complex amalgamation process and attempting rapid change in order to respond to local and national initiatives. At College C, the turbulence affects mainly the mechanical elements of the model in Figure 6.8. The structures are constantly under adjustment, and managers express frustration with cumbersome college systems; however, the college's purpose and values are well understood, thus strengthening the top portion of the model, and giving scope for the more organic elements to develop.

At College B, in contrast, there is significant uncertainty about the whole-college values and purpose; these aspects seemed clear before the crises, and are less clear now. At this college, it is the organic elements of the model which have been destabilised; there is both role ambiguity owing to the move towards more mechanical systems and role overload as a result of loss of staff. Autonomy, which was previously valued, has been put in question, and the environment for leadership is uncertain. The

college is concentrating on strengthening its systems and structures; hopefully this will produce conditions of greater stability in which the organic elements can become re-established. From these two examples it appears that turbulence does not always affect the same parts of the system; the models can therefore be used to identify where the turbulence has most impact, and what the compensating factors might be. The models could thus be used as a tool for managing externally or internally generated change, through a consideration of scenarios which would be produced by the change and an analysis of how to mediate the anticipated turbulence.

The role itself, and the changing environment within which it is placed, can therefore be explored by a consideration of the six concepts and their determinants. Finally the different types of manager role can also be examined against the model.

Curriculum managers

On the whole, curriculum managers are well placed within the college structure. They are seen as enacting the purpose of the college through their management of teaching and learning, and structures tend to be built around them. The comparative insularity offered by the college structure may, however, prevent them from interacting easily with other managers, and even from understanding whole-college values and purpose. Curriculum managers do not generally create college systems. The systems should be designed to help the college enact its purpose, and curriculum managers should therefore benefit, but this is not always the case. If liaison is poor, particularly between the service managers who devise and operate the systems and the curriculum managers who use them, effectiveness in role will be impaired.

Curriculum manager roles are generally valued, for the reasons given above. Role ambiguity can be experienced, however, especially between curriculum managers and student service managers. Close co-operation is needed between these two sets of managers over provision for students, and sometimes the roles overlap, causing ambiguity. Given their status in leading an area of the college curriculum, curriculum managers generally have scope for creativity and interpretation in their role, and they value this factor as part of their professionalism. They may, reluctantly, see themselves as leaders.

On the above analysis, it appears that curriculum managers are well supported by organic factors, and by key mechanical factors, such as college structure. Their effectiveness, and through them the effectiveness of the college, depends on how well they understand the whole-college purpose and values, and how well they liaise with other managers who are crucial to their success.

Student service managers

In respect of the mechanical dimension, student service managers need access to all the structures and territories of the college in order to manage their dispersed staff and to liaise over student provision. They are therefore most likely of all the managers to experience difficulty with college structures and territories, which tend to be curriculum- or site-based rather than service-based. Student service managers create some of the college systems, however, which gives them a certain amount of mechanical security, and the broad-ranging nature of their role usually places them in a position to understand whole-college values and purpose.

On the organic side, student service managers have to be responsive to individual and collective student need, and they therefore usually have scope for contextual interpretation and creativity in their role. Student service roles may not be understood or valued in themselves, however: it is the effective manager in role who is valued. Respect has to be earned from other managers and staff through the quality of service offered to students. They may see themselves as team leaders, but their role probably depends too much on liaison for them to see themselves in conventional leadership terms. From this analysis, it appears that there are both organic and mechanical strengths and difficulties inherent in this role. It is not a role which has positional status, yet it encompasses such fundamental college activities as enrolling students, providing them with computer systems and learning resources and supporting their individual needs. The role therefore contributes to whole-college effectiveness through serving the needs of the differentiated parts of the system.

Service managers

Service managers operate mainly in the mechanical domain. They create college systems and implement national ones – for example for handling finance and management information, for human resource management, for managing estates.

Some of these systems, notably finance and management information, link the college with its funding bodies, and some govern key internal functions, such as the employment of staff at the college; potentially this situation offers positional status to service managers. Interview data suggests that service managers have a good understanding of whole-college purpose and values, and wish to liaise effectively with other managers. However, they are not well placed to navigate college structures and territories, often being placed in a separate structure of their own, and interaction with other managers can be difficult.

Service managers on the whole do not wish for autonomy in role, although they are often involved in creating systems. Their function is to manage systems, and to operate them efficiently. Although they potentially have positional status, their roles are sometimes not well understood; their mechanical nature means that they are associated negatively with college bureaucracy. Like the student service managers, therefore, they have to earn respect in role in order to be valued. This suggests that there needs to be a focus upon the interaction across the top right hand corner of the model, so that coherence between college functions and systems can be achieved, and the service manager roles be better understood and valued. Although the role is largely mechanical, it also depends upon the organic element of respect and value afforded by others.

6.7 Whole-college coherence

From the minutiae of the day-to-day interactions of college managers with their environment which are offered by the data, a model for whole-college coherence (Figure 6.8) has been constructed which encompasses differences in role and differences between colleges. The chosen range of middle manager roles – curriculum, service and student service – were selected for study as collectively they *constitute the operation of the whole college at middle manager level*. It was argued in Chapter 5 that, in order to manage the complexity of its provision, the college disassembles its functions and allocates them to departments and managers for the functions to be carried out. In order for the student to have a successful educational experience, the jigsaw has to be reassembled and work as a coherent whole. If middle managers are the means whereby college purpose and strategy are translated

into action, then conditions which favour middle managers in role should favour the operation of the college as a whole.

No two 'coherent' colleges would be identical: the discussion above concerning turbulence indicates that colleges have different strengths and vulnerabilities, just as they are of different sizes and demonstrate different patterns of leadership. The concept of coherence acknowledges such difference, whilst offering insight into generic enabling features. Firstly, in a coherent college, the structures and territories would be easy to navigate. They might resemble Schneider's (2002) 'radix' organisations, which have fluid and permeable boundaries, and an emphasis on lateral relationships across functions. They could be built upon Burns and Stalker's (1961) organic model, having lateral, rather than vertical, interaction within a 'stratified' system. The individual sections of the college could be federal or confederate (Busher and Harris, 1999), homogeneous or heterogeneous departments, dependent upon the breadth and complexity of their scope of operation, but forming a constituent part of the whole-college function.

Secondly, the college systems would facilitate both efficiency and effectiveness. Simkins (2000) comments that whereas reform in schools has driven them to become focussed on effectiveness, reform in colleges has resulted in a dominance of efficiency. In fact, both are needed, and the college systems are crucial to both. As Lumby (2001: 43) observes, achieving the 'twin objectives' of reducing unit costs and increasing efficiency on the one hand, and maintaining the quality of education and the focus on learning on the other is a central concern for college managers. With constraints upon funding, and high levels of political accountability, colleges have no choice but to be efficient, and in the coherent college this efficiency would result in operational systems which were well designed for their purpose and quick and easy to use. The systems are also judged by how effectively they enable the college to meet its professional and market accountabilities, through providing appropriate learning opportunities for students and clients. If the purpose of systems is to replace routine decision-making (March and Simon, 1958), then it is important to review and redesign them (Morris, 1975) in order to keep them fit for both purposes.

Thirdly, managers would be well placed to understand whole-college values and purpose; they would use that understanding to apply their professional knowledge appropriately, both in their departments and in contributing to whole-college decision-making. Glover *et al* (1998) offer a picture of schools being on the cusp of change in this respect, with some middle managers reluctant to accept this concept of their position, and seeing their inclusion in whole-school decisions as tokenistic; Gleeson and Shain (1999) see middle managers in colleges as mediators and translators rather than as shapers of policy. The current study likewise shows inconsistency in middle managers' understanding of, and participation in, whole-college issues. If the college, as a complex, multi-structured organisation, is to function organically, then the managers of the individual 'segments' of activity have to be in a position to understand and relate to whole-college purposes and values, in order to enact them differentially within their departments.

The fourth element in whole-college coherence is that manager roles would be understood and valued. This not only entails an absence of role conflict, ambiguity and overload, it also entails an acknowledgement of the status of all types of manager in contributing to the whole-college operation. Lumby's research (2001) indicates a change in attitude towards manager roles, with 'support' staff acquiring new status due to their professionalised function, but comments that at present, consensus on status is elusive. That situation is confirmed by this research. The negative effects of role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload seem to pervade both the data in this study and the middle manager literature, and research such as that of Glover *et al* (1998) in schools indicates that the managers' response is to 'retreat' to an operational function when overloaded, despite their understanding of the need to move from administration to management and leadership. It would appear from the current research that coherence at whole-college level is inter-dependent with coherence of role, a factor to be discussed further in Section 6.8 'Professionalism'.

Fifthly, this research indicates that whole-college coherence is supported where managers have a degree of autonomy, giving them scope for interpretation and creativity in their role. This need is governed by the multiple differentiated functions of the college, which depend for their operation upon 'local' specialist expertise. Whilst the underpinning purpose and values of the college need to be communally

understood, and whilst clear, consistent systems of operation can promote both efficiency and effectiveness, individual expertise and professionalism are essential for effective departmental operation. If managers feel that their autonomy and creativity are unduly restricted in the very area in which their expertise lies, both their motivation and their ability to manage will be restricted. Brown and Rutherford (1998), in analysing the role of 'servant leader', consider that the basis of the head of department's influence is their professional expertise. Likewise, Hannay and Ross (1999) consider subject specialism to be a part of professional identity. It is upon this professional knowledge and understanding that, according to Argyris and Schon (1978), 'espoused theory' is built, guiding the actions of the manager through their 'theory in use.'

The last element of whole college coherence concerns distributed leadership. If leadership in theory and practice conforms to managers' value systems, then their professional identity may include a leadership role. A system of dispersed leadership, encouraged by transformational leadership at senior level, would strengthen the departmental role described in the paragraph above. An understanding that if leadership is dispersed, it is a joint, communal activity, aimed at a common purpose, would enable harmonisation of whole-college and departmental function. There is potential for dispersed leadership to 'flow' through the organisation as described by Ogawa and Bossert (1997), using the organic structures of the college to create whole-college purpose and change. The findings of this study indicate that the issues of territoriality and status may act as impeding factors in this process. Neither the literature on further education colleges, nor the evidence from this research indicate that distributed leadership of this kind is consciously in operation to any significant extent. If colleges do not espouse the concept of leadership, then it is likely that another concept, which has persistently run through this analysis, will take its place: that of professionalism.

6.8 Professionalism

The recent literature on professionalism in colleges is part of a wider debate about managerialism and professionalism in relation to public services (eg Pollitt, 1990). In schools, the discussion revolves around the need for heads of department to take on management and leadership activities (Glover *et al* 1998), and the necessary

'reskilling' which may be needed for managers to accept and undertake these new professional roles. Gleeson (2001) pursues this debate in the college context. He writes of the 're-professionalisation' of further education, which might be seen as a new, business-like, approach to the 'old' values of addressing the learning needs of students. A related paper by Gleeson and Shain (1999: 467) discusses the 'struggle over the meaning and identity of professionals' in this context. Simkins (2001: 321), comparing the experiences of schools and colleges, sees the 'client-centred, public sector values' as being espoused by colleges in a form of 'bureau-professionalism'.

The debate on professionalism in colleges has been fed through enquiry into a range of issues. Randle and Brady (1997a and b) investigated responses to a number of new 'managerial' practices at one case study college; Gleeson (2001) and Gleeson and Shain (1999) investigated the impact of government policy upon colleges through a broad empirical enquiry based on five case study colleges; Lumby (2001) and Lumby and Tomlinson (2000) drew on a range of quantitative and qualitative data investigating cultural change in colleges; Simkins (2001) used existing literature and conceptual debate to compare the effect of educational reform and managerialism upon schools and colleges. The current research enters the debate, using the empirical base of four case study colleges, from the perspective of analysing what managers do, and what enables and impedes them in doing it. It is therefore well placed to address the concept of professionalism from a fresh angle: an understanding of the middle manager role itself.

Chapter 4 revealed different perceptions of professionalism at the different colleges. In Chapters 5 and 6, professionalism was discussed in relation to individual aspects of role, such as implementation and staff management, but also with the whole middle manager role. As was stated in Section 6.7 above, whole-college coherence and whole-role coherence may be interdependent. Any 'new professionalism' emerging from this whole-role coherence depends upon managers working within a context which enables them to reconcile managerial and professional demands. It has been argued that curriculum managers are likely to see their professionalism as being rooted in their subject area, rather than in their management skills, whereas for service and student service managers, there is a growing perception of professionalism as being rooted both in their service and in how it is managed. This difference in

perception is also evident between colleges. At College B, for example, the nature of the professionalism of service managers is valued, provoking the desire that student service and curriculum managers should develop the same kind of outlook on their work. This would equate with a stronger focus on the management role, moving the college away from the 'amateur' approach of offering management roles as a reward, or as a way of occupying 'semi-redundant' staff. Conversely at College C, the recent allocation of teaching to all middle and senior managers indicates that a focus on professionalism equates with an understanding of the process of education. This dual focus, on efficient and effective management and on educational values, can be seen in the way that professionalism is both equated with fulfilling the bureaucratic 'managerial' functions of the college – handling data, meeting targets, implementing quality procedures – and is also strongly associated with the application of professional values and specialist expertise to the departmental operation. The 'reskilling' recommended by Glover *et al* (1998) would need to encompass both management skills and the development and application of specialist expertise, and both would be underpinned by an understanding of educational values. This mirrors the debate offered by Gleeson and Shain (1999), where the rational mechanical aspects of 'being a manager' are being blended with an organic understanding of professional values.

Gleeson and Shain (1999) take the term 'managerialism', formerly used in the literature (Randle and Brady 1997a and b) as the mechanistic antithesis to professionalism, and re-define it. They see it as 'a rational process, linked with new principles of funding, efficiency and professionalism' (my italics), thus implying that managerialism and professionalism coexist as a rational approach to management. They acknowledge that there is a struggle over the meaning and identity of professionals, and propose (p488) that new professional identities are arising from 'ambiguities and contradictions' in the working environment. This 'struggle' can be traced in the data from this study, and it is particularly pertinent to the implementer role, where there is an attempt to combine the mechanical activity of implementing college procedures and systems with the organic activity of shaping and defining 'local' implementation. Managers appear to perceive their role in terms close to Simkins' (2000) 'bureau-professionalism, basing their role upon 'client-centred, public sector values.' They show that in ideal terms they need to be responsive to the corporate

needs of the college and to the individual needs of the students, whilst maintaining a proactive attitude to implementation.

Examples were quoted in Section 5.3 (b) of managers at College A, the most 'managerial' of the four colleges, stressing the importance of 'carving out the space' for their manager activity, using their own professional standards to guide what they do and earning respect from others through the way their section of the college is managed. This supports the proposition of Gleeson and Shain (1999: 472) that, contrary to the literature which describes middle managers as being oppressed by managerialism, many middle managers 'view their new responsibilities positively,' and that there may be 'a basis for rethinking professionalism in the FE sector' (Gleeson and Shain 1999: 488). This professionalism is based upon the managers' creativity in translating policy and practice into actions which acceptably meet both the corporate needs of the college and the individual needs of the learners, thus reconciling the imperatives of the mechanical and the organic.

6.9 Conclusions

This chapter has moved from a discussion of the data, and the activities which make up the role, to a depiction of the interaction of the role with its college environment. The first set of models (Figures 6.2 to 6.6) enables insight to be gained into the ways in which the various aspects of role are facilitated and impeded by features of the environment. They offer a tool for assessing college environments, for identifying key factors which influence the middle manager role, and for considering scenarios of change. This set of models is used to construct a model of the college systems, both mechanical and organic, as they impact upon the manager role, which is presented as Figure 6.8. This model depicts key concepts – structures and territories, position, systems design, role coherence and status, autonomy and identification with leadership – as elements in a whole-college system. It enables examination of the various patterns of activity which impact upon the middle manager role, and how they differ for different types of role, and through this discussion, the concept of whole-college coherence is developed.

Whole-college coherence is important, not only for its impact upon the middle manager role, but for the effective working of the college as a whole, as perceived by staff,

clients and students. The discussion presented here indicates that, in a complex college environment, whole-college coherence is difficult to achieve, and that some of the elements discussed are evident neither in the data nor in the literature. The concept is offered therefore as a possible 'ideal type', to enable evaluation of current college environments, and to stimulate further discussion and research. Likewise, the concept of whole-role coherence, here discussed in terms of professionalism, is an elusive one, which will vary from role to role.

The research offers a contribution to the current debate upon professionalism in further education, taken from the perspective of the middle managers and their role set. There are considerable impediments to effective enactment of the role: pressures imposed by college structures and systems, limitations on manager position and status, the range of expectations of the role set, and restrictions on manager autonomy and leadership. However, there are indications from the data that both middle and senior managers are striving to create a middle manager role which takes account of whole-college purpose and values, and the businesslike management of education within the college sector, and makes full use of the 'local' knowledge, expertise and specialisms within the college departments. This 'new professionalism' is not yet in place, but is aspired to, and would constitute a successful balance for the manager between enacting political and professional accountabilities, meeting the corporate needs of the college and the differentiated learning needs of clients and students, resolving the difficult equation of business with learning.

7.0 Introduction

The critical knowledge of the way in which colleges could be managed to be effective and to improve remains underdeveloped, and extrapolation from literature on schools... will not meet the case. (Lumby, 2003)

This study was undertaken in order to increase the body of published research into the management of English further education colleges. Unlike research into schools, there is no wide-ranging stock of empirical data or extensive body of applicable concepts and ideas upon which to draw. Further education research is fragmented among personal investigations, small-scale research projects, government-sponsored studies and a growing number of larger-scale funded research projects. The pool of available research into further education management is a small proportion of this small total, and since the mid 1990s it has been dominated by the subject of managerialism.

Literature searches reveal little empirically-based research into what further education managers do, and what would enable them to do it better: the ways in which 'colleges could be managed to be effective', as Lumby puts it (above). Given the turbulent context of the further education sector since incorporation, as colleges have taken on new management responsibilities and responded to a succession of government initiatives within a competitive market economy and changing frameworks of funding and accountability, the management of colleges, and the quality and effectiveness of their managers, is clearly important.

7.1 Research purpose

The purpose of this research has been to explore the nature of the role of a range of middle managers, and to gain insight into ways in which their work is influenced by the context within which they work. Specifically, the research questions are:

- What roles do further education middle managers perform?
- What are the factors in the environment for management at the colleges which impact upon the role?

- How do members of the role set perceive that middle managers enact their role?
- How are the middle managers facilitated and impeded by factors in their environment for management?
- How can modelling be used to represent and interpret the interaction between middle managers and factors within their environment which facilitate and impede?
- How can the models be used for problem-solving and considering college design?

The findings from these research questions are important in themselves, given the lack of previous research. Conducting the investigation in a number of case study colleges of contrasting sizes and structures enables the complexity of the role and its environment to be analysed in some detail. The cumulative insight gained from analysing middle management at four colleges enables further consideration and discussion of such important issues as whole-college coherence and professionalism.

7.2 Research validity, reliability and trustworthiness

Before considering the outcomes from this research, its claims to validity, reliability and trustworthiness must be examined, and its limitations acknowledged. This is especially important when there is difficulty in comparing research findings with those from other similar investigations. Although the four colleges chosen for investigation differ in ways which are interesting to the research, they are not a representative sample of the sector. Other colleges may differ in significant respects. The main support for validity arises from the similarities found between the aspects of role undertaken by the managers, the types of impact of the environment upon the role and the patterns of manager activity at the colleges. No two college environments, and no two manager roles are the same, but the richness of the data collected enables a rationale constructed for one college or one manager to be used to understand another. This relates to one of Bassey's (1999) tests of trustworthiness: the systematic testing of the emerging hypothesis against the analytical statements. Validity has also been supported by triangulation of data at each of the colleges. The

360° view offered by the sets of respondents, together with the data from observation and documentation, presents perspectives upon the issues under investigation which are mutually coherent, and which together form a rich picture of the middle manager experience. Difficulties of access caused constraints upon the number of managers and team members who could be consulted; nevertheless the cumulative data from the four colleges have offered ample scope for analysis.

Reliability is a difficult concept to apply to this research, and to case study as a whole. The turbulence of the college environments, and the complexity of pressures and expectations upon managers, means that individual managers, asked the same questions after a lapse of time, might give different answers. As in the 'garbage can' model of management, different concerns would be at the top of the pile, and the mix of issues would be different. A whole college might appear more transactional, through having reacted directly to a recent event; a particular type of manager role might have higher status if that role had been thrown into prominence by particular college developments. At the time of writing, all of the colleges have 'moved on' two years since the data were collected. New national systems of funding and inspection have been introduced; two of the four colleges have new principals. Different concerns are certainly at the top of the pile.

The collection of multiple data, and the reductive analysis of data in order to identify and model key issues, was intended to address this issue. The key factors identified and the systems explored in the models may not be reliable over long periods of time, but they offer scope for theory to be built (Bassey, 1999) which can be tentatively applied to other further education colleges. As has been suggested in Chapter 6, colleges could use the models to explore the impact of their college environments on middle management and to consider the overall coherence of their systems and to consider future scenarios. This might entail the development of 'local' versions of the models, but the concepts and factors considered are widely applicable. Modelling has enabled theory to be constructed from the insights gained through case study.

One way of testing trustworthiness is to test out the findings, either in the case study colleges, or as implied above, in others. During the period of undertaking this research, it was not possible to verify findings through further investigation, but a

'sample test' was carried out with College A. A research paper (Briggs, 2002), analysing the impact of the environment for management upon middle managers at College A, was circulated to the principal and senior managers at the college for comment. They considered that it offered a realistic assessment of the management context of the college, and adopted the paper as a staff development tool for their managers. The possibilities for further research clearly include a more rigorous 'testing back' of the models at the four case study colleges to assess their trustworthiness, or in new settings in order to assess their transferability. A third alternative would be to investigate the outcomes of the research – the issues of whole-college coherence and professionalism – in other college settings, in order to increase the understanding and application of these important concepts.

7.2 Research findings

What roles do further education middle managers perform?

How do members of the role set perceive the role?

The evidence from the role set indicates that, collectively, middle managers carry out *their role in a number of different ways*. Firstly they have corporate responsibilities, contributing, directly or indirectly, to whole-college decision-making, and enacting whole-college purpose and values at a departmental level through the work of their teams. Whether the college has a federal or a confederate structure (Busher and Harris, 1999), the direction of individual departments and the direction of the whole organisation are mutually dependent. Under conditions of political accountability (Scott, 1989), middle managers have to understand the constraints and responsibilities experienced by the college as a whole, and within this whole-college framework they enact their professional accountability, managing their departments according to their standards dictated by their own specialism. The current study concurs with the findings of Brown *et al* (1999) in schools, that shared decision-making – one element of corporate agency – is enhanced by management structures which offer regular, formal opportunities for collaboration, and by senior manager encouragement of middle manager involvement. Drodge and Cooper (1997), in their study of strategic planning in further education colleges, found that middle manager involvement depended upon the nature of the consultation process and the degree of freedom of the participants: the attitudes and perceptions of both senior and middle managers

were key factors affecting involvement. The term 'corporate agency' encompasses more than shared decision-making and strategic planning, but the existence of both structures which enable consultation and shared understanding, and a perception among senior and middle managers that middle managers should engage in whole-college issues, are crucial to this aspect of role.

Acting as a corporate agent involves middle managers in a second aspect of role: that of implementation. In this pressured and highly visible activity, middle managers enact college purpose at a departmental level: they form a bridge between those who generate the vision, plan systems for the organisation, and those who perform the tasks of the organisation (Bennett, 1995). In so doing, they use many of the aspects of knowledge proposed by Turner and Bolam (1998): process knowledge, which is their understanding of what has to be done, and the practical aspects of doing it; situational knowledge, which concerns the college context of implementation; knowledge of educational practice, which guides what they do, and in this study is espoused by all types of middle manager; and conceptual knowledge, the managers' accumulation and understanding of the concepts underpinning their work, which becomes the 'theory in use' (Argyris and Schon, 1978) that guides their actions as managers.

Implementation is a pragmatic activity, 'constructing the art of the possible' (Gleeson and Shain, 1999), making decisions within the range of what is 'affordable', based upon educational values, concern for community and collegiality (Alexiadou, 2001). This study provides detail as to what constitutes the implementer role: carrying out a multitude of operational tasks such as planning programmes, attending meetings and arranging accommodation; undertaking work to develop the specialisms of the department; setting up and monitoring quality frameworks; fulfilling student needs in a variety of different ways, an activity often requiring flexibility and inventiveness; managing resources; solving problems; marketing; sustaining a sense of purpose and direction for the department; and balancing this range of management activities with the operational function of teaching or providing a service.

In order to implement, middle managers manage staff, using the skills and knowledge of the team to enact the purpose of their differentiated area of college activity. Respondents to the research of Smith (2002) and Bolton (2000), both in higher

education contexts, indicate that staffing issues are the most difficult things an academic head of department has to deal with. Leading from within the department, yet being 'a Manager with a capital M', illustrates the manager's joint allegiance to the college as a whole and to the individuals within the department: the conflicting demands of the mechanical and organic aspects of role. This study offers insight into how the manager balances the pressures from the staff themselves, from the managerial processes of staff management, and from the students with whom the staff are working. The study also identifies the staff as a source of support for the manager, both personally, and in developing and undertaking the work of the department.

Managers work not only with their own staff, but also liaise, vertically and laterally within the college with other managers and teams, and externally, to fulfil the work of their department. Liaison is identified as an important role for school middle managers by Busher and Harris (1999) and Glover *et al* (1998). In colleges, Drodge (2002) identifies 'managing boundaries' as part of the manager role, and Peeke (1998) notes the importance of external liaison. A number of writers, including Gleeson and Shain (1999) and Gillett-Karam (1999) writing about college middle management, emphasise the difficulty of the translation and mediation role which is a key aspect of 'vertical' liaison. Managers in the present study speak most about the pressures of liaison, of the ingenuity and flexibility needed to keep the channels of communication open, to 'get the message across' and to mediate incoming messages. For service and student service heads, lateral liaison is particularly important, and not always easy to achieve.

Undertaking the aspects of role discussed so far involves managers in leading their departments, working with their teams to shape vision and direction for their section of college activity and using their expertise to develop its specialism. As has been noted throughout this research, leadership is little discussed in further education colleges, especially at middle manager level. However, Lumby (2001) considers that there is dispersed leadership in colleges, and the present research confirms this perception. Both team members and, reluctantly, managers acknowledge the term 'leader' as applying to middle managers, and there is ample evidence from managers of all types of shaping the direction for their department, developing vision, and in a number of ways performing an energising and creative role for the work of their department.

Members of the role set differ in how they perceive the role. Senior managers largely focus upon the mechanical dimension of college operation. They are concerned with the middle managers' ability to meet college targets, to use the structures and systems of the college effectively and to implement quality-based procedures, although they also acknowledge the organic need for autonomy and professionalism. Middle managers strive to keep the balance between mechanical and organic demands, being concerned for both clarity and authority in role, being reliant upon college bureaucracy, but needing to shape the work of their department according to local need. Team members, whilst acknowledging the bureaucratic burden upon managers, value the organic aspects of the role, which support them in their work. Not all of the managers perform all aspects of role to the same extent. Few consciously consider that they lead, some have little time for liaison, some are claimed by others to have little corporate understanding. All have difficulty with some aspects of their role, usually through overload and role conflict. On the whole, the role is performed intuitively, with managers using their 'assumptive world' (Bennett, 1995) to assess and enact what is to be done. As a result, although managers receive various forms of feedback upon their role, effectiveness is difficult to define.

What factors in the environment for management impact upon the middle manager role? How do they facilitate and impede?

With the exception of Lumby (2001), previous research into further education colleges has not focused upon what is here termed the 'environment for management', the internal context of the college which shapes the operation of the manager role. Lumby offers a number of possible structures and systems for colleges, based on her empirical research, and it is hoped that the present study adds further insight. Key factors in the environment for management were initially identified through analysis of the management context of each case study college. This analysis was further developed through modelling aspects of the college environment against aspects of role, and from this process the following elements emerged as important to the functioning of the middle manager role.

Structures and territories

The first factor is the college structure, both in terms of its management structures and its 'territories'. The management structures are those indicated on the college's

management charts, often in hierarchical form, together with the informal sub-structures (Burns and Stalker 1961) which operate around and across such hierarchies. Territories are geographical, functional and micro-political locations within the college, which provide 'home bases' for both staff and students. The case study colleges demonstrate a need to operate both through mechanical structures, with a hierarchy of control, authority and communication, and through organic structures, where control, authority and communication operate as a network (Burns and Stalker, 1961). They show some affinity with Schneider's (2002) 'radix' organisations, which have fluid and permeable boundaries, and an emphasis on lateral relationships across functions. Individual territories may occupy places in this network, but the more territorial they are, the less well the network functions.

The present study concurs with Brown *et al* (1999) and Earley's (1998) findings in schools that the structure of the organisation is important in enabling collaboration and liaison. Managers are facilitated by the design and operation of the college management structures and territories: where structures and territories are difficult to navigate, staff management, liaison and implementation are all impeded. Territories which are easy to access and to understand are essential to cross-college and whole-college working. Territorial barriers exist where there is differential status *between* managers, where working practices are *not mutually understood*, and where one or other of the parties is unwilling to co-operate or difficult to locate. Structures which engage managers in cross-college networking for specific purposes, and which enable face-to-face contact for team *management and liaison* are important in reducing territorial barriers. The managers' effectiveness is also enhanced when they are well enough placed to understand whole-college accountability, values and purpose, and can apply their own professional knowledge in implementing them. A lack of whole-college understanding not only impedes the corporate aspect of the manager's role, it affects the whole-college coherence of their departmental implementation, and impedes effective liaison.

System design

Networks which both follow and cross the college structures and territories are provided by the college operational systems, and system design is a second key factor in the environment for management. College systems are often created by middle

managers and are routinely used by them, particularly for staff management and implementation. They enable, and in some cases replace, routine decision-making (March and Simon, 1958), and facilitate communication, data transfer and administration. Ideally, the systems support both efficient and effective management, and enable implementation of both whole-college and departmental activities. Managers feel that they are impeded when there is excessive bureaucracy and where systems of reporting or data acquisition are cumbersome; this may make them reluctant to comply, especially when they do not relate to the rationale or purpose of the system. They value systems which are clear and consistent, and which help them in their work by offering easy access to information or support. This research shows that systems offering communication and access to data and information present particular problems. The system may be well set up, with easy access to what is needed, but if the manager does not have the time to access, respond to, and use what is communicated, the system is perceived to be failing. Thus, system design may be 'blamed' due to problems of manager overload.

From the evidence presented, the colleges seem to display an uneasy balance between Mintzberg's (1979) two bureaucracies. Some systems are reminiscent of Mintzberg's centralised machine bureaucracies, having an abundance of rules and regulations and standardised procedures, not all of which are fully understood or followed by managers. There is also evidence of Mintzberg's decentralised professionalised bureaucracy, in which there is less perceived need for conformity and where each section focuses upon its own operation. As with other examples of mechanical and the organic influences produced by this research, there is tension between machine and professional bureaucracies. This tension is governed by the degree of centralisation and decentralisation at the college in question, with no single 'ideal' mode of operation. Comments from the managers in this study indicate that colleges need to keep systems under review, resolving tensions where they occur, to enable the organisation to function coherently (Bennett, 1995).

Position

A third influential factor in the environment for management is the manager's position in relation to the college structures and territories. This concept is related to Bordieu's (1990) term 'field', the structured system of social positions which provides the set of

power relations within which a person acts. Managers may be in key positions to acquire and to use information, and to act influentially. Earley and Fletcher-Campbell (1989) and Busher and Harris (1999) consider that middle managers occupy a powerful position through their 'brokerage' of information, which offers them the potential to be entrepreneurs and to effect organisational change and improvement. Data from the present study indicate that where managers are in a position to understand and contribute to whole-college values and purpose, they find their own role easier to understand. They may also be in a position to question and change college practice. Where they occupy a less influential and informed position, they may lack access to other parts of the college, keeping their focus on the local operation of their department and the contiguous areas of the college. This isolation impedes liaison, including their accessibility to others, which in turn reinforces their lack of influence and understanding.

Role coherence and status

As the above argument implies, the manager's position and status are inter-related, and a fourth key factor in the environment for management is the coherence and status of the manager role. Coherence of understanding between different members of the role set, together with absence of overload, makes the role potentially viable; status and respect for the manager enacting the role make it possible for the manager to act effectively. In this study, role ambiguity and role overload are common features of the managers' situation. Ambiguity is caused through changes in college policy and direction not being communicated effectively enough to this 'layer' of management, and in some cases by confusion between middle managers working in complex college structures as to where responsibility lies. Managers also experience role conflict, particularly where there is difficulty in reconciling the needs of senior managers and their team. Overload is mainly seen in terms of lack of resource, which results in the manager having too many managerial and operational tasks to perform, and through attempting to shield members of the team from overload.

Curriculum managers are the most likely to have the status needed to perform their role; service and student service managers can be less fortunate in this respect. In their higher education study, Palfreyman and Warner (1996) conclude that differential status is often found where there is a bureaucracy interacts with professionals. They

point to Mintzberg's (1979) professionalised bureaucracies as examples of positive practice, where the professional administrators are respected through their key roles in managing internal structures and relationships with partners. This situation exists in theory at the case study colleges, as colleges are dependent upon such matters as sound financial management and effective student support, but in practice there is still differential status at most of the colleges. This supports Lumby's (2001) judgment that further education 'support' staff are acquiring new status due to their professionalised function, but that an egalitarian 'one staff' approach has yet to be achieved in colleges.

Autonomy

The fifth factor is the degree of autonomy accorded to the manager: the 'space' within which they can apply their specialist knowledge and expertise to carry out the role. Randle and Brady (1997a) propose that one of the features of the paradigm shift from professionalism to managerialism has been a decline in professional autonomy. In this research, senior managers speak of having to find the balance between empowering middle managers and monitoring their work to ensure compliance to college strategy; they also report that some managers do not adopt an autonomous enough stance towards their role. Both senior and middle managers link autonomy in role with access to resources: without resources, the manager is not empowered to act. Middle managers generally report that they experience autonomy in their role which is necessarily limited, and the constraints of compliance and of resource may make them content with small degrees of freedom. However, managers *speak with enthusiasm* about shaping and developing the work of their departments, using their professional expertise to keep up with – and ahead of – new trends and requirements; the main constraint upon these activities appears to be a lack of time, rather than a lack of freedom.

Identification with leadership

The sixth and last factor is the extent of the manager's identification with leadership, which is shaped by the prevailing attitudes to, and understanding of, leadership within the college. Both senior and middle managers at the case study colleges observe that both transactional and transformational leadership are needed for the college to cohere and prosper. However, under systems of transactional leadership, directive mechanical systems prevail, autonomy is likely to be limited, and dispersed leadership

little acknowledged. In a transformational leadership context, organic systems are likely to predominate; managers may feel confident and autonomous in their role, and may identify with dispersed leadership. The middle managers' identification with leadership therefore depends upon the extent to which transformational leadership is acknowledged and practised at the college. A similar balance of leadership styles is found in research into schools: Harris *et al* (2000) found that the school heads adopted transactional leadership to ensure the smooth running of essential systems, but that they also were transformative in their concern to build expertise, autonomy and achievement among staff and students.

Middle managers in this study understand this need for a blend of leadership styles, and for contingent styles of leadership, chosen to suit the individual or the situation being addressed. Their comments about how they encourage and develop their teams, offer purpose and direction for their departments, and wish for more time to address departmental development more creatively, show that on the whole they identify with the principles of leadership. They use mission, direction and inspiration (Fullan, 1994) to exert influence over other people to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation (Leithwood *et al*, 1999). They are impeded from identifying with leadership by the lack of leadership dialogue within colleges: by the inter-dependence of manager activity, both vertically and laterally, which may prevent individuals from considering that they have an area of leadership responsibility; and by the pressure of other aspects of their role, particularly day-to-day implementation.

What insights can be gained from modelling the middle manager role and its environment?

Modelling enables an examination of the systems at work within the college and within the role. It enables key determinants of influence to be identified, and their effects to be traced through the system. Modelling enables the researcher to 'see through' the complexity of the situation in order to identify the sources of problems, or to hypothesise the effect of proposed changes. It can also stimulate further insight into the situation being modelled. The main insights gained from the modelling presented here concern the concepts of role coherence, whole-college coherence and professionalism.

The analysis in Chapter 5 demonstrates the complexity of the middle manager role. Although the constituent parts of the role can be identified and explored, they are interdependent, and are enacted as a whole, usually on an intuitive basis. Within any one aspect of role, the pressures of the mechanical and the organic, of the whole-college needs and the needs of the differentiated section are exerted upon the manager. Managers mediate and balance the pressures pragmatically, using espoused theory to guide their actions. The espoused theory encompasses the managers' understanding of, and identification with, the mechanical systems of the college, which might be termed their managerial understanding. It also draws upon the knowledge and experience gained through the professional activities of the managers and their colleagues, which might be termed their professional understanding. Hopefully, the managerial and professional understanding are brought together through the managers' awareness of the college's purpose and values. The balance of determining factors varies according to the perceptions, working experiences and personal values of the individual: in some the managerial understanding predominates, in others the professional. What this research has shown is that, for the role to be coherent, both types of understanding are needed.

On a larger scale, whole-college coherence is needed. The sector itself is not coherent: the colleges differ widely in their types of provision and mix of funding sources, and government policy on post-compulsory education changes rapidly. The main opportunity for coherence is therefore at a college level. The word 'coherent' carries two connotations; one is of a system with an underlying logic, and one is of things 'sticking together'. Whole-college coherence demands both. The systems model, Figure 6.8, shows the extent of the college influence upon the manager role and, through the manager, upon effective college performance. Influences include physical entities, such as the location of college sites; factors underlying the design of college operational systems and management structures; people's perceptions of the status of manager roles or of the context for leadership; the expectations of the managers' role set including the managers themselves. This list presents a mix of the physical, the rational, the subjective and the professional. Whilst it might be possible for senior managers to control the physical and the rational to some degree, the subjective and the professional contexts are harder to reach. Coherence of all these

types of influence cannot therefore be imposed; it must be based upon some strong, agreed point of common understanding. A consistent theme emerging from the analysis of the research data has been that of a re-definition of professionalism, and the concluding discussion turns to this concept as a potential catalyst for whole-college coherence.

7.3 Professionalism

The discussion of the coherent manager role above suggests that managers combine managerial understanding and professional understanding in order to enact their role. This concurs with the argument put forward in the previous chapter, Section 6.8, that the 'schismatic' view of college management is being replaced by a holistic one, where professionalism is seen to encompass both client-centred, learning-based values and the principles of funding-based business efficiency. This is not an easy combination to achieve: Gleeson and Shain (1999) refer to professionalism as a 'struggle' for identity which arises out of 'ambiguities and contradictions.' In this research, whole-college 'struggles' have been observed, principally at College B, which is attempting to re-define its value-base to include both client-centred principles and business efficiency. There is also a struggle for the meaning of professionalism as applied to the managers themselves: does professionalism entail a return to the classroom for all managers, or an increased awareness of management techniques, spreading outwards from the 'professionalised' college service departments? Individual managers are aware of the contradictions within their role, as they try to produce positive outcomes for clients and students through the unwieldy agency of college bureaucracies.

This research indicates that if professionalism is to be achieved, each college will seek its own definition, based upon an agreed understanding of the educational values of the college, what its purpose is in relation to its clients and students, and how these are to be achieved. The external pressures both for business efficiency and for effective, meaningful outcomes for clients are strong, and through its own unique combination of internal and external factors, each college will come to its own point of balance. As this research has demonstrated, this entails a reconciling in the internal context of the college of the mechanical and the organic, the needs of the whole with the needs of the parts; one proposition is that the 'mechanical' is the vehicle which

enables the organic to happen, just as the businesslike operation of the college enables the differentiated learning activities to take place.

This research has shown that in colleges there is only a partial understanding of how the differentiated sections of the college fit together, of how they cohere to reach clients and to provide learning for them. What this indicates is that there is not only a need to understand professionalism, but also a need for professionalism to be shared throughout the organisation: if one section of the college defines it differently from another (as at present they probably do), then coherence will not happen. In particular, management can no longer be purely an intuitive activity, but should comprise a shared understanding of the issues, values and principles underpinning college operation, and a valuing of each of the college's constituent parts. Developing 'professionalised' management would involve cross-college discussion, not only of values and purpose, but also of the fitness-for-purpose of college systems and the shapes and scope of manager roles. This type of understanding could be shared and developed on an inter-college basis through national professional networks, such as the Association of College Managers, the National Association for Managers of Student Services or the Council for Learning Resources in Colleges. Shared professionalism entails not only an awareness of what management is, but also of what it does: what managers can jointly achieve in terms of outcomes for clients and students. Further research, which directly investigated the differing perceptions of professionalism and the extent of shared identification with the concept, would provide valuable insight into these issues.

This research, based upon a manager-focused investigation of what managers do and what enables or impedes them in doing it, has stimulated the development of theory which focuses upon the nature and status of management in colleges, and upon management as a shared professional activity. It has formed the basis, so far, of three refereed research papers (Briggs, 2001, 2002, 2003a), one of which has been adopted as a book chapter by the Open University (Briggs, 2003b). Hopefully the research presented in this thesis makes a contribution to the understanding of professionalism in relation to college management – 'the way in which colleges could be managed to be effective' (Lumby, 2003) – and will stimulate further investigation and debate.

APPENDICES

Middle Manager Case Studies

Rationale

Middle managers occupy a pivotal role in the life of a Further Education college. Through holding responsibility for curriculum areas, for cross-college student provision or for service departments within the college, they have a key role in implementing – and influencing – senior management decision-making and whole-college policy. The nature of their role means that they may also have considerable 'local' knowledge, power and autonomy, and have a substantial influence on the quality and nature of student provision. It could be argued that management structures which facilitate middle manager roles are crucial to the effectiveness of the whole college, since these are the role-holders who, on a day-to-day basis, make the business of the college happen.

Purpose of the research

To devise models of factors within the college which facilitate the middle manager role(s)

- To explore perceptions of middle manager role effectiveness
- To identify features of college management structures and management cultures at the college which promote the middle manager's perceived effectiveness in role
- To identify features of management structures and cultures (if any) which impede perceived effectiveness

The purpose is **not** to evaluate whether individual managers are effective.

Definitions

Middle managers

The actual definitions will vary from one institution to another; actual examples might be:
Heads of Curriculum areas / Cross-college curriculum co-ordinators
Heads of Student Services / Learning Resources / Learning Support
Heads of Service departments: Finance, Estates, Personnel, Management Information

Perceived effectiveness

It is likely that managers occupying different types of role will have different perceptions of effectiveness.

Ways of identifying effectiveness will be sought from the managers themselves, and from members of senior management. Input from the managers' team members will be sought by questionnaire.

Management structures

Management hierarchies, roles, committee structures and membership; communication routes; systems of decision-making.

Management cultures

The ways in which these structures operate – eg bureaucratically, through devolved responsibility and autonomy, through status attached to role, unpredictably.

Modelling

A process which in this case will represent the interaction of selected factors which are seen to enable or impede middle managers in role; a 'static' version of the model could be a typology of college structures and cultures presented in matrix form against aspects of the manager role.

Brief methodology

Case studies will be undertaken at a number of colleges.

- Access will be requested to people occupying a range of middle manager roles to carry out 'focus group' discussions. These will explore the nature of their generic role, suggest indicators for effectiveness in role, and identify factors which facilitate or impede the role.
If groups of managers are not available at the same time, individual interviews will be conducted.
- Access to three senior managers and the Principal will be requested for individual interviews, to ascertain their perceptions of how the roles under scrutiny are facilitated by the college, and to offer insight into the nature of the role and the way it is performed.
- Documentation will be requested as available eg: College management structure and meeting structure charts, generic job descriptions, flow charts for college decision-making and college communication, policies or other documents which indicate management culture.
- If further documentation is identified by the focus groups or interview respondents as useful for clarification, access will be requested, subject to relevant permission being granted.
- Access to members of departmental teams via questionnaires will be requested.
- Access to a small number of meetings which involve groups of middle managers will be requested.

The emergent data will be used to model factors which facilitate the middle manager role(s) and to provide qualitative analysis of the impact of structure and culture upon managers in role.

Ownership of data

The researcher claims ownership of the data, and freedom to publish it, subject to the following provisions.

Transcripts of group and individual interviews will be sent to respondents, to be checked for accuracy. Meeting observation notes will be checked with the chair for accuracy.

Responses will be used collectively and anonymously – ie individual role-holders and colleges will not be identified – in order to construct the models.

For qualitative illustration, individual comments may be quoted, but only the generic role (Senior manager, Curriculum manager, College service manager, Cross-college provision manager) of the speaker will be identified, and none of the colleges will be named. However, if someone makes a comment specific to their role, eg: 'What Heads of Student Services need is...', 'I feel that as Head of Engineering the situation is different for me....', their role would be identified by implication.

The content of 'off the record' comments and informal observation will not be used as data.

Feedback to colleges

Colleges will be offered oral or written feedback on the collective outcomes of the case studies. Colleges will also be offered a set of educational management text books as a token of thanks.

List of documentary sources

College A

College website
FEFC inspection report 2001
LSC summary statistics 1999-2000 and 2000-2001
College self-assessment report 1999-2000
Annual Report 1997-1998
Mission statement
Student satisfaction survey 2000-2001
Student prospectus 2001-2002
Information for staff applicants
Staff induction material
Equal Opportunities policy
Staff Handbook 2000-2001
Course tutor handbook
Committee and management structure

College B

College website
FEFC inspection report 2000
LSC summary statistics 1999-2000 and 2000-2001
College self-assessment report 1999
Annual report 1999-2000
Strategic plan 2000-2001
Mission statement
Student prospectus 2001-2002
Teaching staff induction pack
Staff handbook
Equal Opportunities policy
Learning resources information
Computer use policy
Emergency procedures

College documents

Appendix 2

Code of ethics and code of conduct for staff
College management structure
College meetings schedules
Management briefing document
Staff development brochure
Staff briefing papers: quality and business management
Staff and student newsletters

College C

College website
FEFC inspection report 2001
LSC summary statistics 1999-2000 and 2000-2001
Self-assessment report 1999-2000
Annual report 1998-1999
Strategic plan 2000-2003
Student prospectus 2000-2001
General information for students
Information for staff applicants
Staff induction and mentoring pack
Staff handbook
Disability statement
Extracts from staff intranet resources
Middle manager job specification
Organisational structure diagram

College D

College website
FEFC inspection report 2001
LSC summary statistics 1999-2000 and 2000-2001
College self-assessment report 1999-2000
Annual report 1999-2000
Update of the strategic plan September 2000
Strategic planning process

College documents

Appendix 2

Student prospectus

Information for staff applicants

Middle manager job specification

Staff induction resources

Quality assurance structure

Staff handbook

Management organisation charts

Middle manager role

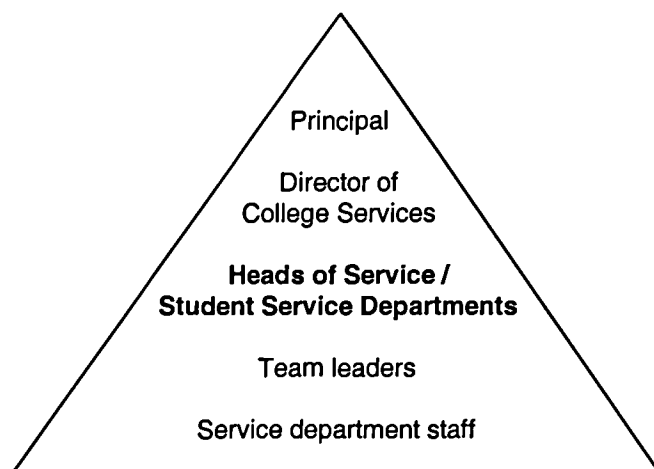
- What college function do middle managers perform?
What do you think – generically – they should do?
On the whole, do they do it?
- Do you see a difference between the role of a Head of School and a Head of Service or a Head of a Student Service?
Are they treated / regarded differently?
Are there different types of expectations on them?
- What features of the college culture and structure do you think support middle managers in their work?
Do you think they are enabled to work together?
How would you describe the management culture at this college?
- Are there any features of the structure or culture which you think impede middle managers?
- Look at the College management style continuum and mark it as indicated.
What comments would you like to make?
Is the style likely to change in the near future? If so, why?

1 Directive / transactional leadership					Participative / transformational leadership 10				
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leader sets the standards and monitors performance• Commitment is implicit in your role – expected to follow the system• Positive and negative feedback are given from 'above'• System seeks efficiency in meeting targets					<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Leader enables shared understanding, resulting in organised action• Staff are helped to establish long-term goals• Individuals are encouraged to take responsibility in decision-making• There is space for innovation and debate				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

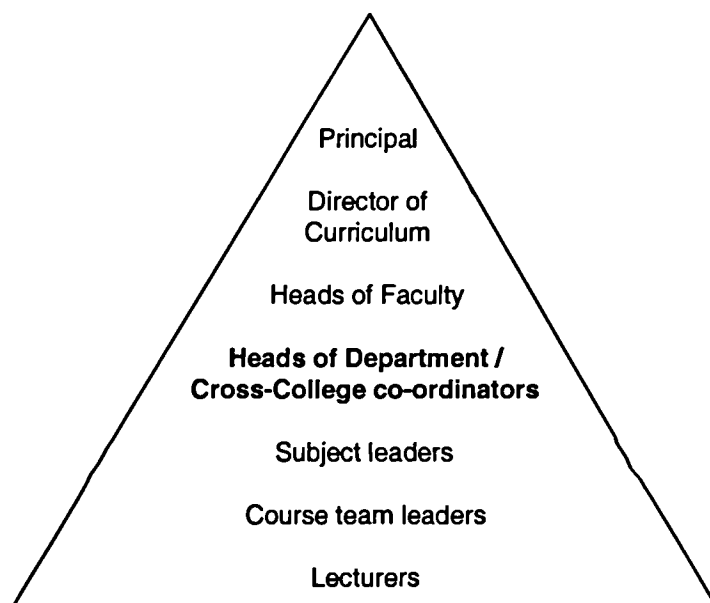
On the scale, please mark:

- A** The present position for the college management style
- B** Your own present leadership style
- C** Your preferred position for the college style
- D** Your preferred position for yourself

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' styles



Hierarchy of roles for college services and student services



Hierarchy of roles for curriculum provision

A Middle manager role

- *What do college middle managers do?*
- How do you know what to do?
- How did you learn to be a manager?

B FENTO management standards

FENTO state that managers:

- Develop strategic practice
- Develop and sustain learning and the learning environment
- Lead teams and the individual
- Manage resources

Do you do all of these?

Do you do some more than others?

Are some more important to your particular management role than others?

C Authority and effectiveness

- On whose authority do you act?
- *Do you always feel that you have enough authority?*
- *How do you know when you have carried out your role effectively?*
- What helps you to carry it out effectively?
- What (if anything) stops you from carrying it out as effectively as you would wish?

Heads of School / Heads of Service / Heads of cross-College student services:

- *How well do your college systems enable you as managers to work together?*
- Is there anything which could make liaison within the management groups or between members of different management groups easier?

D Role ambiguity / role strain

- ***Are there consistent / conflicting expectations as to what you should do?
From whom?***
- Do you get consistent / conflicting communication or instructions as to what you should do?
From whom?
- Does your role overlap comfortably / uncomfortably with someone else's?
If so, how do you manage the boundaries?

1 Directive / transactional leadership					Participative / transformational leadership 10				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader sets the standards and monitors performance • Commitment is implicit in your role – expected to follow the system • Positive and negative feedback are given from 'above' • System seeks efficiency in meeting targets 					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leader enables shared understanding, resulting in organised action • Staff are helped to establish long-term goals • Individuals are encouraged to take responsibility in decision-making • There is space for innovation and debate 				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

On the scale, please mark:

- A** The present position for the college management style
B Your own present leadership style
C Your preferred position for the college style
D Your preferred position for yourself

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' styles

F Middle manager role in the whole-college system

When carrying out your management role, are you most influenced by:

- A. Whole-college directives?
- B. School / service department priorities?
- C. Personal professional values?

Whole-college planning: do you –

- A. Fully participate?
- B. Often find yourself consulted?
- C. Provide information for decision-making?
- D. Have little part in it?

G Summing up your role

In your management role, do you feel that you are any of the following?

- A 'bridge' or 'broker' between senior management and your teams?
- A leader?
- An information manager?
- Someone whose influence enables the vision of the college to be turned into action?
- A source of specialist expertise?
- Something else?

If you could change up to three things to make your role as a manager easier, what would they be?

College ASenior managers interviewed

Principal
 Senior Assistant Principal
 Assistant Principal, Student services
 Assistant Principal, Centre X

Middle manager focus group members

Head of Student Welfare Services
 Head of Learning Resources
 Head of Admissions
 Head of Personnel Services
 Head of Information Services
 Head of Quality Development
 Franchise Manager
 Head of School: Engineering
 Head of School: Creative Studies
 Head of School: English for Speakers of Other Languages
 Head of School: Construction

College BSenior managers interviewed

Principal
 Vice Principal: Business Development
 Vice Principal: Curriculum and Quality
 Divisional Head: Business

Middle manager focus group members

Library and Information Services Manager
 Student Services and Lifelong Learning Manager
 16-18 Programme Manager
 Marketing Manager
 Head of Accommodation and Estates
 ICT Services Manager
 Programme / Quality Manager: Arts and Technology
 Administration Manager: Services Division
 Team Leader: Art and Design
 Team Leader: Animal Care and Horticulture
 Team Leader: Health and Social Care
 Team Leader: Business, Management and Professional

College CSenior managers interviewed

Principal
 College Director: Quality and Standards
 Campus Dean
 Head of Curriculum and Learning Support

Middle manager focus group members

Learning Services Manager
 Student Development Co-ordinator
 Business Support and Communications Manager
 ICT Manager
 Buildings Manager
 Personnel Services Manager
 Project Manager
 Programme Manager: Key Skills
 Programme Manager: Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
 Programme Manager: Information Technology

College DSenior managers interviewed

Principal
 Director of Quality
 Head of Faculty, Business, Health and Professional Studies
 Head of Sixth Form Studies

Middle manager focus group members

Information Services Manager
 Head of Resources and Planning
 Quality Improvement Manager
 Head of Learning Support
 Head of School Liaison and Customer Services
 Head of Department: Entry Level
 Head of Department: Art and Design
 Head of Department: Health and Food
 Head of Department: Community Education
 Head of Department: Business and Office Technology
 Head of Department: Language, Leisure, PE / Sport

Who do I give questionnaires to?

Thank you for distributing questionnaires – and envelopes - to your team members

Please think about the staff in your team and categorise them as follows

	Female	Male
Full-time, whole year		
Full-time, term time		
Part-time, any fraction		

Please give questionnaires to 2 women and 2 men in each employment category, if they exist.

Do not add 'extras' from other categories if, for example, you have no male full-time, term time team members.

The questionnaires ask respondents for the above data, so you do not have to note it down yourself.

Please reassure the respondents that their replies are confidential – no-one from the College will see them, and they will not be identified.

Thank you very much.

Ann Briggs
ann.briggs@le.ac.uk

Middle manager case study

Questionnaire for team members

This questionnaire is part of research being carried out at a number of colleges into the role of the FE middle manager. The research aims to find out the features of College management culture and structure which enable middle managers to do their job well, and those which impede them. It is NOT intended as a critique of individual managers.

When you answer the questions, you will no doubt have your own line manager in mind, and your answer will be relevant mainly to your department. As you answer, try to think also about other managers whom you know working at this level, so that we can identify broadly the features of the college which need to be celebrated or addressed.

Neither you nor your manager will be identified by your answers.

Please return the questionnaire **by Friday 22nd June**, using the stamped addressed envelope provided. It will only take around 10 minutes of your time.

Please give a brief answer to each question

1. ***What, in your view, do Heads of Service do? (eg Head of Finance, Head of Personnel)***

2. ***How do you know when they are doing it well?***

3. ***Do you think they carry out their role effectively? (Please ring one option)***
A. Always B. Most of the time C. Sometimes D. Hardly ever
4. ***If you answered A, B, or C, what do you think helps them to perform their role well?***

5. ***If you answered B, C or D, what do you think prevents them from being effective?***

6. ***Is there anything you can suggest which you think would help Heads of Service carry out their role better?***

7. **Do you see your own Head of Service as any of these?**
(Please tick the appropriate box on each line)

		Yes, strongly	Yes, on the whole	Not really
A	A 'bridge' or a 'broker' between senior managers and your team			
B	A leader			
C	An information manager			
D	Someone who interprets the College vision and College policy so that you can act on it			
E	A source of specialist expertise			
F	Something else (<i>please specify</i>)			

8. Which of the above is most important to you? (*Please ring one*) **A B C D E F**

9. Below are two types of leadership, the extremes of which can be seen as opposite ends (point 1 and point 10) of a scale, grading to a mixture of styles in the middle.
Read the two descriptions, and then mark the scale below as indicated.

1	Directive / transactional leadership	Participative / transformational leadership	10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader sets the standards and monitors performance Commitment is implicit in your role – expected to follow the system Positive and negative feedback are given from 'above' System seeks efficiency in meeting targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leader enables shared understanding, resulting in organised action Staff are helped to establish long-term goals Individuals are encouraged to take responsibility in decision-making There is space for innovation and debate 	

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Please mark on the scale your perception of leadership styles as follows:
There are no 'right' or 'wrong' styles

Mark as **A** where you think the present leadership style of your department lies
Mark as **B** your preferred position for the leadership style for your department
Mark as **C** where you think the present leadership style of the college lies
Mark as **D** your preferred position for the leadership style of the college

Finally, please answer the following. The questions are to help me to *describe respondents as a group*, not to identify individuals. Please ring or fill in the appropriate response.

10. Are you: Female Male 11. Length of service at this college
12. Are you employed: Full-time whole year Full-time term-time only
- Part time (state fraction)

Thank you very much for your time and responses. Please be assured that neither you, nor your line manager nor your college will be identified in the published research.

Agenda item number

College

Note: • identify senior and middle managers Number of senior managers present F M
 • identify the type of meeting and its overt objectives Number of middle managers present F M

Chair	
Senior manager	
Middle manager	

Chair	
Senior manager	
Middle manager	

Chair	
Senior manager	
Middle manager	

I = Introduced item P = Participated in discussion D = Stated decision

Commanding instructing co-ordinating controlling	Selling of ideas of self	Advisory giving information receiving information seeking opinions	Negotiating between...	Problem-solving planning recommending decision-making	Support emotional learning team building

Agenda Item number

College

Chair	
Senior manager	
Middle manager	
Chair	
Senior manager	
Middle manager	
Chair	
Senior manager	
Middle manager	
Chair	
Senior manager	
Middle manager	

I = Introduced item P = Participated in discussion D = Stated decision

Commanding instructing co-ordinating controlling	Selling of ideas of self	Advisory giving information receiving information seeking opinions	Negotiating between...	Problem-solving planning recommending decision-making	Support emotional learning team building

Middle manager roles

- 1 Corporate agent**
 - 1.1 Strategic planner
 - 1.2 Decision-maker
 - 1.3 Translator (of policy into service / teaching & learning)
 - 1.4 Information handler / communicator
 - 1.5 Communicator
 - 1.6 Quality monitor
 - 1.7 Marketing

- 2 Implementer: of curriculum / of departmental activities**
 - 2.1 Development role: for dept / curric
 - 2.2 Resource manager
 - 2.3 Student manager
 - 2.4 Management for students
 - 2.5 Problem solver
 - 2.6 Disturbance handler

- 3 Staff manager: organisational role**
 - 3.1 Staff manager: developmental
 - 3.2 Staff manager: support role
 - 3.3 Enabler (of people)

- 4 Liaison: downwards, from & to**
 - 4.1 Liaison: upwards, from & to
 - 4.2 Liaison: bridging
 - 4.3 Liaison: across
 - 4.4 Liaison: external

- 5 Leader**

- 6 Broad, unidentifiable**
 - 6.1 Role not understood / not done

Concept codes: facilitators / impediments
Appendix 10

Facilitators		Impediments
Being able to see the 'big picture'	1	Restricted MM viewpoint
Clarity of expectations	2	Lack of role clarity
Being allowed to learn the role	3	Pressure for performance
Being allowed to shape the role	4	Lack of opportunity for flexibility
MM creativity / freedom in fulfilling role	5	
Compatibility of college strategies – top, middle, operational	6	
Being involved in consultation	7	Inability to influence decision-making
	8	MM role to implement 'unwise' decisions
Clarity of accountability	9	Unclear role boundaries
MM capacity to observe & deduce role	10	Lack of motivation for role
Appropriate MM skills and experience	11	MM unsuitable for role
Others' respect for MM role	12	Lack of authority
Others' respect for MM in role	13	Lack of respect for MM in role
Support of SMT members	14	Lack of SMT support
Appropriate workload	15	Logistical difficulty of fulfilling agreed tasks – other tasks
	16	Logistical difficulty of fulfilling agreed tasks - time
	17	Pressure of day-to-day events
Autonomy in role – acceptably bounded	18	Directive SM style
Freedom to respond to client need	19	Inflexible systems
Team support	20	Team needing inappropriate support
Team response	21	Underperformance of team members
Access to systems of feedback on performance	22	Poor systems of feedback
MM capacity to receive and use positive and negative feedback	23	Lack of clarity of feedback on performance
Access to training & development	24	Inappropriate training / no training
Clarity of budgeting	25	Lack of clarity over budget / resources
Accessibility of resource	26	Resource restraints
	27	Pressure of staffing resource / staffing reductions
Clarity & usefulness of systems	28	Cumbersome systems
	29	Bureaucratic systems
	30	Inflexibility of working conditions
College size - benefits	31	College size / multi-sitedness
Systems which enable inter-team working	32	Territoriality / power struggles
	33	Competition between MMs
Strong communication structures in the range of directions needed	34	Communications – being 'left out of the loop'
	35	Communications – lines too long
Reliability of information channels / data	36	Unreliable information / data
Blend of 'human' and corporate communication	37	Directive communication predominates
Responsiveness to external pressures	38	External constraints

Environment for management

Management structures	1
Cross-college liaison systems	2
Communications systems	3
Decision-making systems	4
Strategic planning systems	5
Information channels	6
Calendars of duties	7
Deadlines	8
Targets	9
Quality systems	10
College policies	11
Budgeting systems	12
HRM systems	13
Inter-site systems	14
Team working – with senior managers	15
Team working with own team	16
Team working with other teams	17
Opportunity to delegate	18
Clarity of role	19
Individual approach to role	20
Authority of role	21
Workload	22
Physical environment	23
Response to students	24

**Appendices 12 to 14 (p. 280-325)
have been removed from the
electronic copy of this thesis due
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