Challenges in Educational Management

Principles into Practice

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CHALLENGES IN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
Principles into Practice

FOREWORD

This is a book about the effective management of our schools. Its authors are widely experienced in the provision of management training: their practical experience is firmly underpinned by their extensive reading of management literature. Indeed, this book is a happy combination of the practical and the theoretical: of sound commonsense and relevance.

For practising teachers the literature on management is, as the authors imply in their introduction, so vast as to be daunting. As a headteacher for nearly twentyfive years I am well aware of the problems involved in trying to keep up with the spate of books relevant to the wide issues of school management. With so much dense wood around — dense in both content and presentation far too often — I would have found a book such as this invaluable. In the few years since I left headship the spate has become a flood; and, unfortunately, the increasing pressures on all teachers, not least on headteachers and their senior staff, have reduced the time available for improving the professional knowledge base.

It is becoming increasingly accepted that school management is merely a subset of general management practice and principles. Nevertheless, adaptation from one culture to another is no easy matter, and teachers are often put off by what appears to them to be an alien language. What this book does so well is to select in such a way as to point up the relevance of the management literature which the authors cite.

If the authors have any axe to grind it is that school management is not a concern reserved to the headteacher. Management is the responsibility of the staff as a whole: leadership, decision making and accountability must be thought of as corporate concerns. This book has a significant contribution to make to the way in which our schools will be managed in the next decade. It deserves a wide readership.

Cyril Poster

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INTRODUCTION

Over 100,000 teachers in UK schools hold posts with managerial respon-
sibilities. It is to such headteachers, deputy heads, house and departmental
heads, curriculum co-ordinators and so on that this book is mainly
directed. However, the remaining 400,000 teachers and related staff form
an equally important group because their work is influenced and sometimes
directed by the managerial activities of others. Also, many of them aspire
to gain promotion to posts with managerial responsibilities. In addition,
the way schools are organised, and the nature of teaching mean that all
teachers have considerable control over their own work patterns, and they
can become involved in many ways in the management of their schools. In-
deed, since members of both groups spend, or have spent, most of their
time in the classroom, this differentiation of teachers into two types must
be viewed with caution since it is more apparent than real. In
addition,both have managerial responsibilities not directly associated with
their teaching. Even newly-appointed staff have to assume general over-
sight of certain activities such as liaising with parents or carrying out
playground duties. More significantly, their professional capabilities and
knowledge make them potential contributors to management decisions af-
fecting activities beyond their classrooms.

Interest in school management has increased since the mid-1970s with the
work of more senior staff receiving greatest attention. Potentially these
teachers have the most influence over school activites, while their
managerial accomplishments and failures are highly visible both within the
school and outside. Headteachers, for example, are seen by parents,
pupils, governors and councillors as being ultimately accountable for
everything that goes on in the schools, a perception which has been rein-
forced in law. Not surprisingly, as arrangements for school management
training began, from 1983 onwards, to be developed on a formal and
systematic basis, the DES chose to concentrate activities upon the needs of
headteachers and senior staff (DES, 1983a). The fairly recent appearance
of such training arrangements in the UK as compared with North America
(Leithwood, 1986), parts of Western Europe (Hegarty, 1983) and Australia
conceals the initiatives of LEAs, schools and individual teachers in this
respect. Before 1983 most LEAs organised some form of induction course
for newly-appointed headteachers, while many staff with managerial
responsibilities made their own arrangements in an attempt to extend and

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refine their skills. By contrast relatively few senior members of staff in the UK had the opportunity to attend COSMOS courses organised by the Committee on the Organisation, Staffing and Management of Schools (Poster 1976). However, the range and scope of such courses and activities have expanded even at a time of financial constraint, as both DES and LEAs have placed more emphasis on the centrality of management training for teachers in schools (Dennison, 1985b).

Undoubtedly the main cause of the continuing and rapid increase is related to the changing environment in which schools operate. Schmuck (1974) suggested six factors likely to produce such changes in secondary schools:

a growing demand for increased individualisation of learning;

a need to ensure that what is taught is relevant, particularly in relation to vocational requirements;

closer attention to evaluation and accountability;

increasing awareness of technological change;

re-organisation of the traditional fields of knowledge and a breakdown of conventional subject barriers;

greater emphasis on the socialising and humanising capacities of the school.

A set of very similar factors could easily be derived for primary schools. Since the 1970s the cumulative effects of these factors on attitudes and behaviour within schools have been compounded by problems of contraction both in pupil numbers and in financial support. In brief then, schools have been expected to achieve more in terms of identifying and satisfying pupil needs without the benefit of the resources to which staff had become accustomed in the mid-1970s.

In such circumstances the superficial attractions of increased emphasis on management techniques can be very appealing because they contain a hint of better value for money. Drucker (1974) for example, suggests that the management of any organisation has three main components. First, the purposes of the organisation have to be decided. Second, its work must be made productive in relation to these purposes. Third, the social responsibilities and impact of the work require attention. The real problem in schools and all other organisations is to staff them with individuals who possess skills and attributes to enable the requirements of these components to be fulfilled.

In schools this certainly does not mean that the headteacher or other senior members of staff define the objectives which dominate the design of working practices and control contacts with external agencies as do some industrial managers. It does involve utilising and extending the whole

of staff knowledge, experience, contacts and expertise so that the identification and satisfaction of the changing needs of young people take place, irrespective of the conditions in the environment of a particular school.

This book therefore looks towards the management skills and attributes of school staff and the ways in which these can be developed. In particular it concentrates on the provision of a theoretical framework through attempting a comprehensive survey of management thinking as it can be applied to schools. Always the main emphasis is on problem solving. At the same time a prescriptive approach is avoided.

The book is based on four main premises:

skills and attributes associated with effective management can be learned;

the important element in the acquisition of these skills and attributes is the understanding of the learning methods used by adults;

the effectiveness of managers is influenced by insights about themselves and their work;

knowledge gained by learning about management can improve managerial performance, despite the differences in the two activities.

The last premise is of particular significance to teachers who have had the benefit of a long formal education often involving complex subject matter and ideas. Most teachers, therefore, have the confidence to analyse and criticise any guidance and information offered to them. If, as part of management training, they are asked to reflect upon their experience, they would acknowledge that any conclusions they appear to be able to draw should have at least some theoretical underpinning. In particular, specific advice - for example that individual feedback should be given on performance, or that teamwork rather than competition should be rewarded (Hollingsworth and Hoser, 1985) - will be more readily acceptable if the supporting evidence and theoretical background appear convincing. However, busy teachers, even including those fortunate enough to be released for a time to study management practice, do not wish to risk being overwhelmed by such evidence (particularly when much of it may appear contradictory) and have little desire or opportunity to devote their time exclusively to a study of the vast literature on management and related topics, particularly when that on school management is growing rapidly, as this Croom Helm series demonstrates.

Within all of this literature there is much of value to individual teachers who are trying to construct a base for the development of more effective management practice at all levels in the school. Under normal circumstances the immediate demands of a teacher's work are dominant,

and difficulty is found in searching for what may be available. This book, after surveying the enormous literature which relates to school management, attempts the processes of selection, analysis, criticism and synthesis. Where appropriate, reference has been made to the management literature, not limited to that derived from school studies, in order to substantiate and reinforce the discussion, and also to indicate to the interested reader where futher information may be sought. Although there may be significant differences between the perspectives of teachers and those of members of other professions (Lowther and Stark, 1984), educational managers must not allow these differences to blind them to the applications of 'management theory' in schools. The intention of the present book is to strengthen the theoretical framework by placing schools within the broader context of studies about organisations with a view to exploring how the management of schools might be improved.

The dominant theme, then, is learning , not because the book concentrates on schools, but because the way in which improved performance of both teacher and organisation can best be achieved is through this process. Therefore, after a consideration of the changing environment of the school in Chapter 1, learning for managerial effectiveness receives attention in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 concentrates on the key issue of leadership in schools, while Chapter 4 looks at the problems of management expertise and credibility. Power and authority provide the core themes in Chapter 5, with particular reference to the participation of staff in decision-making. The response of management to changing demands and constraints is the focus of Chapter 6. This leads to consideration of the contribution of interpersonal skills to effective management in Chapter 7, and the fundamental importance of personal, group and organisational communication is studied in Chapter 8. The final chapter returns to the issue of learning by individuals, sub-units of the school and the school itself, through a review of appraisal, staff development and team -building, so that the role of the individual manager in contributing to the school's capacity to respond flexibly to both internal and external pressures can be fully appreciated and developed.

CHAPTER 1

DEMANDS, OPPORTUNITIES, CONSTRAINTS AND INFLUENCES

Changing demands

Managers in education, as elsewhere, are at the centre of conflicting demands. That is part of the job; it cannot be otherwise. Demands are made upon their time by children, other staff, parents and people outside the school who think that staff with managerial responsibilities ought to be concerned about, or intervene in, some particular matter. Competing demands for resources between departments and individuals have to be resolved. Demands to include new materials in the syllabus or adopt alternative teaching approaches will have to be answered: these will have come from parents or any one considering that they have a legitimate stake in the activities of the school. Increasing demands for greater accountability in relation to a school's or an individual's performance require some sort of response. Anyone who resists this notion of being the subject of numerous demands should not contemplate a post involving management duties in schools. Any school, even a small one, whose behaviour is to be shaped and modified as part of the management process, represents a complex organisation. Appointment to a senior post, as headteacher for example, does not permit a person to rise above that complexity. Indeed such a post heightens an individual's involvement with others, has an increased range and number of demands associated with it, and increases the complexity of the situation which the individual must confront.

To newly-appointed school leaders the debate about whether organisational life is primarily the product of the free will of its members or the result of determinism produced by environmental pressures may seem largely theoretical (Astley and Van der Ven, 1983). What such promoted teachers will soon discover, if they have not realised it already, is that both sets of factors, far from being mutually exclusive, contribute to a plethora of controls over action. Staff expect certain behaviour from school leaders who in turn feel obliged to respond to these expectations. To some extent, this provides some guarantee that the teachers will act in ways that they, as leaders, could approve. Externally, schools are fixed into a network of obligations and exchanges with other organisations including neighbouring and feeder schools, colleges, parents' organisations, employers and examination boards. These, as individuals and groups, or as members of

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groups, anticipate certain behaviour by schools; if their aspirations are not realised they strive to achieve their own perceptions of conformity. It is hardly surprising, in these circumstances, that schools, like most other organisations, are inherently conservative. Moreover, fixed into a pattern of relationships with other organisations and managers, they have to mediate between numerous competing demands which reflect the existing values, practices, structures and habits of staff, and to such people the achievement of changed behaviour presents immense problems (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978).

In many situations there can be incentives for an education manager to raise the importance of these demands for continuity. Individuals have invested in a particular pattern of behaviour since it provides them with security and confidence. From the manager's point of view this avoids the new and additional demands that change might bring, without any certainty that these demands can be predicted or controlled. Some managers might argue that their free will is extremely limited; their freedom of action appears totally constrained by the social determinism of internal and external factors. That perception would be disputed by Stewart (1982). She, using a relatively narrow definition of demands (what anyone in a job has to do), goes on to establish empirically, through study of a large number of UK managers, that the choices available - those things that **can** be done as part of the job - are quite extensive.

Middle managers in school have the power to allocate their time and attention, either by concentrating their efforts on a small number of difficult pupils or by distributing their interest more widely to all their pupils; they can restrict their interest exclusively to their own field of activities or they can take an active part in issues affecting the whole school; they can involve their deputies in interviews with parents or assume this responsibility alone; they can see their duties as restricted to support for the teaching activities of the school or having a wider social function. Stylistically, in relation to their colleagues, parents, welfare agencies and children, they are free to adopt any position on the continuum from autocratic to laissez-faire (Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1958).

Contrary to this view of their freedom of action many middle managers in school would claim that, in practice, most of such choices are illusory. Because of conventions, expectations, the nature of client- and work-groups and as a result of their own personalities, they visualise few alternative courses of action in any of these situations. A newly-appointed pastoral head would find it difficult to delegate interviews with parents, for example, if the previous holder of the post had established these as a personal responsibility. Indeed, a special problem for education in general in a

no-growth situation is the potential dominance of demands for continuity. Less mobility means that staff-groups become well established, sometimes for long periods. In such a situation there is a tendency for staff to structure their work in such a way that predictability increases, and familiar and comfortable arrangements prevail, based upon routine or precedent. Some of the stresses of the work place may be reduced, but at a cost, as individuals occupying the same position for some time become increasingly less responsive to the challenging aspects of their jobs.

With greater continuity the temptation for managers is to respond only to certain demands, usually those evolving from the more immediate workgroup. To personnel whose demands are seldom recognised, such as other staff on the margin of the work-group, parents and children in their role as consumers, the fact that their demands are only occasionally acceded to can be highly frustrating. Younger members of staff unable to gain promotion and others who think they have been passed over for the wrong reasons can make demands on the headteacher or departmental head for a change in syllabus, or an alternative teaching approach, but with little hope of satisfaction. Similarly, parents may demand more involvement in decision-making or a clear policy about homework but may not anticipate a positive outcome, particularly if similar requests have been turned down on previous occasions. Indeed, the most effective way of reducing demands is to demonstrate their ineffectiveness and the futility of making them.

Alternatively, if those making demands can establish a resource-dependency there is some certainty that other parties will pay attention to their demands. More directly, if A makes a demand upon B the response and its likelihood of satisfaction will relate to the extent to which B relies upon A for scarce resources (Aldrich, 1976). Under the 1980 Education Act all parents have a choice of schools. When, usually as a consequence of falling rolls, they are able to exercise that right of choice they are imposing a form of dependency in that their decision represents an allocation of resources in favour of one school but to the disadvantage of another. Their demands are thus less likely to be overlooked (Dennison, 1983).

The most significant change that has occurred in English education since the 1970s has been the growing tendency of the DES, followed more slowly by LEAs, to try to enforce particular views about the desirability of school activities. In this they have utilised the school's dependency upon locally provided, but increasingly centrally determined, resources. Because schools are almost wholly dependent upon public funds it is quite easy for ministerial or local advice about some aspect of the curriculum to be interpreted as an order; a request for information about whether a curriculum policy has been introduced may be regarded as an instruction to adopt the

new practices. In fact, of course, resource support levels from central government to local authorities and then from LEAs to schools are governed by criteria much more sophisticated than whether a particular policy or scheme has been implemented. However, in conditions of extreme resource scarcity there are few impediments to using a relationship of total dependence to create a climate of submissiveness. Individuals, groups and schools who do not wish to appear resistant to DES or LEA demands, risk a cut in resources, either in absolute or in relative terms.

It is no coincidence that the emergence of a more interventionist curricular position has taken place at the same time as the imposition of strict spending controls. To the increased dependency which retrenchment produces must be added the need to demonstrate value for money in an increasingly competitive environment for public expenditure. The DES obviously feels that this will more likely be achieved by greater central control of the curriculum, school practices and public examinations. Hence, there has been a steady production of discussion documents, policy guidelines, circulars and so on since the late 1970s (DES, 1985). LEAs and schools cannot ignore them, even when they doubt the quality of the content. With selectivity in funding the exploitation of dependency goes even further. Previously, LEAs and schools welcomed autonomy in resource matters: they were given block grants with ostensibly few specific instructions about spending patterns, but in fact this apparent autonomy was restricted because of high fixed commitments. Nevertheless, there was some freedom. When shortage of resources eliminated previously existing opportunities, the institutions found themselves increasingly reliant on specific grants, on funds from ESG (Education Support Grants) TVEI (Technical and Vocational Education Initiative), and TRIST (TVEI Related In-Service Training). In effect, the spending of centrally supplied money is being limited increasingly to the achievement of centrally determined objectives.

With TVEI the government has done little more than to respond to demands for a more technical and vocational bias in the upper years of secondary school. The pressure has arisen from employers, parents and government itself, concerned about high levels of youth unemployment and the inadequate wealth-creating potential of the country's commercial and industrial base. Possibly, such demands will be satisfied by a strategy to raise the technological literacy of pupils leaving secondary schools. Even without this initiative, however, schools find themselves at the focus of increasing demands from a constituency, based around parents and pupils, to concentrate on pre-vocational activities. This pressure has resulted from a tight labour market. Yet this demand is only one of many. It cannot be

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considered in isolation from all others, whether internally or externally generated; it should not be discussed other than within a framework of matching a need for continuity to the requirements for changed arrangements. The task of the manager is, first, to attempt to make an assessment of the totality of demand in any situation and the likelihood of change; next, to interpret the potential role of the school in the satisfaction of these demands; finally, to assist the sub-units in pursuit of this satisfaction.

Enhanced opportunities

Those involved in education management for more than ten years would undoubtedly claim that the demands upon them and others in their working group have risen, often dramatically. Caution, of course, is necessary in accepting such views. Everyone can recall when the demands seemed less than now, because the passage of time reduces perceptions of the stridency with which past demands were argued. In fact, any attempt to assess changes in the values of perceptions of individuals over time is beset with difficulties. Similar methodological issues arise when assessing changes in stress over time, if this factor is to be used as indicative of extra demands upon the individual. Certainly, interest in work-related stress has grown in recent years, in all occupations (Cooper, 1981a) and particularly for teachers (Dunham, 1984); but increasing interest cannot be adduced as incontrovertible evidence that jobs are increasingly stressful and, in this context, necessarily subject individuals to additional and rising demands.

Most teachers would argue that such caution is quite unnecessary. They would point to general demands, impossible to quantify but nevertheless important, demands for increased accountability of both school and individual teachers, for example. These may have only limited direct effects but teachers would still argue for their significance. Essentially however, the systematisation of school inspections by HMI, complemented by a more monitorial stance of some local advisory staff, the publication of the results of these inspections and the availability of secondary school examination results represent tangible outcomes of greater accountability. Quite probably a formal appraisal system for teachers' performance will be introduced (DES, 1983), but without this, given the numbers of HMI and frequency of inspections, individuals are not likely to be in an inspected school more than once or twice in their careers, and, even less probably, be the subjects of an easily indentifiable comment in a published report. The counter-argument of teachers might be that it is the intangibility of accountability that produces additional demands. They would maintain that there is a new climate, only recently developed, which permits, and even seems to invite, criticism from pupils, parents, employers and the