

The evolving role of the Head of Department

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This paper examines three concepts relating to the role of heads of department (HoDs) in secondary schools: boundary management; the roles of subject leadership and departmental functioning as HoD activities; and the place of HoDs in evolving school hierarchies. To throw light on the last an empirical study is reported that explores hierarchies in middle management across three professions, and draws comparisons. The paper rejects boundary management as an appropriate model. It concludes that hierarchical models in education are very different from those in the military or in business and establishes a typology against which to view the research data.

Introduction

This paper examines three conceptual issues about the function of leadership/management that impinge on heads of department (HoDs) in secondary schools. These are:

- ‘Boundary management’ (James & Hopkins, 2003, p. 61).
- The relative roles of subject leadership and departmental management in school functioning.
- The place and role of HoDs in emerging school hierarchies.

The first two will be discussed from a mainly theoretical perspective, the third with the aid of some empirical evidence. The paper argues that the HoD role is evolving as schools evolve, and traditional concepts are becoming increasingly outmoded.

Boundary management

For the present purpose a HoD is assumed to mean the promoted teacher in a secondary school responsible for the work of a discrete subject area, e.g., mathematics, IT

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or English (though the Glover *et al's* (1998) caveat, that some middle managers hold multiple roles, is acknowledged). Boundary management consists (James & Hopkins, 2003, p. 61) of preserving the place of the HoD's area of responsibility in the school by:

- Preventing the loss of resources (financial/human).
- Defending departmental members against unwarranted criticism.
- Recognising and ameliorating negative influences in the department's environment (e.g., an inappropriate dominant style of learning throughout the rest of the school).

James and Hopkins claim that HoDs 'used their management of the department boundary and their boundary position as a particularly beneficial source of leadership authority' and that HoDs need to manage the boundary 'because of its potential to significantly enhance their leadership authority' (2003, pp. 61–62).

Though the James and Hopkins' work deals with other aspects of the role of HoD, that of boundary management is clearly central to their thinking. It is unclear how widespread such a view is among HoDs themselves (the James sample consisted of just 17 respondents)—but the concept takes us all the way back to Bayne-Jardine (1981), who produced 'pathologies' of departmental management and described 'types' of managers:

- The *ritualist* (who hides behind detail and systems).
- The *neurotic* (who worries ineffectually about translating theory into practice).
- The *robber baron* (who is mainly concerned with territorial expansion, creating an image of efficiency and innovation while failing to develop the team).

Of these three pathological approaches, the marking of departmental boundaries seems to belong substantially to the last; and herein lies the problem. If the *ritualist* and the *neurotic* are passively negative approaches to the HoD role then the *robber baron* is an aggressively negative concept, traditionally associated with:

- expansion *at the expense of others*;
- *protectionism* rather than improvement;
- the '*knowing organisation*' rather than the 'learning organisation';
- the *operationalising of micro-politics*, especially between departments;
- the *narrowing of curriculum* rather than its expansion (e.g., into thematic approaches);
- *historical budgeting* rather than zero-based budgeting;
- *concern for the good of the specific subject* rather than the good of the school, or the student, or of *all* subjects;
- *being seen to be effective* rather than being effective; and
- *maintaining the status quo* in favour of embracing opportunity for experiment and development.

The implications of the James and Hopkins study are firstly that this robber baron mentality is alive and well; and secondly that it is attractive because of its pretensions

to power for the HoD, at least among his/her own staff. Thus Wise and Busher (2001, p. 131) note that Siskin's (1994) description of HoDs' domains as 'subject areas' could be amended to read 'arenas of conflict'. The argument runs: winning boundary battles wins colleagues' respect. This is a view that invites challenge yet is oddly pervasive.

The insidiousness of this concept is partly due to the very busy-ness of the HoD role. Thus, in a previous study (Kerry, 1994) on the role of a pastoral manager, the post-holder had 54 separate job operations (see Briggs & Somerfeldt, 2002, pp. 88, 89). It is partly why such operational responsibility leads to a view of the role as primarily functional, characterised by what Gronn (2000, p. 319) describes as 'the routine or programmed nature' of the work. This function-loaded, rather than conceptual, approach may infiltrate training manuals (a plethora of these illustrate the point—Blandford, 1997; Donnelly, 1990; Earley & Fletcher-Campbell, 1989; Gold, 1998; Kemp & Nathan, 1989; Tranter, 2000).

Yet most contemporary writers on management/leadership themes are agreed that what distinguishes effective performance in education are behaviours far removed from boundary management. The position is summarised by Russ:

The culture of the learning school is one where implicit rules, assumptions and values are *commonly shared, created and owned*. The *common collaborative* agenda binds the organisation. (1995, p. 7, my emphasis)

What James and Hopkins saw fit to call 'a particularly beneficial source of leadership authority' is, according to Russ, the epitome of poor practice. Other theorists agree: Fleming (2000) advocates a collegiate approach in which the goals are excellence, initiative and flexibility. Ruding (2000) argues against a top-down model. Busher *et al.* (2000, p. 15) provide a typology of this busy role into five operations: bridging or brokering; creating social cohesion; mentoring pupils and subordinates; creating professional networks; and using power.

If HoDs operate ideally with an intention towards school improvement, in situations that promote the school as a learning organisation, that develop characteristics such as initiative and flexibility, and in a context of flattened hierarchies, then we are indeed a long way from boundary management. Which raises the issue: is the gap between one view and the other the gap between theorist and practitioner? Or is it the gap defined by traditional post-holders in traditional schools on the one hand, and 'new age' HoDs in twenty-first century schools on the other?

The relative roles of subject leadership and departmental management in school functioning

If tension underpins the HoD's role, its locus is in the conflict between departmental management (the collection of, and accountability for, performance data, for example) and subject leadership (the development of learning and teaching in the subject by members of the department under the HoD's leadership). To relieve the tension ways have to be sought either to combine the functions seamlessly, or to separate

them. The following paragraphs examine briefly two possible models to achieve these ends.

Firstly, schools may avoid the tension of management/leadership conflict by allocating the roles to different individuals. It mirrors some aspects of what Hopkins (2001, pp. 123–128) calls a cadre group. On this model head teachers acknowledge that the traditional boundary management concept of the HoD is prevalent, but recognise its downsides. They therefore put into place a school-wide policy for learning and the curriculum that is driven by a new team of individual teachers drawn from across the institution but not including HoDs. This team is made responsible for school-wide learning and teaching methods and for curriculum innovation. HoDs are instructed to facilitate the work of this independent group. Meanwhile, HoDs are made overtly responsible for the management (as opposed to leadership) operations of the department: for timetabling, collecting statistics, for outcomes from assessment and so on. Thus HoDs are made to focus on transactional issues; new, young, fresh staff within and outside the department are given the transformational roles.

This approach is pragmatic and functional—such a scheme is described in Campbell and Kerry (2004). It satisfies the desire for flattened hierarchies and gives power and influence to people throughout the institution regardless of seniority. By contrast, the second approach is one that has existed for some time and involves the combination of the HoDs into Faculty groups under Heads of Faculty (HoFs). By combining several HoDs (e.g., History, Geography and RE) into a single Faculty (Humanities) under a HoF, the tensions are again lessened by splitting the role of management from the role of leadership. The HoF undertakes the transformational leadership, to achieve the school's mission; while HoDs of individual subjects provide the management by keeping records, checking the outcomes and being accountable for the performance of staff in their subjects.

This option is again a hierarchical model, and tends to extend the hierarchy and provide a power-base for a small number of individuals (who may then apply boundary management principles to their roles!). This second model is, in effect, the very opposite strategy from the first. Positively, HoFs may form an 'inner core' or 'think tank' that advises the Senior Management Team—something a large group of HoDs would be too unwieldy to achieve. Each of these models has both strengths and weaknesses. Each is designed to remove the tensions and ambiguities that the HoD role creates.

The place and role of HoDs in emerging school hierarchies

Underlying the discussion about the role of the HoD is the debate between management and leadership. For the present purpose, management is seen essentially as 'running a tight ship': it is about efficient systems, administration, bureaucracy. Managers (including HoDs) go through the right processes, fill in the right forms, balance the books with prudence, see that all the records are in place and account for these elements to the right people at the right time. This kind of management is sometimes called 'transactional leadership' (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

By contrast, transformational leaders capture the interest and imagination of followers, help them to locate their work in the overall mission or vision of the organisation, develop individuals to perform better and motivate them to support the team and its goals with enthusiasm.

Head teachers, aware of the implications of transformational leadership throughout schools, look to filter this approach to others with responsibilities such as HoDs; and Wise and Busher (2001, p. 131) are right to emphasise the potential of HoDs' leadership as both transactional and transformational. This is well illustrated by Harris (2002, p. 19) when she talks of distributing leadership. However, before we become too carried away with this simple, perhaps cosy, picture we need to bear in mind Gunter's (2003, p. 122) warning that, while 'transformational leadership is about winning hearts and minds ... and the rhetoric is of teams and empowerment ... this is a very top-down model'. Indeed, much of the focus on leadership in schools at every level is political in the sense that leadership is seen as a factor in creating an effective school, and therefore one that achieves or exceeds the 'standards' required by government and mediated through school governors and the head teacher. Increasingly, in order to satisfy its own targets, government sets down the parameters of leadership roles such as those of HoDs, trains trainers to communicate those roles, funds and accredits the training, and thus effectively and in fact sets the agenda for leadership style. Though there is much debate about leadership styles, and HoDs and even head teachers are encouraged to celebrate about them, the reality is more constricting.

This needs to be borne in mind when we note the short history of the effectiveness movement in the UK and overseas that can be found in Reynolds *et al.* (2002, pp. 6–14). While Preedy *et al.* (2003, p. 259) point out that the improving schools movement and the effectiveness movement do not belong necessarily together, it is an interest in school improvement that leads Hopkins (2001) to argue momentarily from an improvement perspective that what is needed is a merging of the transformational and transactional styles; leadership in schools by head teachers and HoDs does not reside in hierarchies but is 'multi-level' (Hopkins, 2001, p. 121). He rapidly moves on from that construction, however, to discuss 'dispersed leadership' (p. 123) and the formation of the cadre groups (p. 124) mentioned earlier:

Typically, the cadre group is a cross-hierarchical team which could be as small as three to six in comparatively small schools, to between six and 10 in large schools ... it should, ideally, be cross-hierarchical, cross-institutional, have a mix of ages, experiences, gender, length of time at the school and so on ... the reason a cadre group is required is because of the tensions in schools caused by the conflicting demands of maintenance and development. One of the underpinning characteristics of authentic school improvement is the separation of maintenance activities from development work.

What these insights have done is to throw into relief a factor that is probably seminal to thinking about leadership in middle management contexts: that factor is tension. Nor does the picture become any less permeated by this issue if one takes a wider, if more traditional, view of management theories. Bush's survey (2003, p. 195) concludes that 'conceptual pluralism ... recognise(s) the diverse nature of educational

contexts and the advantages of adapting leadership styles to the particular situation'. The conceptual underpinning of senior or middle management action becomes the ability, almost the agility, of the individual manager to shift ground from facets of one leadership style to another in rapid succession to deal with a constantly changing pragmatic situation.

However, even Bush admits that there are, inevitably, some fixed points. Though school hierarchies are 'modified by notions of collegiality', he claims (2003, p. 50) nevertheless, that 'because of the clear legal authority of heads and principals, hierarchical models remain significant for schools'. Hierarchy is a vertical system of management; but Bush (p. 49) records the comment of Packwood (1989), that subject leaders also indulge in lateral communication. Packwood, however, does not regard this as management (nor, presumably, leadership) since 'these staff communicate with class teachers about aspects of their subject but they do not have managerial authority over them'. This last statement may hold true for subject coordinators in the primary sector, but may be generally regarded as less accurate for HoDs in the secondary phase, even if 'authority' is limited in its range and scope (e.g., to exclude 'hiring and firing' staff).

So HoDs are part of a hierarchy; but that hierarchy is subject to the modern trend described as 'flattening', i.e., involving fewer rungs. For middle managers—as opposed to head teachers—this produces tension. They have to look both up and down the school's hierarchy, to be both leaders and followers. It is not that head teachers do not have such tensions (with governors, or LEA officials for example), but that the entity of which they are 'in charge' (the school) is recognised as discrete and their authority over it is seen as holistic. For middle managers such as HoDs the entity (the subject area) is part of something, not the whole of it. There are other HoDs in parallel, each in charge of something, but independent of one another, each reporting upwards, and each coordinating the work of subordinates. But the decisions they make, the visions they have, within their sphere of operation are conditioned by more senior managers and an over-arching vision and mission.

In order to explore more fully the issue of hierarchy in school departments it was decided to access the literature of 'followership'. Thody (2002, 2003) had set out the groundwork for studying the concept of hierarchical dynamics known as 'followership'. This literature is too long to explore at length here, but it contains important insights and provocations. Thody notes an over-emphasis on the leadership, as opposed to the followership, dimension in schools: Ofsted rates the head's leadership performance but not teachers' followership qualities. Heads of failing schools may have to resign, though a factor in failure may be the shortcomings of followers. In the same way, it might be hypothesised that a HoD might lead a department well, but the members of it may fail to deliver a quality learning experience in the subject for pupils. Leaders work more effectively where there are effective followers. Leaders may need brave followers to point out wrong directions. The great advantage of this perspective is that it treats departments as organic rather than as inert entities 'controlled' by HoDs. Thody drew together from various

sources a typology of positive and negative roles that followers might play within their organisations. These insights were used in the empirical study reported below.

The investigation: cross-professional comparisons

A decision was made to explore the roles of HoDs in schools and to compare these with middle management in two, rather different, professions: the hotel and leisure industry and the armed forces. This was an in-depth but small-scale study (Kerry, 2003a, b) constructed with a view to later more detailed investigation based on the findings. The outcomes from only two of the research questions are reported in this paper.

- What can be learned about middle management generally, and followership specifically, by comparing the professions?
- Are the perceptions of middle managers across the three professions consistent in constructing a vision of how followership operates in their own day-to-day worlds?

The sample consisted of three HoDs from local secondary schools nominated by their head teachers, three middle managers from the different hotel chains chosen by the respective hotel managers (HLMs), and three serving warrant officers (WOs) identified by their commanding officers. These comparative contexts were selected because it was felt that, on a crude continuum, the hotel middle managers would be trying to create a relaxed atmosphere for their clients, the military middle managers would be operating in a highly disciplined environment and the school HoDs would be trying to create relaxed learning but in an orderly situation. What they shared was a management responsibility and some role in training others.

Methodology chosen was questionnaire, using both open-ended and more structured questions, including Likert-style scores to explore frequencies and importance of selected behaviours. This allowed both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The questionnaires explored middle management both in relation to subordinates (leadership) and with respect to those higher in the respective hierarchies (followership).

The questionnaire was administered in an interview situation. Responses to the open-ended questions were tape-recorded and form the basis of this paper; open questions were punctuated by the use of proformas containing the closed questions, which were filled in there and then by the respondents.

The purpose of the research was fully explained to the participants, as was the intention to publish. Confidentiality was guaranteed. Each participant was sent a transcript and copies of completed proformas for agreement or comment and amendment. Only a few minor amendments were made. A final report was sent to all participants and to their line managers in line with the permissions obtained at the start of the work. Data were compared both within and across professions. The small numbers involved militate against generalisation. However, the results do form the springboard for creating what, in other contexts (Kerry, 2002), I have

called ‘testable propositions’ that could underpin more extensive investigation. The results reported here represent only those parts of the findings relevant to the present theme.

The findings: comparisons and contrasts across professions

The HoD is the archetypal ‘piggy in the middle’ of school leadership, reporting upwards to deputy heads and head, and seeking to lead the departmental staff—as well as the increasing number of teaching assistants and support staff who form the learning team. Amid all the hype about leadership in education it is particularly easy to lose sight of the fact that every leader has to have followers. The first research question explored that issue.

What can be learned about middle management generally and followership specifically, by comparing the professions?

Education. In construing their jobs as middle managers, HoDs were orientated to getting the best out of subordinates. They used various descriptors to illustrate this, such as ‘empowering’, ‘communicating’ and even ‘absorbers of stress’ in their subordinates and their managers. But the key concept was ‘communication’.

A factor central to all three HoDs was that leadership of subordinates was harmed by the actions of a small minority. Each described a non-conformist among subordinates; two HoDs regretted this person could not be easily removed. Non-conformists ‘coloured life’ in school (HoD2). The third did not explicitly reject having the person removed; she had never had any training for management: she suggested that actions such as dismissal procedures were the prerogative of those who had.

Conflict with line-managers (in all cases a deputy head) was minimal, but if it arose, it was a private matter expressed away from the subordinates. The rare event of conflict was over demands made by the senior management team—e.g., to cut time for a subject or to cut a budget. HoD2 did identify that in his specific situation (in a special school environment) he would conflict publicly with a line-manager in one circumstance: that of incorrect restraint of a pupil—but it had not happened. Indeed, in all cases, HoDs claimed their relations with their line managers were good or very good, at a level of critical friendship.

HoDs’ declared intentions were to make things better: the delivery of a sound curriculum and a good school experience for students. In selling unpopular decisions to subordinates they relied on reasoning and thought it important to empathise with their line-manager’s point of view. Outside of conflict situations, teamworking was a key to relationships with subordinates. HoD1 noted that the increasing age profile of the teaching profession was leading to confrontation rather than aspiration. In terms of a hierarchy within the departments, the HoDs did have people they regarded as deputies, but these individuals essentially ‘held the fort’ until the HoD was available rather than dealing directly with situations.

The Military. The middle managers of the military—warrant officers—did not share the same kind of organisational hierarchy that the HoDs enjoyed. They were, in all cases, relatively long-serving men who reported upwards to younger, middle-ranking officers (major, flight lieutenant). While in schools HoDs were halfway in experience between teachers and their line-managers, in the military the WOs were more experienced than their line-managers. They construed their roles as leaders of subordinates and as mentors of their own leaders, therefore. (One even named his officer/manager as one of the team he managed.) Though out-ranked as followers, their advice was taken almost without exception, because it was the voice of experience. Reportedly, ‘I wouldn’t do that if I were you, sir’ was usually enough to deflect a bad decision from above.

Nevertheless, the WOs stood in line between officers and troops. They were communicators like the HoDs: but usually after they had influenced the message. The levels of loyalty were significant. WO1 made it clear that it was his job to come between bad decisions (though they were rare) from above and the troops below, and this was a shared view.

In terms of subordinates, the conceptual framework of operation was also different from that of the HoDs. Below the WO was a long hierarchy of senior and junior NCOs (in some cases civilian employees also). The WO’s job was described by one as breaking tasks down, to be done, bit-by-bit in a logical way, by subordinates—in order to achieve the original strategy.

This process of breaking tasks down we shall refer to as incrementalism, and the lineage of people involved as the chain of command (the WOs’ own descriptor). Incrementalism and the chain of command were reinforced by the authority of rank, they claimed. There were occasional misfits and awkward customers in the military environment, but if ‘Would you?’ did not produce a result and ‘You will ...’ failed as a strategy then removal was an option and was operationalised.

Hotel and Leisure Industry. As might have been expected, the HLMs talked a business language:

Their job (i.e., that of subordinates) is to operationalise part of my business.

This approach characterised the thinking in three main ways. First, it was assumed that everyone, both up and down the hierarchy, had business goals (i.e., the generation of profit) as a key intention by which their jobs were guided. Secondly, there was a concern for clients, which affected both the choice and the retention of staff. Third, there was an emphasis on teamwork.

These three themes permeated the transcripts generated by each of the HLMs. At times, the implications of the issues became much more far-reaching. For example, our HLM middle managers were responsible for the income generated by the areas of the hotel operation they controlled—there was considerable accountability. One of the HLMs spoke powerfully of total quality management and how the principles of this were applied in the areas for which he was responsible—and, though

others were less explicit, the implications were the same. Teams formed substantially because hotel staff worked long and unsocial hours, and were not just thrown together but were dependent on everyone contributing their specific task to the overall operation. Hotels were places of rumour and gossip, though much of it was not malicious. Some subordinates drifted, but poor employees were removed. This had to be done using proper procedures (and might take six months) but the good of the hotel required it.

Our respondents each reported to a general manager (GM). GMs usually had a traditional hotel background, but some had been off the 'shop floor' for some years. They took a more or less pro-active role in the day-to-day running of the hotel, but were always strategic managers (though the strategy might emanate from company policy). Relations with the GM were good in all cases, and conflict rare because both were seeking the company's aims; but these relationships were not described as 'friendships'. Communication in both directions in the hierarchy was critical for HLMs.

Compared with HoDs, HLMs had huge financial responsibilities and often large human resource responsibilities as well. Hotel teams were closer-knit, perhaps, than those in most schools, forming social bonds and not just working relationships. Teams were more like those in the military: members had to pull together and guard one another's backs. There was not room for the maverick troublemaker, though the selection process would normally rule these out from the beginning. The next section explores the workings of 'followership' in the teams being run by the middle managers in this study.

Are the perceptions of middle managers across the three professions consistent in constructing a vision of how followership operates in their own day-to-day worlds?

Middle managers as leaders and subordinates as followers of middle managers. There is no question that WOs as middle managers carried real authority:

Let's say there is a management check or procedure that has to be carried out ... sometimes my force of personality can get that done because they follow you as leader. Occasionally you get the body language back that they are doing it because you are the rank you are.

Nevertheless, they still relied on good communication to produce goodwill:

If you've got an issue then explain it; don't ask someone to do something you don't do yourself; and give them a reason ...

There was a strong message of leading from the front.

[Of a junior NCO who was initially shoddy at his job] I didn't have to tell him, I set him an example and now he is good.

Sometimes, individual followers would be difficult: the WOs were surprisingly candid in discussing issues about 'saboteur' followers. But they were all agreed: their behaviour was not long tolerated in a military environment.

We occasionally get barrack room lawyers ... there are occasional cliques with their own agendas. ... It has to be nipped in the bud. They cause confusion and unnecessary frustration.

There was an admission that there was a tension at the heart of the follower process. On the one hand there was an encouragement of initiative, on the other there could be sensitivities about good ideas being seen to emanate from people in lower ranks:

If people do have constructive and proactive ideas we do encourage them to bring them forward ... it is difficult for people to bring suggestions forward without contravening the rank structure.

While this tension mostly worked satisfactorily in practice, there could be sticking points; for example, 'career sergeants' could stand in the way of progress. On the other hand, it was important for WOs to win the respect of aspiring sergeants and other NCOs.

Teamwork featured in the conceptualisation of how relations between middle managers and subordinates worked effectively, but so did an element of horse-trading:

I had to nominate a senior NCO [a family man, because there was a shortage of men due to covering for the firemen's strike] to go on Christmas duties. He knows I would stand by him, and have stood by him. So he's looked at that, and though he's reluctant to take that on, he is prepared to do it.

That did not mean that everything was always perfect, and the major cause was disinformation:

I don't have people gossiping about me because I don't have underhand dealings. But there can be inaccurate information, like Chinese whispers. Down the chain of command, things get mis-relayed.

It was important to meet reluctance with real information, and to meet it head on:

... by explaining the consequences if we don't and the nature of the need, then they become more focused on the usefulness ...

In comparison with the WOs, there were both overlaps and differences in the ways in which HoDs construed their relations with subordinates. None of the WOs could have made this statement from a HoD:

I do not think of myself as a leader, actually. ... I have never had any training to be a leader. If I were in a different job I would have had lots of courses about personnel management and about human relations; but in this job it isn't like that; and we do try to work together as a team; and my job is to act as a go-between, to keep throwing the ball back into play.

This view was not universal:

Lots of people like to sit back and see middle managers do all the work. ... 'You're paid to do it, off you go'. I've worked in other schools, and in each case most staff were in the last 10 years of their careers ... comfortable ... not aspiring.

HoDs could not fall back on a chain of command; they may have deputies but these only held the fort in the HoD's absence:

If I'm on courses she will cover for me. If there are any problems there are Post-its all over the desk when I get back ...

They did have to worry about 'saboteurs', however—much more so than the WOs. Furthermore, there was little they could do about it:

Most of us work as a team, but one person is independent ... we are building up our Y7 and Y8 schemes of work ... and we're all building the resources and sharing them. This person has done no worksheets, she doesn't follow the system.

I do have one difficult member of the department ... quick to complain to senior managers about perceived slights.

Two HoDs indicated that the real issue was that it was almost impossible to dismiss a difficult or incompetent teacher and not worth the energy it would take. One complained:

If you had a problem in industry the person would be called in, cards on the table, sort it out—the person is told off, effectively. That doesn't happen in schools ... Rather than say: you've got this wrong, one has to listen to their side of it, spin it round slightly and adapt it, and then put them out there and monitor, support and evaluate them ...

There was, nevertheless, talk of 'being supported' by subordinates and of delegating to them. Some were eager to try out ideas and sought ratification for this. One HoD claimed that support staff were particularly loyal. Teachers can be good thinkers and actors in their own right, and often have to be persuaded of the need for, and value of, change. But, oddly, the change then becomes the norm and further emendation may prove difficult:

When I took over, I decided that we would not have a textbook at all. We spent a lot of time on what we thought would make a good course, and did a lot of work on it. At first, there were a lot of people who didn't like that way of working, the new approach. But there was a lot of discussion and people were prepared to try it. Now, I suggested last year going back to some use of the textbook and there was resistance to the idea.

Both HoDs and WOs did, however, share a feeling that part of their role was to act as a buffer between unpopular management demands and the need to achieve the required goal.

In the hotel and leisure industry middle managers were very powerful leaders of their teams. The basis of that leadership was to be found in part in company policy, and in part through careful communication of decisions:

I would never tell someone to do something without a reason; there would always be some justification.

There was a belief that challenge was healthy because it drew out the logic of courses of action more clearly:

If [a subordinate] didn't like it, I would always ask them to question me and ask: why? But once the decision had been made—a collective decision or an instruction—I would expect commitment.

Overall, probably because of the close teamwork and social nature of the job, conflict was rare, and there was commitment to shared causes:

If the departments see that it's their revenue that goes down the drain if they get it wrong, then that concentrates the mind.

Thus business concerns outweigh personal preferences. Initiative was not frowned upon when it fitted within the overall intentions of the company. One HLM did describe himself as 'a buffer', but conflict was not frequent:

It's about being rational and being able to put across an argument, and justify why something is happening in a way the staff understand—even if they are not your decisions. If we have a 16-year-old waitress working here and I have to convey the GM's decisions, I have to translate that vision into something understandable.

In at least one hotel group the appropriate team of workers is involved in the short-listing of potential employees for their area of work. This minimises the employment of misfits and non-conformists. But that does not rule out all those who choose to coast: 'serial pot-washers'. Nor does it completely eradicate conflict. However, conflict damages business, and non-conformists are removed:

If someone is a poor operator it is possible to remove them. ... Obviously we have a set structure to disciplinary action, but there are regular training sessions so people know what is expected of them. ... We can't afford dead wood.

Within these data, it emerges clearly that HLMs mirror the approach and attitudes of WOs more closely than those of HoDs. They have a clear mission, a strong sense of empowerment and authority to get things done and, despite a commitment to explanation and communication, a determination not to allow individuals to stand in the way of the goals.

Conclusion

Models of departmental leadership/management can throw some light on how the role is performed in schools. Using the concept of testable propositions referred to earlier, one might explore these issues in relation to school HoDs:

- While the traditional 'robber baron' may still have limited existence, it seems more probable that today's effective schools will have reorganised their departmental structures, will perhaps have split management functions from those of leadership.
- Leadership (in the case of revising curriculum, for example) may, in some instances, be provided from below; alternatively, more senior faculty heads may inherit the strategic functions. In either case, typical HoDs seem increasingly likely to pick up the transactional duties, while the transformational roles may be delegated by senior management to those above or below them.
- In the broader context of the school, the HoD increasingly belongs to a flattened hierarchy.
- These flattened hierarchies can be compared with the position of middle managers in other professions.

But by identifying the similarities and differences, the intention has been to discover what—if anything—can be gleaned by educationists from the practices and nature of

hierarchies in other spheres. To this end, the key factors in the operation of the hierarchies that apply to middle managers in the military and the hotel industry, as well as in education, were identified through the research data quoted above and then listed in the form of a typology. The relative importance of each factor ($n = 10$) was then assessed for each profession on the basis of the evidence from the questionnaire responses (and rated High, Variable or Low). The result of this process is shown as Table 1.

The outcome of this process, while still in its infancy and requiring a larger study to confirm the conclusions, is nevertheless instructive. It suggests that middle managers in the military have a pivotal role that operates both up and down their extended hierarchies. Even in the business context, hierarchies are important in operationalising the mission, in providing a sense of commitment, in focusing action and improved performance from the departmental team, and in controlling the negative behaviours of subordinates. By contrast, the place of HoDs in the education hierarchy seems to be increasingly weak on most fronts. Strong leadership by HoDs seems to have been sacrificed in a quest for a more democratic and open school ethos through flattening the organisational structures. Thus the realities described in the second part of the paper, the empirical evidence, confirm the shift in models promulgated in the first part.

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Table 1. A typology of factors influencing the working of hierarchies across three professions

Factor	HoD: education	WO: military	HLM: hotel trade
Clarity of the mission	Variable	High	High
Deep sense of shared commitment & inter-dependence	Low	High	High
Middle manager (MM) acts as strong focus of commitment for subordinates	Variable	High	Variable
MM is catalyst for action	Variable	High	High
MM effects improved performance	Variable	High	High
MM's authority is based on experience	Variable	High	Variable
MM has power to control the behaviour of subordinates	Low	High	High
MM has power to remove obstructive followers	Low	High	High
MM incrementalises task responsibilities to achieve total goal	Low	High	Variable
MM is mentor to his/her senior managers	Low	High	Low

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