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**Leverage Leadership:
A new paradigm for further education**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to review existing models of leverage leadership which are currently applicable to schools to establish whether they are appropriate for further education colleges. Due to the complexities of the environment in which further education colleges operate and the scale of the organisations involved, models of leverage leadership have not currently been applied to this sector. The paper proposes that a new model Distributed Leverage Leadership is more suitable to further education colleges. Unlike existing models which are predicated on the head of the organisation adopting the principles of leverage leadership, Distributed Leverage Leadership suggests a shared responsibility between senior and middle leaders. The model is predicated on a notion of forensic analysis of data, regular observations of learning, building a culture of high expectations and accountability.

Introduction

Further education has an awkward place in the UK education system, unlike schools that are defined by law and universities which are protected by Royal Charter (or for newer universities by Act of Parliament – Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or by Privy Council approval). Yet the same clarity of definition is not afforded to the further education sector which is broad and encompasses non-school-based education for young people aged fourteen and over through to adult learning and some elements of higher education. As a result, there remains considerable variation in the accepted understanding of further education, both in terms of its place in the topology of education and its purpose.

Similarly, leadership, which is conceivably one of the most studied topics and possibly one of the least understood. Despite the massive effort to identify key elements of leadership and the thousands of studies that have collated empirical data a commonly accepted definition of leadership still eludes us. Therefore, leadership in further education brings together two largely undefined elements.

This paper will explore and add to the notion of leverage leadership, which is still in its infancy and whether it has a role to play in the UK further education system. In order to achieve this, the paper will first explore existing literature surrounding leverage leadership in order to come to a model that could be applicable to further education colleges. After which the paper will explore whether the proposed model has a role to play either as an intervention tool or as an organisational approach to leadership.

Literature review

Some of the earliest published work on leverage leadership is in healthcare, and focus on the need to use leadership to make incremental improvements in organisational efficiency (Anthony and Huckshorn, 2008; McAlearney, 2009). In education, two of the earliest writers in leverage leadership are Mongon and Chapman (2012) who use the term to describe individuals whose work in schools contributes to an impressive effect on a range of outcomes for children and young people. They propose that the term leverage is used as it represents the multiplication effects of a force. Their model of leverage leadership focuses on UK schools and is based on three core areas of work, *Navigation, Management, and Partnership*.

Navigation: which focuses on securing the vision and setting the direction, with leaders constantly anticipating the priorities which the organisation needs to address through constantly scanning the political horizon in order not to be surprised by initiatives and policy shifts. This idea of horizon scanning or political astuteness is not unique to leverage leadership as it appears in models of sustainable leadership such as Hargreaves (2009) and Davies' (2009), both of whom advocate the need to set institutional priorities as well as scanning the environment to check for deterioration in the conditions in which the institution operates. Woolley, Caza and Levy (2011) also highlight this notion of political awareness or being 'savvy' is a theme of authentic leadership too. Part of Mongon and Chapman's (2012) navigation element is the need to understand that current practices may be barriers to improvement and that these must be changed if organisations are going to improve. However, they do not articulate how these barriers are identified only that staff should be responsible for the outcomes of their work. This assumes that not only is there sufficient capacity within the staff to change, but also that there is an understanding of how this change might be done and what the end result will look like. The final aspect of the Navigation element is the creation of a 'living vision' which was first developed and published by the UK's Innovation Unit and proposes 4 important characteristics (Innovation Unit, 2009):

1. *Focused, creating an invigorating sense of purpose and the courage to set extremely stretching goals;*
2. *Feasible, fuelling people with energy, passion, and enjoyment;*
3. *Desirable, offering an ending worth going for;*
4. *Imaginable, enabling all the stakeholders to answer the question: 'what is it?'*

Mongon and Chapman (2012) argue that leaders should achieve this through personal modelling of the expectations of everyone, akin to Davies' (2009) argument that leadership should model the behaviours they wish to see in others in order to preserve the present and secure the future of the organisation. Leaders are also expected to use the language of a 'living vision' which reflects and expresses the values and practices of an organisation. Again, this is not unique to leverage leadership, DCSF (2008, p. 4) argues that 'dynamic leaders who lead from the front, set the tone and establish a 'can-do' culture.

Management: focuses, according to Mongon and Chapman (2012) on problem solving, creating order and providing consistency. The issue that they do not address is whether by providing consistency it has the potential to stifle innovation; Greany and Waterhouse (2016) suggest that it does and by imposing a level of standardisation there is a limitation in the potential for innovation. It is in this section that Mongon and Chapman introduce management, whereas up to this point the focus has been more on leadership. There appears to be a shift in emphasis from leadership and the changes that leadership might bring about to one of management and notions of maintenance and working within a defined system. Given that Mongon and Chapman's ideas of leverage leadership are predicated on the head teacher implementing the elements proposed, there is seemingly little to substantiate this move to a managerial focus. However, within this domain, Mongon and Chapman proposed an expectation that data is used to create a high definition picture of how issues manifest themselves locally. This is what Lynch, Grummell and Devine (2015) call local logic, which provides a particular understanding of the context of an institution from which decisions are based. Mongon and Chapman (2012) propose that rather than create new systems existing data sources are used as the foundation of building this picture of the organisation. However, the focus must be less around the collection of data and more on the use of it to inform organisational priorities. Saying that, leaders need to ensure a balance between an over-reliance on quantitative data at the expense of the contextual qualitative data, one should inform the other. Reinforcing this Ofsted (2008) state that there is no single kind of data that can tell the whole story about a school, instead, a range of different types of data must be considered. The second element is the management domain is the focus on change and in particular the emphasis on ensuring that there is only a limited number of priorities for change. However, Mongon and Chapman (2012) advocate Drucker's (2007) idea of systematic abandonment in which he states that there needs to be a deliberate and regular decision to end some

activities, which is slightly different to Davies (2009) notion of strategic abandonment which considers whether initiatives should commence. It is important to note that abandonment of activities are not necessarily because they were flawed but simply there are less important than others.

Partnership: is the final dimension of Mongon and Chapman's (2012) model and requires individuals to treat partners with respect, acknowledging that leaders influence the way that people feel. They argue that the terms partnership and community have become so commonly used that they have lost their meaning. Instead, they propose that leaders should consider their partnerships and communities through a lens of friendship or companionship whereby leaders use their 'social intelligence' (Mongon and Chapman, 2012, p. 20) meaning that they are sensitive to the emotional states of those around them. However, emotions and emotional intelligence are just one facet of an individual's cognitive skill set, alongside practical (Sternberg et al, 1995), social (Cantor and Kihlstrom, 1987) and personal (Gardner, 1983) intelligence and should be part of a leaders skillset. This idea of friendship and companionship may be possible for school leaders whose institutions operate within a limited geographical area and are largely based on a single site. However, the complexities of the policy and organisational landscape that further education colleges operate, with multiple sites and large geographical areas covering multiple local authorities [districts] make the ideas of partnerships and friendships challenging, to say the least. While a level of professionalism and courtesy can be expected the infrequency of the engagement that college principals will have with partners who are on the periphery of the organisation's activities is likely to be minimal.

Mongon and Chapman (2012) conclude by arguing that leverage leadership is more than simply distributed leadership (Harris and Spillane, 2008) which recognises that there are multiple leaders within an organisation. The assumption Mongon and Chapman (2012) make is that distributed leadership focuses on interactions in the same way that transactional leadership does, rather than action as in transformational leadership. It may be the case that, as Harris (2007) and Parker (2015) highlight there is some conceptual confusion between distributed leadership and delegation which raises the question whether the model proposed by Mongon and Chapman (2012) is different from existing approaches to leadership? It could be argued that this is yet another conceptual framework and that leaders should be doing these things anyway and if they are then why the national variation in outcomes for children and young people.

Contrary to Mongon and Chapman (2012), Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) states that there is a significant amount of literature that conceptualises notions of leadership but nothing on the actions of leadership. Instead, Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) proposes specific tasks that leaders need to do in order to achieve high levels of student performance. His model which has been applied to US elementary schools (equivalent to UK primary schools) and high schools (secondary schools) is based on 7 principles or levers. Given the contextual differences between the US and UK education systems, particularly around the role that the district superintendent has in US school leadership compared to the UK equivalent Director of Children's Services as well as the optional US federal state led curriculum compared to the one in the UK, do these factors become a prohibiting feature of leverage leadership in the UK. Like Mongon and Chapman (2012), Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) uses the same analogy of (multiple) small incremental change having a big impact on student outcomes and suggests that student performance is not governed by the use of technology, buildings or levels of funding, but simply through the presence or absence of high quality teaching; a view that is shared by Rivkin et al (2005).

The 7 levers are grouped into 2 categories, *Instructional levers:*

1. data-driven instruction;
2. observation and feedback;
3. instructional planning;
4. professional development.

and *Cultural levers:*

5. student culture;
6. staff culture;
7. managing leadership teams.

Instructional Lever: Within this category Brambrick-Santoyo suggests that there needs to be a greater level of management insight into to planning and delivery of education, advocating an almost micro-level approach. Underpinned by an ethos of data being used to inform teaching and learning. However, in many organisations data is the preserve of a group of senior staff who pour over the data without the involvement of teachers. Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) argues that teachers need to have access to data about their students' performance and that they should be involved in honest conversations around student level performance. This analysis then needs to inform future curriculum planning. For example, a teacher sets a formative assessment which subsequently highlights a range of marks. Using this data, the teacher with their head of department would identify which questions presented a particular challenge to students, and what it was about the question. Was it the language or phrasing of the question or a deficiency in the level

of knowledge needed to successfully answer the question, leading immediately on to how could the teacher have better framed the identified issue, whether it be language, question phrasing or knowledge? Coupled with this, is an increase in observation of teaching and learning. Rather than the traditional one or two observations per year which cover a raft of different areas of teacher practice, from planning, classroom management, student engagement, and assessment, Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) advocated regular short intensive observations. The proposal being that observation frequency needs to be increased, to fortnightly, with the duration reducing to 15 minutes and focusing on 1 key area. Feedback is then provided on that area which clear specific actions which are followed up in two week's time. The rationale being, that teaching, and learning are the core focus of the organisation, yet leaders spend insignificant amounts of time observing classroom practice. A typical, full-time UK school teacher will have approximately 0.12% of their teaching observed while a further education college lecturer will have 0.11% of their timetabled teaching observed under existing systems. By adopting Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model of increased frequency, but a shorter duration of observation the same teacher would have 1% of their teaching observed. While the numbers may seem insignificant it does represent an 833% increase in observation. The challenge for leaders is how they schedule in these observations into their working week.

This is where Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model differs significantly from Mongon and Chapman's (2012). The latter is a conceptual model which is relatively easy for senior leaders to implement and requires little change in existing practices. Whereas Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model is possibly more challenging for senior leaders to implement given that number of staff involved and the range of responsibilities that senior leaders hold. However, with the correct guidance from senior leaders such as training on data analysis and details of the focus of forthcoming observations, this is a model that could be implemented by middle leaders.

Cultural Lever: Culture can typically be categorised as hard or soft culture (Seel, 2000), the former focusing on systems, power and organisational structures whereas the latter, and the focus of Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model, is of rituals and routines, stories and myths and symbols. Brambrick-Santoyo suggests that if you want to develop a culture of excellence, you build it through repeated practice, performed by both children and staff. This is achieved through consistent reinforcement of school values and the vision statement along with regular motivational talks to staff and children. Although having a vision statement does not mean that institutions will perform any better, the

challenge for leaders is in transforming the vision into consistent practice across the organisation. With teaching and learning often operating in an independent vacuum of classrooms, connected only by proximity it is unsurprising that the culture within these varies considerably. Such are the inconsistencies in a culture that students can easily identify the variations between teaching staff. In order to address this inconsistency, thought should be given to ensuring identical routines, expectations, and consequences in every classroom. To make these routines happen consistently throughout the organisation, there should be a focus on what teachers and students are doing at any one time, and what will happen immediately when a student doesn't comply? Associated with this is the need to ensure that the culture amongst the staff mirrors that of the student culture.

Brambrick-Santoyo states that there is no question that time spent developing staff culture pays dividends, furthermore that creating a top-performing institution does not have to mean sacrificing staff happiness. Creating a positive culture does not mean you cannot hold staff accountable. Staff are more willing to be held accountable because they feel more trusting, more trusted, and more willing to do the hard work to make their school succeed. In order to achieve this staff need more than the solitary motivational speech at the start of the academic year, culture needs to be developed and reinforced on an ongoing basis. Staff culture needs to be based on mutual respect and value. Within both the US and UK schooling system these ideas of culture, value and respect are easier to achieve given the range of subjects taught to students. In further education, the curriculum is often limited to a single subject area, such as business or computing and as a result fewer staff engage with individual students. This means that culture has the potential to be departmentally based and vary significantly across the organisation. Furthermore, even within a single department there is the potential for variation if the college operates across multiple campuses. This further highlights the challenge of leverage leadership within a further education college context. This idea of respecting and valuing staff is not unique to leverage leadership and appears in many other forms of leadership theory, but what is unique is the link between staff and culture. For example, when recruiting staff Brambrick-Santoyo suggests that leaders should not only recruit staff who are technically skilled but also subscribe to the culture and values of the organisation. This has to be reinforced through the selection process in order that candidates fully experience the strong culture and ethos of excellence within the organisation and this must continue through the new staff induction process. As part of the ongoing development of culture, leaders need to ensure that they prevent negativity before it arises. Weekly open communication identifying what has gone well, what could have been improved

alongside observing non-verbal communication of staff all contribute to the idea of developing a positive staff culture.

Leaders need to become aware of their own actions on, particularly non-verbal and the effect on staff culture. Brambrick-Santoyo proposes that leaders try having a bias towards 'yes' and refrain from facial expressions which could indicate negativity.

The final element of Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model focuses on leadership teams and the idea that an instructional leader should not have more than 15 teachers reporting to them. The argument put forward is that principals cannot and should not serve as the only instructional leaders. Instead, involve reliable and receptive vice-principals, deans, and other members of the administrative team to ensure that no one serves as an instructional leader for more than 15 teachers. Clearly, Brambrick-Santoyo's model focuses on schools in America and the next section of this paper discusses the translation of this model between the US and UK education systems. However, there is a suggestion that strong teachers can serve as additional leaders by coaching one or two teachers. Earley and Jones (2010) note that there is often an assumption in education that individuals will simply 'know' how to lead. Instead individuals need to be trained and developed in order to take on leadership roles; however, when instructional leaders are involved in shifting leadership and performance then clarification around the role and expectation of the instructional leaders is required. Brambrick-Santoyo goes on to suggest that most leadership teams have meetings, but these often don't go far enough to improve the quality of instructional leadership. Instead, these meetings traditionally focus on announcements, but they should also focus on the levers of leverage leadership.

What is noticeable through the review of Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model is that only by implementing each of the seven levers will the net gain of leverage leadership be realised. What is apparent is that this model of leadership, while possibly not feasible for senior leadership level implementation, it may not be unrealistic for middle leaders. The model does advocate a relentless focus on an almost micro-level of management which could raise questions as to the level of trust that organisations place in their staff and whether this model of leadership erodes teacher autonomy and professionalism.

Leverage Leadership in the UK

The ideas proposed by Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) are not unfamiliar to UK schools. The practice of regular short focused lessons observations is being implemented in a school in the North of England. All newly qualified teachers (NQTs), in addition to the statutory observations required as part of the induction year process, are observed for 15 minutes on a weekly basis (a different 15 minute time frame from the previous observation) from the start of the term until Christmas, reducing to fortnightly for the remainder of the academic year. The senior leaders within the school have received positive feedback from NQTs on short observations citing that they [the NQTs] feel well supported as they embark on their career in teaching. The school found, anecdotally, that the teachers settled into school more quickly and performed better than previous groups of NQTs who had not been supported in this way. The challenge for the school going forward is the scalability of the observation system which in its current form is time-consuming due to observations being undertaken exclusively by the senior leadership team.

Data-driven leadership is also an approach to leadership, similar to the element within leverage leadership, which is gathering prominence. Raising standards groups such as PiXL (Partners in Excellence) currently support over 1500 schools nationally and at the core of their philosophy is a form of data-driven leadership. Based on a model of Diagnosis, Therapy, and Test, where at the diagnosis stage, schools are provided with an examination paper based on the subject requirements of public examinations. Students complete the test and the papers are sent for marking and analysis. It is this analysis which identifies question by question where there is a deficit in a student's knowledge. Schools are then provided with 'therapy' additional intervention resources to work through with students before being retested. This is coupled with holding teachers and departments accountable through regular (six times per year) raising standards meetings which are led by a senior leader in the school. This is further supplemented by a national network of 'associates' who act as critical friends to the school, challenging the school's performance and providing support as required. When considering Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model of leverage leadership the ideas of the PiXL group are not dissimilar to the instructional levers and when combined with an expectation of high achievement of students and staff alike, parity can be made between the two approaches.

There are however two potential issues, one is that there is an argument that PiXL and others similar groups are simply applying a gaming strategy. However, gaming could be construed

as a result of the current notions of accountability which are predicated purely on outcome based measures such as performance tables. Coupled with performance data being publically available schools, colleges and training providers are always going to want to ensure that their organisation is represented positively in performance tables. This notion of 'gaming' might be achieved through changing qualifications to a different examination body or through intervention strategies to support students who are borderline in achieving a particular grade. The second issue is around scalability of leverage leadership. Both Mongon and Chapman (2012) and Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model advocate that it is the school principal (head teacher) who is the key driver of leverage leadership. However, an AoC (2016) analysis of the further education sector suggests that there are approximately 127,000 FTE (full-time equivalent) staff working in 325 further education institution in England of which 51% are designated as teaching staff, equating to 65,000 or 200 FTE teachers per institution. Given that Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) argues that instructional leaders should have no more than 15 teachers reporting to them, it is therefore not feasible for further education college principals to implement this model of leverage leadership in its current form. While school and colleges data systems are becoming increasingly more sophisticated and accessible, the real issue is how it is used to support leaders in raising standards. Data cannot simply be used as a tool to retrospectively look at the performance of a course at the end of the academic year. Staff at all levels of the organisation need to have access to real-time data and importantly use it with teachers in order to support and challenge existing orthodoxies of student and staff performance.

Emerging themes

From the analysis of the literature on leverage leadership there are a number of emerging themes:

- Forensic attention to detail – at the micro-level, through the work of individual teachers;
- Holding staff accountable – for performance;
- Tireless approach to leadership – repeatedly reinforcing expectations, living the culture of the organisation.

Both Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) and PiXL focus on micro levels of detail when it comes to student performance, including a question by question analysis of examination papers. While there will be institutions who regularly review questions arising from the previous year's public examinations, the difference is both the systematic application of this across all subject areas and the use of interim assessments conducted in the same manner as public examinations.

Coupled with this is the need to hold staff accountable for the performance of students and move away from a culture of excuses. For example, 'it was a weak cohort', 'we got everything we could out of them' 'all the grades were lower this year'. In education individuals are held to account, but often this stops at those in formal leadership roles such as heads of department or curriculum leader, rarely do teachers get asked to be held to account for the performance of their students. Instead, students are sent to intervention sessions in order to boost their performance, yet teachers are not held accountable for the success of the interventions. Education can no longer be a secret garden with little or no scrutiny of individual teacher's performance given that nearly 11% (£85.2bn) of the UK's total spending is on education.

The final theme arising from the literature is the persistent approach to applying the ideas of leverage leadership. This paper has already explored the ideas of high-frequency short duration observations of teaching and learning and the forensic analysis at question level of examination results. However, each of the tasks associated with leverage leadership is time-consuming. The paper has already highlighted the challenge of scaling up the observation system by the school in the North of England. Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) suggests that leaders need to make time for these activities; however, this is where the role and expectations of senior leaders differ between the USA and the UK. In the UK educational leaders have different roles and identifies (Lambert, 2013) which need to be balanced along with the requirements of being the custodians of academic standards and a business leader running a multi-million-pound organisation. It is important to note that the UK further education system is large and complex. Comprising of only 325 FE institutions but annually receiving £7.4 billion of funding and responsible for educating over 2.7 million young people while employing the equivalent to 127,000 members of staff. Besides the scale of the FE sector, institutions are incredibly diverse, with 26.5% from ethnic minority groups, 17% having a recognised learning difficulty and or disability and 17% identified as being eligible for disadvantaged support, compared to only 9% in schools. Further Education also makes an important contribution to the national economy, returning approximately £24 for every £1 invested in further education with students generating an addition £70 billion pounds over their working life (AoC, 2016).

Given the complexity of the FE system, what is important is to what extent the ideas of leverage leadership can be applied to further education colleges in the UK. The remainder of this paper explores these ideas in more detail through the lens of further education.

Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was chosen for this study as it is grounded in a philosophical position that is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood or experienced. This interpretive approach is ideally suited to exploratory research where little is known about a topic. It allows for an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, using multiple sources of evidence. (Yin, 2013). The principals of four further education colleges were identified through a convenience sample (Plowright, 2011).

Four colleges were selected to participate in this study:

College 1 – was a large further education college based in London. It has approximately 7,000 students aged 16-18, has an income of circa £85 million and in its most recent Ofsted report was graded as *Good*.

College 2 – was a small London-based college with approximately 1,600 students aged 16-18 and an income of circa £8.5 million. The last Ofsted report graded the college as *Requires Improvement*.

College 3 – was a large further education college in Scotland with approximately 8,000 16-18 students and an income of approximately £85 million. Under the Scottish inspection system, the college was graded as *Effective*.

College 4 – a large further education college in the South East of England with approximately 6,000 students aged 16-18, and an income of circa £58 million. The last Ofsted inspection graded the college as *Requires Improvement*.

Three of the four colleges listed above operate across multiple sites and even the smallest of these institution has nearly 100 teaching staff with the largest having nearly 800 teaching staff. Comparing these figures to the number of full-time equivalent teachers in a UK primary school where the average is 13 (DfE, 2016) and in a UK secondary school with an average of 68 teachers (DfE, 2016), with colleges averaging 308 teachers (based on individual staff contract definitions of teachers) per institution (Frontier Economic, 2016) further illustrating the complexities of further education colleges.

Distributed Leverage Leadership

In order for leverage leadership to be realised in the further education sector, an alternative model is required. Therefore, this paper proposes **Distributed Leverage Leadership** (DLL) which takes some of the principles of existing models of leverage leadership but contextualises it for the further education sector. There is, however, a difficulty with the term distributed, in a leadership context, in that the literature associates a range of terms from 'collaborative leadership', to 'shared leadership', to 'devolved leadership'. This presents a real danger that distributed will simply be used as a catch-all term to describe any form of devolved, shared or dispersed leadership practice (Harris and Spillane, 2008). The focus, therefore, is on interactions, rather than the actions of individuals in formal leadership roles (Harris and Spillane, 2008). One central concept is task distribution (Robinson, 2008) and the move away from the 'great man' focus of earlier heroic leadership models which seems to be the basis of Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) model, to a network of interacting individuals (Youngs, 2013). This is where the notion of DLL differs from existing models, with middle leaders (Head of Department, Curriculum Manager, Programme Leaders, Course leaders) being critical to both the implementation and subsequent success of the approach. However, there is still a key role for senior leaders within DLL as implementation will be divided and performed by many team members simultaneously. Therefore, a senior leader in college needs to be the designated Raising Standards Leader who is challenging middle leaders on the implantation of the DLL model, ideally not the middle leader's line manager, in order to ensure objectivity.

In order to fully implement the proposed distributed leverage leadership model in further education, there needs to be a division between the elements that are bound to senior leaders and those that require implementation by middle leaders (see Table 1).

Table 1: Proposed model of Distributed Leverage Leadership

Senior leaders	Middle leaders
Setting the organisational vision	Enacting (living) the organisation's vision
Political/Organisational horizon scanning	Observation, feedback, improvement cycle: <i>Conducting regular observations of teaching and learning with each one having a specific focus</i>
Creating and embedding a culture of excellence	Implementing a culture of excellence
Holding middle leaders to account	Regular, relentless focus on using data to drive improvements
Providing regular access to pupil and course level data	Intervention strategies linked to data
Raising standards leader identified and leading middle leaders to improve performance	Checking of post-intervention impact

Role of Senior Leaders

Harper (2000) highlights the lack of uniformity in the structures which colleges adopt which makes it challenging when trying to consider what is meant by senior leaders. Typically categorised as second tier leaders (those reporting to the principal), the names of those post-holders and the number of individuals comprising the senior leadership team varies considerably.

In the context of distributed leverage leadership, it would be unrealistic for the principal or the senior leadership team take sole responsibility for implements the ideas in its entirety. However, they do have a critical role to play. Senior leaders have a key role in setting the organisational vision and scanning the political and organisational horizon, although not a unique features of this form of leadership it is important in setting the direction of travel for the college. While navigating the ever-changing political landscape in which further education operates, senior leaders much create and embed a culture of excellence. This idea of excellence must underpin the work that staff do in order to raise standards. Again, not unique to this model, as very few people would aspire to be average, but what is different in this compared to Brambrick-Santoyo's (2012) or Mongon and Chapman's (2012) model is the role that middle leaders play in promoting and raising standard from deep within the organisation. This idea of leadership from deep within the institution aligns to the work of Hargreaves and Fink (2006) and Lambert (2011) on sustainable leadership, which offers a conceptual framework for developing organisation capacity. But these three principles cannot be one-off occurrences or ideologies which are espoused at the start of the year. They are part of what Mongon and Chapman (2012) refer to as the living

vision or the idea that leaders leading from the front (DCSF, 2008) or Davies and Davies (2011) notion that leaders need to model the behaviours that they wish to see in others.

In addition to this senior leaders need to hold staff to account. As one principal stated:

'we have a system by which heads of department (third tier managers) are held accountable to senior leaders three times a year through a formal process of continuous monitoring. Once a year programme managers (fourth tier managers) are invited to the meeting. Yet we don't hold teachers accountable for performance'

The challenge will be that if colleges were to hold teachers accountable through individual meetings with senior leaders, given the numbers of staff involved, as soon as one round of meetings has finished the next one would start almost immediately. Therefore, the accountability of teachers could be distributed to middle leaders (tier three managers) across the organisation. However, in order to support this then robust student level data needs to be made available to staff. Data can no longer be the preserve of senior leaders who spend hours poring over the data which little or no contextual understanding about the students and the courses. In order to support the effective use of student-level data, training is likely to be needed in order for teachers and middle to fully understand the data and the role that it has in raising standards. For example, data cannot be viewed in isolation from teaching and learning:

'historically, the college has always had good success rates – retention is ok and achievement is very high, but the data from observations of teaching do not match the outcomes. So we set out on a programme of improving the quality of teaching and learning which affected every teacher. We saw

little impact after one year, but in years two and three we saw an increase in the quality of teaching as reported through the observation system. However, achievement rates stayed largely static, but what did change is the satisfaction of students resulting in an environment where students wanted to be. As a result retention rates on courses have increased and the percentage of students achieving the higher grades has increased.'

What this demonstrates is that if the student stayed for the duration of the course they passed, but through the systematic approach to improving teaching and learning and the use of data to support this, more students are now achieving higher grades the previously recorded. Importantly though, that initiatives such as those already mentioned will often not produce 'quick wins'. Another principal talks about the move away from a single observation:

'we have moved from a single annual observation to a system whereby teachers and their peers undertake the observations, (after receiving training) on multiple occasions throughout the year. But we are not relying simply on a single observation, as most people can put on a good show for an observer. We adopt a more holistic approach to teaching and learning and use qualitative data such as book reviews, student feedback alongside the quantitative data such as attendance data.'

The principals interviewed talked about the move away from a single observation system to one which involves multiple observations per teacher per year and the way in which various forms of data underpin organisational improvement. Some colleges are now moving to a system more commonly found in schools where 'Learning Walks' are undertaken by a member of staff which involves unannounced visits to a lesson for 10-20 minutes at some point during the week, which are more aligned to the short regular observations that Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) advocates. The challenge that most principals cited was a difficulty in shifting the culture of the organisation from one where staff perceived the observation system as a way of 'trying to catch people out' to one which is truly supportive of staff in becoming reflective practitioners. It is the dichotomy between improvements versus performance management which has arisen as a result of the rise in managerial ideologies that has created an education system predicated on low trust.

In order to implement the ideas of Distributed Leverage Leadership colleges should consider where the responsibility for curriculum and quality lies, both for the collection and analysis of performance indicators and for quality improvement and whether these functions should be separated into different roles in order to offer an objective view of the curriculum. Colleges may wish to identify local (departmental) 'raising standards' leaders to support this work at the departmental level. This could

involve peers acting as raising standards leaders for a different department or curriculum unit, again to ensure a level of objectivity. The role of the senior leader would be to support local raising standards leaders in challenging and supporting the department through the analysis of student-level data and acting as a critical friend.

Role of middle leaders

None of the above will be possible in an FE college without the support and engagement of middle leaders. They need to be part of the living vision of the organisation, enacting the principles of the vision through the work that they do. As one principal put it 'middle leaders are key to raising standards and driving forward the vision of the college'. This idea of modelling the vision of the organisation should be at the fore of all staff within the college not just those in leadership positions.

The key to realising the improvements from leverage leadership is the work of the raising standards leaders, heads of department, course leaders and teachers in using data to improve outcomes for students. Even if achievement is already high, as previously outlined by one principal, what story does the data tell about the grades that students are achieving? All too often achievement data simply articulates the number of students passing a qualification, not the grade that they achieve based on their starting point (referred to as progress or value-added data). How many students are achieving the higher grades? It is these target setting discussions that raising standards leaders need to be having with teachers and middle leaders in order to see the rapid improvement in performance. At the same time holding teachers accountable for their performance and that of their students against these targets. A view echoed by one of the principals:

We need to engage middle leaders in honest discussions around student performance as they have the 'local' [departmental] knowledge that senior leaders often don't have.

This needs to be coupled with the data level analysis of students work. For example, the use of 'mock' [specimen] exam papers throughout the year to provide formative assessments of students work and the subsequent question by question analysis underpinning the planning of follow-up learning. If the course is vocational in nature then the same analysis can be undertaken with sample activities that students undertake prior to working on the specific piece of coursework. The difficulty will be in applying the same level of analysis to skills-based education such as carpentry.

I can see this working in some curriculum areas, but whether skills based course can apply these ideas, I'm not convinced at this stage.

It might be that this level of scrutiny cannot be fully realised in skills-based courses as the results of a significant proportion of the assessments undertaken are immediate. For example, an analysis of the skills needed to build a wall in construction, to wire a plug, to replace a tyre on a wheel, cook a meal or cut a particular hair style are often undertaken by an assessor with the student, rather than assessing the work at a later date. However, the analysis of work cannot simply stop because a teacher has identified that students struggled with a particular question or task. Follow up work and activities need to be initiated in order to address the identified deficiencies.

It is this forensic attention to detail coupled with regular observations and creating the culture of excellence that will pay dividends in terms of improvements.

This has to be combined with the increased frequency of observations, but unlike Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) who advocates an increase in short observations and feedback, distributed leverage leadership proposes that as part of the feedback there needs to be clear actions which are followed up by the next observation and that lead to direct improvements in teaching. It is the improvement element that is not explicitly articulated in current models. The challenge for senior leaders will be in facilitating the time required to adopt this approach, particularly if the expectation is that colleagues from a different department or curriculum area are to be conducting the observations. Yet as the school in the North of England as stated this approach to teaching and learning does pay dividends, but as one principal comments:

I can see this approach [distributed leverage leadership] being used to provide a focused approach on a specific department, but key will be ensuring that this approach is applied as an early intervention strategy, rather than when the situation gets critical.

None of these actions will work unless there are intervention measures put in place. For example, if through a short observation it becomes apparent that a teacher needs support in developing their questioning techniques, then simply feeding this back alone is not going to improve that teacher's ability. While there is an argument to say that improvements and changes in practice happen as a result of issues being highlighted there has to be some actions put in place. Is there a member of staff who is particularly good at questioning that could be observed? What resources are available to staff in order to develop their pedagogic knowledge or subject know

that can be drawn on. Likewise, with students; having identified through an analysis of course work or exam questions there is a skill or knowledge deficiency that has led to an individual not being able to fully answer a question, what interventions are put in place. This has to be the duty of the teacher, rather than abdicating their responsibility for interventions by sending a student to the library of a study support centre.

Just like with the follow-up of the teacher at the next scheduled observation, staff should be following up with students that the intervention support or materials put in place now enable the individual to fully understand and answer the question or task asked of them.

Underpinning this is the implementation of a culture of excellence. This is not only a culture of excellence that focuses on students and their performance, but also staff and the role that they play as key actors within the institution. This might be accomplished through the use of challenging targets for all students in order that they can achieve higher grades, supported by clear expectations around appropriate behaviour and standards of work and the forensic use of data to identify key elements of learning that need to be revisited or reinforced. Staff at all levels of the organisation are axiomatically responsible for creating and implementing excellence in order to raise standards.

Conclusion

This paper has put forward a case for the use of leverage leadership in further education colleges. In doing so it has considered two models from dominant advocates of leverage leadership (Mongon and Chapman, 2012 and Brambrick-Santoyo, 2012). The former approach seems to focus on the role of senior leaders in leveraging an environment that can facilitate high performance. On the other hand, Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) argues that there is a lot written about the concept of leadership but there is a deficiency in the practice of leadership and so suggests that there are 7 levers that can be used to yield high performance. It is important to note the context of leverage leadership, Mongon and Chapman (2012) view leverage leadership through a UK lens whereas Brambrick-Santoyo (2012) views leverage leadership through a US lens which has a structurally different education system. The challenge presented is one of scalability from US elementary, middle and high schools to the UK further education college sector.

In recognising that the principal of a further education would be unable to implement Brambrick-Santoyo's model of leverage leadership, but being aware that there has to be a connection between senior and middle leadership and the proposed concept

of Distributed Leverage Leadership. This requires both middle and senior leaders to take responsibility for high performance and one cannot exist without the other. Senior leaders need middle leaders to work at the micro-level within the organisation while middle leaders require senior leaders to facilitate and environment which is conducive to leverage leadership taking place.

It is important to note that leverage is not a panacea for all things wrong in further education colleges and as such is not the answer to everything; however, it is a tool which can be deployed when needed. For some institutions it maybe that leverage leadership acts as a preventative approach to leadership, for others it may be an intervention tool to address underperformance in a particular area of the college. Given the complexity and size of further education colleges in the UK it is more realistic to suggest that distributed leverage leadership offers greater impact as an intervention tool, however for colleges looking to reappraise their approach to leadership and engage all staff from teachers through to senior leaders then it is not inconceivable that distributed leverage leadership be the vehicle in which to achieve this.

Regardless of the approach used to adopt the model key to its success is the relentlessness of the approach used and forensic nature of some of the interactions, which are unlike any other forms of leadership. While it is true that some, such as transactional leadership focus on the engagement of individuals and incremental leadership on steps necessary to assert change, either of this has the combined impact that is suggested through the adoption of this model.

As stated in the opening paragraphs of this paper leverage leadership is in its infancy and as such this paper contributes to the discourse around its place alongside existing leadership theories. Indeed, further work is needed to ascertain the extent to which further education colleges can implement the ideas put forward in this paper and to determine the impact the model has on outcomes for students.

The case remains that there is a place for this approach to leadership in order to support colleges to ensuring that through their efforts all young people can fulfil their potential.

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