Developing management and leadership skills in post compulsory education and training: research to inform a curriculum

Catherine Edwards Zara
Fergus McKay
University of Warwick, UK

Introduction

Further Education (FE) or Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) as it is now commonly known has experienced considerable cultural change over the past 12 years. (Lumby 2001). The 1992 Further and Higher Education Act (FHE) led to the incorporation of colleges in 1993 (Gleeson 2001) Power was devolved from LEAs and colleges were designated independent corporate institutions operating within a quasi market sector (Lucas 1999). This first part of this paper examines some relevant recent publications on the nature of leadership and management in PCET post incorporation. Reference in the first instance is made to research findings, case studies and government publications. The second part of the paper presents the results of interviews with principals and vice principals from five FE Colleges in the West Midlands.

The primary purpose of the research is to inform the curriculum of a B. A. Honours module entitled Developing Management and Leadership Skills in Post Compulsory Education and Training. The module forms part of an innovative degree which has been designed in collaborative partnership between the University of Warwick and local Colleges. Data from interviews with principals and vice principals tells us of sometimes convergent and sometimes contested notions of management and leadership in our local sector including some of the contemporary issues they are challenged by. They tell us the kind of content they, as employers, leaders and managers themselves, want their staff, as students, to study and what they want them to be able to do better, as employees and colleagues, as a result of studying this module. They talk about pedagogies they feel will be appropriate to achieve this.

PCET post incorporation Phase 1 1993-2001

From 1993-2001 PCET institutions were regulated by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC). The FEFC was responsible for the funding and the inspection of the sector. (Alexiadou 2001) According to Avis (1996), Elliott, 1996), Gleeson (1996), Ainley and Bailey (1997), Clarke and Newman (1997) and Gleeson and Shain (1999) FEFC funding methodology coupled with the devolution of power post incorporation led to the emergence of a regulated market place. Colleges were encouraged to perceive themselves as entrepreneurs in a state regulated market place (Gleeson 2001). The rhetoric of the initial phase of incorporation reflected the zeitgeist of this era (Pollitt 1990; Randle and Brady 1994) Colleges became corporate businesses with strategic plans. They set targets and devised mission statements. Employees were encouraged to embrace a new realism, new professionalism and new managerialism which stressed ‘efficiency compliance and flexibility’ (Gleeson 2001). This was also a time of upheaval, uncertainty and dissent. Colleges struggled with the new funding methodologies (McDonald and Lucas 2001_Williams, S. 2003). By 1997 in excess of
50% of PCET institutions were in financial difficulty and several collapsed completely. Industrial unrest intensified. New conditions of service were imposed. Staff turnover increased (30% from 1993-1997). Lecturers were replaced by technicians, instructors and agency workers as the sector embarked upon a process of reorganisation and deskilling (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Gleeson 2001).

PCET post incorporation Phase 2 2001-present

In *Learning to Succeed* (1999) the DfEE outlined plans to reform the FE sector. The White paper recommended a complete overhaul of the sector. In April 2001 the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) replaced the FEFC and the Training Enterprise Council (TEC). The LCS has 47 regional or *local* centres (LLSCs) which fund and oversee all non advanced post compulsory training and education initiatives. According to Ramsden et al (2003) “There emerged three broad concepts that have become influential in shaping the LSC. First, the new structure is seeking to provide national coherence, but with an ability to articulate local requirements. Second, learning provision is to be more demand led. Third, policy is to be developed using broad networks and alliances of public, private, voluntary and community sector agents.” (pp.400-401)

Critics have argued that whilst the rhetoric has changed and the funding formulae are less rigid than those developed by the FEFC, the LSC is in effect nothing more than a larger version of its predecessor (Ramsden 2003). Indeed our own research revealed concerns about the power, credibility and autonomy of the LSC.

A significant number of debates in studies of PCET post incorporation have focused on the impact that new funding regimes have had upon the nature of leadership and management in the sector.

Leadership in PCET post incorporation: models and methods

Initial studies of leadership in PCET post incorporation focused on the extent to which the external fiscal drivers informed internal structures and hierarchies. The *classic* theories that focused on *the great person, the charismatic individual or the lionised hero* were rejected in favour of models that attended to the regulated autonomy of the colleges. (Clarke and Newman 1997; Gregory 1996). Specific reference was made in the first instance to the concept of *distributed* leadership ‘where leadership is shared throughout all levels of in educational institutions from the apex to the base of the organisational hierarchy’. (Gregory, 1996:46). Models based upon notions of *transactional* and *transformational* leadership were also advanced during this period ‘where the leader or leadership team either set standards or monitor performance (transactional leadership) or helps staff to establish long-term goals.’ (transformational leadership) (Drodge and Cooper 1997 et al cited in Briggs, A. 2003:423)

These models have been challenged by recent studies of college hierarchies. According to Harper (2000) for example institutional organisational structures post incorporation appear to be less Weberian and more market orientated with an emphasis upon *accountability and quality control*. (Harper 2000:443.) A view echoed by Gleeson (2001) who explores the *mediation* roles that leaders in PCET play
in the development of a new realism post incorporation. Returning to the charismatic model of leadership Gleeson argues that senior managers in the colleges perceive that their primary function in the organisation revolves around managing staff budgets, strategic planning and redefining the work culture of their staff through charismatic leadership (Gleeson 2001:184). Gleeson points out however that this may be a method adopted by those in authority rather than a particular model of leadership. He adds that the nature of leadership in PCET is a complex issue and that no single theory of leadership will suffice. Indeed any studies of leadership must take into consideration the relationship between the internal dimensions of PCET institutions and their regulatory bodies. The complex relationship between the local (GFEC/SFC) and the national (FEFC/DfEE; LSC/DfES) has also been explored by Smith, Gidney, Barclay and Rosenfeld (2002) and Lumby (2003). In Smith, Gidney, Barclay and Rosenfeld’s study of Principals and SMTs they argued that there appeared to be three dominant approaches to strategic leadership in PCET:

- **Stability optimisers** (the college is viewed as a community service)
- **Market optimisers** (the college is viewed as a business)
- **Resource optimisers** (the college is viewed as public service but act in a business like manner).

According to Lumby (2003) studies of leadership in PCET over the past decade have tended to adopt a two dimensional approach to analysis and theorising. By focusing on the impact that government policies have had upon senior managers the literature has generated models that gravitate somewhat inevitably towards the charismatic and distributed models of leadership. Lumby argues that models of leadership should incorporate the idiosyncratic culture of each institution (student profile, size of institution, stability and the cohesiveness of the curriculum) in conjunction with the meta funding and QA landscape within which institutions operate. Lumby advises a systemic model of leadership, ‘that is, leadership which rather than being consciously distributed flows through an organisation, spanning levels and flowing both up and down hierarchies’ (Ogawa and Bossert 1997:10 in Lumby 2003:284).

Initial studies of management post incorporation examined the impact that new managerialism had upon managers within the lecturing profession. (Elliot 1996; Randle and Brady 1996; Ainley and Bailey 1997). Specific reference was made to the existence of “oppositional cultures” (Lumby and Tomlinson 2000), Randle and Brady argued that following incorporation “a paradigm shift occurred from a professional system based on 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 output and income generation, concern for efficiency and effectiveness, control by managers and the market and a surveillance culture based upon measurement against performance indicators.” (Randle and Brady in Briggs, A. 2004) Recent studies have challenged the views of Randle, Brady et al. Lumby and Tomlinson (2000) in their study of college principals found that their primary aims still revolved around their students and their communities. Lumby (2001) in her study of middle managers concluded that the business like approach to planning was adopted to enhance the student experience. Gleeson and Shain (1999) and Alexiadou (2001) in their studies of senior and middle managers claimed that attempts to impose new managerialism have been met with resistance from college administrators.
managers. This issue has become a site upon which new and existing values and beliefs have been discussed, revised, resisted and modified. According to Gleeson this process had led to the re-professionalisation of the sector (2001). Middle managers have become mediators of change. (Gleeson, D. and Shain, F. 1999: 461). However commitment by middle managers to mediation and the advancement of ‘educational’ values and beliefs was found to be uneven and was contingent upon the middle managers position in the organisation. (Gleeson 2001; Alexiadou 2001 Briggs 2003; Briggs, 2004).

Briggs (2005) has produced the first typology for the role of the middle manager. This typology identifies five distinct aspects of the role: corporate agent, implementer, staff manager, liaison and leader (Briggs: 31). Briggs has also identified six factors within a college environment that inform the manager’s role: structures and territories, system design, position, role coherence and status, autonomy and identification with leadership. According to Briggs the typology offers a framework to begin to explore the role of the middle manager. However according to Briggs generalising from this or indeed all studies is problematic “the sector itself is not coherent: colleges differ widely in their types of provision and mix of funding sources, and government policy on post compulsory education changes rapidly. The main coherence is therefore at college level.” (Briggs: 48).

In the first part of this paper consideration has been given to the development of FE or the PCET since 1993. The studies of leadership and management in PCET post incorporation support view that those in authority in colleges operate within a sphere of ‘regulated autonomy’. Leaders and managers feel they are expected to advance and instil alien and contradictory agendas such as corporate identity, value for money, education and training. These agendas are played out through the lived experience of the college community and result in contested views about ‘grand’ themes such as:

- Autonomy
- Power
- Authority
- Vision
- Methods
- Capacity
- Role
- Purpose
- Mission

The second part of the paper gives a brief description of the curriculum in context and presents results of interviews with principals and vice principals from five colleges in the West Midlands. There are convergent and contested notions of management and leadership yet consensus around a perceived gap in technical management skills. As employers of participants studying the module, and collaborators in its design, they also offer their views on: the value base from which they operate within the sector and want to see explored within the curriculum; the kinds of learning they want participants to achieve; and pedagogical approaches they feel will facilitate this.

The programme of study
The module we are discussing in this paper fits into the following degree design (see Appendix One). HE (Certificate) level comprises a FENTO endorsed Certificate in PCET; the HE (Intermediate) level is a Foundation Degree. Both of these are taught in college and feature integrated work-based learning. The BA honours 'top-up' is being taught at the University and will continue with an integrated work-based learning approach. Staff in the sector who are not pursuing the degree are also expressing an interest in studying this particular module for continuing professional development.

Module aims

The module Developing Management and Leadership Skills in PCET is designed to support the professional development of teachers and trainers in PCET by developing their skills in, and awareness of qualities of management and leadership by:

- cultivating management and leadership skills in PCET
- enabling participants to meet sector-specific management standards
- enabling participants to critically evaluate and implement national and regional policy in PCET

Research methods

Interviews have been conducted to date with principals and/or vice principals from five FE Colleges in the West Midlands. They address the following:

- notions of leadership
- notions of management
- if and how management and leadership in PCET have changed post incorporation
- explicit themes and underlying values which should inform the module curriculum
- pedagogic approaches

Discussion of interview results

Leadership, management and the relationship between them

Leadership models

Whilst the term ‘charisma’ was, perhaps surprisingly, used only twice and one of those time by an interviewer, not interviewee, three different models could initially be discerned. The first of these was of a clear (charismatic) role model whose standards of behaviour and values were seen as of paramount importance as factors influencing organisational culture. Another model which emerged was that of distributive leadership: leadership identified as an attribute of all members of staff at all levels. A third was named the ‘servant leadership’ model denoting a culture in which those higher up in the organisational structure deemed it their role to support and enable their staff to perform their roles well. Examine these a little closer and of course you find they are not mutually exclusive. But they do play themselves out differently in an organisation where strict hierarchy is valued as opposed to one where roles are allocated and performed more fluidly.

Leadership characteristics and attributes
Respondants referred to their own and also to those they wished to encourage in their staff. A range of fairly uncontentious attributes was cited including such things as resilience, courage/foolishness, emotional intelligence, having a strategic sense of direction and purpose and being able to persuade others of its value. The most serious differences of opinion were around whether people were ‘born’ leaders - leadership being seen here as an intrinsic aspect of someone’s personality; whether people could be taught to become leaders; or whether all people had leadership and management attributes to some degree and it was a matter of identifying them and cultivating an appropriate range and balance. There was also disagreement around the notion that leaders ‘inspired’ others on the one hand but on the other they engendered confidence in others to be self-inspirational.

**Relationship between leadership and management**

Concern was expressed by one respondent that leadership sounded more flattering, motivational and attractive (though it was not in reality) and management sounded more mundane and far less exciting involving systems, procedures and processes. There was general consent that the balance between management and leadership attributes needed to change as people progressed up the organisational hierarchy (more leadership towards the top, more management towards the bottom); but there again the PCET sector was celebrated as one place where the majority of staff (teachers) demonstrated good leadership skills from early on in their careers “if you are a good teacher, chances are you have got good leadership and interpersonal skills, classroom management skills, visioning skills, planning skills, engaging – that charisma thing”.

**Management**

There was recognition that those managing in the PCET sector were in complex, challenging and demanding roles. The extent to which institutions were inspected and audited had added considerably to these demands which required many technical skills (see module themes below) as well as the ability to manage self and others. Systems were considered very complicated indeed and funding regimes in particular. It was felt that these were skills which unequivocably could be taught, “management is about rolling out the strategy effectively, efficiently, consistently and you can train people to do that.”

**Changes in leadership and management post incorporation**

There was some temptation to typify pre-incorporation as ‘the good old days’: “Old FE was a very pleasant environment”; “old FE was very male”; “old FE people would not survive in the modern era you could almost do what you liked”; “...it was unbelievably different. When I first started I used to finish in May. From May through to our holidays in June we used to play rounders”.

There was general recognition that the relationship between the LSC as major source of funding was a crucial one. One respondent named it a parent-child relationship with a heavily bureaucratic ‘parent’ LSC holding strong regulatory influence over the power and autonomy of principals. The benefits and the disadvantages of this were in the need for leaders in the sector to be much more collaborative with other local bodies in order to achieve anything and operate like a “flexible, proactively reactive
chameleon”. In some instances respondents felt that they had to compromise some of their core values to survive. Others felt they were able to hold on to them but only with much effort and that they were not always respected by staff in the college for appearing to instigate so many changes so readily. Another named collaboration itself as a core value and was happy to justify it as democratic and congruent. Some felt that they were ‘audited to death’ and that it had a wearying effect on staff morale. Others by contrast felt that the constant demands of self-assessment had created a much more reflective culture in FE/PCET and that this was congruent with the learning culture they espoused for the college and for students.

In one college there was an important discussion about the relatively hidden and invisible profile of the PCET sector, compared with schools and universities. “We are crucial to the workforce, crucial to social justice, crucial to development. But the relative influence of the AoC [on government policy] is weak”. This was not so much something which had changed since incorporation, but something which it had been implied would, and had not, when incorporation was being championed.

**Underlying values**

Espoused values covered a fairly predictable and appropriate range from social justice, equality and diversity, respect and value for the organisation from all who act on its behalf, to probity in the use of public money and custodianship of the organisation. The most interesting debate here was around the ‘students first’ value-base which was contested by one respondent suggesting that ‘college community first’ was a more sustainable and defendable value-base from which to operate. Defenders of the former stance argued it was important to consider the impact on the student in every decision being made, a stance led by OFSTED. They suggested that this protected individuals from ‘corporate’ interest. The counter-argument was put forward on ideological grounds, in part as a reaction to a selfish interpretation of a kind of customer-care ‘me’ culture, and in part, possibly, to promote a sense of co-reponsibility and citizenship in staff, students and other ‘stakeholders’ alike.

**Explicit module themes**

There was a strong plea for a serious recognition that middle and aspiring managers needed some formal instruction in the technical aspects of their roles – understanding systems and funding mechanisms, data, budget, resource and human resource management. Respondents did not, generally, wish to pull the curriculum away entirely from the more reflective, evaluative and critical thinking modes of learning they would expect in a university degree. But they were very concerned that the needs of the sector currently demanded efficient and effective practitioners – people who could come up with good ideas but who also knew how to put them into practice and make them work, or who were at least committed to pursuing learning to acquire those operational skills as a result of this module even if not as a direct outcome of it.

**Pedagogic approaches**

There was strong encouragement to retain the best aspects of the work-based learning elements of the course, particularly in relation to assessed assignments, which are features of the Certificate and Foundation Degree in PCET. This was married with equally strong concerns about the need to strengthen conceptual and theoretical skills.
Conclusions and recommendations

Note that this is work in progress and as good reflective practitioners ourselves (sic!) our analysis and understandings will mature as we re-consider our findings during the planning, teaching and evaluation of the module.

Our findings to date:
• confirm some aspects of research already undertaken in the sector especially with regard to changes in the nature of leadership and management post incorporation and adds anecdotal illustration of some of these aspects
• reveals some contested notions of leadership and different value-bases espoused and in operation
• identifies consensus around some specific skills which those managing at various levels in the PCET sector need to enhance and develop
• suggests that learning programmes for leaders and managers in PCET need to incorporate the notion of regulated autonomy
• suggests that learning programmes for leaders and managers in PCET need a strong collaborative design between partner institutions (colleges and the university in this case) and a high level of participation by employers (colleges) in the support of individual staff-students
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References


Open Studies Certificate in Post Compulsory Education and Training (FENTO Stage 1) (FENTO Stage 1)

Students who successfully complete both Open Studies Certificates will have demonstrated achievement of the outcomes traditionally covered by qualifications such as the City and Guilds 7307.

Open Studies Certificate in Post Compulsory Education and Training (FENTO Stage 2) (FENTO Stage 2)

Foundation Degree in PCET

Modules 1-8

Honours Degree BSET

Modules 1-12

1. (FENTO Stage 2) Open Studies Certificate in Post Compulsory Education and Training (FENTO Stage 2)
2. Learning: Theory and Practice (FENTO Stage 3)
3. Teaching: Theory and Practice (FENTO Stage 3)
4. Reflective Practice (FENTO Stage 3)
5. Reflecting on Practice in PCET
6. Managing Resources in PCET
7. Researching PCET
8. Contemporary Issues in PCET
9. Learning Organisations in a Knowledge Society OR Equal Opportunities: Policy and Practice
10. Work-based project/dissertation
11 and 12. Developing management and leadership skills in PCET

Students who successfully complete both Open Studies Certificates will have demonstrated achievement of the outcomes traditionally covered by qualifications such as the City and Guilds 7307.